

Agonism and Antagonism:  
Past and Future Possibilities of Radical Democracy

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## Abstract

Though radical democratic theory has become a mainstay in progressive political thought for its emphasis on the ability of “anyone at all” to “step out” of their assigned role and challenge political manifestations of domination and exclusion, it is clear that more work needs to be done in terms of establishing the empirical bases for its appearance and continuation. One primary reason for this is the fact that contemporary instances of political contention resembling radical democratic forms of politics have not maintained the agonistic form that radical democratic theorists wish to see.

As such, the primary goal of this work is to establish the circumstances in which such episodes are able to take an agonistic form. In order to establish these circumstances, a comparative investigation and analysis of historical episodes of political contestation that reflect those encouraged by radical democratic theorists such as Chantal Mouffe, William Connolly, Bonnie Honig, and Jacques Rancière is employed. In terms of the analytical approach, given radical democratic thought’s various affinities with the subjective and relational vision put forth by the “Contentious Politics” school of political sociology, many of this school’s fundamental explanatory concepts are put to use, including those of interests, capacities, and intervening mechanisms. In comparing across cases of radical democratic contention that included periods of both agonism and antagonism, the work is able to establish frequently occurring patterns of interest compatibility, relative capacity, and intervening mechanisms for both agonistic and antagonistic moments and thus puts forth a general set of circumstances for the continuation of an agonistic form of radical democratic politics. With the cases – those of Croatia 1990-1995, Thailand 2005-2014, Singapore 1945-1970, and France 1968 – providing the investigation with both a series of events that reflect a radical democratic “stepping out” along with a large number of agonistic and antagonistic moments to be analyzed, the work asserts that these circumstances can be applied to any scenario involving radical democratic contention.

After establishing these circumstances for the agonistic continuation of a radical democratic form of politics, the work turns to the question of what this entails for radical democratic theory’s political goals of not only maintaining agonism between competing sets of actors in the contest, but also promoting political equality and having the wrongs endured by previously subordinated groups righted. As the work identifies, there comes to be a clear trade-off between the former goal of agonism and the latter goals of political equality and socio-political transformation. It is at this point that the work moves to a discussion of potential theoretical correctives to some of the radical democratic project’s apparent weaknesses in order to save some of these core political goals.

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## List of Acroymns

BS - Barsian Socialis (Socialist Front)  
CFDT - Confédération française démocratique du travail  
CGT - Confédération générale du travail  
CPT - Communist Party of Thailand  
CRES - Centre for the Resolution of Emergency Situation  
CRS - Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité  
FEN - Fédération de l'éducation nationale  
FGDS - Fédération de gauche démocrate et socialiste  
FO - Front ouvrier  
HDZ - Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica (Croatian Democratic Union)  
HSS - Hegemony and Socialist Strategy  
JCR - Jeunesse communiste révolutionnaire  
JNA - Jugoslavenska Narodna Armija (Yugoslav National Army)  
MASPOK - Masovni Pokret (Mass Movement)  
MCP - Malayan Communist Party  
MDU - Malayan Democratic Union  
NDH - Nezavisna Država Hrvatska (Independent State of Croatia)  
NTUC - National Trades Union Council  
ORTF - l'Office de Radio-Diffusion Française  
PAD - People's Alliance for Democracy  
PAP - People's Action Party  
PCF - Parti communiste français  
PCFML - Parti communiste français marxiste-léniniste  
PDRC - People's Democratic Reform Committee  
PPP - People's Power Party  
PSU - Parti socialiste unifié  
SATU - Singapore Association of Trade Unions  
SBWU - Singapore Bus Worker's Union  
SCMSSU - Singapore Chinese Middle School Student Union  
SDS - Srpska Demokratska Stranka (Serb Democratic Party)  
SFSWU - Singapore Factory and Shop Workers Union  
SGEU - Singapore General Employees Union  
(S)LF - (Singapore) Labour Front  
SKH - Savez Komunista Hrvatske (Croatian League of Communists)  
SKH-SDP - Stranka Demokratski Promjena (Party of Democratic Reform)  
SKJ - Savez Komunista Jugoslavije (League of Communists of Yugoslavia)  
TRT - Thai Rak Thai (Thais Love Thais)  
UDD - United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship  
UGE - l'Union des grandes écoles  
UMNO - United Malays National Organisation  
UNEF - l'Union nationale d'étudiants français

## Table of Contents

<i>Abstract</i> .....	<i>ii</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i> .....	<i>iii</i>
<i>List of Acronyms</i> .....	<i>iv</i>
<b>1</b> <i>Interrogating the Radical Democratic Project</i> .....	<i>1</i>
<b>2</b> <i>Democratic Paradoxes and Political Blind Spots</i> .....	<i>40</i>
<b>3</b> <i>Logs and Bullets:</i> <i>The Krajina Serb Rebellion in HDZ Croatia</i> .....	<i>76</i>
<b>4</b> <i>The Politics of Double Standards in Thailand:</i> <i>Organic Crisis as Radical Democracy</i> .....	<i>112</i>
<b>5</b> <i>Democratic Theory and the Curious Case of Singapore</i> .....	<i>185</i>
<b>6</b> <i>Radical Democracy Par Excellence?</i> <i>Revolution and Reform in France's May 68</i> .....	<i>276</i>
<b>7</b> <i>Cross Case Comparison:</i> <i>Open and Closed Doors for Radical Democracy</i> .....	<i>365</i>
<b>8</b> <i>Radical Democratic Challenges and</i> <i>Challenges for Radical Democracy</i> .....	<i>403</i>
<b>9</b> <i>Proposals for a Better Democratic Theory</i> .....	<i>462</i>
<i>Works Cited</i> .....	<i>506</i>

# Chapter 1

## Interrogating the Radical Democratic Project

### Introduction

Over the last decade a radical form of the democratic ideal has certainly been in vogue. As a host of analysts have suggested, unlike the fifteen to twenty year period following the end of the Cold War, despite (or in some cases, in response to) a general increased narrowing of political alternatives at the level of state and government, a particular resurgence of democratic engagement “from below” has sprung up to challenge dominant socio-political orders in a variety of locales over issues ranging from the neo-liberal economic order and its resulting socio-economic inequalities, unresponsive managerial technocracy, and unrepresentative forms of governance. Though there have been others which share many similarities, episodes which have clearly embodied some of these goals have included the Occupy Movement in North America and some locales in Europe, the Umbrella Revolution in Hong Kong, the Quebec Student Strike, and some instances of the Arab Spring. In many ways, this recent development within political practice has been mirrored in political thought, with much of contemporary political theory informing and reflecting these recent challenges from actors outside of dominant political channels.

Although it could be argued that many forms of contemporary democratic theory have reflected this recent development in the real world of democratic struggles, the one current that has perhaps reflected this best is what has been referred to as radical democracy, or, for some of its proponents, agonistic democracy/pluralism. While the radical democratic label has often been applied to several other theorists within contemporary democratic theory, it is possible to pinpoint four particular thinkers who have, over the last several decades, spent the bulk of their intellectual energies on developing, articulating, re-developing, and re-articulating the elements of the project into a cohesive theoretical system. These thinkers are

none other than Chantal Mouffe, William Connolly, Bonnie Honig, and Jacques Rancière.<sup>1</sup> Though many of these authors may not, and may not wish to, identify themselves with each other given their philosophical differences or, indeed, even with the notion that radical democracy constitutes a project put together by a network of like-minded thinkers, the abundance of similarities and sympathies across their works and the fact that they have often been in explicit conversation with each other within their pages provides us with sufficient bases to state that the four can be grouped together in a tighter “school of thought”.

Of course, given the fact that their projects do diverge at points, within progressive political theory there has been some debate as to what constitutes radical democratic thought and further debate as to whether radical democracy and what has been termed agonistic pluralism – a term openly put forth by some theorists such as Mouffe and Connolly – should be placed together as congruent political projects.<sup>2</sup> Both of these debates have occurred for the reasons that multiple authors have ascribed in large part to similar ontologies and political principles while maintaining some key differences when it has come to emphasizing a particular ontological basis or a resulting political goal. Yet despite these differences, as Little and Lloyd have pointed out, various radical democratic authors, including the four aforementioned, can be grouped together for several common assertions which involve not merely the recognition of human plurality but also a continued political commitment to it.<sup>3</sup> According to Little and Lloyd, the major theoretical commonalities between these various radical democratic thinkers and proposals are that,

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<sup>1</sup> Additional authors who have frequently been classified as radical democratic theorists and yet have been less systematic or consistent in their presentation of radical democracy as a project include Claude Lefort, Etienne Balibar, Nancy Fraser, and Iris Marion Young. See Claude Lefort, *Democracy in Political Theory* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1988); Etienne Balibar, *We the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actual Existing Democracy,” *Social Text* Vol 25 No 4 (1990): 56-80; Iris Marion Young, “Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship,” *Ethics* Vol 99 No 2 (1989): 250-274.

<sup>2</sup> Ed Wingebach, *Institutionalizing Agonistic Democracy: Post-foundationalism and Political Liberalism* (Burlington, VA: Ashgate, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Adrian Little and Moya Lloyd, “Introduction” in *The Politics of Radical Democracy*, eds. Adrian Little and Moya Lloyd, 1-12 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009): 6

- 1) democracy is understood as a fugitive condition or open-ended process, and thus perpetually amenable to disruption and renewal.
- 2) the political is apprehended as ontologically conflictual or contestatory.
- 3) civil society rather than the state is construed as the principal, even exclusive, site of democratic struggle.
- 4) democracy is not a form of government or a set of institutions but rather a moment marking the practice of politics itself.
- 5) radical democratic politics is oriented towards the contestation of prevailing regimes of cultural intelligibility (and thus exclusion).<sup>4</sup>

In expanding on Little and Lloyd's classification with a specific eye to the projects of Mouffe, Connolly, Honig, and Rancière, all of them begin with some version of the "paradox of politics" which fundamentally stems from each of the theorists' post-foundationalism. Since the theorists start with the assumption that there is no ultimate and indisputable foundation for either political rule or the organization of the political community, democratic politics necessarily involves negotiating the effects of this lack of foundation. This so-called paradox of politics takes either one of two forms, with some theorists employing elements of both in their analysis. In the first form, the establishment of any political community, no matter how rational, complete, or representative of the demos it might appear, always involves a subordinated remainder or supplement that can be either excluded on the one hand or conquered and converted on the other. In the second form, though political rule is necessary in that someone or another will always be in a position of power relative to others in the political community, no one actually is ordained with the right to rule. All forms of political rule thus are both oligarchic and arbitrary. For Mouffe, Connolly, Honig, and Rancière, a radical democratic moment (though some of the theorists may simply say a democratic or political one) occurs when this paradox is revealed through a collective

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 3.

abandonment of prescribed titles and functions and the launching of a political challenge against the dominant order whose very dominance is without foundation. Radical democracy thus involves both a “stepping out” and a political challenge.

In terms of their political project thus, though some of the theorists favour certain elements over others, all four of them agree to the necessity of keeping the political contest open to renewal through “stepping out” of assigned titles and functions and, further, in a manner that maintains an agonistic relation between those involved in the contest. In defining agonism, the theorists posit a scenario whereby sets of actors engage in a spirited public contest in which the contenders’ fundamental visions or worlds are contested, yet avoid coercive efforts to close the other down. As Mouffe argues, in agonistic relations “others are not seen as enemies to be destroyed, but as adversaries whose ideas might be fought, even fiercely, but whose right to defend those ideas is not to be questioned.”<sup>5</sup> Antagonism by contrast occurs in moments in which such efforts do not appear.<sup>6</sup> Though the commitment to renewal is fundamental given their belief in the contingency of every social and political order, the necessity of agonistic relations between constellations of forces involved in any radical democratic contest is the crux of their project. The reason for this is the fact that without these agonistic relations, the contests would be unable to continually provide some of the positive consequences that the radical democratic theorists indicate in their work including the affirmation of political equality, the public litigation of decisions made oligarchically, the unsettling of long settled orders and the uncovering of certain cruelties or wrongs, and from that, the augmentation or transformation of the socio-political world in a way that is more inclusive and representative of previously marginalized groups.

With this stated, it is clear to see why the radical democratic project is reflected in the aforementioned political movements. Indeed, many of these movements, having “stepped out”

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<sup>5</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (New York: Verso, 2013): 7.

<sup>6</sup> Throughout their respective works the radical democratic put forth several dichotomous ideal types that reflect this central antagonism/agonism pairing including police/politics (Rancière) and virtue/virtù (Honig).

of their normally assigned titles and spaces to challenge the dominant socio-political order affirmed the radical democratic ideal of contestation being conducted by anyone at all and, in making their voices heard for the purposes of redressing past misrecognitions and wrongs, attempted to augment or transform the socio-political order. The problem, however, for these movements and, in turn, the problem for radical democratic theory is that these admirable political goals which required the contest to remain agonistic were cancelled out when each of these movements took a turn towards antagonism.

While the ideals of uncovering remainders, enacting renewal, promoting agonism, affirming political equality, and transforming the socio-political order for redressing past wrongs or cruelties ought to be defended, radical democratic thought faces a problem with its empirical bases. Indeed, when reviewing the contents of their major works it becomes very clear that, in comparison to their very thorough theoretical inquiries, their explanation of the circumstances in which a political contest could take an agonistic form is fairly underdeveloped. The primary reason for this is that the theorists tend to place their bets squarely on the possibility that the recognition of difference by contending parties in a given socio-political order will create the conditions for agonistic as opposed to antagonistic relations between them. While some of the authors, particularly Mouffe and Connolly, make great efforts to articulate ways in which political actors could become more willing to accept plurality in the polity, they do so without making reference to the dynamics of contention present in actual radical democratic contests.

As one preliminary example, Connolly blames antagonism on a deep resentment that is the general product of the world's pressures and contradictions but which becomes directed at the Other to provide a justification for the problem of the evil that does not involve or, more appropriately taint, our own identity. According to Connolly, lessening this resentment through genealogical inquiry and a cultivation of care for the various contingencies of the

world could loosen the resentment that identity has toward difference and turn antagonism into something more agonistic.<sup>7</sup>

However, while this argument, due to its high degree of sophistication and its origins with the philosophical sins of St. Augustine, is very impressive and certainly contains a convincing rationale, it is put forth without empirically establishing that actual socio-political antagonisms in identifiable periods of contestation are a consequence of our civilizational resentment towards difference. Though this may be the case in terms of some periods of contestation, this approach, abstracted from actual episodes of political contest, is unable to establish if the factor of resentment and its subsequent delegitimization of negativity and difference is the sole cause of antagonism between different sets of political actors. As such, we cannot simply put forth the suggestion that the key to the maintenance of agonistic relations between political actors is a greater recognition of difference and contingency.

Of course, this is not to say that this recognition of difference is not essential to the type of radical democratic politics that the theorists are proposing. Undoubtedly, any type of democratic politics which is not monist or unitarian revolves around the legitimacy and, further, extension of opposition, must have the recognition of difference as its starting point. Indeed, recognizing the adversary as embodying a varying interpretation of the socio-political world and not as a growth on the social body to be eradicated can go some way in ensuring the maintenance of pluralism in this same world.

Yet there are observable reasons why this sole recognition of difference cannot go all the way. From a purely theoretical point of departure, politics properly defined has been understood as the absence of war in the sense that it does not involve the annihilation of one's opponents, instead operating as a contest between adversaries. However, as in all contests which, by their very nature demand a winner (or at least a reward), the fact that one does not

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<sup>7</sup> William Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1991): 34.

resort to cancelling out the very existence of their opponent does not automatically render them incapable of utilising other coercive or antagonistic methods, beyond the allowance of the agreed upon rules of the game, to eventually reign victorious (or, again, at least ensure their reward) at the conclusion of the contest.

The same logic applies to contests of a political nature. One – and by this it is meant one involved in a collective set of political actors - can coercively block (and be blocked in turn by) one's opponent from key and limited spaces of the polity to ensure victory or reward without desiring or attempting the opponent's existential destruction. Undoubtedly, many of the aforementioned recent examples of democratic contestation which were eventually shut down or transformed into antagonistic instances of repression, including some of the episodes within the Arab Spring, the Occupy Movement, or the Umbrella Revolution were less a result of a misrecognition of difference than an effort by the dominant force to prevent those “stepping out” from furthering challenging or altering their desired socio-political order.

With this stated, what is of the utmost importance when envisioning the possibilities of a radical democratic politics based on the principle of agonism is keeping in mind that the recognition of difference can only ever be a necessary though not sufficient condition for maintaining agonistic relations between contending sets of actors with varying socio-political projects. For what the four theorists miss despite their insistence on viewing the world “politically” as opposed to consensually or morally is the fact that “the political” is a fundamentally Janus-faced concept. Though the possibility of political contestation would not be possible without it, recognizing the nature of the political or, more specifically, viewing challenges to the dominant order politically means more than simply recognizing difference to every identity, the “constitutive outside” to every contingent hegemonic articulation, the remainders to every consensus, or the supplement to every police order. For, indeed, this concept of the political is that which embodies only its inherent negativity. As accounts of the

aforementioned recent political events hint at and as our case studies will go on to demonstrate, there is also something fundamentally affirmative about each and every set of actors who engage in political contests for the purposes of victory or reward.

And what is the meaning of this victory, this reward? In essence, it is establishing or negotiating the appropriate degree of power to shape and contour the polity as one sees fit. Without a doubt, we have seen that the radical democratic project, in its very constitution around the goals of agonistic contest, the promotion of politically enacted equality, and participation for anyone whatsoever, has built itself on the fundamental importance of disruptive elements. However, with its inclusion of the goal of opening doors to socio-political transformations that are built around those, and those positions, that have been remaindered or even miscomprehended by the dominant order, it has also included an element that is fundamentally constructive and thus one that necessarily requires an attempt at achieving, or at least achieving influence over, political power.

Indeed, we cannot separate construction from power, let alone political construction from political power, as power, by its very nature, is the one and only way of producing an effect on the human or natural world. This logic, as we will see, has serious implications for radical democratic theories. For if we cannot divorce the enacting of the political from construction and, by the same token, we cannot separate construction from power, we are simply unable to extricate power from the concept of the political – a theoretical move that, in some respects, the radical democratic theorists attempt to accomplish. This, of course, is seen most explicitly in the work of Jacques Rancière who frames the exercise of power as police and its disruption as politics.<sup>8</sup> Yet, as stark as it may sound, all engaged in politics dream of becoming the police. Without this desire for construction there is no motivation to act politically.

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<sup>8</sup> Jacques Rancière, “Ten Theses on Politics” in *Dissensus: Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Steve Corcoran (New York: Continuum, 2010). Rancière states that politics is not the exercise of power but the very interruption of this logic.

When framed in this manner, it becomes easier to recognize the tensions between competing sets of actors during radical democratic challenges to the dominant order or, in other words, how tensions have the possibility of emerging between those looking to disrupt and those looking to construct. For often enough, this instance of disruption is nothing but the clash between two constructions, one established, one nascent. Keeping in mind that this construction via power is always power over someone else, if the following chapters show anything at all it is the fact that the maintenance of agonistic forms of political contestation depends highly on how these diverse actors' projects of contouring the social-political world can relate to each other in limited spaces of power through which such contouring can be carried out, irrespective of having done their due radical democratic diligence and recognized the adversary as an ontological necessity. On the one hand, one can accept the ontological necessity of the adversary while, on the other hand rejecting the necessity of this adversary's domination and, through it, its ability to shape and contour the boundaries of our common world.

In short, one can have antagonism without annihilation. Though not expressly stated as such, it is this conflation that tends to seep into the analyses of those theorists who posit the recognition of difference as the overriding facilitator of agonistic politics. It is at this point when the conflation is revealed that it becomes necessary to move beyond the question of commitment to the recognition of difference and chart the specific circumstances under which sets of actors can engage in a political contest without falling into antagonism.

As such, what is being proposed here is not to jettison the political project of radical democratic agonism. Rather, it is my contention that what the theorists require are some additional empirical "guts", a task that has also yet to be substantially conducted within

radical democracy's literature.<sup>9</sup> Once again, given the aforementioned limitations, this need for empirical analysis is specifically with regard to establishing the specific circumstances that allow for episodes of political contestation against the dominant socio-political order to remain in an agonistic form. In many ways, the need for an empirical inquiry into the possibilities for radical democratic forms of political activity mirror the past social scientific studies of liberal democracy, conducted with the intention of buttressing some of the great liberal democratic theories. As such, although the theorists have put forth their political projects with eyes to the future, wishing to expand the legitimacy of such democratic contests, our inquiry reaches into the past with the explicit purpose of utilizing instances of political contestation of a radical democratic nature to shed light on the specific circumstances that have been responsible for a given episode's maintenance in an agonistic form or, on the other hand, a drift towards antagonism between the participating sets of actors. By comparing these agonistic and antagonistic moments of contention and the circumstances that have constituted them across a series of cases, we demonstrate that there is indeed a general set of circumstances in which an agonistic form of democratic contestation can occur and be maintained along the lines of what the radical democratic theorists subscribe to. However, before being able to present these circumstances that we have been able to establish from our investigation into four historical cases of contestation, a few words are in order regarding how the radical democratic theoretical project has fundamentally impacted the way in which these episodes of contestation can be analyzed.

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<sup>9</sup> While some authors such as Adrian Little (2009) and Andrew Schaab (2009) have utilized empirical case studies to demonstrate both the real world manifestations of radical democratic forms of politics as well as the theory's prospects in resolving difficult political contests (in Northern Ireland and Australia respectively), there has yet to be a thorough case-based empirical study on what allows for radical democratic forms of politics to be sustained. While theoretical interventions have been able to establish particular criticisms of the radical democratic theorists, these have also been generally conducted without analyzing contests that embody a radical democratic character. See Schaab, "Aboriginal Sovereignty and the Democratic Paradox" in *The Politics of Radical Democracy*, eds. Adrian Little and Moya Lloyd, 52-72 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

## Subject and Method

In many ways, the approach put forth in this work has taken cues from the historical sociology tradition of comparative political analysis whose proponents have included Barrington Moore Jr., Theda Skocpol, and Paul Pierson and whose various works have constituted some of the most compelling studies of regimes and regime change, as well as democracy and democratization. Overall, there are several attractive features of this method that have been displayed when it has come to pinpointing factors that have been responsible for certain outcomes during and after periods of radical and often transformative political contestation – the very type of political episode at the heart of the radical democratic project. First of all, as the above statement suggests, historical sociological studies have tended to have similar objects of analysis – namely, historical ruptures of a sedimented order – to what the radical democratic project explicitly promotes, albeit within a set of prescriptive conditions. Since past studies following this approach have been able to establish lasting insights about such transformative events as democratization and revolution, a similar approach has the potential to offer fresh insights into the similar happenings of radical democratic contestation.

One primary reason for this is that the historical sociological approach is able to document political change over a select duration of time as opposed to through a static “snapshot”.<sup>10</sup> As a result of this ability to analyze the moments central to shifts within events of great dynamism, a researcher is able to develop an understanding of how events - democratizations, revolution, and in our case, radical democratic contestation – with similar beginnings evolved towards highly divergent endings. By pinpointing the circumstances that shifted the direction and eventual outcomes internal to individual episodes and by comparing

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<sup>10</sup> Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

them across cases, a researcher is able to establish a generalized understanding of the circumstances responsible for particular outcomes.

However, despite the benefits that such an approach provides the inquiry, there are also several imposing limits that need to be acknowledged and altered for the purposes of mitigating the method's drawbacks. Indeed, it is the very theoretical bases of radical democratic thought that provide a distinct challenge to our attempt to pinpoint these circumstances responsible for agonistic forms of contestation through an investigation of relevant contentious episodes via a historical sociological approach.

The first, and less revolutionary, challenge to this method brought forth by radical democratic thought involves shifting the understanding of outcomes away from "final outcomes" such as regime types and revolutionary success or failure as in previous historical sociological works in order to move it towards an understanding of outcomes that are far more temporary and changeable. The primary reason for this is the fact that formal democracy does not necessarily provide an indication of the possibility of agonism as radical democratic activity can be extinguished all the while formal trappings of a constitutional democracy remain in place. It is also worth noting that the same can be said in the inverse, with the existence of a formal authoritarian or dictatorial regime not being able to provide sufficient evidence for the impossibility of agonistic contestation. Since both of these scenarios have historical precedence in actual episodes of political contention, it is thus imperative for us to cast our careful eye on the individual moments of agonism/antagonism and their circumstances as opposed to the formation of regime types as was often done in more classical sociological works.

This leads us to the second, and altogether more substantial challenge that radical democratic thought brings to the table for the historical sociological method. This is the challenge of empirically representing the movements of actors and the overall dynamics of

contests in which they participate despite the fact that radical democratic episodes are marked by what can be called a crisis in representation. Though all four of our theorists put forth compatible, though not identical, versions of this crisis of representation, and often go to great lengths to explain how this element of their theorization puts them at odds with more mainstream, representative political theory, it is Rancière who goes the furthest in explaining what makes a truly political or democratic (and for our purposes we can say radical democratic) episode different from what we would usually consider as such. Radical democracy's unfolding in a distinct "world" and according to a separate but always present logic can best be seen through Rancière's elaboration on his third thesis of politics,

"Politics is a specific break with the logic of the *arkhe*. It does not simply presuppose a break with the 'normal' distribution of positions that defines who exercises power and who is subject to it. It also requires a break with the idea that there exist dispositions 'specific' to these positions."<sup>11</sup>

For Rancière, what this entails is the fact that when a properly political event occurs, it is conducted by actors who defy their usually assigned spaces and identities in the political community to dispute a wrong as political equals, and not as bearers of perspectives or demands that stem from their "natural positions".<sup>12</sup> As a result of this, social categories lose their determinacy, with workers no longer being workers, and students no longer being students, at least in the way that the dominant socio-political order defines them and, in turn, sets social and political expectations for them. As Rancière states in *Disagreement*, "There is democracy if there are specific political performers who are neither agents of the state apparatus nor parts of society, if there are groups that displace identities as far as parts of the state or of society go."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics" in *Dissensus: Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Steve Corcoran (New York, Continuum, 2010): 30.

<sup>12</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999): 99.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 100.

It must be said that it is not only Rancière's police order or, for that matter, any of the other theorists' above-mentioned equivalents which becomes challenged by the revelation of political equality and, through it, the contingency of every socio-political order, but also the social scientist. Of course, the historical sociological approach is not immune to this challenge. Indeed, classic historical sociology, along with other approaches which have often tended to rely on structuralist categories such as class or functionalist categories such as student, have tended to imbue predetermined interests into the various social categories at play. Even in more contemporary historical sociological approaches, particularly within historical institutionalism via Skocpol and Pierson, the insistence on the importance of path dependency limits the understanding of political possibilities to those that have been ordained by historical circumstance. One can often see these tendencies at work in studies of liberal democracy in which such categories such as the middle class or the working class are ascribed to carry with them a specific political consciousness and, with it, specific political demands that translate into identifiable outcomes when engaging with other social groups. One common and explicit example of this tendency within studies of liberal democracy is the suggestion that the establishment of a liberal democratic regime can occur once there has been an incorporation of the middle class or working class into the socio-political order. With regards to the former, this is for the reason that the middle class is viewed as being imbued with or historically prescribed the liberal values needed for a democratic system while for the latter, it is for the reason that the incorporation of the working class into the socio-political framework can tame the class' natural or naturalized socio-economic demands and hence protect the liberal democratic regime from revolutionary overthrow or extreme forms of populism.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> For analyses that take this direction see: Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy* (University of Chicago Press, 1992); Carles Boix. *Democracy and Development* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Of course, this type of analysis is not possible with radical democratic episodes of contestation, at least if the researcher wishes to analyze the episodes' occurrences in a way which stays true to the manner in which radical democratic actors participate in these contests. As all four of our chosen radical democratic theorists argue, during radical democratic episodes, political actors, in some way or another, "step out" of their assigned spaces and identities (as workers, students, minorities, etc.) and forge a new identity through action. As such the categories that political scientists, sociologists, and others utilize to analyze the development and outcomes of political events are disrupted. In short, radical democratic action is the very disruption of structures, functions, and path dependencies. Since new subjects and new identities are created in these moments, as a researcher one can only focus on the contingent and constructed identities, interests and demands. This, of course, is opposed to deterministic class or cultural interests that are imposed from the outside. Because of this need to let those engaging in the contest speak for themselves, in radical democracy, there can be no equivalent to Barrington Moore's "no bourgeoisie, no democracy" thesis.<sup>15</sup>

By studying the contingent ruptures which lie at the heart of periods of contestation as well as the heart of radical democratic theory, this project takes the constructed nature of political actors and their interests seriously. As such, it thus necessarily diverges from the structural and cultural accounts found throughout much of the dominant literature in comparative politics that has given priority to more static accounts of actors and outcomes whether having been placed in a political culture, class, or ethno-cultural frame.<sup>16</sup> In many

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<sup>15</sup> Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966).

<sup>16</sup> In what I am calling the "political culture school" important authors and works have included: Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy," *American Political Science Review* Vol 53 (1959): 69-105; Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba. *The Civic Culture* (New York: Sage Publications, 1989); Ronald Inglehart. *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Robert Putnam *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1994). In the "class configuration" school traditional authors include: Karl Marx, *The 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1998) and the aforementioned Barrington Moore (1966). In addition to Rushemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens (1992) and Carles Boix (2003), mentioned above, contemporary authors

ways this approach reflects what Finnemore and Sikkink have described as a constructivist approach in political science as it holds that “(a) human interaction is shaped primarily by ideational factors, not simply material ones, (b) that the most important ideational factors are widely shared or ‘intersubjective beliefs’ which are not reducible to individuals and, (c) these shared beliefs construct the interests and identities of purposive actors”.<sup>17</sup>

However, despite these links, we believe that our approach is closer to that of the “radical constructivism” put forth by Ernesto Laclau, another theorist with close links to the radical democratic theorists. For unlike the constructivism described by Finnemore and Sikkink which can include constructions of a holistic political culture for a political community as a whole, Laclau demonstrates how new identities and demands can be constructed by actors who break from the status quo of the dominant or hegemonic order and, in turn, how subsequent political outcomes are shown to be the result of interactions *between* constructed social groups and their demands rather than a result of any homogenous unity – a concept whose own superficiality is revealed at the moment of contestation.<sup>18</sup> Thus while we still maintain the use of a constructivist lens, like Laclau, we see it operating here at a different level of analysis – specifically at the level of political opposition so central to radical democratic analyses and thought.

The use of “radical constructivism” inspired by Laclau thus takes us part of the way in setting the stage for identifying the circumstances in which an episode of radical democratic contestation can take, and remain, in an agonistic form. First of all, due to the fact that

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with conceptual indebtedness to this type of analysis have also included: Adam Przeworski et al., *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Material Well-being in the World, 1950-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Charles Tilly, *Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2007). For an important work which provides a similar analysis along ethno-cultural lines see: Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (Yale University Press, 1997).

<sup>17</sup> Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink. “Taking Stock: The Constructivist Research Program in International Relations and Comparative Politics.” *Annual Review of Political Science* Vol 4 (2001): 392.

<sup>18</sup> Ernesto Laclau, “Introduction” in Ernesto Laclau. *The Making of Political Identities* (New York, Verso, 1994): 2; Ernesto Laclau. *On Populist Reason* (New York, Verso, 2005): 85.

political outcomes are understood to result from the interactions between constructed sets of actors, it is imperative that we come to understand the position of both sides of any political contest: the set of actors “stepping out” from the dominant socio-political order and the set of actors who act in defense of that order. Though not always playing the role of the perpetrator, as the Occupy Movement, the Umbrella Revolution, and several episodes of the Arab Spring have revealed, it is frequently the actors in defense of the dominant order who are responsible for the episode taking an antagonistic turn. While in past historical sociological accounts, similar types of action, for example the coercive establishment of a dictatorship, were often accounted for through reference to incompatible class positions, we have already witnessed why such an account cannot apply for episodes of radical democratic contests. Indeed, when actors “step out”, they do not do so as a class and may not even embody class-based positions or make any class-based demands. As Rancière argues, “(t)he wrong instituted by politics is not primarily class warfare, it is the difference of each class from itself.”<sup>19</sup>

Though Rancière himself does not go so far as to state it, this can also apply to the set of actors defending the dominant socio-political order. While every order necessarily includes an ordering of economic relations (with a defense of varying degrees of private and common appropriation) this does not necessitate those who defend the order responding to challenges through class or socio-economic motivations or imperatives. Rather, this remains highly contingent on the motivations and, in turn, the constructions of those who are “stepping out” to challenge them. As a result of this, the presence of agonism as opposed to antagonism, already fairly contingent due to the crisis of representation instigated by radical democratic actors “stepping out” from below, becomes highly relational and subsequently even more highly contingent.

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<sup>19</sup> Rancière, *Disagreement*, 18.

Taken together, these challenges leave the researcher with a question of how to empirically establish generalized circumstances for agonistic forms of democratic contestation when not only is this dependent on the relations between two (or more) sets of actors in any contest, but, delinked from any structural or functional identity, the combination of claims that the two (or more) sets can make upon each other are innumerable.

It is at this juncture that this work is of great indebtedness to what has come to be known as the “contentious politics” approach in political science and political sociology, usually associated with Douglas McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly.<sup>20</sup> In a similar vein to the starting points of this work, and thus also similar to the claims of the radical democratic theorists and the “radical constructivism” of Laclau, McAdam, Tilly, and Tarrow state that,

“movements, identities, governments, revolutions, classes, and similar collective nouns do not represent hard, fixed, sharply bounded objects, but observers’ abstractions from continuously negotiated actions among persons and sets of persons... (T)o get our analysis started, nevertheless, we assume that political actors consist of sets of persons and relations among persons whose internal organization and connections with other political actors maintain substantial continuity in time and space.”<sup>21</sup>

With this, it is clear that McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly recognize the contingent and relational nature of both political identities and political contests. However, unlike the radical democratic theorists who derive normative (or better yet, anti-normative) implications from this starting point, the contentious politics scholars are more interested in what contingency and relationality mean for establishing empirical understandings of actual contests. Given that this is a dilemma this work is confronted with as a result of the necessity to adopt a “radical constructivist” approach, their answer to this question provides us not with an outright

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<sup>20</sup> Douglas McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 12.

direction, but with a series of formidable methodological tools with which to establish the circumstances for agonistic contestation.

As this work has already identified and as the “contentious politics” authors concur, the contingent and relational composition of political actors forces us away from identifying “necessary and sufficient conditions for mobilization, action, or certain trajectories.”<sup>22</sup> What they propose, and indeed substantially build upon through their own numerous case studies, is focussing on the dynamics at play during periods of contestation, including the degree of compatibility between opponents’ identities, their capacities for acting upon these identities, and the various processes and causal mechanisms which alter both identities and capacities. While the identification of these elements can be informative in itself, this focus on the dynamics of contention is kept for the larger purpose of identifying regularities of combinations and sequences of dynamics that correspond to particular political outcomes such as revolution or democratization. With the intention of identifying regularities in the dynamics of contention themselves, the method is not only able to capture the relations between competing sets of actors across a wide and diverse range of constructed identities and claims, but is able to establish patterns in these relations that correspond to different political outcomes. As a result of this ability, an adapted approach from the “contentious politics” literature has been put to work for our inquiry into the circumstances for agonistic contestation.

This in turn directly leads to the question of what has been adopted and what has been adapted. In terms of adoption, we can first argue that, in concurrence with the “contentious politics” scholars, it is inappropriate to use the language of “conditions” when inquiring into the regular dynamics of agonistic contestation. For certain, and as McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly attest to, in more structural or cultural approaches in the social sciences, including in

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 13

studies of liberal democracy and liberal democratization, a researcher often indicates one or more particular variables that are correlative with a given outcome. As such, considering these studies' heavy dependence on a small number of identifiable correlative variables, it is in no way inappropriate to label these variables "conditions". However, given the aforementioned contingency and relationality we have introduced into this project due to radical democracy's own constructed and oppositional nature, and hence our desire to identify the regular dynamics at play during agonistic moments of contestation, we have instead opted to entitle these dynamics – our object of inquiry – "circumstances".

The question, of course, that directly stems from this is which dynamics – which circumstances – internal to episodes of radical democratic contestation should serve as the object of our analysis in order to eventually make a general statement on the required circumstances for agonistic contests to be maintained. As an adaptation of dynamics analyzed in the "contentious politics" literature, we have found that interests, capacities, and mechanisms serve as the most substantial dynamics that determine both the direction and outcome of radical democratic contests.

Interests, as an adaptation of the "contentious politics" scholars' dynamic of "identity", is a factor that we have already had a hint of in this chapter through the critique of structuralist interpretations of antagonism put forth in the historical sociological tradition and elsewhere. While sets of actors engaged in a political contest may not always clash due to inherent structural or functional interests, in radical democratic instances, they may yet clash over the interests that they construct for themselves. It is our insistence that because this type of contestatory political identity, rather than just the negative to some other identity's positive – a leftover, remainder, excess, or supplement – necessarily involves an element of construction upon the socio-political world that we believe it is more accurate to speak of them in terms of interests than simply as identities. This of course is not to suggest that the

identity a set of actors' perceives itself to have is not important for the construction and articulation of interests. Rather, interests can be viewed as an active political articulation of a set of actors' identity. When identities shift, interests and the concrete demands put forth by sets of actors are bound to shift as well.

With this stated, interests can also be understood to be the translation of a set of actors' socio-political vision onto the socio-political order. For those sets of actors "stepping out" from below to contest some aspect the socio-political order – whether concerning who should get what, who should be permitted to participate, who should rule the political community, and even how political change or transformation should occur – these interests are articulated, and sometimes implemented, through both the expressed demands of actors and their various mobilizations within the political community that look to shape the socio-political order in their image. For those sets of actors in positions of political power who, during instances of radical democratic contestation, look to defend some aspect of the dominant socio-political order – again, whether concerning who should get what, who should be able to participate, who should rule the political community, and how political change or transformation should occur – these interests are articulated and often implemented through public policy and other state sanctioned institutions of socio-political control also for the purposes of contouring and the socio-political order in their image.

The problem, of course, for radical democratic thought is that often these interests, constitutive of the political actors themselves, come into collision. As will be demonstrated throughout our case studies in the subsequent chapters, it is when one set of actors perceive to have their core interests threatened by an opposing set who have challenged one of their particular interests, or have at least threatened to, by crossing some established boundary, that the chances of agonistic contest transforming into antagonistic confrontation are high.

However, with that stated, we will also witness through our case studies that this compatibility of interest is not the only regularly occurring dynamic at play when radical democratic contests can remain in an agonistic form. As was stated previously, it is divergent combinations of interests, capacities, and mechanisms among competing sets of actors in a contest that determine whether agonism remains a possibility. As another adopted concept from the “contentious politics” literature, the relative capacities of sets of actors involved in an episode of contestation is another factor that determines whether radical democratic contests can remain in an agonistic form as they are what fundamentally determines if a set of actors can defend their interests or encroach upon boundaries against an opponent who has been deemed to have threatened them.

For certain, as we will witness with some of our cases, even if interests have been deemed to be incompatible by one set of actors, without the coercive capacity through institutions such as the police, military, or paramilitary to defend the interests or the encroached upon boundary, the agonistic contest cannot turn into an antagonistic form. As we will see further, even if one set of actors does possess a clear coercive capacity over its opponent, if the opponent has been able to establish a high level of social capacity – through the seizure and control of key socio-political spaces in the polity such as production, education, and transportation – this can also create a check on the set of actors with the coercive advantage as it becomes increasingly difficult for it to turn to antagonism without the possibility of jeopardizing their interests. As a result of these possibilities, relative capacities must be considered alongside the compatibility of interests in establishing the circumstances for the maintenance of agonism.

Finally, as another important adaptation from the “contentious politics” scholars, what we have entitled “mechanisms” has been added to our list of regular dynamics of radical democratic contestation that needs to be taken into consideration for our analysis of the

possibilities of agonism. In essence, though the appearance of mechanisms can stem from many institutional sources and sometimes even the sets of actors engaged in the contest themselves, the reason for being able to group these phenomena under a single explanatory category is the fact that their appearance on the scene of contestation allows for the interests and capacities of the engaged sets of actors to change. In any sustained contest, coming to understand the effect that mechanisms have on the sets of actors in the contest is crucial as it is the only way in which we can explain the nature of the contest changing its shape, size or intensity as time progresses. For example, the appearance of the mechanism of identity shift that sees the reconfiguration of the degree of disapproval one set of actors holds towards its opponent can alter that set's interests and mobilize it in a manner that is more threatening to its opponents' interests, thus changing the potential for agonism. The same can be said for the mechanism of brokerage that links previously unlinked sites of contestation together against a common opponent and that thus alters the new set's capacity for change – a shift that could be responded to by the opponent in ways that could change the dynamics of the contest and open it up to either agonism or antagonism, depending on the newly brokered set's level of threat.

Given the way in which various mechanisms alter the compatibility of interests or the relative capacity of sets of actors engaged in a radical democratic contest, developing an understanding of the regularly appearing mechanisms in periods of contestation is also essential for establishing the general circumstances for the maintenance of agonism. The key question, of course, is which mechanisms combine with which conglomeration of interests and capacities to allow for the agonistic form to continue.

With that stated, the reason that we have suggested that the inclusion of mechanisms in this study is an adaptation rather than a straight adoption from the “contentious politics” scholars is due to our collapsing of these scholars' similar yet distinct categories of

“mechanisms” and “processes”. According to Tilly, there is a “simple distinction” between these two concepts. As he states, while “mechanisms form a delimited class of events that change relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations...Processes are frequently occurring combinations or sequences of mechanisms.”<sup>23</sup> Despite this difference in scale however, we have opted to collapse the two for the fact that, due to their similar functions in changing relations among sets of elements (like interests and capacities in our case), it is often difficult to distinguish mechanisms from processes in episodes of contention. For example, while the aforementioned mechanism of brokerage is identified as a mechanism, it can also be viewed as a larger process as it often depends on other mechanisms such as identity shift and diffusion for its appearance. As such, given that many of the “contentious politics” scholars’ mechanisms and processes can be understood as interdependent and serving a similar purpose, we have decided to classify them solely as mechanisms to aid in the project’s clarity. In situations within our case studies whereby it has been felt that one mechanism could not explain the changes put into effect, a series of mechanisms have been utilised to ensure that the shift has been explained comprehensively.

A list of mechanisms, adapted from the “contentious politics” scholars, that will be identified and analyzed throughout this work includes:

**Boundary Activation:** The increase in the salience of the us/them distinction between two political actors.

**Brokerage:** The production of a new connection between previously unconnected or weakly connected sites.

**Identity Shift:** People who previously thought of themselves in a variety of distinct social roles come together to realize a unified – if temporary – identity.

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<sup>23</sup> Charles Tilly, “Mechanisms in Political Processes.” *Annual Review of Political Science* Vol 4 (2001): 26.

Diffusion: The spread of a contentious performance, issue, or interpretive frame from one site to another.

Certification: The validation of actors, their performances, and their claims by external authorities.

Co-optation: The incorporation of a previously excluded political actor into some centre of power.

Disillusionment: The decline in the commitment of individuals or political actors to previously sustaining beliefs.

Defection: The exit of a political actor from a previously effective coalition and/or coordinated action.<sup>24</sup>

With these methodological tools in hand, we are able to investigate particular periods of radical democratic contestation and determine the regular combinations of interest compatibility, relative capacity, and mechanisms of activation which result in these challenges remaining in their agonistic form. As will be demonstrated throughout our case studies of Croatia, Thailand, Singapore, and France and also through the sets of comparative analysis that will follow from them in subsequent chapters, we can argue that there are three fundamental circumstances that allow these contests to take root and be maintained in an agonistic form. These circumstances are as follows:

1. A radical democratic form of politics – one of an agonistic “stepping out” with the expressed goal of demonstrating equality and righting a particular wrong – can first occur if one set of actors in the contest does not perceive to have their core interests threatened, including their long-term interests, by another set of actors who has challenged some particular interest or crossed some established boundary.

2. If interests are indeed perceived to be threatened, there still remains a chance for the radical democratic form to continue. This depends on whether this set of actors in question

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<sup>24</sup> Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2006): 215.

has the capacity to shut down the challenge and uphold the interest or boundary through antagonistic means. If this set of actors does not have such capacity, it is possible for the radical democratic form to continue.

3. Mechanisms of activation are required for any type of contest to begin, particularly those which push the interests of competing sets of actors away from compromise. However, when these mechanisms affecting interests push actors too far away from the possibility of compromise, they threaten their compatibility and potentially engender antagonism. In a situation of interest incompatibility, mechanisms that re-enforce or redistribute coercive capacity lead to antagonism. By contrast, mechanisms that increase a subordinate force's social capacity through widespread brokerage and diffusion of opposition throughout the socio-political field often create stalemates and thus prolong the radical democratic form.

For most readers it will become immediately clear that this combination of regularly occurring dynamics during contestations that ensure the agonistic form leaves the radical democratic form highly limited, with a dependence on the benevolence of the dominant force in the contest and a need for some degree of compromise. Yet, though these three circumstances, as well as the analysis of regular dynamics of radical democratic contestation that led their establishment, have implications and also create serious challenges for radical democracy as a political project that require certain theoretical interventions to address them, for the time being it is imperative that we explain some of the other key methodological steps that have allowed us to establish these circumstances.

### **Establishing Radical Democratic Circumstances**

First of all, unlike in some studies of liberal democracy, this investigation utilizes a relatively “minimalist” definition of democracy with the agonistic relations of contenders as

its central component, thus focusing heavily on a polity's continued allowance of political opposition. Of course, it must be made clear that this "minimalism" will be true only in terms of the numerical lack of requirements put forth and not the political importance of these requirements. For though it may appear limited in scope, it is of the highest importance to us whether or not actors "stepping out" of the dominant order and engaging in political opposition are afforded the space to agonistically contest other actors with differing positions and projects within the same polity, as it is this commitment to extended openness that lies at the heart of the radical democratic ideal.

When keeping this in mind, the so-called "minimalism" we have spoken about actually reveals something quite demanding. For example, the existence of free and fair elections, so often a minimum standard of democratic rule is insufficient for a contest to be classified as democratic for our purposes. With our commitment to the continued openness of contestation, democracy in this radical iteration does not begin or end with the holding or nullification of elections via the halls and offices of political power. Rather, the moment that democratic agonism comes to an end occurs at any point that a set of actors, whether those in a dominant position or those "stepping out" are able to coercively clear or attempt to clear the expression of alternative positions in the name of political righteousness – when a claim of being entitled to speak for or above others physically translates into efforts to close down the political activity of the opponent. As such, in our investigation of moments of agonism and antagonism, in an effort to replicate the commitments of the radical democratic theorists, we define an agonistic moment as one in which competing sets of actors engaged in a contest are able to do so without the appearance of coercive attempts to clear the political manifestations of the other. Antagonism by contrast is defined as a moment in which such attempts do appear.

Once again, whether such attempts are codified depends on their sanctioning by official bodies of power, though for us, this stamp of approval by institutional, constitutional, or legal officialdom is of little importance on its own. Indeed, the parameters laid out in state documents, even if penned in golden ink, are not worth the paper they are written on if they are unable to constrain the actions of agents with power. A democratic constitution, for example, means little if the army or police at whoever's behest attempt to clear the manifestations of what are deemed unfavourable elements in an extra-constitutional manner. In short, we can have de facto undemocratic antagonism within a constitutional democracy. The same can be said in the opposite situation for an authoritarian constitutional regime in which these arms of the coercive apparatus do not do their job. As such, whether or not these attempts are codified does not matter to us, for both are equally undemocratic in a radical democratic iteration.

Overall thus, in utilizing these definitions of agonism and antagonism, we provided ourselves with a necessary foundation through which we could analyze the frequently occurring combinations of interest compatibility, relative capacities and intervening mechanisms that have corresponded to these two defined moments as they have appeared in historical episodes, and subsequently establish the three circumstances necessary for radical democratic challenges to remain in their agonistic form. This, of course, also made the selection of historical cases an important decision that requires some degree of explanation.

As briefly stated above, the investigation into moments of agonism and antagonism and their corresponding combinations of interests, capacities, and mechanisms has been conducted through the historical case studies of Croatia 1990 – 1995, Thailand 2005 – 2014, Singapore 1945 – 1970, and France January to June 1968. Though at first sight, there are several complications that could come as a result of this case selection, the clear benefits of utilizing these case studies should be presented.

First and foremost, all four historical periods are easily identified as having involved a high degree of contention between competing actors engaged in the respective contest. However, more importantly, as it concerns our project there is an added benefit that all four episodes of contestation began agonistically - with a radical democratic “stepping out” of certain actors from their usual places and functions in the name of equality - before shifting, in differing degrees, backward and forward between moments of agonism and antagonism. The Croatian case, starting with the agonistic contention of the Croatian Serbs against the newly elected Croatian nationalist party, the HDZ, is one that slowly but surely degenerated into antagonism. In the Thai case, both “colour shirt movements” – Yellow and Red – “stepped out” against the Thaksin and Old Elite orders respectively in an agonistic manner, only for the political contests in Thailand to fluctuate between agonism and antagonism for nearly a decade. In Singapore, the radical democratic challenges of the trade unions and the student movements which “stepped out” of their normal functions against the British colonialists started agonistically though also fluctuated between agonism and antagonism depending on the interests of the British, only later to coalesce around something akin to the permanent possibility of antagonism after independence due to the PAP’s vision and hegemony. Finally, in France, while the tensions between radical student groups who refused to be understood as students and the Gaullists started in a scenario of agonism, the period of May and June 1968, when the movement radically shifted scales towards a near revolutionary situation and then back towards the status quo, was littered with varying moments of agonism and antagonism.

This of course provided us with a large number of moments of both an agonistic and antagonistic nature through which we could analyze the corresponding recurrent combinations of interests, capacities, and mechanisms. Indeed, the fact that all four cases demonstrated *different degrees* of agonism on their way or way back from *different degrees*

of antagonism has allowed us to categorize these varying degrees in terms of four common scenarios in which agonism appeared (protest, occupation, containment stalemate) and four common scenarios in which antagonism appeared (crackdown, civil war, insurrection, and take-over). It was through this diversity of scenarios that we have been able to establish the three general circumstances for radical democratic activity to remain agonistic. With that stated, it can be said that though there are substantial differences in terms of the chronological lengths of these episodes with the Singaporean case being presented over a twenty-five year period and the French case being presented only over several months, the similar number of shifts between agonism and antagonism, and indeed between the different forms each of these took, allow for these to be compared and contrasted without much difficulty.

The bigger concern, of course, may come from the fact that the cases stem from different political cultures, regional locations, historical experiences, decades, and, as a result of the last three, socio-economic positions. Though leaving itself open to methodological criticism, it is my contention that a cross-regional comparison such as this one is capable of bearing much fruit. Often, such studies are not conducted for the complications attributed to comparing “apples and oranges”. However, it must be stated that what has allowed for such classifications has been the assumed relationship of determinacy between what can be described as “common foundations” and “common outcomes”. European countries, for example, given their similar cultural norms, levels of development, and structural formations, are thought to produce similar outcomes while other regions, whether it be Latin America, Africa or, in this case, Southeast Asia, are thought to produce their own similar political outcomes from their own similar variables. As such, eyebrows are bound to be raised when comparisons between countries that are situated in divergent regions are used to explain general political phenomena.

Yet, once more, as it was with the necessary rejection of deterministic understandings of political actors and their challenges, radical democratic theory has already demonstrated why this belief in “common foundations” is not always useful to account for instances of political contestation. Despite the fact that such radically disruptive moments are rare when compared to political happenings in their conventional sense, the histories of various countries in both Europe and Southeast Asia (and in any region for that matter) have demonstrated that actors who act politically and shape political developments are capable of doing so in a constructed, contingent, and relational fashion, as opposed to a necessarily culturally, economically, or structurally determined one. Through this type of radical democratic contestation – whereby actors “step out” of their given or ascribed socio-political identity and inaugurate an active one for the purposes of affirmation, equality, and challenge to the dominant order – the democratic actors also subvert the conventional social scientific logics of representation which analysts normally utilize to explain events, including those associated with “common foundations”.

As such, just as it becomes imperative to reject the abstract deterministic explanations of political actions and outcomes when analyzing episodes of radical democratic challenges to the dominant socio-political order in favour of a concrete inquiry into these actors’ contingent, constructed, and relational interests and capacities, so too is it imperative to reject the claim that only cases with “common foundations” ought to be compared. For certain, when attempting to pinpoint the appropriate configuration of interests, capacities, and mechanisms for the maintenance of agonistic forms of contestation – all of which are situated within, and not abstractly prior to, radical democratic episodes of contestation, it is a legitimate exercise to select cases that have what McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly have called

“uncommon foundations”.<sup>25</sup> As a result of the common tendency for social scientists to look for such culturally, economically, or structured dependent answers to questions such as contention and its resolution, one other reason for selecting these particular case studies was due to the difficulty of placing these cases within the bounds of such traditional forms of explanation.

With regard to the Croatian case, despite having had a political culture of toleration between ethnic Croatians and Serbs during the communist period, such political culture was not able to hold due to the new demands put forth by the HDZ and the radical democratic challenge of the Croatian Serbs who “stepped out” to contest them with their own demands. As a result of this, the moments of agonism and antagonism in the Croatian case cannot be explained by some appeal to common political culture but only the contingent and constructed interests and demands that were put forth during the contest itself.

The Thai case by contrast faces difficulties in terms of explanation through both classic structuralist and culturalist explanations. In terms of the weakness of the structuralist argument, while historically it has been the middle class and/or the working class who has been the harbinger of democratic values with the “peasantry” embodying reactionary values, in the Thai case it has been the former two who have been at the forefront of pushing for more authoritarian solutions while the latter has been most keen on appealing to democracy. Likewise, in terms of culture, while it could be argued that Thailand does not have a democratic political culture due to the frequent involvement of the military in its politics, the country also has a proud history of democratic revolt and popular constitutionalism that has emanated from different groups since the 1970s. With the Thai case as well thus, only an analysis which takes the constructed and contingent demands of the sets of actors involved in

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<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of the “uncommon foundations” approach, see: McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, 82.

the contest can adequately explain the agonistic and antagonistic moments that have appeared during the last ten years.

In terms of the Singapore case, which has always had a slightly anomalous status in comparative politics, neither the structuralist nor culturalist arguments suffice either. Indeed, while the working class and growing middle class during the pre-independence period demonstrated their democratic values and demands time after time against the British, upon independence, democratic engagement gave way to a hybrid system of management in which agonistic contestation was ruled out entirely. As such, this too can only be explained with a view to the constructed and contingent interests and demands of competing sets of actors.

Finally, the French case is perhaps the most anomalous of all with a mass revolt on the part of workers and students despite the fact that the 1960s were one of the most prosperous decades in the history of the country. As countless historical accounts have documented, May 68 can only be explained by taking into account some of the “higher order” demands emanating from below including the democratization of the society. As such, in terms of the moments of agonism and antagonism, a true understanding of these can also only come as a result of a careful analysis of the constructed interests and demands of the event’s participants relative to those of the status quo defended by the Gaullist order.

Overall thus, as a result of the starting point of each episode reflecting the starting point of the radical democratic theorists’ project, the diversity of agonistic and antagonistic moments that they have brought to the table, and the difficulty of explaining them according to another logic separate from the radical democratic one, we are confident in presenting these case studies as the most appropriate choice for analysing and subsequently demonstrating the circumstances conducive to agonistic contests.

## **Research Methodology**

Given the affinity of this project to others in the historical sociological tradition, when it comes to the actual research methods employed for attaining the project's historical meat and potatoes, we have followed some the methods laid out by Skocpol in her *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology* for analytic, historical, and sociological comparisons such as this one. As previously stated, one aspect of the historical sociological method that we have had to alter is with regard to analyzing the motivations of actors involved in the radical democratic contests. Indeed, within our inquiries into the historical case studies, rather than "reading in" motivations based on actors' social class or function, we have instead, in keeping with the aforementioned method of radical constructivism, paid close attention to the constructed demands of actors as well as the ways in which they framed them as they are presented in the historical literature. In having kept a close eye to these crucial elements during the historical research, we believe we have been able to more accurately represent the episodes as they truly were, namely radical democratic contests. This of course is not to say that there could not have been more room for in-depth discourse analysis in both the inquiry into and presentation of the contests. For certain, the lack of in-depth discourse analysis has been one of our necessarily trade-offs between breadth and depth. While we have attempted to provide some of this analysis where possible, capturing the various twists and turns of episodes of contention across several prolonged episodes was necessary for establishing a comprehensive set of circumstances for the possibility of radical democratic politics.

This, of course, is not the only element of the study that has been slightly compromised by the need to observe and present lengthy historical episodes. Indeed, the type of historical research that could be conducted was also impacted by this research design. As Skocpol has suggested, "in the realm of actual research practice...sociologists may borrow archival methods from historians or they may use historians' works as 'secondary' sources of

evidence.”<sup>26</sup> As such, the configurations of interests, capacities, and mechanisms we looked to analyze were found within the written body of history. It must be said however that, for the most part, the historical evidence put to work in this inquiry was that which stemmed from the essential secondary sources written on each respective case study. Since the primary purpose of our historical cases was to serve as a tool to investigate certain political dynamics which, in turn, were used to buttress the project of radical democracy, the use of reliable secondary sources was the best way to ensure that our historical inquiries were conducted as efficiently as possible while remaining committed to a comprehensive and balanced account. Doing so, particularly with the need to conduct inquiries into four case studies for necessary breadth, has allowed us to allocate the proper proportion of the project to cross-case analysis, the development of our theses, and the discussion of implications for radical democratic thought.

With that said however, in order to ensure the most accurate historical account possible, the project has not relied on secondary sources without caution. With secondary sources such as those mentioned being interpretations rather than residues of history, some steps had to be taken in order to ensure that the information on which the project draws was not slanted by historiographical biases. In her suggestions regarding research methodology, Skocpol provides two solutions to this problem that this project has taken on board. First is providing a specific role for primary sources and archival research. As Skocpol states,

“Secondary research can also be strategically supplemented by carefully selected primary investigations or reinvestigations, ... comparative historical sociologists are well advised to familiarize themselves with at least some of the primary evidence on which the secondary sources have built conclusions. Such a practice may reconfirm confidence in the findings of the specialists. Alternatively, it may call particularly secondary sources into question or open up the possibility for the comparative historical sociologist to build new findings out of primary sources previously inadequately analyzed.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Theda Skocpol, *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology*. (Cambridge University Press, 1984): 360.  
<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 383.

Likewise, just as secondary sources need to be checked against primary documents, so too do secondary sources need to be checked against each other. Often in history, historiographical trends dictate the particular interpretation of a given event and, as such, it is imperative to consult a wide and balanced range of literature to obtain a more complete understanding of the period at hand. Skocpol writes that,

“Comparative historical sociologists who use secondary sources must... pay careful attention to varying historiographical interpretations, both among contemporary historians and across scholarly generations of historians. The questions that the comparative historical sociologist needs to ask about every one of the cases included in his or her study may not correspond to the currently fashionable questions historians are asking about a given case. Thus, the comparativist must be very systematic in searching through historical literatures to find evidence for and against the hypotheses being explored.”<sup>28</sup>

For certain, this inquiry has incorporated the suggestion of paying careful attention to the primary resources that have shaped the secondary literature, as well as the historiographical differences between the secondary resources themselves. This has particularly been the case with regard to one of the historical cases that remain controversial and whereby the secondary literature has been produced under continually sensitive political conditions. This of course is none other than the Singapore case. Given that the depiction of the country’s history has, at times, been produced in a manner that has been careful not to challenge the official history put forth by the PAP, reputable alternative sources based on primary documents from the British colonial period have been included for an appropriate balanced view of some controversial events. Likewise, several contemporary publications, which have been willing to take more risks in challenging some of the dominant narratives, have also been incorporated for the sake of balance. In a similar vein, with regard to the other case studies, efforts to include a wide range of secondary sources that reflect differing

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 382.

perspectives on their respective episodes have been made to ensure that the most comprehensive and objective account of the events under study was constructed, analyzed, and presented for our social scientific inquiry.

### **Chapter Breakdown**

In order to set the theoretical parameters for the inquiry undertaken in this work, Chapter 2 lays out the projects of Mouffe, Connolly, Honig, and Rancière in great detail, paying close attention to the similarities that provide the overall radical democratic vision with its bases as well as its political aims. After a thorough engagement with these, the chapter also furthers the discussion regarding the central theoretical weakness of the four theorists, namely their inability to account for the circumstances that allow for agonistic relations between political contenders to be maintained.

With these grounds having been established, Chapters 3-6 explore the dynamics of radical democratic contestation within our selected case studies: Croatia 1990 – 1995, Thailand 2005 – 2014, Singapore 1945 – 1970, and France January to June 1968. Through an analysis of the individual case studies and their internal instances of agonism and antagonism, we begin to identify recurrent patterns of interest compatibility, relative capacities, and intervening mechanisms that correspond to agonistic and antagonistic moments within periods of contestation.

While these case study chapters provide the empirical backbone of the study, the comparative analytical work needed to establish general circumstances across the cases is conducted in Chapter 7. In this chapter, we demonstrate that the possibilities for radical democratic activity to either continue within an agonistic framework or by contrast devolve into forms of antagonism fall into eight general scenarios – four of agonism and four of antagonism. After establishing these scenarios through the comparison of similar political

occurrences as well as their associated patterns of interests, capacities, and mechanisms across the cases, we are able further generalize and establish the three fundamental circumstances for radical democratic contests to maintain an agonistic form. It is at this point that the work turns to a question of implications for the radical democratic project.

As will become clear, the three identified circumstances, as well as the analysis which has led to their establishment, including the dynamics of these eight agonistic/antagonistic scenarios, present some serious challenges for radical democratic thought – challenges which need to be clearly understood and intervened in if the project is to be of assistance to future political theorists and political actors looking for inspiration from the radical democratic project. In Chapter 8, we thoroughly unpack five problems identified in our analysis that come to challenge some of the main goals of the radical democratic project, including the goals of agonism, political equality, and socio-political transformation.

With these problems being thoroughly detailed, the work then moves to the question of where radical democratic thought stands in light of these identified challenges which could indeed render much of the project unfeasible and, further, which theoretical interventions and innovations are required to shield the project from some of these problems and in turn save many of its worthwhile aspects. As such, in our final chapter, Chapter 9, we argue that though parts of the radical democratic project can, and should certainly, be salvaged, its designs cannot be maintained as Mouffe, Rancière, Connolly, and Honig have presented them. Indeed, we will see that as a result of a certain trade-off between maintaining radicalism and maintaining an agonistic relation between contending sets of actors that becomes undeniable through our analyses, particular correctives need to be included within the radical democratic project to ensure that some, though unfortunately not all, of its political goals are sustained.

Before we can elaborate on these issues further however, a great deal of groundwork including a presentation of the strengths and weaknesses of radical democratic thought, an

analysis of our four reflective case studies, and a discussion of its implications for the radical democratic project needs to be laid out more thoroughly and with more attention to detail.

With that stated, it is thus necessary to begin this comprehensive study with the very bases for the project itself, the theorizations of Mouffe, Rancière, Connolly, and Honig, whose various omissions on the nature of political contests have forced us to ask if radical democracy, a project that has inspired many, can withstand the pressures of the very forces it awakens and brings to life.

## Chapter 2 Democratic Paradoxes and Political Blind Spots

### Post-Foundational Foundations

Though there are many characteristics to which we can, and will, attribute to radical democratic thinkers, it is their desire not only to work through a paradox that presents itself during episodes involving a “demos”, but also to embrace it as a positive political development that shapes their theoretical approach and political prescriptions. Though each of the respective theorists has their own way of formulating it depending, of course, on their various arguments leading up to its appearance in their work, Bonnie Honig puts forth a general formulation of this paradox that encapsulates the post-foundational logic also at work within the other three thinkers. As she states in *Emergency Politics*, “power must rest with the people but the people are never so fully who they need to be that they can be counted upon to exercise their power democratically.”<sup>29</sup> For some, the people cannot be engendered without generating remainders and, as such, while some rule or benefit from that rule, others are unjustifiably excluded. With this, the people can never be as unified as they need to be in order to rule or be ruled as a democratic whole. For others, the people are unable to rule because, though someone necessarily must, as a result of the political equality that democracy presupposes, no one is actually ordained with the entitlement to do so. In this case, even in situations whereby rule is legitimated by mechanisms we usually describe as just, these mechanisms, along with the orders they produce, must be deemed as arbitrary.

On the whole, whether due to the impossibility of unity in the first case, the impossibility of entitlement in the second, or even a combination of the two, it is through this paradox that radical democratic theorists build their political project. Once again, though we will see that this project is not an identical one between the four thinkers, with some

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<sup>29</sup> Bonnie Honig, *Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law, Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009): 2.

emphasizing certain elements more than others when the elements proposed are similar and at times putting forth fairly different proposals, we can also argue that these radical democratic theorists are on the same page when it comes to the proposal of keeping the political contest open to renewal and in a manner that maintains an agonistic relation between those involved in the contest. Indeed, though these are two separate elements, for the radical democratic theorists a situation of renewal without agonism would be unable to provide some of the positive consequences that the four theorists understand as being produced as a result, including the affirmation of political equality, the public litigation of decisions made oligarchically, the unsettling of long-sedimented orders, and perhaps even the reconfiguration or transformation of the socio-political world in a manner that is more inclusive and representative of previously marginalized or invisible subject positions. Agonism and the frequent renewal of the political contest thus are postulated as general requirements not only because, in the post-foundational condition of the democratic paradox, there are few, and debatable, legitimate bases for necessitating their closure, but because their continuance opens the door to some other ends that progressive political theorists and actors have a long history of struggling for.

At this point, we must state that such prescriptive goals which we can go so far as to call normative may appear as being slightly paradoxical in their own right given the fact that they are put forth by a collection of post-foundationalist thinkers – those usually committed to deconstructing and revealing the exclusions of norms as opposed to putting forth norms of their own. However, despite this fact, we will see that the commitment to such goals does find a fair amount of expression in their work. The question that must be asked thus is how do the radical democratic thinkers' post-foundationalist/post-structuralist starting points come to fit with the promotion of particular prescriptive or normative goals?

Though the tension is not an easy one to completely erase, there is one way in which radical democratic thought tries to soften the tension. Fundamentally, this involves radical democratic thinkers proposing norms that are not the programmatic goals of individual sets of political actors but rather as a series of goals for the bettering of political contests *between* sets of actors including, of course, the central goal of agonism. In other words rather than proposing norms in the manner that more classic forms of political philosophy often do, radical democratic thought, particularly in its promotion of agonism, limits itself to proposing norms for the very challenging of norms. Adrian Little discusses this peculiar normative stance of radical democratic thought as a type of non-ideal theory in his critical exchange with Alan Finlayson and Simon Tormey. After stating that many post-structuralist accounts (of which radical democratic theory is one) are often “reluctant to offer definitive normative accounts of an alternative” for the fear of falling “into the methodological trap of other theories that fail to be open about the value-laden nature of their commitments”, Little argues that radical democratic thought has responded to the question of normativity in a fairly different way.<sup>30</sup> As he states,

“in this approach the point...is not just to deconstruct prevailing institutions and power structures, but also to engage in the development of alternative hegemonic projects that reflect different set of political priorities and a reordering of power structures to generate a less elitist, hierarchical set of power structures....it seeks to replace the prevailing interpretation with another *in the full understanding that what is real is not fixed or static at a given point in time.* (emphasis mine).<sup>31</sup>

It is this openness to non-permanence and the perpetual continuation of the political contest that lies at the heart of what we can call radical democracy’s normative commitments, including its promotion of agonism, equality, and socio-political transformation. It is also what allows the radical democratic theorists to make judgments about not only other political

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<sup>30</sup> Adrian Little, Alan Finlayson, and Simon Tormey, “Reconstituting Realism: Feasibility, Utopia and Epistemological Imperfection,” *Contemporary Political Theory* Vol 14 No 3 (2015): 285.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

theories but also the way in which politics operates in our current era. As the theorists' bodies of work will demonstrate, in spite of the fact that some recent attempts of democratic renewal – the Occupy Movement, the Umbrella Revolution, the Quebec Student Strike, and some instances of the Arab Spring – were shut down or limited by the very orders they were up against, this type of attempt at renewal is needed more than ever given the direction that politics in many countries has been going toward throughout the last quarter of a century. Indeed, as all of our four selected theorists indicate somewhere in their work, the last twenty-five years have been marked by the growth of what some call post-politics. Though there is much to be said about this, we can summarize here and state that post-politics or, for some, post-democracy, describes the current state-of-affairs whereby, as a result of the economic pressures and security concerns that have come as a result of globalization, the decisions of governments have become more managerial and technocratic in nature while the spaces for alternatives have been gradually shrinking. While some of this decline in alternative space has come as a result of the direction of the technocratic state in its quest to regulate and manage global risks, the theorists point out that a part of this decline must also be placed on civil society groups and political organizations, including parties, many of whom have accepted to work within the post-political managerial scenario as opposed to contest it.

This, of course, given the primary concerns of the radical democratic theorists, fosters nothing short of a crisis. Indeed, if the theorists have argued that, even at the most responsive of times, all political orders produce remainders and that all political rule is oligarchic and arbitrary thus requiring constant openness to renewal and reconfiguration, what does this mean in a time such as now when the current technocratic direction of politics is being presented as not only legitimate but without remainder? In short, it means a plethora of unaccounted for remainders without the possibility of redress. It also means our arbitrary acquiescence to oligarchic decisions without recourse to dispute. In short, it means the

erasure of the political and, for those who do not stand to benefit from nor believe in the latest post-political “end of history”, the need to save it.

If political theory is an effort to provide solutions to the political problems that we are collectively faced with at a given historical juncture, then radical democratic theory has lived up to its purpose and, given the current direction towards the evisceration of the political mentioned above, perhaps even more so than some of its philosophical counterparts in liberal, communitarian, and left-wing thought who have not paid sufficient attention to such a direction or have even contributed to it. As will become clear in the presentation of the radical democratic theorists’ individual bodies of work, political philosophy has all too often attempted to displace politics in an effort to provide the most appropriate principles and institutions for the correct allocation of rights and goods or the fully realized political community. In doing so, it has often ignored the paradox of politics and thus, in addition to having fostered types of exclusions and hierarchical orderings in the past, has also established the theoretical bases for exacerbating rather than ameliorating the problems associated with the contemporary post-political direction of politics the radical democratic theorists identify. In this way as well, in being able to pinpoint some of the areas of more prominent liberal, communitarian, and left-wing thought in which the issues of remainders and arbitrary rule have been omitted, radical democratic theory has also been able to make a significant contribution to contemporary political thought for both the current juncture and future ones.

Taken together, the timely and thought-provoking interventions that radical democratic approaches have made at both the level of theory and the level of political practice have earned the attention of many. For certain, given the fact that the radical democratic theorists have not only been able to put forth a general project of highly admirable political goals that serves as a check against the omissions of some of political theory’s dominant approaches, but have also given us theoretical tools that are of much

pertinence taking into consideration democracy's current critical condition, we can say that the aims of radical democracy are worthy of our defense.

Yet, as we have stated in the introduction, there is also a key omission within the works of the radical democratic theorists themselves. This omission is none other than the fact that, in abstracting from actual episodes of contestation involving radical democratic actors, the radical democratic theorists are unable to thoroughly explain the way in which an agonistic relationship can be maintained between contending sets of actors involved in a contest. As one example, we can take some of the episodes in the Arab Spring which were shut down antagonistically after fairly substantial periods of agonistic contestation including in Egypt and Libya. In analyzing these events, certain questions immediately come to the fore. First, what made these episodes turn antagonistic? Was it simply a matter of viewing all difference as illegitimate? Was it a matter of resentment fostered by a lack of political avenues or socio-economic pressures? Or was it something internal to the dynamics of the contest itself? Of course, the answer to these questions could include the possibility that they involved a combination of all three factors to differing degrees. The problem however is that radical democratic theory as it stands cannot provide us with a clear answer to these questions.

As such, within this chapter, after presenting the development of the four chosen radical democratic theorists' work, their important insights into the omissions of political theory and consequent dangerous blind spots in political practice, and their proposals for their rectification, we also need to investigate this blind spot of their own, which is their tendency to abstract from the very object of their political project – compellingly complex episodes of political contestation. It is these various strengths and weaknesses of each thinker's thought and of the radical democratic theoretical project as a whole to which we now turn.

## Mouffe's Post-Marxism

Though some of the other theorists explored in this chapter may have been more influential with their innovative interventions in the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the work of Chantal Mouffe ought to be addressed first particularly as a result of the role its early analyses had in setting the general framework, as well as specific conceptual terms utilized, for the radical democratic discussion and debate. Indeed, though others have gone on to use the terms in a variety of both similar and divergent ways, it was with Mouffe's publication of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy (HSS)* in 1985 with Ernesto Laclau that the concepts of radical democracy and agonistic pluralism were first put forth in a systematic manner.

Above all, the ground-breaking *HSS*, which spawned a large amount of controversy amongst the Marxist left, broke with many of the conceptual assumptions of that same tradition of which Laclau and Mouffe had been a part. According to Mouffe, both the Soviet experience and the weakening of the social-democratic parties in Western Europe had demonstrated the fact that Marxism's "real movement of society" based upon the class-struggle was in fact a form of class-reductionism. This was revealed through the rise of the so-called "new social movements" within Europe that Marxism was unable to account for along with a plethora of other struggles and demands which could not be subsumed under the logic of the class-struggle, including those related to issues of diversity, anti-racism, and anti-sexism.<sup>32</sup>

According to Mouffe thus, what was required of the left was a reformulation of its foundational political philosophy – one that, as the authors put forward in *HSS*, focussed specifically on the nature of the political, building upon some of the anti-essentialist elements of post-structuralist thought as well as some important insights from Antonio Gramsci's

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<sup>32</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (New York: Verso, 1993): 9.

theory of hegemony.<sup>33</sup> Though Mouffe often appeals to different thinkers associated with post-structuralism in her work such as Wittgenstein and Derrida, her theory of the political has consistently been presented throughout her work with two interrelated moves.

First is an appeal to the post-foundationalism of Claude Lefort and his account of the “dissolution of the markers of certainty” within modernity.<sup>34</sup> Following from Lefort, Mouffe believes that in a society in which the concept of divine right of kings no longer holds, the space of legitimate political rule remains perpetually vacant, with no ultimate foundation or element of final legitimation that we can appeal to, such as Reason.<sup>35</sup> For Mouffe, the fact that many in the modern period failed to see that there are always multiple forms of rationality led to inevitable failures in trying to maintain Reason as the ultimate ground or final element of legitimation. As Mouffe argues in response to this problematic in *The Return of the Political*, “radical democracy demands that we acknowledge difference – the particular, the multiple, the heterogeneous – in effect, everything that has been excluded by the concept of Man in the abstract.”<sup>36</sup> In turn, it also means acknowledging that every order is a contingent one and that “things could always be otherwise.”<sup>37</sup>

Beyond this however, Mouffe makes a second theoretical move which involves the articulation of her theory of the subject which attempts to ward off naysayers who defend the Enlightenment ideal that certain subjects are unified and objective carriers of the fully and truly realized political community, whether through Reason or through the embodiment of the social totality. Indeed, such a privileging of particular subjects is impossible because the subject is always divided. As Mouffe states,

“...we are in fact always multiple and contradictory subjects, inhabitants of a diversity of communities (as many, really, as the social relations in which we participate and the subject

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<sup>33</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (New York: Verso, 2013): 130.

<sup>34</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (New York: Verso, 2001): 1.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>37</sup> Mouffe, *Agonistics*, 131.

positions they define), constructed by a variety of discourses, and precariously and temporarily sutured at the intersection of these subject positions.”<sup>38</sup>

Society thus is not simply composed of the relationship of domination between classes, but of unequal power relations across a plethora of social relations, including those of race, gender, and other identity markers. The constellation of subject positions that can fix the meaning of social institutions and thus dominate others through the control of the state apparatus and the associated practices of articulation is what can be described as having attained hegemony. The goal of progressive forces thus should be “stepping out” of or abandoning their subordinate positions prescribed to them by this standing hegemonic articulation and joining together in a “chain of equivalences” to disarticulate it. This disarticulation is to be done via interventions in the multiple institutional terrains through which they are usually articulated and in attempting to establish a new hegemony that would make efforts to rid society of some of the forms of subordination that had been prevalent under the old order.<sup>39</sup> In terms of the political spaces that such interventions require, Mouffe argues that since hegemony and its associated construction of “common sense” is conducted in a multiplicity of places within the socio-political order including what is usually understood as “civil society”, this confrontation should not limit itself to traditional political institutions.<sup>40</sup>

For Mouffe, however, as for all of the theorists we have identified within the radical democratic camp, the political game cannot come to an end there, as the purpose of working towards the construction of a counter-hegemony is “not to unveil ‘true reality’ or ‘real interests’.”<sup>41</sup> The lack of a final ground of legitimation means that every hegemonic order is constructed in a contingent field. Likewise, given that subject positions are multiple, and that

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid

<sup>39</sup> Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 84.

<sup>40</sup> Mouffe, *Agonistics*, 89.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 82.

hegemony can only ever be constructed on the basis of excluding other possibilities, there will be several subject positions that will be excluded from the hegemonic order. This paradox - that the construction of some identity necessarily comes with the creation of some ineradicable and potentially antagonistic difference – is a feature that also appears in the theoretical frameworks of Connolly and Honig, and is described by Mouffe through the concepts of the constitutive outside or radical negativity. In recognizing this radical negativity along with the fact that there is no final ground to which we can appeal, Mouffe suggests that the ideas of “consensus and the perfectly reconciled society need to be abandoned.”<sup>42</sup> Indeed, if we wish to stay true to the democratic principle that without such a final ground, no one can coercively or antagonistically try to “solve” this problem of the paradox, then the central issue becomes fostering an arrangement that will ensure that the contest remains open and that the conflict that ensues remains in an agonistic form.<sup>43</sup> In defining agonism, Mouffe states that within such a political contest, opponents act not as enemies to be destroyed but rather as adversaries in a struggle involving competing hegemonic projects.<sup>44</sup> In explaining her understanding of adversaries, Mouffe argues that, “adversaries do fight – even fiercely – but according to a shared set of rules, and their positions, despite being ultimately irreconcilable, are accepted as legitimate perspectives.”<sup>45</sup>

Though Mouffe has argued that certain commitments often found in liberalism – for example the necessity for competing hegemonic projects to be structured around varying interpretations of the concepts of liberty and equality<sup>46</sup> – she has, throughout her work, demonstrated how liberal thought as it currently stands is altogether incapable of coming to terms with the nature of the political – the indispensability of radical negativity – necessary

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<sup>42</sup> Mouffe, *Agonistics*, xi.

<sup>43</sup> Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 104.

<sup>44</sup> Mouffe, *Agonistics*, 7.

<sup>45</sup> Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 52.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 132.

for the type of pluralism for which she advocates.<sup>47</sup> This is particularly the case with regard to the Rawlsian and Habermasian visions that tend to put forth a rationalist and individualist understanding of the appropriate procedures and designs for the liberal political community.<sup>48</sup> Given Mouffe's presupposition of multiple rationalities and her theory of the ever divided subject, such theoretical projects aiming at consensus cannot do justice to the various remainders that are the result of any construction of a "we" and thus do not only leave themselves open to the socio-political exclusion of these remainders but also jeopardize the political community itself by pushing these ignored remainders into positions of antagonism.<sup>49</sup> In appealing to the work of legal theorist Carl Schmitt from whom she borrows the us/them or friend/enemy distinction as the central characteristic of the political, Mouffe argues that Schmitt was correct in suggesting that liberalism is fundamentally blind to the political as it fundamentally ignores the fact that politics is a phenomenon that transpires between collective identities.<sup>50</sup> While liberalism tries to banish such collective subject positions it necessarily fails as, "every religious, moral, economic, ethical, or other antithesis transforms itself into a political one if it is sufficiently strong to group human beings into friend and enemy".<sup>51</sup>

Of course, while Schmitt did not believe that the antagonism that comes as a result of this friend/enemy relation could be tamed, Mouffe puts forward the corrective that enemies can be transformed into adversaries under two conditions. Though, indeed, we will later argue that these conditions may not be sufficient for the antagonists becoming agonists, Mouffe suggests that agonism depends on, first, citizens having the choice between projects with substantially different visions and, second, opponents in the contest, when one does arise,

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<sup>47</sup> Mouffe, *Agonistics*, 3.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> Ibid

<sup>50</sup> Mouffe, 4.

<sup>51</sup> Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008): 78.

recognizing each other's legitimacy in disagreeing<sup>52</sup>. Though the second condition is more particular to the relationship between competitors, involving opponents recognizing the particularity of their own project and thus the legitimacy of an opponent's right to disagree, the first involves a larger political change through which citizens have the opportunity to group themselves around meaningful projects and collective identities. As Mouffe points out once again via Schmitt and also psycho-analysis, politics has a clear affective dimension as the collective identities through which it operates involve passionate forms of investment amongst its participants.<sup>53</sup> As such, without it offering "real purchase on people's desires" through certain bodies which could channel them, politics is more likely to descend into an antagonistic relationship.<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, for Mouffe, such an occurrence has already happened with such antagonistic potential, and sometimes outcomes, having been encouraged by the closure of real political alternatives since the end of the Cold War.<sup>55</sup> As a result, such developments including the drift to the centre amongst mainstream political parties, the moralization of politics whereby issues are framed in terms of good and evil as opposed to left and right, the development of a managerial and technocratic form of post-politics, and the extension of America's unipolar hegemony in the international sphere, and a general lack of political alternatives have had the effect of antagonistic developments such as rioting in the developed world, the rise of far-right parties in Europe, and the increase of intolerant militancy and terrorism.<sup>56</sup> In response to this closure of political space thus, Mouffe argues in a series of theoretical inventions regarding the future of politics nationally, within the European Union, and the world order that we must abandon the dreams of flat consensus that many put forth in terms of national politics and the EU and the dreams of cosmopolitanism for the world order. In an application

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<sup>52</sup> Mouffe, *Agonistics*, 55.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>54</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2005): 6.

<sup>55</sup> Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 115.

<sup>56</sup> Mouffe, *On the Political*, 63, 90.

of the agonistic model in a variety of spaces, she suggests replacing these consensual visions with a scenario in which multiple forces can compete to ensure that the desire for real political alternatives and the passions for acting collectively are channelled into agonistic forms.<sup>57</sup> As such, alongside the need for radical democratic challenges that attempt to disarticulate the current hegemonic order in place of a new one – a strategy which she sees being impeded by the anti-institutional nature of some social movements – there is also a real need for these to take an agonistic form.<sup>58</sup> For Mouffe, while the aforementioned philosophical reasons for this are clear enough, thinking the world politically, particularly in terms of radical negativity, can also encourage secondary effects that could save our political communities from debilitating antagonism.

### **Connolly and the Commitment to “Life”**

Though his path towards the promotion of agonism has been a fairly different one from Chantal Mouffe and her Gramscian origins, the work of William Connolly is well-placed beside that of Mouffe given some of their theoretical affinities including their use of post-structuralist thought and the importance of the logic of identity/difference (or the constitutive outside) to their system. Two fundamental differences however must be presented to adequately distinguish the two from each other.

First of all, in terms of this different path, Connolly’s initial intellectual endeavours revolved around the limitations of the classical American pluralist paradigm (via Robert Dahl and others) in terms of its inability to envision a more radical pluralization of the socio-political order. This starting point, which Connolly has built upon throughout his career, has made the promotion of a wider pluralism a higher priority in his work than the transformation

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<sup>57</sup> Mouffe, *Agonistics*, 41; Mouffe, *On the Political*, 48, 90.  
<sup>58</sup> Mouffe, *Agonistics*, 118.

of the socio-political order through taking political power as it appears in Mouffe's post-Marxist project.

Second and perhaps more importantly, as Tonder and Thomassen identify, Connolly's ontology is marked not by a lack as in Mouffe but by abundance.<sup>59</sup> While in a similar manner to Mouffe the affirmation of any identity requires a difference through which an identity can define itself, as opposed to theorizing the contingent construction of identities, Connolly here moves to a more Nietzschean ontology in which the immanent possibilities of "life" always overflow the boundary of any identity. As Connolly states, "the world is always richer than the systems through which we comprehend and organize it."<sup>60</sup> In another similar vein to Mouffe, this division is not only apparent within the community but also marks each and every subject. For Connolly, each subject is haunted by a certain double – a part of the self that does not abide to the elements of life that are used to define its identity.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, as a result of this abundance of "life" found within both the social body and the self,

"each worthy design of the moral self, the common good, and justice, while realizing something crucial to life through its patterns of correctness and interdependence, encounters resistance that inhibit its transparency, coherence, and responsiveness and impede its harmonization with the other elements of life to which it is bound."<sup>62</sup>

Like Mouffe once again, every identity that affirms itself does so contingently amongst a series of other possibilities, both within society and the self. Further, like Nietzsche and Heidegger who influence his thinking about abundance beyond identity, this certainly is not something that should be bemoaned or simply tolerated. Undoubtedly, for

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<sup>59</sup> Lars Tonder and Lasse Thomassen, *Radical Democracy: Between Abundance and Lack* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

<sup>60</sup> William Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991): 32.

<sup>61</sup> William Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995): 11.

<sup>62</sup> Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, 31.

Connolly, this is something to be uncovered and fostered. As he states, since “nothing is fundamental...almost everything counts for something.”<sup>63</sup>

The problem however rests in the fact that, in large part due to the West’s religious and philosophical tradition, as opposed to holding a reverence for this “life”, identities, including those of a political nature, often convert these differences into otherness to “secure (their) own self-certainty” and result in a number of cruelties including exclusion and repression.<sup>64</sup> In *Identity/Difference*, what is held to be his most authoritative text, Connolly defines this tendency as “the problem of evil”. Though there have been other thinkers in the West who have also been responsible for the development of this tendency, Connolly discusses the Catholic theologian St. Augustine as one of the most influential culprits of such a direction. As Connolly argues, with Augustine unable to hold God responsible for the suffering of the world given his supposed perfection and omnipotence, he looks to detractors from the faith as the cause of this suffering, or evil, in the world to protect the integrity of those who believe. In *Pluralism*, Connolly explains how this conversion of difference into otherness can result in some fairly violent consequences. He states that,

“The tendency to evil within faith is this: The instances in which the faith of others incites you to anathematize it as inferior or evil can usher into being the demand to take revenge against them for the internal disturbance they sow, even if they have not otherwise limited your ability to accept your faith.”<sup>65</sup>

Generally, this type of revenge can take one of two forms: conversion or conquering. This of course, as Connolly argues, is despite the fact that responsibility for suffering in the world cannot be pinned down to any particular agent or sets of agents and, likewise, that the so-called “deviant” streak that is identified in the Other also happens to run through certain

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<sup>63</sup> Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, 40.

<sup>64</sup> Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, 20, 177.

<sup>65</sup> Connolly, *Pluralism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005): 27.

elements of ourselves, given the nature of the abundant subject.<sup>66</sup> As such, when an attempt to convert or conquer the Other occurs, it also involves a disciplinary struggle against our very selves.

It is important to note that, for Connolly, this Augustinian method of managing the problem of evil – blaming others for the destabilization of one’s own identity and then attempting to convert or conquer these others – has extended well beyond the medieval period and into our own times. Indeed, just as one of his major influences Michel Foucault has often pointed out, modernity has not been so kind to man’s double either. For certain, not only has Enlightenment universalism often been “oblivious to the other” but also has often resulted in “the denigration of it”.<sup>67</sup> The primary reason for this, according to Connolly, is for the fact that the modern project has continued to assume the existence of a *telos* – a higher direction in being itself – in which the true, harmonious, or inclusive community is achievable through human mastery.<sup>68</sup> With the modern urge to master, any type of contingency has the potential of being viewed as a type of “fall” also in need of conversion or conquering, with the stronger the level of piety and desire to unify, the stronger the drive to convert or conquer.<sup>69</sup> This of course, rather than embracing the ambiguity central to “life”, goes a long way in concealing it.

Stemming from this problem highly central to our very thought systems, Connolly suggests the serious need for a new ethic in order to engender and protect a reverence for the abundance of “life” that exceeds any identity. As he states,

“an ethic responsive to the fugitive flow of surplus and difference in dominant constellations is likely to be more sensitive and generous than a morality grounded in a putative command, an original contract, a fixed conception of utility, the presumption of the universal subject, or attunement to a putative purpose in being.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, 69.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, xvii.

<sup>68</sup> Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, 72.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 143; Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, 21.

<sup>70</sup> Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, xxv.

Given that the attempts to convert and conquer others are frequently conducted by what Connolly refers to as dominant constellations of identity through the state and associated institutions, this ethic must necessarily take a political form. Though not using the language of hegemony as often as Mouffe, he does describe the political reflection of identity/difference in politics through the use of hegemonic terms in stating that difference entails “a plurality of forces circulating through and under the positional sovereignty of the official arbitrating body.”<sup>71</sup> As another similarity with Mouffe’s project, attempting to fold the identity/difference logic into the workings of politics continues to be necessary given the tendency of the modern state to discipline the population into an increasingly smaller number of possible identities. In a manner comparable to what Mouffe describes as post-politics and the rise of the technocratic and managerial forms of governance that limit political choice, Connolly suggests that in the current “civilization of productivity”, the processes of globalization have allowed for governments to implement (and civil society groups to accede to) increased surveillance and attempts at normalization of their citizenry for the purpose of meeting the dictates of the global political economy.<sup>72</sup> As Connolly argues,

“Pressures to normalize are deeply inscribed in the contemporary order; these pressures depoliticize consensual convention that injure many; a pluralizing political society would foster cultural diversity while relieving many of these injuries.”<sup>73</sup>

What Connolly proposes thus to free up necessary spaces for constellations of difference and to commit to the Nietzschean abundance of “life” is what he calls agonistic democracy. This, as we know, carries with it many of the same features found in the political prescriptions of Mouffe and the other radical democratic theorists. One can clearly see these similarities in some of his statements regarding the nature of the potential agonistic

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<sup>71</sup> Connolly, *Pluralism*, 147.

<sup>72</sup> Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, 44.

<sup>73</sup> Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, 88.

democratic vision he puts forth. For example, in *Identity/Difference* he states that agonistic democracy is,

“a practice that affirms the indispensability of identity to life, disturbs the dogmatism of identity, and folds care for the protean diversity of human life into strife and interdependence of identity/difference.”<sup>74</sup>

In further elaborating on the nature of the agonistic relation, Connolly’s thinking also bears great resemblance to that of Mouffe in stating that,

“One response, suitable for some issues on certain occasions is to convert an antagonism of identity into an agonism of difference, in which each opposes the other (and the other’s presumptive beliefs) while respecting the adversary at another level.”<sup>75</sup>

Along the same lines as Mouffe thus, agonistic democracy is presented as requiring two separate yet interrelated commitments. Initially, the given settlement of identity by the dominant constellation requires interrogation and unsettlement by the “plurality of forces circulating through and under” this dominant constellation.<sup>76</sup> Connolly argues that this positive disturbance flows out of what he denotes “the politics of becoming”. As he states, this politics of becoming “emerges out of historically specific suffering, previously untapped energies, and emerging lines of possibility eluding the attention of dominant constituencies.”<sup>77</sup> For Connolly, as it is for the other radical democratic theorists, this first involves a “stepping out” of the frames which these constituencies of difference were given by the dominant constellation – those of the “netherworld”, below the register of acceptability, legitimacy, or justice – and contesting the very codes of obligation, goodness, identity, justice, right, or legitimacy that previously banished them to this netherworld.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid, ix.

<sup>75</sup> Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, 178.

<sup>76</sup> Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, 101.

<sup>77</sup> Connolly, *Pluralism*, 121.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

In entering into a political contest with the dominant constellation, the paradox of difference finds expression in public life and avenues to address previous cruelties are opened up.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, as Connolly affirms, the political is “the medium through which the interdependent antinomies of identity and difference can be expressed and contested.”<sup>80</sup> While a dominant constellation will predominate in many areas of public debate and will take action to sustain many of the economic and cultural conditions of the existing order, in agonistic democracy, this will be checked by “resisting factions” who “remain effective in publicly articulating the terms of their opposition and compelling compromises on some of these fronts.”<sup>81</sup> For certain, destabilization and disturbance is not the only goal of Connolly’s agonistic democracy. Rather, through constructing assemblages of differences that were previously below the register of the dominant constellation, compromises can be made, and certain demands can be processed through the state.<sup>82</sup>

This political program however cannot come to fruition without the development of a new ethic between participants in the democratic contest. Since the problem of evil often sees various constituencies embodying difference being blamed for the suffering in the world and for challenging the integrity of a dominant identity, resentment needs to be diluted through a commitment to contingency and respect for the other. The two concepts Connolly puts forth to explain this necessary “bicameral orientation” are agonistic respect and critical responsiveness.

Agonistic respect is that which can be developed between two contingently constituted yet competing identities that recognize this contingency. In doing this, while one’s own identity remains important for who one is or wishes to become, one resists the temptation to view it as a universal identity. As Connolly states,

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<sup>79</sup> Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, 209.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 92.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 123.

<sup>82</sup> Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, xxi.

“You can be a political pluralist...if you admit that the philosophy you adopt...is profoundly and legitimately contestable to others, and if you work upon yourself to overcome resentment in this very condition.”<sup>83</sup>

In working upon oneself, including for example through a genealogical quest to explore the contingent means by which one has been constituted, one puts oneself in a better position to express a certain degree of generosity to others, and approach others with a level of “hesitance and forbearance” when it comes to claims made on the basis of universality.<sup>84</sup> As such, while political partisans may “test, challenge, and contest pertinent elements in the fundamentals of others”, they do so keeping in mind the contestability of their own fundamentals.<sup>85</sup>

Critical responsiveness, by contrast, is an attitude required by those embodying identities in dominant constellations to remain true to the politics of becoming. As was stated previously, and from a similar starting place as Mouffe and the other radical democratic theorists, when subordinate constituencies “step out” from the netherworld, they do so in affirming an identity that the dominant constellation does not recognize. As Connolly states, in the eyes of the dominant constellation, since “a new ‘it’ has not yet been formed...the old institutionalized definition thereby retains considerable cultural resonance.”<sup>86</sup> This, in turn, not only leads to the dominant constellation refusing the claims of these constituencies “stepping out” but perhaps also to the dominant constellation denying the legitimacy of such a claim being made in the first place.

Critical responsiveness, in embodying an attitude receptive of the politics of becoming, involves establishing the awareness of constituencies’ emergence from below the usual register and further commits to “careful listening and presumptive generosity to

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<sup>83</sup> Connolly, *Pluralism*, 82.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 123; Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, 34.

<sup>85</sup> Connolly, *Pluralism*, 123.

<sup>86</sup> Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, 183.

constituencies struggling to move from an obscure of degraded subsistence.”<sup>87</sup> While a limit ought to be set against fundamentalisms that deny the abundance and ambiguity of “life”, this generosity should help to usher new identities “onto the registers of justice and legitimacy.”<sup>88</sup>

As a qualification to his own theorization, Connolly does explain that such measures can only be expected to help with the establishment and maintenance of democratic agonism as opposed to guarantee it. For certain, with Connolly understanding resentment towards others as the largest impediment to a deeper pluralism, agonistic respect and critical responsiveness can only go part of the way in fostering it. Interestingly however, and again in the same vein as Mouffe, Connolly insists that the exposure of the paradox of difference via agonistic democracy could relieve some of this resentment itself, as it would alleviate some of the pressures emanating from exclusions that often result in antagonistic reactions.<sup>89</sup> Beyond this, Connolly points to a reduction in socio-economic inequality as another avenue for the lowering of general levels of resentment that, for him, would be conducive to a better chance for agonism. Yet once again, though Connolly, perhaps more than any of the radical democratic theorists provides more of a tangible basis for the realization of agonism, we still need to ask serious questions about whether such proposals are sufficient when it comes to the workings of the actual agonistic political contests, an important area of concern for the theory which Connolly too generally abstracts himself from.

### **Honig’s Arendtian Amendment**

To Bonnie Honig’s credit, she, more than any of the radical democratic theorists, utilizes a multitude of philosophical influences to make her case for agonistic democracy. Early in her academic career, Honig became renowned for her employment of what she described as *virtù* theorists of politics such as Nietzsche and, most particularly, Hannah

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<sup>87</sup> Connolly, *Pluralism*, 126.

<sup>88</sup> Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, xxix.

<sup>89</sup> Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, xxi.

Arendt to demonstrate how the so-called virtue theories shaping the academic debate at the time, including the social liberalism of Rawls and the communitarianism of Michael Sandel, actually displaces politics to dangerous effects. As Honig argues in *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*,

“republican(s), liberal(s), and communitarian(s)...converge in their assumption that success lies in the elimination from a regime of dissonance, resistance, conflict, or struggle...(They) confine politics (conceptually and territorially) to the judicial, administrative, or regulative tasks of stabilizing moral and political subjects, building consensus, maintaining agreements, or consolidating communities and identities...(They assume that the task of political theory is to resolve institutional questions, to get politics right, over, and done with, to free modern subjects and their sets of arrangements of political conflict and instability.”<sup>90</sup>

For Honig, as it is for Mouffe and Connolly, such political closure becomes a serious danger for the reason that the programs upon which they are built are unable to recognize the remainders that the establishment of any political community entails. As Nietzsche has demonstrated, and as some of the radical democratic theorists have incorporated into their work, building a political community around Reason or the fully realized community “diminishes alternative possibilities of individuality, spontaneity, responsibility both within the community and within the self and also closes down the possibility for “the affirmation of the world and himself as they are.”<sup>91</sup> Honig echoes this when she states in *Emergency Politics* that,

“unchosen, unarticulated, or minoritized alternatives – different forms of life, identities, solidarities, sexes or genders, alternative categories of justice, unfamiliar tempos – re-pret themselves to us daily, in one form or another, sometimes inchoate.”<sup>92</sup>

As a result of this lack of recognition, not only is the affirmation of “the world” (or in Connolly’s language, “life”) denied, but the insistence on having realized the true expression

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<sup>90</sup> Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993): 45.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 60

<sup>92</sup> Honig, *Emergency Politics*, 16.

of the individual and the political community by the carriers of this “truth” leads squarely to the punishment or normalization of those who do not fit, if not their very exclusion from the political community.<sup>93</sup> Just as Mouffe and Connolly do, Honig also demonstrates how cruelties such as these continue to appear in mainstream liberal thought including within the works of Rawls and Sandel. For Rawls, exclusion or punishment is justified for those who do not meet his standards of reason or justice whereas for Sandel, exclusion or punishment is justified for those who do not meet his standard of the common communal identity.<sup>94</sup> For these reasons, Honig’s embrace of the Nietzschean and, indeed, Homeric contests as a corrective to these anti-political theories, puts her promotion of a democratic agonism for the purposes of revealing and augmenting these closures within the same general political direction as Mouffe and Connolly. Indeed, in describing what ought to be done politically when faced with these closures, Honig suggests that,

“The point of the action is to offset the normalizing effects of the social by opening up and founding new spaces of politics and individuation for others to explore, augment, and amend in their turn.”<sup>95</sup>

However, as we will see, Honig’s promotion of agonism also stems from a neo-Arendtian understanding of action that brings her work closer to that of Jacques Rancière and away from the more post-structuralist accounts of Mouffe and Connolly. For certain, while these latter two often speak of remaindering only in terms of certain differences being translated into otherness by a hegemonic force or dominant constellation, for Honig, one other element that is remaindered is the human ability to enter the public sphere, contest, and create something new in spite of the “constatives” which come to define us, such as our nationality, class, gender, race or any other social marker, including our belonging to a

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<sup>93</sup> Honig, *Political Theory*, 3.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 11-12.

<sup>95</sup> Bonnie Honig, “Towards an Agonistic Feminism: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Identity,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, ed. Bonnie Honig (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995): 155.

particular “people”.<sup>96</sup> For certain, even in the most democratic of regimes, this problem of remaindering appears the very second the authors of a democratic community come to experience the community’s laws not as author but as subject.<sup>97</sup> What was once a sui generis act of creation thus becomes the imposition of a constative – “the people” – upon those – a multitude – who always have the definitive human capability to decide whether “the people” that the sovereign is interpellating or calling into play actually reflects their will. As a result of this Arendtian ability to decide and engage in action – for her, the only human possibility that correlates to the political as opposed to social with its labour, work and various constatives – the democratic contest can, in fact, never come to an end. As Honig states,

“There is no getting away from the need in a democracy for the people to decide – on which is truly the general will, whose perspective ought to count, who is a true prophet, what are the right conditions for their lives, which enduring institutions deserve to endure and which should be dismantled, which would-be leader to follow, whose judgements to take seriously, and so on.”<sup>98</sup>

It is at this juncture where Honig’s commitment to the revelation of remainders and her commitment to Arendtian democratic action combine to form a theory of agonistic democracy that is quite fitting given our particular democratic predicament in what Honig also believes to be our post-political times. While other democratic theorists have identified the recent closing of political space as a result of the managerial and technocratic response to the pressures of contemporary global capitalism, Honig, in her more recent work *Emergency Politics*, spends her energies on an issue quite central to developments in her native America, and increasingly elsewhere – that being the closing of political space as a result of security concerns that have become a mainstay in the post-9/11 era.

Undoubtedly, Honig’s understanding of the people, who are always a multitude and always a remainder of the sovereign, having to make the decision in the last instance on an

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 104.

<sup>97</sup> Honig, *Emergency Politics*, 19.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 23.

Emergency declared in their name is an interesting and quite welcome counter-argument to the Schmittian idea that the Emergency is a miracle-like state of exception. For Honig, as she demonstrates through several Biblical stories regarding the Israelites sceptical reception of God's miracles via Moses in the desert, even real miracles – which an Emergency is not considering its human origins – are subject to the reception of it as miracle by the demos.<sup>99</sup> In short then, the Emergency as exception is not so exceptional since, like any other political decision, it is dependent on the people accepting it. As such, the Emergency should not be understood as a time to back away from politics but rather, as an invitation to engage, contest, and potentially augment the boundaries of the Emergency through political action.

Honig's commitment to a politics of revealing remainders and her commitment to a politics of Arendtian action meet at this point when considering why actors should contest the political constative of "the people" put forth by the sovereign during an Emergency or during any other political decision. For Honig, unlike Arendt, this contest must necessarily go beyond simply the physical space of public life, as constatives such as class, race, ethnicity, and gender are not natural givens but are sedimented identities that have been produced via power relations involving the workings of dominant constellations of identities upon others.<sup>100</sup> As such, the reason for engaging in contest against the imposition of constatives such as "the people" or those of class, race, ethnicity, or gender is not simply to engage in political heroism or foundation as Arendt would have it, but to ensure that the remainders of such imposed constatives, once again found within any affirmation of a political community, have the ability to open spaces for their alternative forms of life and for the augmentation of who gets what within the political community.<sup>101</sup> As Honig states quite succinctly, "if democratic politics is about risk and heroism, it is also just as surely about generating, fairly

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<sup>99</sup> Honig, *Emergency Politics*, xvi.

<sup>100</sup> Honig, "Towards an Agonistic Feminism", 145.

<sup>101</sup> Honig, *Emergency Politics*, 10.

distributing, demanding, or taking the resources of life.”<sup>102</sup> Given the importance that such types of contests have in being able to produce new “public goods, rights, and popular orientations”, Honig states that we should look to identify these types of breaks with sovereign interpellations of “the people” and other constatives in order both to prolong and regularize them.<sup>103</sup>

Though Honig understands that living politically in such a way will be far from an easy change for citizens since it means living as if it were an Emergency each time there is a political challenge, the democratic benefits mentioned above must be seen as outweighing other costs. As she argues in *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, if the agonistic gamble fails, the result is more politics, not more punishment.<sup>104</sup> Once again however, though such a stance offers much given the limitations of mainstream political theory, the current drift towards post-politics, and the various injuries that result from both the former and the latter, we need to ask whether the politics of disruption and augmentation that Honig puts forth could ever lead to a type of antagonistic punishment that it has all intentions of avoiding. In a similar move to some of the other theorists, Honig too suggests that the opening of spaces for agonism itself could in fact be the best tonic for avoiding this type of antagonism. Indeed, in a statement that highly resembles that of Mouffe and Connolly she suggests that,

“the always imperfect closure of political space tends to engender remainders and that, if these remainders are not engaged, they may return to haunt and destabilize the very closures that deny their existence.”<sup>105</sup>

Along these same lines, Honig also opts to adopt Connolly’s concepts of agonistic respect and critical responsiveness to provide an ethic for such agonistic contestation and

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 140.

<sup>104</sup> Honig, *Political Theory*, 148.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 57.

contestation.<sup>106</sup> Yet despite these efforts, it must be said that by once again abstracting from actual political contests, we cannot be certain if either the reduction of general resentment or a wholehearted commitment to difference on the part of involved actors is sufficient to ensure that the benefits of agonistic democracy are not washed away through drifts to antagonism.

### **Rancière and the Presupposition of Equality**

If we can say that there is a black sheep of the radical democratic family, it is Jacques Rancière. For one, unlike the previously encountered theorists, Rancière never employs terms such as radical democracy or agonism, despite the fact that his political recommendations do amount to something quite similar to those who explicitly utilize such terminology. Second, and perhaps more importantly, Rancière does not rely on a post-structuralist framework for the promotion of his version of politics/democracy. Rather, and perhaps surprising for someone once associated with Althusserian Marxism, Rancière bases his claims on a type of post-foundational neo-Aristotelianism in which it is humans' ability to speak, understand, and be understood that provides the political equality necessary for politics as Rancière defines it.<sup>107</sup> For this reason we can say that Rancière's system of thought is close to that of Honig's neo-Arendtianism, minus her incorporation of remainders via the identity/difference logic, than it is to that of Mouffe and Connolly, who base their projects primarily on this latter logic. As we will see in due time, this affinity with Honig's reworking of Arendt goes even further. For now however, it is important to trace the development of Rancière's assertion of speech and intelligibility as the basis for equality and all political action, as it can help to illuminate the differences between his account of politics/democracy and the ones that are commonly put forth.

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<sup>106</sup> Honig, *Emergency Politics*, 38.

<sup>107</sup> Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics* (New York: Verso, 1995): 50.

Like many left-wing intellectuals in France following the events of May 68, Rancière embarked on an academic quest to make sense of the gap which existed between the experiences of the unprecedented and unpredicted events which swept the country, and in which Rancière actively participated, and the social scientific and philosophical paradigms of the day which were unable to account for them. Philosophically and, in many ways, social scientifically, the 1960s in France witnessed the hegemony of structuralist frameworks, including that of the structuralist Marxism of Luis Althusser of whom Rancière was a student. In Althusser's understanding of the socio-political order, all sectors of society were overdetermined by the ideological state apparatuses that worked to maintain the dominance of capitalist socio-economic relations. For Althusser, the dissemination of this ideology has the effect of producing a false consciousness amongst the workers who, in turn, required the direction of intellectuals associated with the Communist Party – as Althusser was – in order to reveal the “real movement of society” to those who did not have access to it. In short, political actions required the intervention of the intellectual.

For Rancière, the experience of May 68 in which workers and students were able to defy and indeed “step out” of their roles as workers and students and speak not just about work and study, but the very future of the political community, shattered these structuralist assumptions. For Rancière, May 68 demonstrated that the people could speak for themselves. As a result of this, for the twenty or so years which followed the events of May 68, Rancière committed himself to an inquiry into how subjects were able to, on occasion, speak above and beyond their prescribed position in the social order. Such inquiries primarily focussed on this issue via the trials and tribulations of labour as well as the usual hierarchical dynamics of the classroom, with *Nights of Labour*, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, and *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* written as a result. The conclusions that Rancière reached in these works all pointed in a similar direction. Despite subjects' usual title or function, the fact that they could

periodically speak intelligibly about matters they had no business speaking about demonstrated that humans have equal intelligence.

It is this equality of intelligence when applied to the political order that creates the conditions for Rancière's vision of democracy. As Rancière argues in "Ten Theses on Politics", there are two logics by which the political community can be organized: the logic of politics or the logic of the police.<sup>108</sup> Rancière states that the police "is made up of groups tied to specific modes of doing, to places in which these occupations are exercised, and to modes of being corresponding to these occupations and these places."<sup>109</sup> A fundamental element of the police, or what Rancière in later work has called the logic of consensus, is that the community is divided into particular parts with particular tasks and that each part is counted with nothing left over. While some are designated as being able to speak intelligibly about the community, others are relegated to their tasks with their speech being deemed as mere noise or, worse, the bestial expression of pain.<sup>110</sup> Interestingly enough, for Rancière, as opposed to the problem of exclusion, what defines the police order is a belief in a perfect inclusion by which "each part of the social body supposedly obtains the share to which it is entitled."<sup>111</sup>

The real problem here for Rancière is the fact that this logic fundamentally miscounts the part that has no part, the supplement which is none other than the ability of anyone and anyone at all to speak intelligibly about the political community.<sup>112</sup> It is only when this supplement is affirmed that we witness the appearance of politics and democracy as opposed to police and consensus. As Rancière states further,

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<sup>108</sup> Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics" in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. Steve Corcoran (New York: Continuum, 2010): 36.

<sup>109</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999): 36.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>111</sup> Jacques Rancière, "Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?" in *Dissensus: Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Steve Corcoran (New York: Continuum, 2010): 72.

<sup>112</sup> Rancière, *Disagreement*, 30.

“This break is manifest in a series of actions that reconfigure the space where parties, parts, or lack of parts have been defined. Political activity is whatever shifts a body from a place assigned to it or changes a place’s destination. It makes visible what has no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only a place for noise;...”<sup>113</sup>

This break in the “logic of the *arke*” has several implications for politics as it continues after such a break. The most important of these is the fact that such a break reveals the arbitrary and oligarchic nature of every political order.<sup>114</sup> With anyone at all being able to speak about the political community, no one is more entitled to rule than anyone else. As such, in a similar conclusion to Honig, we are faced with a paradox of politics in which democracy requires rule but no one actually has the ground to do so.<sup>115</sup> As a result of this, Rancière is brought to the same necessity of promoting the constant renewal of the democratic moment as the other radical democratic thinkers. As Rancière states in “Does Democracy Mean Something?”,

“the power of the people must be re-enacted ceaselessly by political subjects that challenge the police distribution of parts, places or competences, and that restage the anarchic foundation of the political.”<sup>116</sup>

However, again much like Honig, this re-enactment must necessarily not be limited the question of who rules the political community as it is the police order which also determines the “the parts, places and competences” throughout the political community. It is this arbitrary alignment of places that also needs to be continuously interrogated and challenged. Indeed, as Rancière argues, anything can become political if it involves the

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid

<sup>114</sup> Ibid

<sup>115</sup> Jacques Rancière, “Does Democracy Mean Something?” in *Dissensus: Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Steve Corcoran (New York, Continuum, 2010):52.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid

meeting of the logic of the police and the egalitarian logic of politics.<sup>117</sup> On this point

Rancière states in *Disagreement* that,

“Politics is the practice whereby the logic of the characteristic of equality takes the form of the processing of a wrong, in which politics becomes the argument of a basic wrong that ties in with some established dispute in the distribution of jobs, roles, and places.”<sup>118</sup>

As such, in a proper instance of politics, there are always two elements up for dispute – one over the object of discussion and over the capacity of those who are making an object of it.<sup>119</sup> While Rancière is not in the business of theorizing a final reconciliation within the community given that his account understands every order to be arbitrary and susceptible to reconfiguration by the part that has no part, he does insist upon this reconfiguration of the socio-political order through instances of disagreement regarding various interpretations of important concepts central to the ordering of the political community. As he states,

“Political subjectification redefines the field of experience that gave to each their identity with their lot. It decomposes and recomposes the relationships between ways of doing, of being, and of saying that define the perceptible organization of the community, the relationships between the places where one does one thing and one does something else,..”<sup>120</sup>

Though Rancière provides less explanation than any of the other radical democratic theorists in terms of how such contentious disputes, both over the boundaries of the community and who has the ability to speak, can remain agonistic, his political stance, based on the logic of equality of intelligence and speech, insists on it needing to be so. Indeed, Rancière argues that such instances of disagreement truly are about argumentation and dispute with their “processing” conducted through a certain montage of proofs put forth by actors.<sup>121</sup> As for the responsibility of the dominant forces within the police order, they must

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<sup>117</sup> Rancière, *Disagreement*, 32.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 60-61.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 40.

accept the fact that those “stepping out” and engaging in politics are indeed intelligible and are not merely expressing noise.<sup>122</sup> Indeed, in *On the Shores of Politics* Rancière states that, “Those who say on general grounds that the other cannot understand them, that there is no common language, lose any basis for rights of their own to be recognized.”<sup>123</sup> Beyond this set-up, as he states, there is only the order of domination or the disorder of revolt.<sup>124</sup>

With that said, much like the other radical democratic theorists, Rancière has witnessed the order of domination expand in the post-Cold War era with the growth of a post-political consensual age. While, in a similar vein to Honig, Rancière believes that political philosophy’s historical *raison d’être* has been hiding or ignoring the part that has no part, he sees something particularly dangerous in this new post-political era which tends to dissolve norm into “fact” – those of economic “necessity” vis-à-vis the global political economy.<sup>125</sup> In a compelling comparison, Rancière argues that,

“we see regimes said to be liberal-democracies, take up, off their own bat, a sort of rampant Marxism according to which politics is the expression of a certain state of the social and it is the development of the forces of production that makes up the bulk of its forms.”<sup>126</sup>

For certain, in this era whereby politics has been transformed into a technocratic affair to deal with “objective” economic conditions, the people has been reduced to sociological categories and interest groups with no supplement, and each is viewed as being allocated what they deserve, our condition appears to have rid itself of politics, and thus of the avenues through which we could demonstrate our political equality, dispute oligarchic decisions, and redress certain wrongs.<sup>127</sup> For these reasons, though Rancière is all too unclear about how this is to be sustained, it is in this age that we are presented with an opportunity to rediscover the

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<sup>122</sup> Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, 50.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid

<sup>124</sup> Rancière, *Disagreement*, 12.

<sup>125</sup> Jacques Rancière, “The Ethical Turn of Aesthetics and Politics” in *Dissensus: Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Steve Corcoran (New York, Continuum, 2010): 184.

<sup>126</sup> Rancière, *Disagreement*, 97.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 113.

part that has no part and its ability to put two worlds into one – the world of equality within our world of an ever reifying inequality.

### **Common Concerns**

As we have seen, the four selected radical democratic theorists share a large number of analytical and prescriptive similarities that have allowed us to categorize them into a coherent system of thought. First and foremost, not only do all four theorists begin their analysis with an uncovering of some version of the paradox of politics, but also they all express a commitment to ensuring that such a paradox is continuously negotiated through political challenges and renewal. This places them in similar opposition to much of modern political thought including liberalism and Marxism which attempt to displace the paradox. Furthermore, all four theorists are in relative agreement that such radical democratic challenges involve actors “stepping out” of their usual titles and functions. Though they all describe this “stepping out” in various ways, they all posit this radical disarticulation as the only way in which actors can evade the logic of the consensual community that sees itself as being without remainder or supplement and which, in turn, fosters the certain wrongs or cruelties in need of redress. While this commitment to radical democratic action is a commitment to the paradox in itself, the theorists also view the continuation of agonistic contests as creating opportunities for the reconfiguration of the political community and the reallocation of previously denied political rights and social goods. Finally, in terms of application in our current political climate, the four theorists each denounce the closing of political space and the development of different forms of post-political management that has become common within states and within the international system since the end of the Cold War. Given that such closures also dangerously contribute to the realization of political

communities “without remainders or supplements”, the theorists put forth their own analyses and projects as a well-intentioned alternative.

Unfortunately for the radical democratic theorists however, there is one other commonality that poses serious questions for this potential application of their project. As we have seen, in not providing sufficiently deep or broad empirically-grounded analytical accounts of the dynamics of the radical democratic contests that they are proposing, the theorists have also not been able to provide an adequate account of what circumstances would allow for these radical democratic challenges to take the all important agonistic form that they encourage.

For some of the theorists, including Honig and, particularly, Rancière, given their focus on detailing the politics of disturbance, this discussion is hardly taken up. While Honig in *Emergency Politics* discusses several real-world cases of radical democratic politics within American political and legal life, these are simply employed to demonstrate the effects such challenges can have in shifting the political direction of the dominant order and not *how* they can take root, be sustained, and succeed in these challenges. The same can be said for Rancière, who aside from a brief analysis of the 1995 mass strikes in France within his *On the Shores of Politics*, has tended to shy away from archetypical representations and explanations of his theoretical approach and political project.<sup>128</sup>

On the other hand, it has to be said that when the theorists have committed to this discussion of circumstances as Mouffe and Connolly have, the explanation of agonistic possibilities tends to remain underdeveloped with regard to the contexts of actual contentious episodes. Indeed, such accounts of agonistic possibility tend to rest on two assumptions of a primarily theoretical nature. The first assumption is that sets of actors in the contest recognize the particularity of their own position, and hence the legitimacy of their opponent via the

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<sup>128</sup> See Chapter 3 in Honig’s *Emergency Politics* and Chapter 2 in Rancière’s *On the Shores of Politics* for this type of demonstrative, though not analytical, use of case studies.

legitimacy of difference. The second assumption is that the diluting of general levels of resentment, for example stemming from economic pressures and inequality or the absence of real political choices that can mobilize the passions, can go a long way in mitigating both the blame towards and desire for revenge against others and thus create better conditions for the recognition of the legitimacy of difference.

Once again, while we will argue that Connolly and Mouffe are correct in asserting that these assumptions are necessary for ensuring that one's opponent is not annihilated, they are not enough to always ensure that an agonistic expression of political disagreement strays away from the possibility of antagonism. As an important distinction, while annihilation involves an effort to completely destroy the existence of one's opponent as it serves to impede the vision of what Mouffe calls a "perfectly reconciled society"<sup>129</sup>, antagonism involves clearing out a particular manifestation of an opposing political position. In this latter case, one can recognize the contingency of one's own position and the legitimacy of the other to make a claim, yet still coercively block it from infringing on a socio-political space or boundary that is deemed as being central to one's identity or interests. As opposed to a question of whether or not the contenders in the contest recognize the legitimacy of the difference they each embody, in this scenario, the outcome boils down to a question of how far the respective contenders can legitimately impose themselves in a contest – an issue which is contingent upon the dynamics particular to the contest itself. In short, an antagonistic relation can commence due to what is at stake in the contest despite the fact that contenders recognize their own position as particular and recognize the other's difference without resentment. It is for this reason that, in order to provide a comprehensive foundation for when radical democratic episodes can remain in an agonistic form, we must move beyond abstract theoretical discussions and turn to actual cases in which both agonism and

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<sup>129</sup> Mouffe, *Agonistics*, xi.

antagonism made appearances in contests of a radical democratic nature. It is from a critical analysis of the recurring dynamics of such cases that we can attempt to deduce the circumstances for an agonistic democracy whose political worth is undeniable. It is to this task that we now cast our attention.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Logs and Bullets: The Krajina Serb Rebellion in HDZ Croatia (1990-1995)**

#### **Approaching Agonism in Croatia**

Croatia from 1990 to 1995 is a case of radical democracy gone wrong. From what started as a “stepping out” from dominating political orders by not one but two previously subordinated groups (‘the Croatian people’ from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and subsequently the ‘Krajina Serbs’ from the then newly instituted Croatian people-party-state), ended with the violent negations of the initial expressions of contestation. Of course, as anyone familiar with the history of post-Cold War Europe will know, these expressions of disagreement from 1990 within Croatia’s republican and, later, state borders, did not foster an environment that would allow for the continued possibility of a radical democratic expression of disagreement but rather descended into war.

It has become apparent through the previous discussion of radical democratic and agonistic pluralist theorists that the political project of these thinkers rests with the ability of contending political actors to engage in what can be described as an “in between” space (the space of agonism) which can be found neither within a political order of domination of certain groups over others (police, post-politics, hegemony, “identity”) or within the realm of complete negation of opposition (revolt, war, antagonism, violence), but somewhere in the middle. As has been discussed in the introduction, the purpose of this work is to attempt to ground this theoretical concept of agonism and evaluate the prospects for such a politically progressive and ambitious project by establishing the circumstances necessary for politics to operate in this (truly) democratic space of “in-betweenness”. Also as stated in the introduction, the method chosen to establish these circumstances is one of historical comparison. By comparing four cases of contestation which began in agonistic disagreement and which subsequently fluctuated between moments of agonism and antagonism of varying

degrees, the particular circumstances that must be present for there to remain the possibility of a radical democratic and agonistic contestation can be brought to light.

The period of intense political contestation in Croatia between 1990 and 1995 thus is a telling case as it provides us a detailed picture of a series of contestations which first began agonistically and eventually devolved into war as radically disruptive measures aimed at reconfiguring the community from previously subjugated groups shifted to measures of violence aimed at repressing each other's opponent. Though the argument of this work will advance and become clearer with the exploration of the three other case studies, each with their own divergent occurrences and outcomes, the case of Croatia can provide a first glimpse of the central claims of the work, both in terms of the mechanics appropriate to agonism and the implications for democratic theory in general. In the introduction to this work, three necessary circumstances for the continuation of agonistic forms of contestation were put forth. For the purposes of having them more easily illuminated in this first case study, they are listed again as follows:

1. A radical democratic form of politics – one of an agonistic “stepping out” with the expressed goal of demonstrating equality and righting a particular wrong – can first occur if one set of actors in the contest does not perceive to have their core interests threatened, including their long-term interests, by another set of actors who has challenged some particular interest or crossed some established boundary.
2. If interests are indeed perceived to be threatened, there still remains a chance for the radical democratic form to continue. This depends on whether this set of actors in question has the capacity to shut down the challenge and uphold the interest or boundary through antagonistic means. If this set of actors does not have such capacity, it is possible for the radical democratic form to continue.

3. Mechanisms of activation are required for any type of contest to begin, particularly those which push the interests of competing sets of actors away from compromise. However, when these mechanisms affecting interests push actors too far away from the possibility of compromise, they threaten their compatibility and potentially engender antagonism. In a situation of interest incompatibility, mechanisms that re-enforce or redistribute coercive capacity lead to antagonism. By contrast, mechanisms that increase a subordinate force's social capacity through widespread brokerage and diffusion of opposition throughout the socio-political field often create stalemates and thus prolong the radical democratic form.

Throughout the course of this chapter, it will be demonstrated that a series of initial agonistic contestations gave way to the direct antagonism of war due to the eventual absence of these three key circumstances. Though Croatia as a whole and the Krajina within it can be analyzed in a similar vein due to what could be viewed as a common situation of a “minority within a minority”, this chapter will focus primarily on the shifting episode of contestation between the Croatian Serb movement and what was then the newly formed Croatian party-state ruled by Franjo Tudjman's nationalist Croatian Democratic Union (*Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica*, HDZ). As it was suggested in the beginning of this chapter, it is clear when looking at the region of Southeastern Europe in the early 1990's that both the Republic of Croatia's own demand for reimagining its political community from what was a subordinate position within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Croatian Serbs' initial more grassroots demand for reimagining and reconfiguring their political community from a subordinate position within the Croatian state can be studied in the same light. However, the reason why the Croatian Serb movement will be the primary focus of this analysis is for the fact that their underdog rebellion began in a way that was much more in line with what the theorists describe as both radically and agonistically democratic.

Unlike the Republic of Croatia, whose name itself speaks volumes about its own level of officialdom and proper place in the institutions of the Former Yugoslavia, the Croatian Serbs originally had no borders, no designated army or police, and no spot on the rotating Yugoslav presidency. While they later came to possess some of these features with the territory of the Krajina, and also later fought alongside the Yugoslav National Army (*Jugoslavenska Narodna Armija*, JNA) in their quest to preserve a rump Yugoslavia, the beginning of the Croatian Serbs' contestation came from the position of no position or, at least, very little position at all. Coming from outside the dominant order, hegemonic bloc, or police part, the Croatian Serbs' initial resistance to the new Croatian party-state order thus more closely fits the description of radical democratic and agonistic contestation that the theorists under discussion provide. As such, a focus on the contestation internal to Croatia will be primary. However, without a shred of doubt, since the broader process of the disintegration of Yugoslavia played a near inseparable role in the developments internal to Croatia itself, particularly with the involvement of Serbia and the JNA, the chapter will keep a close eye to these crucial intertwined developments, especially as they appear as mechanisms shaping internal interests and capacities.<sup>130</sup>

It must be stated however, that despite this claim of initial radical and agonistic democracy, though the eventual Krajina rebellion did begin from origins akin to those spoken of by radical democratic thinkers and initially participated in an agonistic form of political contestation, antagonism became clear with the introduction of measures of war and furthermore, 'ethnic cleansing' which looked to coercively erase the claims of the opposing side. It will be argued that the gradual shift from barricades to bombs in the Croatian Serb

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<sup>130</sup> Although complex, such an approach has been previously utilized with the same case study in a different project. Nina Casperen, author of *Contested Nationalism* states that: "Serbia only technically became a kin-state following the international recognition of Croatia and Bosnia, but due to the great degree of decentralization in the Yugoslav Federation and the explicit goal of Belgrade to protect its co-ethnics, it appears reasonable to consider Serbia's involvement with that framework, even in 1990 and 1991." Nina Casperen, *Contested Nationalism: Serb Elite Rivalry in Croatia and Bosnia in the 1990s* (New York: Berghan Books, 2010).

and then Krajina Serb uprising provides the first evidence for the three-point theory of agonism presented in this work. In summary, it will be demonstrated that:

1. While the initial period of contestation starting with the lead up to the election of the HDZ in mid-1990 to the “log revolution” took place in the “in-between” space of agonism, this period was characterized by an unstated compromise whereby the Croatian Serbs, partly due to the leadership of Jovan Rašković, were willing to accept limited Croatian rule. As an equally important factor in this period, despite the general inhospitality of Tudjman’s HDZ, the Croatian party-state was willing to negotiate. However, once it became clear that Croatia would not accept Serb demands, the positions of both sides hardened. With the general perception of each other worsening and neither side wishing to concede rule over either peoples, policies, or territories (the Croatian party-state wanting full control of its territory and its transformation into a more exclusive national homeland through independence and the Croatian Serbs wanting a firm guarantee of their cultural, if not existential, well-being in the territory of Krajina, eventually through a rump Yugoslavia and the support of its institutions including the JNA), interests became mutually exclusive and antagonism became more likely. Once the HDZ no longer desired negotiation with the Krajina Serbs, agonism only remained due to the incapacity of the Croatian state to repress the movement. When the Krajina’s capacity dramatically increased with the direct support of the JNA, any remaining agonism was washed away with rebellion giving way to outright war.

2. With the possibility of any type of compromise eroded by mutually exclusive interests and competitive capacities, the question of the possibility of a compromise which would permit democratic agonism became redundant. Only after the ending of the war and the answering of the “Serb Question” with the mass exodus of Serbs from the Krajina during Operation Storm

in 1995 did the possibility of agonistic contestation on the basis of ethno-cultural questions return under clear Croatian hegemony.<sup>131</sup>

3. The majority of the mechanisms at play during the period of contention and conflict pushed the Croatian party-state and the Croatian Serbs away from compromise. Particularly, mechanisms such as boundary activation and identity shifts pushed on by elites, the media, and community actors, which saw the crystallization of boundaries and the radicalization of identities and, subsequently, interests and demands were common as they were a response to collective threats stemming from (real or perceived) exclusivist opponents. The ubiquity of these types of constructed and diffused identities made it difficult for mechanisms of demobilization such as institutionalization of demands, competition within groups, or disillusionment to take root. Furthermore, with the increasing pervasiveness of the mechanism of certification, particularly as it applied to the arming of, or direct participation alongside, belligerents by outside actors (whether from within elsewhere in the Yugoslav federation or externally), what may have been a case of forced compromise, continued agonistic possibilities or the one-way repression from the new Croatian party-state, instead resulted in a mutual capacity increase conducive to war.

### **The Borderland**

The Krajina or “borderland” of the Croatian interior runs semi-circular from Northern Dalmatia to the south of Western Slavonia with Bosnia and Herzegovina wedged in between. For several centuries, this strip of rural land with the city of Knin as its hub had existed as a

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<sup>131</sup> This argument is consistent, and indeed furthers, much of the literature discussing democracy in Croatia in a more conventionally liberal sense. For example as Davorka Matić has argued, “With the full integration of Croatia’s territory within its legal framework in Jan 98’, debate about human rights and civic liberties, social justice, economic recovery and overall democratization came to dominate Croatia’s political arena.” Davorka Matić, “Political Culture, Socio-Cultural Values and Democratic Consolidation in Croatia” in *Croatia Since Independence: War, Politics, Society, Foreign Relations*, eds. Sabrina P. Ramet, Conrad Clewing, and Reneo Lukić (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag GmbH, 2010): 176

pocket of Serb inhabitancy within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, two incarnations of Yugoslavia, and, for five years from 1990 to 1995, within a partly and then fully sovereign Republic of Croatia. The presence of the Krajina Serbs dates back to the late 16<sup>th</sup> century when Austria-Hungary employed Serbian mercenaries to defend their territory against Ottoman incursions.<sup>132</sup> As Srdja Trifkovic states in her history of the of Croatian Krajina, from the time of Viennese rule, through rule by Belgrade and then Zagreb, the Krajina Serbs had historically faced a situation of political dependence upon foreign rulers, a fact that often had devastating consequences during periods in which they became expendable.<sup>133</sup>

The most violent and tragic of these periods occurred during the Second World War when the Krajina Serbs were subject to extreme forms of domination and attempted extermination at the hands of the fascist and Nazi supported Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, NDH) under the rule of Ante Pavelić and his far-right Ustaša movement. With hundreds of thousands<sup>134</sup> of Serbs throughout the territory slaughtered alongside Jews, Communists and other marginalized groups through the camps and death squads of the Ustaša (an integral part of their policy of their “kill one-third, expel one-third, convert one-third”<sup>135</sup>), the Croatian Serbs in the Krajina and elsewhere in the country never lost their deep suspicion of Croatian nationalism or secessionism in the post-war period. Within Tito’s socialist Yugoslavia, though generally strongly denounced and punished, many of the crimes of the Ustaša were not given full attention by the leading Communist Party due to their rebuilding project of “brotherhood and unity” which officially looked to uphold the equality of nations including Croatia alongside the other constituent nationalities. Some such as Trifkovic have argued thus that the Krajina Serbs never truly had their wartime devastation

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<sup>132</sup> Srdja Trifkovic, *The Krajina Chronicle: A History of Serbs in Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia*. (Ottawa: The Lord Byron Foundation for Balkan Studies, 2010): 5.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 225.

<sup>134</sup> The exact number of murders has been the subject of dispute between the nationalist literatures of both sides.

<sup>135</sup> Laura Silber and Allan Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia*. (New York, Penguin, 1996): 93.

fully rectified.<sup>136</sup> Even the demand for autonomy within the Socialist Republic of Croatia as a part of the larger Yugoslav federation was denied based on a “Brotherhood and Unity” logic as many ethnic Croats and Titoists saw it as an expression of “Greater Serb hegemony” – a threat deemed as equally dangerous to the Yugoslav project as its Ustašist reaction.<sup>137</sup>

Though this did little to erase the bitterness and suspicion of many Serbs within the Krajina and elsewhere in Croatia, between 1945 and 1974 the Serbs could rest somewhat easier in terms of their existence as a situated cultural minority within the borders of the Socialist Republic of Croatia. This was for the reason that from the establishment of the socialist federation in 1945 with the victory of Tito’s Partisans and the coming to power of the Communist Party to the federal constitutional changes of the mid-1970s, Yugoslavia’s constituent republics were designed as administrative (and not national-popular) under a centralized party-state apparatus in the capital city, Belgrade. As such while some concern remained about life in Croatia after the fascist experience and despite the Serbs in Krajina not receiving full redress, the majority were assured by both the Communist Party’s near zero-tolerance of Croatian secessionist stirrings and the fact that their existence as a minority was balanced by the presence of Serbs (around 40% of the population) throughout Yugoslavia, including, of course, in the Socialist Republic of Serbia.<sup>138</sup> As such, in this environment – one which also involved the threat of repression upon any development of their own nationalist uprisings – the identities that could be constructed and enacted were more of a pan-Yugoslav nature than nationalist. This of course made the Krajina’s interests and demands less antagonistic to the Socialist Republic of Croatia as the bulk of Serbs and many Croats in the

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<sup>136</sup> Trifkovic, 205-209.

<sup>137</sup> Branka Magaš, *Croatia Through History: The Making of a European State* (San Francisco: Saqi, 2007): 609.

<sup>138</sup> The predominant choice of the reform communists of Ivica Račan over the nationalist Serbian Democratic Party in the first post-communist election of 1990 suggests that most Krajina Serbs sympathized with pan-Yugoslav ideas up until the period following the electoral victory of Tudjman’s Croatian Democratic Union in that same year.

immediate post-war period participated in the overarching hegemonic framework of Yugoslav socialism and national equality.<sup>139</sup>

Of course, however, as the radical democratic theorists have taught us, hegemony - the dominant framework informing ideas and practices – is never complete. Meanings and practices, understandings and expressions, and identities and demands always remain running beneath the dominant framework.<sup>140</sup> From the end of the Second World War to the end of the 1980s however this alternate framework did not manifest itself as a radical democratic uprising from the Krajina. Before that could happen, the dormant force of Croatian nationalism would have to reappear not once but twice.

### **The Return of the National (Question, Movement, State)**

In Chapter 1, it was argued that the interests and demands of groups follow from their identities which are constructed from various sources. Rupture from “business as usual” forms of politics, whatever their form or regime type, thus need to be viewed as the contention between collectivities which have defined themselves and launched their demands against dominant or hegemonic ways of seeing, doing, and ordering social and political life. The construction of identities, and, subsequently, interests and demands are not thus simply created from scratch. Indeed, certain material conditions such as the effects of opposition must be present for these interests to take shape, while not being determined by them outright. In this particular case it is imperative that the development of the Krajina uprising be seen as contingent upon a new Croatian nationalism which became revived in the 1970s and

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<sup>139</sup> Ivo Žanić, *Flag on the Mountain: A Political Anthropology of War in Croatia and Bosnia*. (London: Saqi, 2007): 325; Magaš. *Croatia Through History*, 597.

<sup>140</sup> As we have seen, the radical democratic/agonistic pluralist thinkers have different approaches to this. Mouffe and Connolly have a poststructuralist view that either sees a part of the social as “unsutured” by the political or as identity excluding its own constitutive differences. Honig and Rancière take a more Arendtian view whereby it becomes impossible for dominant projects to represent either “the new” or “the part of those that have no part”.

subsequently aided in the opening up the entire Yugoslav federation to new national questions, movements, and finally states.

Nearly twenty-five years after the fall of the NDH, a new Croatian nationalist movement of a more liberal nature made inroads in both the official structure of the League of Croatian Communists (*Savez Komunisti Hrvatske*, SKH) and amongst other members of the urban intelligentsia, many of whom were instrumental in the operations of *Matica Hrvatska* (Croatian Heritage), an institution for the protection of Croatian language and culture. Rather than buying into the idea that the Titoist notion of “brotherhood and unity” had been fulfilled, participants in the “Croatian Spring” (labeled MASPOK – *masovni pokret*, “mass movement” by the Yugoslav authorities) argued that such official rhetoric masked the reality of Serbian dominance within many branches of the state apparatus due to the centralization of institutions.<sup>141</sup> For the members of the SKH the issue of Serbian domination was most apparent in the central state’s economic, coercive and administrative apparatuses. In terms of the economic arm, many members of the SKH felt that too much of its “hard earned money” – particularly tourist dollars from the Dalmatian coast was going to Belgrade to support Serbia and the “have-not” southern republics. Furthermore, since Croatia, along with Slovenia, was one of the chief exporters of the federation, some prominent SKH members demanded that the exchange rate set by Belgrade be lowered to assist Croatian exports.<sup>142</sup> In terms of the coercive and administrative apparatuses, members complained that in Croatia itself, while Serbs made up only 12% of the entire population, they occupied 60% of the police force and 40% of the party.<sup>143</sup> Since Belgrade had its hand in all of these policy areas, there came to be a direct call for decentralization and autonomy. At the level of civil society, members of the intelligentsia claimed that the Croatian language had been unrightfully replaced by a Serbian heavy Serbo-Croatian variant which took away Croatian

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<sup>141</sup> Marcus Tanner, *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997): 190.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 187.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 191.

cultural and literary independence. Beyond this, on a more political note, they also argued that Croatian history, including the representation of historical instances of sovereignty had been completely and incorrectly Ustašized and, as such, had been used as a method to delegitimize Croatian expressions of popular sovereignty.<sup>144</sup>

By 1971, however, the “Croatian Spring” was no more. Tito, fearing the repeat of the nationalist tragedy of the Second World War, the breakup of the country, and an invasion by the Soviet Union in a similar vein as the “Prague Spring” three years earlier, obliterated the movement from top to bottom.<sup>145</sup> Members of the SKH with nationalist tendencies were purged with some being jailed and others fleeing the country. In the intellectual sphere, *Matica Hrvatska* was shut down and many of its members were jailed, including the future first president of an independent Croatia, Franjo Tuđman.<sup>146</sup> The Croatian nationalist movement would be silenced for another twenty years and Croatia itself would gain the moniker of “the silent republic”.

As Marcus Tanner has suggested, however, “if Tito thought he had saved Communism by destroying MASPOK, he was wrong, for the cure killed the patient.”<sup>147</sup> In keeping with Tanner’s expression, there were several ways in which Tito’s choice to destroy the “Croatian Spring” went on to erode the foundations of Communist rule both in Croatia and in federal Yugoslavia as a whole. For one, by crushing a movement that had a high degree of support amongst the populace, Tito, who had previously ruled as a benevolent authoritarian due to the historical support of the working classes from the constituent nations, had created some doubts about his own, as well as his party’s, legitimacy.<sup>148</sup> When Croatian nationalists returned to the forefront of political life in the late 1980s and early 1990s, much

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 190-191.

<sup>145</sup> Tim Judah, *The Serbs: History, Myth, and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997): 148.

<sup>146</sup> Ivo Goldstein, *Croatia: A History*. (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1999): 182.

<sup>147</sup> Tanner, 201.

<sup>148</sup> Branka Magaš, *The Destruction of Yugoslavia: Tracing the Breakup 1980-1992*. (New York: Verso, 1993): 105

of their support came from those who believed that Communist rule had suppressed Croatia's expressions of popular sovereignty.<sup>149</sup> As Croatian historian Ivo Goldstein has argued,

“when the first free elections were announced at the beginning of the 1990s, it became likely that whoever managed to offer voters the most forceful defense of Croatia's endangered sovereignty and settle accounts with the hated Communists would win.”<sup>150</sup>

Yet before this could come to fruition, several other important shifts needed to occur. It is clear that Croatia's first multiparty elections in 1990 also had their origins in Tito's handling of the “Croatian Spring” in the early 1970s. This however was much more a result of how he dealt with unresolved issues after the purge than with the purge itself. As Tanner has stated, it is not surprising that in response to the “Croatian Spring”, Tito “gave with his one hand and took with the other.”<sup>151</sup> Part of this “giving” was the Yugoslav constitution of 1974. Indeed, as a non-nationalist response to demands for decentralization like those of the “Croatian Spring”, along with the need to reform a slumping economy and a poorly functioning set of central state institutions, the constitution of 1974 was implemented to decentralize decision-making and policy implementation to an unprecedented level.<sup>152</sup> It was this decentralization, as well as the alienation that many Serbs throughout the federation would go on to feel because of it, that eventually resulted in the rise of Serbia's Slobodan Milošević in the late 1980s.<sup>153</sup> With the population of Yugoslavia's Serbs divided between several republics and autonomous regions which had even further autonomy after the adoption of the 1974 constitution, many Serbs, like those within a minority position in Kosovo, complained of being treated as second class citizens within their own state. Coupled with continued economic crisis in the 1980s, and the stagnancy of the Socialist Republic of Serbia's political institutions, Milošević was able to lead his “anti-bureaucratic revolution”,

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<sup>149</sup> Judah, 148.

<sup>150</sup> Goldstein, 210.

<sup>151</sup> Tanner, 203.

<sup>152</sup> Goldstein, 185-188.

<sup>153</sup> Trifkovic, 211; Silber and Little, 34.

replacing old-guard politicians with those loyal to him, in his home republic of Serbia, the Socialist Republic of Montenegro, and the autonomous regions of Vojvodina and Kosovo.<sup>154</sup> This putsch-like takeover guaranteed Milošević a striking amount of political power not only within these republics but also within the federal institutions such as the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (*Savez Komunističke Jugoslavije*, SKJ) and the 8-member federal presidency which was established after Tito's death in 1980. Unacceptable to both the Slovenian and Croatian delegations in the SKJ, both republics walked away in January of 1990.<sup>155</sup> With the SKJ and its subordinate republican branches like the SKH having lost legitimacy in both western republics, Slovenia and Croatia announced multiparty elections for later in the year. It is within this context that we can begin to understand the uprising of the Croatian Serbs which began that same year.

### **A Nascent Movement**

As soon as elections were declared, an identity shift began to occur within Croatia's Serb population. As Trifkovic has stated, republican borders which were to be nothing more than administrative for Tito in the immediate post-war period had suddenly gained substantive national meanings and consequences.<sup>156</sup> Croatian Serbs, who had previously had the benefit of living both under an anti-nationalist authoritarian regime and within a larger state with their Serb co-nationals who made up a plurality of the overall population, now faced a very different reality. With the elections, Croatian Serbs were now at the mercy of the, if limited, popular (and potentially popular-national) sovereignty of the Croats. As such, the calling of elections by the SKH began to activate a previously dormant boundary between majority Croats and minority Serbs and subsequently spurred an identity shift – a development whereby previously unconnected subjects rallied around these respective

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<sup>154</sup> Goldstein, 202.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 209.

<sup>156</sup> Trifkovic, 205.

identities as a response to new opponents who could potentially have a negative impact upon them. It is clear through the historical account that Croatian nationalism arose as a response to the real or perceived threat of Serbian dominance from Belgrade. The Croatian Serb uprising meanwhile would stem from Croatian dominance from Zagreb.

This, of course, was not automatic. As was explained previously, material circumstances such as the existence of opposition condition identity formations though they do not determine them. These identities, and subsequent interests and demands, had to be fostered and brokered amongst potential members through appeals to common culture, history, and myth by individuals and institutions committed to the cause. Of the most important of these “organic intellectuals” within Croatia’s Serb community was the psychiatrist Jovan Rašković, who as the founder of the Serb Democratic Party (*Srpska Demokratska Stranka*, SDS) was able to channel Serb apprehensions regarding the new post-communist political situation amidst what had been a period of political crisis and uncertainty. By coming into the streets and demanding to be heard as equal to the Croats, Croatian Serbs began their radical democratic movement as “an uprising with no weapons.”<sup>157</sup> Participating in rallies and demonstrations, the movement that had the SDS and Rašković at its head challenged the Croats to re-imagine their community in terms of democracy and human rights, and a national equality which would guarantee cultural autonomy. Radio Belgrade captured some these demands in a broadcast of one of Rašković’s speeches at a rally of 10,000 people in Petrinja:

“Addressing the crowd...Jovan Rašković ...said that the Serbs respect the Croatian people’s right to their sovereign state but they (the Serbs) demand in that state an equal position for the Serbians and other peoples. The Serbs do not want a second state in Croatia, but they demand autonomy...The Serbian people in Croatia should be allowed to speak their language, to write their script, to have their schools (cheers), to have their education programs, their publishing houses and their newspapers.”<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Silber and Little, 97.  
<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 95.

In sum, the early radical democratic movement of Croatia's Serbs against the newly emerged popular-national framework of Croatian politics was able to unfold agonistically – outside the dominant order without descending into either repression or war. There are several reasons for this and they happen to provide evidence for the position being argued in this work. Though the SDS and the movement it channeled had a divergent view of Croatia's, and in a broader scope, Yugoslavia's future direction, the standing configuration of interests were present in such a way that the SDS did not threaten the interests – the ways of seeing and ordering society and politics – of an SKH in transition. Second of all, the movement was relatively small and lacked coercive resources, leaving the SDS and its supporters with the incapacity to force change through non-democratic channels if they had wanted to. For these reasons, the Croatian Serb movement could be left alone to operate in an agonistic fashion. Within months, both of these circumstances would change and, in turn, change the outcomes.

Despite what this early movement was able to achieve in terms of the expression of opposition and its embodiment of radical democratic principles, the holding of the first multiparty elections in a newly democratic Croatia was not enough to win the support of the majority of Croatian Serbs. Though Rašković had been able to channel a high degree of participation through demonstrations and rallies, the electoral support for the SDS in the election of 1990 turned out to be quite low with the party receiving less than 50,000 votes of a more than 600,000 strong Serb population.<sup>159</sup> Indeed, most of Croatia's Serbs voted for the reform Communists - the transitioning SKH with their new platform and rebranded name of "Party of Democratic Reform" (becoming SKH-SDP, *Stranka Demokratski Promjena*). Moreover, not only had most Serbs not abandoned the Communists for Rašković's party-movement, but also they had decided to place their faith in a Croat, Ivica Račan, who led the SKH-SDP. Despite the inroads made by Rašković in civil society, most Croatian Serbs had

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<sup>159</sup> Judah, 168.

not been brought into the ethno-national framework as a type of radical democratic rejection of the dominant order. Indeed, despite some instances of neglect over the course of the previous forty-five years, the election results demonstrated that many Croatian Serbs felt as though they still had a place within it. This, of course, all changed with the electoral victory of Franjo Tudjman's nationalist Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ).

### **Croatia for Croatians, Croatia for Croats**

As previously mentioned, looking back upon the historical record, it is clear to see that a pro-Croat, anti-Communist, and also anti-Milošević's party like the HDZ would win the first election. This position has been confirmed by several scholars over the past fifteen years who have analyzed Yugoslavia's death. For example, historian Bruce MacDonald has argued that,

“For many Croats, Communism had been an utter failure – Tito's “pretended socialism” had done nothing to eliminate the economic exploitation by the Serbian/Bourgeois Class/Nation over the Croatian/Proletarian/Peasant Class/ Nation.”<sup>160</sup>

Cultural and political anthropologist Ivo Žanić has furthered this sentiment and has suggested how the HDZ had managed to capitalize on it by being in sync with the position of much of the Croatian public. According to Žanić,

“The HDZ, as well as the other newly founded parties, like almost the whole Croatian public, had realized that Yugoslavia was historically defunct, that Milošević's pro-Yugoslav rhetoric, full of come-on phrases about a ‘modern federation’, national equality and the fight against all extremists was just a mask behind which stood a reinvigorated Greater Serbian and Chetnik project, and that Croatia could be defended only by the establishment of democracy and strengthening statehood.”<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> David Bruce MacDonald, *Balkan Holocausts? Serbian and Croatian Victim Centred Propaganda and the War in Yugoslavia*. (New York: Manchester University Press, 2002): 194.

<sup>161</sup> Žanić, 109.

In 1990 however, the victory of the HDZ came as more of a surprise.<sup>162</sup> Indeed the SKH-SDP had expected to win the election and had as such designed the electoral system in a way that would ensure that a plurality of votes would translate into an absolute majority of seats in Croatia's primary legislature, the *Sabor* and the right to appoint the president. Originally, this plan had been implemented to ensure that the reform Communists would more easily form a government and control the presidency, thus being able to ease Croatia into the new democratic reality both within republican borders and the federal Yugoslav framework which, at the time, was facing acute crisis. With the federal League of Communists disbanded, only the rotating presidency and the JNA remained as core integrative bodies.<sup>163</sup> The election of the HDZ in April 1990 and the appointment of Tudjman a month later would go on to alter this substantially. In terms of effects on Croatia's internal dynamics, this was most worrying for Croatia's Serbs. Indeed, there came to be a long list of HDZ features and measures that made Croatia's Serbs feel both marginalized and distrustful in a way that had not been experienced since the rule of the fascist Ustaša during the Second World War.

Officially, Tudjman's policy on the question of Yugoslavia was one of confederalism, believing that Yugoslavia could only exist as a democratically legitimated association of sovereign, or near sovereign states. Many authors have argued that Tudjman was honest about his confederal leanings as it was a position for which he advocated even during periods of federally sanctioned violence in Croatia up to the point that the JNA firmly committed to carve up a rump Yugoslavia in "those territories that wished to stay in it".<sup>164</sup> Others however

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<sup>162</sup> Sabrina P. Ramet, "Politics in Croatia since 1990" in *Croatia Since Independence: War, Politics, Society Foreign Relations*, eds. Sabrina P. Ramet, Conrad Clewing and Reneo Lukić (Munich, R. Oldenbourg Verlag GmbH, 2008): 41.

<sup>163</sup> The federal assembly did remain but had been substantially weakened since Tito's constitution of 1974 had decentralized decision-making and veto power to the republics.

<sup>164</sup> For a view on Tudjman's confederal position see James Sadkovich, "Franjo Tudjman: An Intellectual in Politics" in *Croatia Since Independence: War, Politics, Society, Foreign Relations*, eds. Sabrina P. Ramet, Conrad Clewing, and Reneo Lukić (Munich, R. Oldenbourg Verlag GmbH, 2008): 65. For the JNA's decision,

have been more skeptical. MacDonald, for example, argues that Tadjman clearly believed in Croatia's cultural, political, and historical divergence and independence (and sometimes superiority) – a position that often made him hesitant about Croatia's position alongside the Serbs and within Yugoslavia. As Tadjman was quoted as stating after Yugoslavia's eventual breakup and Croatia's independence,

“Based on its geopolitical position, its fourteen-centuries-long history, civilization and culture, Croatia belongs to the Central European and Mediterranean Circle in Europe. Our political links with Balkans between 1918 and 1990 were just a short episode in Croatian history and we are determined not to repeat that episode ever again!”<sup>165</sup>

Though it is difficult to state with complete certainty whether he held these beliefs prior to the outbreak of full-scale war in 1991, Tadjman's further statements regarding the need for ethnic cleansing as an answer to the internal “Serb question” gives some indication of his serious resentment about Serb and “Balkan” presence on Croatian soil. As Tadjman went on to state after the war, “there can be no return to the past, to the times when (Serbs) were spreading cancer in the heart of Croatia, a cancer that was destroying the Croatian national being.”<sup>166</sup>

Although these statements may be seen as simply the perspective of one man, albeit an important one, within a diverse and complex party, they are extremely significant for a few reasons. First of all, power was centralized to such an extent in the HDZ and the Croatian presidential system that there were very few policy areas which Tadjman did not either control or strongly influence. This was particularly concerning when it came to control over the military which involved, along with his position as commander in chief, power over armed forces' development plans, organization and command structures, and acquisition

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at the behest of Belgrade after the war in Slovenia, to defend Serb territories in Croatia, see Silber and Little, 145.

<sup>165</sup> MacDonald, 118.

<sup>166</sup> Trifkovic, 222.

plans for material and personnel.<sup>167</sup> Such a degree of centralization and control also applied to the media, whereby very little was permitted that criticized the HDZ's direction of leading the recently awakened Croatian nation.<sup>168</sup> As MacDonald has argued, "By controlling the media and almost every aspect of communication within Croatia, the HDZ under Tudjman was able to cement nationalist power virtually unopposed."<sup>169</sup> As a result of the control wielded over these public (and sometimes private) institutions, the severe lack of checks and balances within both the state and party, sometimes to the extent that the two were indistinguishable, meant that policy was often directly the result of the desires of the self-described "father of the nation", Tudjman.<sup>170</sup> The Croatian Serbs thus were not only held at the mercy of newly political activated borders but the authoritarian nature of Tudjman's rule.

The second reason why Tudjman's political positions mattered substantially was for the fact that his actual "flirtation with Ustaša ideas"<sup>171</sup> and other less extreme positions of ethnically exclusive nationalism were actually enacted as public policy through the various apparatuses he controlled. These policy changes were of both a symbolic and material nature and did much to further alienate the Serb community through the activation of a sharp and aggressive boundary. Symbolically, Tudjman brought back the *šahovnica* "checkerboard" flag that, despite having medieval historical roots, was a sensitive issue due to its use by the Ustaša in the Second World War. In further symbolic moves, streets and squares were renamed to reflect Croatia's own history, though this too received harsh criticism for some of these occurrences of renaming also involved the glorification of questionable characters from the country's fascist period. The welcoming back of former Ustaša exiles, sympathizers, and

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<sup>167</sup> Reneo Lukić, "Civil-Military Relations in Croatia (1990-2005)" in *Croatia Since Independence: War, Politics, Society, Foreign Relations*, eds. Sabrina P. Ramet, Conrad Clewing, and Reneo Lukić (Munich, R. Oldenbourg Verlag Gmbtl, 2008): 197.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid

<sup>169</sup> MacDonald, 203.

<sup>170</sup> Sabrina P. Ramet and Marius Søberg "Challenges facing Croatia since Independence (An Intro)" in *Croatia Since Independence: War, Politics, Society, Foreign Relations*, eds. Sabrina P. Ramet, Conrad Clewing, and Reneo Lukić (Munich, R. Oldenbourg Verlag Gmbtl, 2008): 21.

<sup>171</sup> Žanić, 489.

historical revisionists from the Croatian diaspora into Tudjman's new party and even government did little to quell the suspicion that the president was instituting a type of neo-fascist revival among members of the Serb community.<sup>172</sup>

While these developments certainly did much to alienate Croatian Serbs, with many worrying, with the help of Belgrade television<sup>173</sup>, that a new genocide was possible, it was the material policies of Tudjman's HDZ that further pushed the Serbs outside of the dominant order and gave their symbolic worries some tangible evidence. Whereas the pre-1990 Socialist Republic of Croatia had defined both the Croats and Serbs as constituent nations, Tudjman's proposed, and eventually implemented, constitution for the post-communist Republic of Croatia relegated the Serbs to a status of a national minority alongside the substantially smaller Hungarian and Italian populations.<sup>174</sup> This change had a profound impact on Croatia's Serbs as it would strip them of their legal right to their own language, education system, cultural institutions, and script. Equally important to the undermining effect the constitution would have on these more cultural provisions was the negative impact it would have with regard to guarantees for positions in the workplace, particularly within Croatia's public institutions. In terms of these protections, Tudjman and the HDZ did not even wait for the implementation of his new constitution before the purges of Serbs began in government, police, education, and, given its extent of control, the media.<sup>175</sup> Since one of the major concerns of Croats throughout the Communist Yugoslav period was the overrepresentation of Serbs in Croatia, the HDZ was quick to "Croatize" the public sphere at the direct expense of the Croatian Serbs.

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<sup>172</sup> Tanner, 223.

<sup>173</sup> Magaš, *The Destruction of Yugoslavia*, 212

<sup>174</sup> MacDonald, 103

<sup>175</sup> Ibid

## **The Krajina Serbs Including Themselves Out**

It was this boundary activation – the pushing of the Croatian Serbs outside the official realms of the state and public life that created the circumstances for the expansion of the radical democratic response previously channeled by Rašković and the SDS. However, as will become clear, with its expansion, its existence as an agonistic form of contestation could not be maintained. Following this dramatic shift on the account of Tudjman and the HDZ's radical reworking of the dominant socio-political order through Croatian sub-state apparatuses, Croatian Serbs began to join Rašković's SDS party-movement en masse.<sup>176</sup> With Croatian Serbs now facing a situation of subordination not only in terms of institutional design but also in the very definition and operation of their socio-political community, the movement with the SDS at its head had its credentials as a radical democratic uprising enhanced. Serbs across Croatia, many of whom had never previously defined themselves politically as such, demanded that they be heard as equal to Croats and protested the HDZ's restrictive policies of placing – a rejection of Tudjman's potentially life-threatening Schmittian politics of friends and enemies and states of exception. The life of the movement as an agonistic form of contestation however would not depend on this political expression itself. It would come to depend on the nature of the demands put forth and the capacities available to secure them.

One key event signaling the expansion of the Croatian Serb movement was the boycott of the newly formed HDZ-led assembly in the spring of 1990. Rašković announced that the direction of the HDZ was fundamentally unacceptable and that for every bit of autonomy Croatia would look to secure from Yugoslavia, the Croatian Serbs would counter.<sup>177</sup> While at this point Croatian autonomy, and for some even independence, was not completely objectionable in itself, the movement with the SDS at its head would not accept

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<sup>176</sup> Judah, 168.

<sup>177</sup> Goldstein, 217; Judah, 168.

this under any circumstances if the HDZ did not change its stance on the protection of guarantees for the Serbs' well-being, including cultural and political autonomy.<sup>178</sup> As such, the movement quickly expanded with many members of the Croatian Serb community joining the SDS party-movement.

When Rašković met Tudjman in May however it became clear that the Croatian president had no intention to provide the Serb community with the autonomy they desired. As Rašković later recalled, Tudjman would not budge on the constitutional issue of the Serbs as a constituent nation or the implementation of any other measure that would give the Serbs an autonomous space in the Republic. For Tudjman such a direction would have undercut his desire of building a national homeland for the Croats as well as Croatia's claim to sovereignty in the event of a vote on independence.<sup>179</sup> The failure of Tudjman to provide political and cultural autonomy – a would be mechanism of demobilization that could have pushed the sides toward compromise – instead resulted in the furthering of divisive mechanisms such as boundary activation and identity shift, with Croatian Serbs coming to feel that they could trust neither Tudjman nor Rašković for the securing of Serbian protections. With Tudjman, the problem was easily identifiable. The Croatian president and the HDZ had little intention of recognizing the Serbs' claims of equality of policy demands and had openly engaged with anti-Serb ideas and proposals in his directives. In terms of the newly lost faith in Rašković, many of the Serbs who were a part of the movement had come to the decision that his moderate approach was not securing the interests of the Serbian community, now even more imperative given the firm position of Tudjman.<sup>180</sup> As such, more militant leaders such as the politician Milan Babić and the police chief Milan Martić gained

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<sup>178</sup> Silber and Little, 95.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid 96.

<sup>180</sup> Casperen, 51; Judah, 169; Tanner, 231.

control of the SDS amidst a growing environment of civil disobedience.<sup>181</sup> Included in this, with the lingering fear that the Croatian government would impose its will as it had in 1941, some members of the community began to disarm the Croatian police. According to Ashbrook,

“Beginning in June 1990, the SDS in northern Dalmatia took steps to resist HDZ authority by having rabble-rousing demos, procuring weapons and other support from the Yugoslav People’s Army and by blocking traffic around the hinterland of Knin.”<sup>182</sup>

The attainment of weapons, although at this point unused, diffused a type of contention that sharpened the boundaries between the Croatian government and the Serbian community. At this point it became clear that war was a very real possibility, not just in Croatia but also within Yugoslavia as a whole. Fearing an attempt by the JNA to overthrow the elected nationalist government, the HDZ had begun illegally arming Croatia at the beginning of 1990 through the underground activities of Tudjman’s first defense minister Martin Špegelj.<sup>183</sup> Having made clandestine arms deals with Hungarian officials, Špegelj claimed that by the later date of mid-1991, he could call upon 65,000 men in the case of a JNA attack. This arming, of course, was something that deeply concerned the Croatian Serbs as it gave them the perception that, first, the Croatians had the desire to impose their will by force and, second, that they would have the ability to do so. The procurement of weapons with the help of the JNA then must be seen as both an expression of their interest to defend their autonomy from Croatia’s potential coercive imposition *and* as an expression of their

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<sup>181</sup> Nikica Barić, “The Rise and Fall of the Republic of Serb Krajina (1990-1995)” in *Croatia Since Independence: War, Politics, Society, Foreign Relations*, eds. Sabrina P. Ramet, Conrad Clewing, and Reneo Lukić (Munich, R. Oldenbourg Verlag GmbH, 2008): 91.

<sup>182</sup> John Ashbrook and Spencer D. Bakić, “Storming to Partition: Croatia, the US and Krajina in the Yugoslav War,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies* Vol 21 No 4 (2010): 539.

<sup>183</sup> Martin Špegelj, “The First Phase, 1990-1992: the JNA prepares for aggression and Croatia for defence” in *The War in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina 1991-1995*, eds. Branka Magaš and Ivo Magaš (London, Frank Cass Publishers, 2001): 25; Silber and Little, 111.

equality. For certain, the Croatian Serbs quite plainly expressed their unwillingness to be subordinated by Croatian guns.

Whether this type of action can be said to be a form of radical democratic contestation or agonistic pluralism is not entirely clear. Indeed, the notion of multiple centres of coercive power pushes the concept of plurality into a whole new realm. Unfortunately, the radical democratic and agonistic theorists encountered in this work are quite silent on the issue of coercive power. In many ways their emphasis on the problem of ideological and behavioural dominance (the “common sense” aspect of hegemonic orders) often leads them to understate (or outright ignore) the coercive backing of dominant orders such as that of the HDZ in Croatia post 1990 election through the newly armed police forces and Home Guard. Thus, when the radical democratic thinkers demonstrate the ability of subordinated or “placed” peoples to challenge the ideological and behavioural elements of domination through expressions of equality through words, ideas and practices, they tend to present the outcome as a type of Dahlian level playing field. For this reason, the question of coercive power never arises. This, however, as can be clearly seen, leaves a gigantic elephant in the room for radical democratic and agonistic pluralist theory since, in modern states, the coercive apparatus is *always* present and is *never* neutral. As such, even where there comes to be an expression of equality through the launching of demands by subordinated groups this is most often done against the backdrop of highly unequal levels of coercive power. It is true that the radical democratic and agonistic pluralist theorists demand that enemies become adversaries. However, in doing so, they forget that at the round-table of modern state politics one always comes to the meeting with a gun in their hand.

Does this mean that equality must be expressed through the presence of weapons as it is with words, ideas, and practices? It is not likely that this is something that any of the theorists presented in this work would advocate for. Without a doubt, one of the central

motivations for each one of these theorists is the establishment of a vibrant politics of equality and claim making *beyond* the violence of Clausewitz, the violence of Schmitt, or the violence of Marx. Yet, by ignoring the fundamental insight of Weber – that the state, the arena of much of modern politics, *is* violence and the fundamental insight of Gramsci (who many of the thinkers are clearly indebted to) - that all dominant orders are based on consent *and* coercion - they forget that politics, as long as it is conducted within the state, is simply inseparable from the possibility of violence. This clearly has some extremely serious implications for radical democratic and agonistic pluralist theory and, by extension, democratic theory in general. Indeed, it provides support to one of the central claims of this work; that agonism can really only occur when the configuration of interests is compatible to the extent that sustained violence is not needed to ensure them. Since it is clear that this protective coercive power between adversaries is not equal in the modern state, as in the Croatian case, the compatibility of interests usually requires that one set of actors and their interests remain subordinate to another. In short, it can be said that the expression of an agonistic equality rests upon the existence of a fundamental inequality. These claims of course require a great deal of elaboration in later chapters. For now, these insights can continue to be teased out in the Croatian case.

At this stage of the Croatian episode in June 1990 coercive power had moved from one spot to three. Not only had there been the growth of an increasingly dangerous face-off between the newly strengthened coercive apparatus of the Croatian sub-state and the recently armed Serb rebels, but the army of the still sovereign Yugoslavia, the JNA, also remained under the control of the active, though crisis-ridden Yugoslav presidency.<sup>184</sup> However, just as agonism can remain due to a single coercive centre not acting, in the Croatian case, the agonistic form of the Serbian uprising remained as a result of all three of these autonomous

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<sup>184</sup> The rotating Yugoslav Presidency had been split due to the nationalist developments in Slovenia and Croatia and the rise of Milošević in the East.

coercive power centres not acting. This was for both reasons of interest and capacity. At this point, it is clear that the JNA had the capacity, but not the interest to end the tension in Croatia. With the presidency divided and most members, along with the JNA generals, wanting to avoid a war, the top brass of the Yugoslav political and military branches did not yet intervene.<sup>185</sup> This was despite the fact that there is evidence to suggest that Croatian Serb uprising was receiving material support from within the JNA to help defend the Serbs from the Croatian paramilitary/police force and Home Guard. This relative non-interference, despite their concern, of the highest authorities in the land, left the Croatian government and the Croatian Serb movement to determine the outcome bilaterally, at least for the time being.

Though there was certainly a high degree of tension between the HDZ and the movement headed by the SDS, the situation remained agonistic – the Serbs contesting outside the dominant order of the HDZ without descending into repression or war. The main reason for this was that both sides' interests remained compatible between the period of April 1990 (the coming to power of the HDZ) and July 1990. The Serb community remained willing to accept some form of Croatian rule along with their demand of autonomy and, as such, the Croatian government was still willing to allow the movements' expression of protest and civil disobedience since it had not been viewed as threatening Croatia's territorial integrity or ability to maintain rule over the area.<sup>186</sup> This too was supplemented by the fear of intervention of the JNA that could result in the end of the Croatian nationalist project. As Špegelj has claimed, during this time Croatian capacity was also an issue as Croatia could not bring down the Serb rebellion, let alone fight a war with the JNA.<sup>187</sup> Moreover, the leaders of both sides were willing to negotiate or at least approach negotiations despite the stark divergence between the two adversarial sides. While the HDZ wanted to defuse the situation

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<sup>185</sup> Silber and Little demonstrate that this position resulting from division and fear of war as held up until the well after the “log revolution” in August 1990. See Silber and Little, 109.

<sup>186</sup> Žanić notes the change in reaction of the Croatian high officials from the less threatening to more threatening forms of dissent by the Croatian Serbs. See Žanić, 111.

<sup>187</sup> Špegelj, 34.

and bring the Serbs under their control, the SDS wanted to ensure the necessary political protections to ease the anxieties of their threatened people. However, as the weeks passed and June gave way to July it became even clearer that the sides were nowhere closer to a suitable compromise. The HDZ had not moved on the issue of Serb autonomy and, in fact, with the continued passing of nationalist laws, the Serb position radicalized.<sup>188</sup> Croatian intransigence instead of institutionalization of Serb demands played into the hands of the new radical leadership under Babić.

### **Shifting Scales**

If the HDZ would not provide the Serb community autonomy through negotiations, then the alternative would be to create it themselves and pressure the Croatian government to recognize it. As such the movement led by the SDS took a more radical direction and opted to carve out a territorial space of Serbian autonomy through the expansion of the Association of Serbian Municipalities which had been founded one month before.<sup>189</sup> This association, whose members consisted of municipalities which were sympathetic to the movement against the direction of HDZ rule, was built within the Krajina with Knin as its base as a bulwark against the Croatian government's imposition. By acting collectively through the newly established local structures it was thought that the Krajina Serb community could construct their own policies, resist the Croatian government and force the HDZ to accept their autonomy. At this stage, the contention maintained its agonistic form although there were clear signs that it would soon break. The level of autonomy that the Serbs were demanding implied even less direct rule by Croatia than it had with Rašković's more moderate demands, with the association creating the conditions for a future para-state within Croatia.<sup>190</sup> Not only did it threaten the rather bizarre "one and indivisible" position of the HDZ but it jeopardized the

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<sup>188</sup> Tanner, 232; Goldstein, 215; MacDonald, 104.

<sup>189</sup> Judah, 169.

<sup>190</sup> Tanner, 232.

integrity of Croatia's borders. In the event of a war with the JNA, such territories had the possibility of being partitioned and annexed by a future rump Yugoslavia or Greater Serbia. However, as long as this self-organizing process was not interrupted by Zagreb and the HDZ remained at a distance, the Krajina Serbs continued to accept their rule, however indirectly.

Yet it was increasingly clear that this could not last. Both sides' interests were such that non-interference and non-antagonism were made to be impossible. This was true for both the dominant HDZ and the radical democratic Serb movement. Interference at the hands of the Serbs raises further questions about some elements of radical democratic and agonistic pluralist thought, namely the space of "in-betweenness" that is so prevalent in all of the thinkers encountered in this work. For though the actions directed at the HDZ remained in this "in between" zone of domination and war in late June and early July 1990, the Serb movement after the growth of the Babić's Association of Serbian Municipalities became antagonistic in other ways and to other actors. As Silber and Little indicate, not all municipalities with Serb majorities in the Krajina wished to join Babić's association. In some cases like this, including the town of Korenica, when local government did not comply with the demand to join the association, Babić would hold aggressive "rallies of truth" to force officials out and replace them with members loyal to the movement, the SDS, and himself. In the case of Korenica, the target of the Serb uprising was not the HDZ but actually Račan's SKH-SDP, a "neutral" player in the contention between the Croatian government and the SDS party-movement who chose to oppose them.<sup>191</sup>

Thus, while the relationship was neither antagonistic nor dominating in regards to the HDZ, it was so in terms of other members of the population like in Korenica who suddenly found themselves "placed" or "policed" in the same way that the HDZ had with regards to Croatia's Serbian community. When it comes to instances of contentious politics, this

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<sup>191</sup> Silber and Little, 97.

paradox is hardly new. Strikes, student protests, and social and national movements have frequently been identified for some of their non-democratic tendencies during episodes of contention for their occupation and ordering of space that often excludes “neutrals” or “non-participants”. In labour strikes, it is consumers that are often said to be held hostage; in teacher strikes, students; in minority struggles, minorities within minorities. It is frequently the case that “stepping out” of the dominant order requires “stepping into” a space that the dominant order controls both as an expression of equality and as a means to further the goals of the movement. As such, it can be said that while radical democratic and agonistic pluralist thinkers see movements from subordinated sets of actors as “stepping out” from the dominant order, they are not so thorough when it comes to describing where they are “stepping into”. It was previously stated that radical democratic and agonistic pluralist thinkers ignore the elephant in the room when it comes to the coercive backing of dominant political projects. Here, it can be said that the thinkers not only ignore the elephant but also ignore the room. It is clear that the ordering of the social and political world requires not just ideas, practices, and coercive backing, but spaces and places where such orderings occur. Political contestation thus is not merely about the contestation of ideas abstracted from this geography of the social world, but around the very constructed boundaries of the social world that the dominant order shapes and maintains.

This reality too has serious repercussions for radical democratic and agonistic pluralist theory. Without this “stepping into” a space that the dominant order has ruled off-limits, there can be no “stepping out”. If subordinated groups only launch their claims of equality and demands for reimagining the socio-political world within the designated spaces assigned by the dominant order, one must ask if radical democratic equality as the thinkers define it is truly present. However, if the subordinated groups move beyond this designated space, there is the tendency to replace the existing “policing” and “placing” order with their

own. Once again, the full repercussions of these theoretical issues arising from the case studies will be more thoroughly explored in later chapters. For now, the effects of this paradox within the Croatian case can be returned to.

By coming to “police” and “place” members of the Korenica community, it can most certainly be said that the Croatian Serb movement lost some of its radical democratic and agonistic pluralist credentials, at least in its relationship to communities who did not wish to participate in the association and movement. However in terms of the continued struggle with the Croatian party-state, this cannot be said in terms of this period of the episode. Indeed, the Croatian Serb uprising maintained its struggle from a position outside the dominant order and, with the chance for autonomy still firmly on the table due to the inaction of the Croatian coercive apparatus, had not violently opposed Croatian rule despite its possession of arms. Moreover, with the Croatian government able to manage this degree of opposition to its interests given the Serbs’ relative moderation and the threat of JNA intervention, the struggle stayed within the bounds of agonism. Yet at this point, the Serbs had not “stepped into” any space of the dominant order that the HDZ could not tolerate.

The summer of 1990 changed this as the demands of the Serbs became more pronounced and incompatible. The first of the events to mark this change took place in early July in Knin over Serb police officers refusal to wear the checkerboard *šahovnica* flag on their newly issued uniforms due to its association with Ustaša rule and mass-murder.<sup>192</sup> For Tudjman and the HDZ however, this breach signaled an intolerable and dangerous rejection of HDZ rule, the nation-building project, and Croatian sovereignty. As such, Tudjman sent a delegation of officials to bring the Croatian Serbs into compliance. As it turned out, this was not to be the case. As Silber and Little describe, after one of Tudjman’s men Josip Boljkovac had given a speech about pay raises given by the HDZ (Boljkovac did not mention the

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<sup>192</sup> Tanner, 232.

previous purges) and failed to convince the Serb officers to accept the uniforms and, more importantly, the Croatian chain of command, the police chief and movement leader Martić took the floor and gave a speech that aroused the Serb officers in the room,

“Gentlemen...you have forgotten one fact. Yes, it is nice to live well, to have good pay to have good clothes, a good car. However there is something which money cannot buy. What cannot be bought is our Serb dignity. We would rather go hungry, as long as we are together with our Serb people. We will eat potatoes, and husks, but we will be on the side of our people. We will remain human.”<sup>193</sup>

Unacceptable to the HDZ delegation, one of Tudjman’s other men, Perica Jurić gave his address to the officers – a series of condemnations and demands which implied the need for nothing less than the Krajina Serbs’ submission to the Croatian law and police hierarchy.<sup>194</sup> Such a position which denied them their claim to cultural, political and, in this case, police autonomy, was simply unacceptable to the local Serbs. As Silber and Little describe, as word got out that the Croatian officials remained unwilling to negotiate and were steadfast in their demands that the Serbs comply, a large crowd gathered outside the meeting hall calling for the Croats’ heads. Had it not been for Martić’s decision, whether strategic or out of generosity, to provide the Croatian delegation with a security escort out of the town, the HDZ delegation may not have been spared.<sup>195</sup>

The events of July 1990 dramatically altered the future of the conflict in Croatia. For both sides, it became clear that the opponent was unwilling to concede around the question of autonomy. For the HDZ, this was due to the fear of potentially losing Croatian territorial integrity and nation-building ability as well as their potential existence beside a Greater Serbia. For the Serbs it came as a result of their unwillingness to be subordinated by the HDZ-led Croats who had already shown their anti-Serb tendencies with employment purges and symbolic rapprochements with the Ustaša of the 1940s. Once again, instead of

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<sup>193</sup> Silber and Little, 99.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid

<sup>195</sup> Ibid, 100.

institutionalization of differing interests, sharp boundaries were drawn to a near irreconcilable point.

As Silber and Little point out, the HDZ delegation composed of Jurić and company was the last to set foot in Krajina's "capital" of Knin.<sup>196</sup> With their interests and demands unable to be met by the HDZ, the Serbian movement announced on 25 July that it would hold a referendum on autonomy on 19 August.<sup>197</sup> With this announcement the HDZ finally felt that the Croatian Serbs had proposed to "step into" a space that seriously threatened the HDZ's dominant socio-political order as it directly threatened the aforementioned interests of territorial integrity, nation-building, and geopolitical peace of mind. As such, though it was seen as hypocritical by both unitarist federal politicians and sympathizers of the Croatian Serbs, on 17 August Croatia declared the referendum illegal and attempted to move in on Knin.<sup>198</sup> From this point, the agonistic situation was replaced by one of antagonistic intent.

In the early morning of 17 August, the Croatian Interior Ministry sent seven armoured vehicles to try to put an end to the referendum and the Serb uprising as a whole. After succeeding in disarming the Serb controlled police station at Pakrac, the Croatian police failed to take control of the station at Obravac as the local police had distributed weapons to the townspeople in case of a Croatian assault. From here, the mayor of Obravac warned Babić in Knin that a Croatian police formation was on its way. This was the beginning of the so-called "log revolution". After Babić declared a state of war, the people of Knin began arming themselves with the help of Martić and the police. Trees were cut down to barricade the roads around Knin and Northern Dalmatia and armed guards manned them, preventing the HDZ controlled paramilitary police from entering. Railways and communication lines were also blocked, leaving the Croatian coastal towns of Šibenik, Split, and Zadar cut off from Zagreb and mainland Croatia. Meanwhile, two helicopters from the Croatian Interior

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<sup>196</sup> Silber and Little, 100.

<sup>197</sup> Tanner, 232.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid

Ministry which had been sent to aid the Croatian incursion on Knin were told to fly back to Zagreb or be shot out of the sky by JNA jets who had intercepted them.<sup>199</sup> This second appearance of the mechanism of certification by the JNA and sympathizers of the Croatian Serbs in the federal institutions both increased the capacity of Krajina Serbs and signaled to them that they would not tolerate Croatian repression.

### **No Going Back**

A clear dividing line of sprawling log barricades now divided the HDZ-led government of Croatia from the Krajina Serbs' rebellion. If a situation of agonism was at all maintained during this period (again we must ask if state failure should count as agonism), it existed more as a lack of Croatian capacity as opposed to a lack of Croatian desire. The HDZ knew at this time that it could not defeat the armed Krajina Serbs, especially with their opponents having been shown clear signs of certification by the JNA and, following their attempt in Knin, federal Serbian politicians and the Republic of Serbia's President, Milošević. As he stated in a meeting with skeptical opposition students in Belgrade,

“It has not occurred to us to dispute the right of the Croatian nation to secede from Yugoslavia, if that nation decides of its own free will in a referendum...but I want to make it completely clear that it should not occur to anyone that a part of the Serbian nation will be allowed to go with them. Because the history of the Serbian nation in the NDH is too tragic to risk such a fate again.”<sup>200</sup>

For the Croatian Serbs however it had become abundantly clear that the time for protest against and negotiation with the HDZ was up. The HDZ had attempted to impose its vision, directly infringing upon the Croatian Serbs' interests of autonomy, and there was nothing to suggest that this would not happen again. The response of the federal institutions furthered this worry. With the Yugoslav presidency alarmed at the developments between the

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<sup>199</sup> Silber and Little, 100-102; Barić, 91.

<sup>200</sup> Silber and Little, 131.

paramilitary groups of the Croatian sub-state (both that of the HDZ sanctioned police and Home Guard and the Krajina's militia) the presidency was prepared to disarm the HDZ's party-army by force to "save Yugoslavia".<sup>201</sup> The HDZ however saw this as nothing more than an attempt to use federal institutions to protect Serb interests and to authorize a coup d'état against the popularly elected HDZ. As such, the Croatian government began preparing for independence in early 1991.<sup>202</sup> Though the motion to overthrow the HDZ as well as the popularly elected Slovenian government was eventually blocked in the Yugoslav presidency the threat of JNA intervention loomed large and, as such, preparations for independence continued throughout the spring of 1991, including measures to increase the party-state's coercive capacity.<sup>203</sup>

While the movement led by the SDS under Rašković had at one point reluctantly accepted the possibility of independence, Croatian intransigence had led to a definitive about-face. With the discriminatory policies of the HDZ, their unwillingness to negotiate on autonomy, and their attack on Knin in August 1990, members of the SDS led movement in the Krajina now saw Croatian independence as a disastrous situation for the Croatian Serbs. For most supporters, such a move would have left them at the mercy of a Croatian government that had been hostile to not only their interests, but also their identity as a whole. Fighting to carve out territory and join a rump Yugoslavia, an idea that had just gained unprecedented support from Belgrade both morally and materially<sup>204</sup>, was the path that was perceived as being more likely to meet their political and cultural demands. As such, it was the Krajina Serbs, who in the spring of 1991 declared independence from Croatia and expressed a desire to stay in Yugoslavia. In acts which were clearly antagonistic, the Krajina Serb paramilitaries forcefully captured a mounting number of towns in the Krajina as well as

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<sup>201</sup> Silber and Little, 111.

<sup>202</sup> Tanner, 239.

<sup>203</sup> Goldstein, 220.

<sup>204</sup> Silber and Little, 145.

in Serb-populated Eastern Slavonia, erected barricades, and defended them against Croatian counter-offensives with gunfire and rocket attacks, all the while expelling Croats from their homes.<sup>205</sup> At Plitvice in March, a firefight with Croatian police resulted in the first two deaths of the war: one Serb, one Croat.

The war, which began with the firefight in Plitvice, would go on to involve the full support of the JNA and a rump Yugoslavia after the decision was made to give up on Yugoslavia and to defend the Serb territories in Croatia after the HDZ had declared independence in June 1991.<sup>206</sup> A 1992 ceasefire brought temporary relief but not a compromise between the two belligerents. Interests and capacities still remained mutually exclusive and conducive to antagonism. However, due to the abandonment of the Krajina Serbs by Belgrade as a result of international sanctions being levied against the Republic of Serbia, a deployment of UN troops under the Vance Plan was accepted and split the Croatian and Serbian held territories until 1995.<sup>207</sup> With one final chance to negotiate and be reincorporated into Croatia with extensive political and cultural autonomy with the Z-4 plan, the Krajina Serb leadership wholeheartedly rejected it, now unwilling to accept any form of Croatian rule as they had in the past.<sup>208</sup> It is questionable whether Croatia would have accepted the plan in any case. Military preparations had already been made to take back the entire Krajina with the controversial approval of the United States in exchange for its cooperation in Bosnia-Herzegovina and that country's peace agreement, the Dayton Accords. In August 1995, with a substantially bolstered military capacity, the Croatian Army swept through an isolated and weakened Krajina in days, contributing to a mass exodus of roughly 200,000 Serbs.<sup>209</sup> What had started as a radical democratic and agonistic contestation on the

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<sup>205</sup> Barić, 91.

<sup>206</sup> Silber and Little, 172.

<sup>207</sup> Goldstein, 236.

<sup>208</sup> David Rieff, "The Krajina War: Endgame for the United Nations," *World Policy Journal* Vol 12 No 3 (1995): 71.

<sup>209</sup> Ashbrook and Bakić, 538.

part of Croatia's Serb community had seen its end with the removal and evacuation of that very community at the tail end of Europe's most bloody conflict since the end of the Second World War. Incompatible interests pushed on by intransigent leaders, eventual mutually destructive capacities, and mechanisms of boundary activation and certification had driven a deep wedge between the Croats and the Serbs and ensured that the original agonistic manifestation was wholly irretrievable.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Politics of Double Standards in Thailand: Organic Crisis as Radical Democracy (2005-2014)**

#### **Thailand's Permanent Politics**

Looking at the West from the West, it may be possible to suggest that radical democratic politics (or politics pure and simple by some definitions) "hardly ever happens." Certainly, for most of the thinkers that have been encountered here, this is one of the primary problems associated with "politics in the consensual age". According to this analysis of contemporary socio-political arrangements, not only are societal demands typically managed through apolitical and inegalitarian bureaucratic and market channels for existing sets of claim-makers, but furthermore, new claims which are put forth by new groups arriving on the scene find themselves without any channels at all, rendered subordinate by whichever dominant framework organizes socio-political life. As we now know, for these theorists, the proposed solution to this problem is a so-called "return to the political." By this, what is suggested is not only the desire for more politics but, more specifically, more politics of a radical democratic nature - more "stepping outs" of assigned socio-political spaces and places in expressions of equality and contestation. According to these thinkers, just as this movement towards contention was seen as the tonic for the constrictions of the high-modern bureaucratic state and the structural-functionalist political science and sociology that mirrored it in the 1950s and 1960s, so too does it remain the tonic for our age of management by the market and its resulting consensual politics.

Yet as we look outside the realm of the West and also outside the focal points of Western political theory, we need to seriously ask whether "consensual", "post-political" or even the more neutral "hegemonic" can really apply when it comes to some political communities. For example, and as will be made readily apparent in this chapter, during the last fifteen years the Kingdom of Thailand has been anything but "post-political". Writing in

2009 in the midst of the frenzy of contestation, two prominent scholars of Thai politics and society, Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, had this to say about the five years they had experienced since the intense contentious period had begun,

“Even by the wayward standards of Thai politics, the intervening five years has been extraordinary. Three general elections. A coup. A new constitution. Assassination plots. Airports occupied. A demonstration lasting over half a year. Gun battles on Bangkok's main streets. Government House occupied and trashed. Cabinet meetings under siege. Four political parties dissolved. Four premiers in one year. Ministers scattered by court judgments like pins in a bowling alley. Someone who stepped through a time-warp from 2004 to today would be amazed at the content of the political rhetoric, the size of the crowds, the uniforms of red and yellow, the frenzy over *lèse majesté*.”<sup>210</sup>

Building upon this commentary, it must also be said that the types of politics that the radical democratic thinkers are so keen on have, in the streets of Bangkok, certainly not been rare. Indeed, if radical democracy entails the “stepping out” of hierarchically assigned socio-political places and spaces, then in the last fifteen years with various groups of various “colours” claiming their equality to the politicians, the capitalists, and the *ammarthaya* (bureaucratic elite) in the intersections, commercial districts, official halls of power, and even airports, Thailand's capital has been among the most radical and most democratic of them all.

Of course, such assessments raise some serious questions and concerns about radical democratic thought more generally. Just as was made problematically apparent in the Croatian case, it will become clear that in Thailand between 2005 and 2014, the occurrence of actors “stepping into” places deemed off-limits along with the appearance of clubs, knives, metal rods, makeshift grenades, Molotov cocktails and, on several tragic occasions, sniper rifles and military tanks were common enough to raise questions about the agonistic potential of such diametric instances of disagreement.

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<sup>210</sup> Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thaksin (2<sup>nd</sup> Expanded Edition)* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2009): vii.

Likewise, it must be said that the near perpetual cycle of contestation since 2005 and its consequences for the people of Thailand are bound to raise very classic Platonic, Hobbesian, and even Huntingtonian critiques of states of “too much democracy”. Throughout the period of heavy contention, many scholars have dedicated their efforts to calculating the cost, in terms of economics but also in human lives, that such political drama has been responsible for. In light of these issues, one must ask the question with a high degree of seriousness whether the abundance of radical democratic politics ought to be classified as vibrancy or turbulence. Once again, this is an age-old question, though one that is not adequately dealt with theoretically by the thinkers outlined in previous chapters, let alone in relation to actual historical instances of radical democratic contestation. For now, these more normative issues, just like those encountered in the Croatian case, will be put aside for later chapters when the implications for radical democratic theory can be more thoroughly discussed. Yet, as will be demonstrated with the Thai case, whatever the theoretical reading of such a situation - whether viewed as a virtue or a degradation - it will be shown that radical democracy does often, at its very foundation, require a degree of “instability” or perhaps, in less loaded terms, require what Gramsci had called an “organic crisis”.<sup>211</sup>

Indeed, given the nature of this vibrancy (or turbulence) in Thailand, particularly in terms of its radical democratic credentials, the Kingdom's last decade provides an ideal example to evaluate the realities of some of the previously discussed theorists' projects of enhanced democratic engagement when applied to a historical case. Most importantly, as has already been done with the Croatian case study, a comparative look at Thailand can help to demonstrate the necessary circumstances for the possibility of radical democratic forms of contestation. Thailand during our time period is particularly helpful as, against some of the structural accounts which have historically disregarded rural forces as having democratic

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<sup>211</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

potential, it constitutes a period of contestation whereby the ability of groups, including the so-called peasantry, to “step out” of their assigned places and spaces and speak in the name of equality had fluctuated as a distinct possibility between the two military coups of 2006 and 2014.

While such an explosion of political discontent may have been in the works for some time given the various structural changes and subsequent repercussions that have unfolded in Thailand since the end of the Cold War, this period of intense contention clearly began in the last years of the era of the former populist Prime Minister and billionaire media mogul, Thaksin Shinawatra. Running on a platform which promised to rescue the Thai economy from the Asian financial crisis of 1997, Thaksin was able to attract a segment of the business community which had felt hard done by as a result of the lacklustre performance of the bureaucratic elite. More importantly however, by appealing to rural voters in the historically subordinated North and Northeast through a populist program which included affordable healthcare, reasonable loans, and a village improvement scheme alongside a more systematic (though arguably not unusual) form of patronage, Thaksin and his TRT party were able to win a comfortable plurality of parliamentary seats in 2001 and subsequently an absolute majority in 2005. However, given his growing authoritarianism which included his increasing control of the media and a poor human rights record as well as his use of TRT's parliamentary majority to further enrich himself and his family, Thaksin came under strong pressure from the Thai, and particularly Bangkok middle classes, during 2006. These issues, when combined with his alienation of the traditional Thai bureaucratic elite whose power he attempted to limit, resulted in the formation of a mass demand for Thaksin to resign as Prime Minister. The mass and popular embodiment of this demand came to be known as the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) or the “Yellow Shirts”, whose boisterous street

politics, numerous mass demonstrations and long-term occupations became a central feature of the radicalization of Thailand's democracy between 2005 and 2008.

Furthermore, following the overthrow of Thaksin by the bureaucratic elite via the hands of the allied military in 2006, an additional mass movement of “Red Shirts” - many supporters of Thaksin, many simply angered by the undemocratic and inequalitarian nature of Thai socio-political arrangements - came onto the scene, first protesting the coup and later clashing with the reactivated Yellow Shirts once an associate of Thaksin and Red Shirt-friendly Samak Sundaravej was elected Prime Minister in 2007. After the Yellow Shirt occupation of Suvarnabhumi International Airport in November 2008 helped to once again bring down a government associated with Thaksin - this time through a shotgun judicial decision and background deal-breaking which once again involved the military - the Red Shirts took centre stage, launching the largest mass demonstrations and urban occupations in Thai history during both the springs of 2009 and 2010.

Following the re-election of a party affiliated with Taksin, Pheu Thai run by sister Yingluck, in 2013, it was the reconstituted and renamed Yellow Shirts who once again took centre stage in terms of radical democratic opposition. Opposing both a seemingly corrupt government rice pledging scheme and, more importantly, an amnesty bill which could exonerate Thaksin of previous crimes, the People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) engaged in debillitating protests, occupations, and even the blocking of elections from late 2013 until the military intervened once again in a coup d’état on 22 May 2014. Taken together this Yellow/Red episode evolved into arguably the most divisive period in Thailand's political history resulting in mass mobilizations, the radicalization of tactics, and a stark increase in confrontation, all of which often blurred the lines between protest and unrest,

expression and repression, revolution, democracy, and war.<sup>212</sup> Yet despite the frequency of antagonism throughout the episode, one compelling feature of the Thai case is the fact that in between many of these repressive moments, political activity with clear radical democratic credentials was able to take an agonistic form. It will be argued here that the same three circumstances - compatible interests, capacities conducive to toleration (whether desired or not), and mechanisms which bring opponents closer to this toleration - is what allowed for the possibility and actuality of radical democratic disruptions to take place in an agonistic form when they did in fact do so.

Given the dual nature of this “stepping out” through the very opposed, though intertwined, coloured shirt movements, the analysis will progress chronologically with detailed attention paid to each. This is particularly important as the stories of Yellow and Red also tell very different stories about the limits and possibilities of radical democracy. For certain, the strikingly divergent reasons for the continuation of the Yellow Shirt and Red Shirt movements speak volumes about the necessary circumstances being put forth in this work.

This chapter will show that the ability of the Yellow Shirt PAD, and later PDRC, movement to engage in the disruptive and radical politics of occupation including, most importantly, the extended occupations of Government House and Suvarnabhumi Airport, were tolerated due to a clear compatibility of interests between the Yellow Shirts and key factions within the Thai state including the bureaucratic elite and the Thai military. As such, while the PAD expressed interests that were diametrically opposed to those of the governments of, first, Thaksin and subsequently Samak and Somchai, these administrations did not sufficiently wield power over either the more entrenched bureaucratic elite or Thai military which would have given them the capacity to put an end to the Yellow Shirts when

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<sup>212</sup> For a concise summary of the major events of the Thaksin and post-Thaksin period up to the present day, see Terwiel. Pasuk and Baker, Nostitz's two volumes, and Askew also provide accounts covering most, if not all, of the period of contestation.

their actions became more hostile. As such, with regard to the Yellow Shirts, it can be argued that instances of radical democratic politics occurred due to state fracture and organic crisis - a situation whereby no single bloc or faction can claim hegemonic control over either civil society or the state apparatuses. With the various Red Shirt-friendly governments lacking the capacity to crackdown on the movement, the Yellow Shirts' attempts to oust these governments were able to take markedly radical forms.

By contrast, when the Red Shirts began to express interests that were directly threatening to Abhisit's Democrat and Yellow Shirt-friendly government after the judicial decision of 2008, the alignment of the Democrats with the military and the bureaucratic elite engendered an anti-Thaksin alliance that went on to repress the Red Shirt movement, first in 2009 and again in 2010. It will be shown that only after the decimation of the Red Shirt movement, particularly in terms of its upper echelons of leadership, that the Democrat/Military/Bureaucratic Elite alliance found the worn out Red Shirt movement sufficiently non-threatening to allow it to take to the streets in 2011 and 2012.

Finally, in 2013 and 2014, with anti-Thaksin forces back on the street in their quest to force the Yingluck government out of office and to reform the political system in order to “de-Thaksinize” it, the dynamics of contestation returned to those of 2006 and 2007. Once again, with key components of the Thai state not supporting the Yingluck government in the face of increasingly intense extra-parliamentary opposition and thus depriving of its capacity to repress, the radical democratic activity of the anti-Thaksin forces was able to carry on in an agonistic, if highly aggressive manner. Only until the Red Shirts remobilized around Bangkok in the spring of 2014, threatening their interests once again through the prospect of civil war, did the military-bureaucratic elite deem it necessary to end the possibility of radical democratic opposition through the coup and implementation of the military regime. With this

stated, in breaking down the situation into the three designated circumstances, the following can be argued:

**Interests:** At almost all points of the long period of contestation (2005 - 2014) the interests of opposing forces - Yellow Shirts/TRT and TRT offshoot parties, Red Shirts/ Democrat Party - Military - Bureaucratic Elite, Yellow Shirts/Red Shirts - remained starkly intolerant of each other. This was particularly true of the movements who were each committed to the ousting of their respective enemy governments at very high costs. Only until the Red Shirts were thoroughly dismantled in 2010 and consequently reluctant to take on the Democrats directly did this intransigence fade. Though this general hostility directly resulted in the crackdowns of 2009 and 2010, the capacities of contending groups remained the more important circumstance throughout most of the period.

**Capacities:** With all contending parties at various points wishing to topple or quell their opponents up until the crackdown of 2010, the question of radical democratic continuation fundamentally rested with the issue of capacity. In terms of the movements, both Red and Yellow demonstrated a high degree of capacity to forcefully alter the operation of their targeted governments. This was particularly true of the Yellow Shirts/PDRC who were able to add legitimacy to the military coups of 2006/2014 and the judicial dissolution of parliament in 2008. However, none of the movements had the capacity to erase the other's ability to radically contest. This capacity fell to the influence of Thailand's various state apparatuses. While the TRT and TRT offspring governments did not have the capacity to repress the Yellow Shirts due to state fracture, specifically with its lack of control over the bureaucratic elite and military, the Democrat government was able to align themselves with these forces and thus repress the Red shirt movement.

**Mechanisms:** Taken as a whole, the period of contestation saw mechanisms of activation far exceed mechanisms of deactivation. Successful campaigns of brokerage and diffusion by both movements - the Yellow Shirts building a case against the excesses of Thaksin and the Red Shirts rallying of the masses around the double standards of traditional power holders - were able to bring the groups to uncompromising positions. By 2010, this situation had evolved into a full-on propaganda war with very little space for reconciliation. Brief periods of deactivation, when they did happen, generally occurred with one side and not the other. This was seen most after a change in government pleased one movement and instigated their opponents. The reasons for deactivation thus were also reasons for reactivation. The simultaneous deactivation of both movements only occurred once the Red Shirts' organization was weakened due to the disillusionment caused by the repression of Prime Minister Abhisit and the military in May 2010. With a weakened Red Shirt movement as a result of these mechanisms, the Democrat government could tolerate the Red Shirts taking to the street once again the following year. In 2013 with the Red-friendly Yingluck Shinawatra government placed under scrutiny, Thailand was confronted with re-activation and re-mobilization of anti-Thaksin forces in a manner that once again witnessed the development of an uncompromising anti-Thaksinist position be articulated on a mass scale.

### **Historical Antecedents to the Red/Yellow Years**

Though the Thaksin and post-Thaksin years have witnessed an incredible increase in political claims against various Thai governments of different political stripes, a democratic politics “from below” has a long and proud history in Thailand with various movements having challenged status quo socio-political arrangements throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Indeed, for politically-minded Thais, the very mention of the years 1973, 1976, and 1992 conjure up stories of ordinary citizens taking to the streets and demanding

changes to the bureaucratic and/or authoritarian practices of government that have been a mainstay of Thai politics.

Structural accounts of Thai political history have generally presented a story of gradual and systematic incorporation of various political functions and social classes into the active citizenry or body politic. As part and parcel of this process of incorporation, commentators have frequently told a tale of an intertwined political awakening. Through the use of historical narrative, many authors have demonstrated that this incorporation came off the back of a group by group shift in political consciousness whereby, due to structural changes, certain functionally defined political groups as well as particular social classes became aware of their political entitlements and demanded entry into the official realm of decision making from which they had previously been excluded.<sup>213</sup> Speaking of the recent Red Shirt movement, this historically attuned analysis by Red Shirt activist Sombat Boonngamanog is a case in point,

“I believe that this will be the last fight. All the revolutions in Thailand are about sharing the power and status. The 1932 revolution was for the military, 1973 and 1976 were for intellectuals, 1992 was for the middle-class. This time it will be for ordinary people.”<sup>214</sup>

Though Boonngamanog is correct when he suggests that these respective groups took on a leading role in each of these uprisings, it ought to be emphasized that “ordinary people” have been taking part in politics of a radical democratic nature for some time, including in most of his historical examples and not simply from 2005 to 2013. Indeed, during both the 1973 and 1976 uprisings against the military governments of the time, students, workers, and farmers took to the streets alongside the “intellectuals” who assisted in

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<sup>213</sup> For an account of some of these structural accounts see Andrew Walker, *Thailand's Political Peasants: Power in the Modern Rural Economy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012).

<sup>214</sup> Federico Ferrara, *Thailand Unhinged: The Death of Style Democracy* (Kuala Lumpur: Equinox Publishing, 2011): 172.

providing the movements with a mouthpiece though certainly not a voice. This, as the students, farmers, and workers demonstrated, the movement already possessed.

Following the harsh crackdown in October 1976 by the military which resulted in the bloody massacre at Bangkok's Thammasat University, many “ordinary people” once again took up their claims of equality against the military and the bureaucratic elite in the form of armed insurrection via the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). Buried deep in the Northern jungles of the Kingdom, workers, students, and farmers and other fellow travellers began a campaign of guerilla warfare which operated on Maoist principles and looked to previous communist successes in neighbouring Indochinese states for inspiration. Although this armed insurgency does not fall under the category of a radical democratic movement, it does demonstrate the groups of “ordinary people” and not simply the progressive intelligentsia were able to make strong demands against the hierarchical order at this time, despite the prevalence of structuralist framings in the academic literature.

The same can also be said of the rural and working class support that was given in 1992 in what has generally been considered a classic uprising of the middle class or bourgeoisie which demanded civil and political rights. Though the middle-income residents of Bangkok may have played a central role in the mass protests against the 1991 coup d'état and resulting junta which deposed of Chatichai Choonhavan, other "ordinary people" also played a significant role. This was particularly true for previously subordinated groups including labour associations and some rural organizations which had organized in the relative freedom of the post-Cold War and post-CPT insurgency era and were now attempting to flex their muscles and have their voices heard.<sup>215</sup>

Given this evidence from the historical record, it must be said that politics being done by “anyone, anyone at all” has been a regular feature of Thai political life over the last

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<sup>215</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 19.

fifty years, despite the prevalence of the cleaner story of a structurally rooted and gradualist occurrence of political awakening and incorporation. For certain, the period of 2005 to 2013 also provides strong evidence of this. With the Yellow Shirt and Red Shirt movements having involved members of diverse social categories, political functions, and economic classes, the last eight years has truly been a showcase of the idea that “anybody, anybody at all” can claim their equality in the face of hierarchical socio-political arrangements and subordination under hegemonic projects. Beyond this however, the episode of Thai contention in the last ten years has also challenged both structuralist *and* culturalist understanding of what makes democratic action, including the politics of opposition so central to radical democratic thought, possible not just in Thailand, but anywhere. Thailand has been and continues to be an interesting case for students of democracy as it has and continues to provide a thorn in the side of structuralist accounts of democratic political actors.

Cultural explanations, though certainly common in the more general literature of democracy in comparative politics, do not feature so heavily in studies of Thai democracy when compared to their structuralist counterparts. Perhaps the reason for this rests with the fact that holistic accounts which would take into consideration the political culture of the country as a whole would fail to capture the nuances that are involved when it comes to the negotiation between different groups, interests, and sets of values in Thai society. Anyone studying Thai politics in even the most cursory way, whether contemporarily or historically, quickly comes to realize that Thai political ideals have been anything but holistic. Though there may be some political activists (particularly within the PAD) who subscribe to the overdetermination of “Asian Values” in Thai political life and thus view democracy as incompatible or “unThai” compared to authoritarian and elite driven “Thai Style Democracy”,

such analyses are few and far between.<sup>216</sup> Rather, many scholars of Thai democracy tend to paint a different and more pluralistic picture - showing Thailand as having a very deeply entrenched tradition of public participation and contention, both at the local and national levels. Thais have certainly not been living in a “subject” or “parochial” culture given much of the citizenry’s constant entanglement with the state.<sup>217</sup> Likewise, when it has come to international indexes of attitudes towards democracy such as the *Asian Barometer*, Thailand tends to rank as quite democratic. Of course, the problem with these more positive culturalist analyses is that they are unable to account for why democratic politics, including instances of radical democratic uprising, are periodically repressed. Particularly, such analyses overlook the definite existence of capable forces that have been and continue to be undemocratic when certain demands have been made against them. It is clear that such an understanding needs to be developed through a close study of the conflicts present in Thai socio-political life.

In terms of the structuralist approach to understanding democratic possibilities, as will be made abundantly clear through the remainder of this chapter, though members or various social classes participated in radical democratic forms of claim making, the desires of the groups themselves were frequently far from progressive and democratic. This was particularly the case for some members of the PAD who articulated elitist, authoritarian and, at times, even fascist ideals. Though Marx and his disciples, including many structuralists in comparative politics, have often painted the working class as an inherently progressive and democratic force, the Thai case tells a tale of several unions and labour-affiliated NGOs fighting alongside the often anti-democratic (and ironically named) People's Alliance for Democracy.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> For an account of some of these Asian Values and Thai Style Democracy approaches see: Kevin Hewison and Kengkij Kitirianglarp, "Thai-Style Democracy: The Royalist Struggle for Thailand's Politics" in *Saying the Unsayable: Monarchy and Democracy in Thailand*, eds. Soren Ivarsson and Lotte Isager (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Press, 2010)

<sup>217</sup> Walker, 231.

<sup>218</sup> Giles Ji Ungpakorn, *Thailand's Crisis and the Fight for Democracy* (WDPress., 2010): 66

From a different line of argumentation, Barrington Moore, another well-regarded historical sociologist with a structuralist account of democratic politics, was quite famous for the summary statement of his 700+ page *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*: “no bourgeoisie, no democracy.” Indeed, historically as it was for Moore, the bourgeoisie, whether defined in terms of the relations of capitalist production or more broadly in terms of the “middle classes” has been viewed by comparative analysts as being bearers of democratic values. However, as the Thai case shows, though the bourgeoisie and middle classes may have demonstrated their desire for democratic forms of politics during the uprisings of 1992, from 2006 to the present, many members of this social stratum have gone on to support the undemocratic actions of the military and, like some of the working class, the undemocratic proposals of the PAD.<sup>219</sup>

Most strikingly of all, despite their historically assigned label as the most “reactionary” and problematic of classes, the social segment which has arguably furthest exhibited the values of democracy has been the peasantry.<sup>220</sup> As many rural supporters of the Red Shirt movement have stated, their uprising, though certainly centred on the figure of Thaksin Shinawatra, was also about the belief that anyone can and ought to do politics rather than simply any *one*.<sup>221</sup>

For these reasons, structuralist understandings of democracy which have assigned particular values to particular classes or, likewise, the existence of democratic arrangements to the ascendancy of certain classes do little to help explain why the radical democratic politics of Thailand have been able to carry on at points and be closed down at others. Likewise, neither do structuralist accounts that have been built upon more crude economic or

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<sup>219</sup> Marc Askew, "Contested Legitimacy" in *Legitimacy Crisis in Thailand*, ed. Marc Askew (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2010): 8.

<sup>220</sup> Walker, 231.

<sup>221</sup> David Fullbrook, "Changing Thailand, an Awakening of Popular Political Consciousness for Rights?" in *Bangkok May 2010: Perspectives on a Divided Thailand*, eds. Michael J, Montesano, Pavin Chachavalpongpun and Aekapol Chongvilaivan (Singapore: ISEAS, 2012): 136.

monetary considerations. Older models which have often rested on the incorporation of the working class, the eradication of the “peasant problem”, or, most reductionist of all, the income gap between the rich and poor, generally have assumed that without alleviating the pressure placed on the political system by the impoverished lower classes, democratic politics would remain impossible due to state reaction to revolutionary upheaval. Though such an argument may hold when analyzing the period of communist insurgency from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, accounts such as these cannot explain the periods when Thailand did experience democratic (including radical democratic) possibilities, including throughout the last decade, despite the lack of incorporation of some social classes as well as the persistence of the “peasant problem”. One major reason for this lack of explanatory power is the fact that often in these analyses, the actual wishes of existing groups are not taken into account. As was argued in the theoretical section of this chapter, there is enough historical evidence to demonstrate that the connection between class position and articulated interests and demands is by no means automatic, thus rendering arguments about class configurations and democratic possibilities incomplete.

As such, while culturalist explanations (albeit not so common in the Thai case) cannot account for the times when democratic “stepping out” is not possible, the structuralist accounts have a difficult time accounting for the instances in which they are. Of course, while the culturalist accounts would have to suggest a Thailand that has been a bastion of democratic potential and the structuralist explanation the very opposite, the historical record has shown that the truth rests somewhere in the middle. At times, Thailand, especially when compared to its regional neighbours, has been a place where democratic uprisings against governments and various entrenched elites have been tolerated. Despite this however, the country has also witnessed multiple instances of repression against democratic movements, both during the 1970s and 1980s as well as in the current era of post-Thaksin politics. It is for

these reasons that, rather than utilizing broad-sweeping claims about culture or structure, it is imperative to study the recent Thai case and its radical democratic possibilities with a close eye to the actual interests and demands of mobilized contestants, their capacities for action, and the mechanisms which shape relationships within and between participating groups. Only then can we understand what has allowed for this incredible period of radical democratic politics to persist or, at some points, not persist.

### **The Rise of Thaksin (and his Enemies)**

Thaksin Shinawatra, Thai Prime Minister from 2001 to 2006 has been and continues to be one of the most unique political figures that the kingdom has ever witnessed. First of all, and quite telling in terms of the seemingly perpetual uncertain nature of Thai politics, Thaksin was the first Prime Minister to complete a full term in the country's history. This in itself, of course, was a remarkable achievement. As Chambers and Croissant stated while writing in 2008,

“in the seventy-six years since the overthrow of the absolute monarchy, Thailand has seen somewhere between seventeen and twenty-three coups and coup attempts, eighteen constitutions, and fifty-six governments.”<sup>222</sup>

When Thaksin thus completed his first term in 2005 and subsequently went on to win a majority government with his *Thai Rak Thai* (TRT) party in the same year, many observers believed that Thailand had finally turned a corner in terms of its liberal democratic consolidation. It goes without saying that nearly ten years of political turbulence bookended by two military coups have made many believers in stable political designs (including liberal democracy) hold their breath a little bit longer. Nonetheless, it is clear that Thaksin managed

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<sup>222</sup> Aurel Croissant and David Kuehn, "Civilian Control of the Military and Democracy: Conceptual and Theoretical Perspectives" in *Democracy under Stress: Civil-Military Relations in South and Southeast Asia*, eds. Paul Chambers and Aurel Croissant (Bangkok: Institute of Security and International Studies Chulalongkorn, 2010): 23.

to do something quite different in terms of both his political rise and in his period in power. As his record shows, not only was he able to change the pattern of electoral and constitutional politics between 2001 and 2006 by completing a full term but he was also able to change the nature of contention *after* his deposal by the so-called “Council for Democratic Reform under the Constitutional Monarch”, contributing to perhaps the most intense and greatly participated in period of political tension in the kingdom's history.

For certain, much of this shift can be attributed to Thaksin's credentials as a populist - a hotly contested concept whose own fundamental ambiguity has allowed for the production of several volumes aiming at its clarification. Though this debate will probably never lead to the creation of a completely agreed upon set of requirements, one set of features that has come to receive somewhat of a consensual status is the existence of a relative political outsider who is able to lead a series of subordinated groups against an entrenched, exclusive, and generally impenetrable elite.<sup>223</sup> Though there have been questions about his outsider status given the power and extent of his networks and his immense wealth, Thaksin was able to mobilize previously excluded groups, particularly the Northern and Northeastern rural electorate, against the bureaucratic elite. The fact that Thaksin was able to manage this was an achievement of great magnitude. As Ferrara has argued,

“Real political power has almost never rested with elected officials, whose autonomy is limited by the extra-constitutional domains reserves by a network of palace insiders, royal advisors, top military officers, high level bureaucrats, judges, and business elites.”<sup>224</sup>

Along with this, it can be definitively argued that, in fact, Thaksin's actual existence *as* an outsider helped this very process along. Though certainly not a near political nobody such as the likes of Peru's Alberto Fujimori, both Thaksin's wealth and political power were

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<sup>223</sup> For a good literature review on studies of populism see Chapter 1 in Ernesto Laclau's *On Populist Reason*.

<sup>224</sup> Ferrara, 75.

achieved relatively autonomously of the bureaucratic networks normally needed to further one's stature in these areas.

As the grandson of a wealthy Thai-Chinese family in Thailand's northern second city of Chiang Mai, Thaksin carried on the tradition of market involvement by involving himself in several ventures after the completion of his Doctorate of Criminal Justice throughout the 1980s. Like many Thai businessmen who understand that state connections can substantially aid one's business opportunities, Thaksin worked his way through the police force where he was able to make numerous political relationships and create opportunities for his fledgling business enterprises, most of which were large-scale failures.<sup>225</sup> Eventually however, unlike many others who have benefited from their connection to the Thai state, Thaksin's accumulation of vast wealth came not as a result of a forged partnership between the state bureaucracy and one of his business ventures but rather due to a state concession in telecommunication which allowed Thaksin to become a billionaire when the explosion of the mobile phone industry allowed him to cash in on the phone networks he controlled and operated.<sup>226</sup>

Though this wealth could certainly not have been created without the original concession provided by the Thai state, his autonomous accumulation of this money gave him the status as a type of *nouveau riche* - a position that translated into an outsider status when put into confrontation with the "old money" of the Thai bureaucratic elite.<sup>227</sup> With this extreme wealth, Thaksin did not need to rely on these historically entrenched bodies in the civil service, palace, and military to launch his own political career. It also gave him the ability to create a different path from the historical top-down functioning of Thai politics in which politicians of all parties would set agendas that had little mass appeal and relied on

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<sup>225</sup> B.J. Terwiel, *Thailand's Political History From the 13<sup>th</sup> Century to Recent Times*. (Bangkok: River Books, 2011): 287 ; Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 45.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid

<sup>227</sup> Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, "Thaksin's Populism" in *Politics of Modern Southeast Asia: Critical Issues in Modern Politics*, ed. Allen Hicken (New York: Routledge, 2010): 24.

local patron-client exchanges as opposed to large-scale projects.<sup>228</sup> As Pasuk and Baker make clear,

“Until recently, the advent of parliamentary and electoral politics resulted in no major challenge to this order. People invested heavily to ensure that money was critical to electoral success, excluding all those who did not have enough, In the 1990s, around 70% of MPs were drawn from the ranks of male business owners who make up less than 3% of the population. Parliament was a highly unrepresentative rich man's club and one of the key institutions of oligarchic networking.”<sup>229</sup>

As such, when the opportunity presented itself after the 1997 crisis shook up the governing parties and bureaucratic elite, Thaksin was able to forge an entirely new relationship with Thai voters which consequently also fundamentally altered the nature of Thai politics.

Given the top-down, elite oriented nature of political functioning that the country had witnessed from even before the 1932 revolution up until the Thaksin era, large segments of Thai society remained politically and, especially, electorally neglected, including the vast majority of Thailand's rural dwellers. Though scholars such as Andrew Walker have argued that the Thai state has been continually involved in the development of the rural North and Northeast particularly in the Cold War period during which the kingdom faced its own “red scare”, he and many others have been consistently critical in their appraisal of the traditional bureaucratic elite's neglect of rural dwellers as citizens.<sup>230</sup> Importantly, this has been both in terms of their existence as equal political beings and as claimants to the distribution of the wealth that the country has seen gradually increase to middle-income levels over the past sixty years. As the majority of analysts of the most recent period of contestation have been

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<sup>228</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 234; Walker, 3.

<sup>229</sup> Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker. "Thailand in Trouble: Revolt of the Downtrodden or Conflict Among Elites?" in *Bangkok May 2010: Perspectives on a Divided Thailand*, eds. Michael J, Montesano, Pavin Chachavalpongpun and Aekapol Chongvilaivan (Singapore: ISEAS, 2012): 222.

<sup>230</sup> Walker 222; Charles Keyes, "The Color of Politics: Thailand's Deep Crisis of Authority" in *Bangkok May 2010: Perspectives on a Divided Thailand*, eds. Michael J, Montesano, Pavin Chachavalpongpun and Aekapol Chongvilaivan (Singapore: ISEAS, 2012): 175.

quick to point out, while Thailand has witnessed impressive growth and a sharp decline in absolute poverty since the 1960s, inequality has clearly worsened.<sup>231</sup> Quite simply, much of Thailand's population, including most of the rural and poorer North and Northeast, has not seen their lot improve to the same extent as those closer to traditional centres of power, whether it be the Bangkok middle classes or, even further, much of the traditional elite.

Thaksin was therefore able to appeal to a large segment of Thai society who clearly wanted in. This more structural feature certainly speaks to Thaksin's populist categorization. Beyond this, so too did the way he was able to mobilize, politicize, and incorporate his base. While Walker is most definitely correct when he suggests that Thaksin aimed to provide state-centred initiatives through a system of mass provision in a way that was appealing to a “peasantry” looking to benefit through incorporation, it is also crucial to note that Thaksin was able to implement his various promises and additional policies all the while *bypassing* the conservative gatekeepers of the Thai bureaucracy as well as their elite overseers.<sup>232</sup> As Pasuk and Baker demonstrate in their work on Thaksin, the then yet-to-be Prime Minister was not only able to win the 2001 election with this approach, adding a mass electoral base to some of his more business-oriented and reform-minded supporters, but was also able to come through with his promises via this bypassing manner with a relatively ambitious shopping list including a universal health plan, a popular debt relief scheme, an affordable loan system and a highly appreciated village improvement fund along with a host of other small rural developments and subsidies.<sup>233</sup>

This skirting of the Thai bureaucracy also says much about Thaksin's outside status despite his vast wealth as this was a forged position that would eventually have serious repercussions for his rule. For though Thaksin's building of alternative channels for policy

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<sup>231</sup> Kevin Hewison, "Class, Inequality, and Politics" in *Bangkok May 2010: Perspectives on a Divided Thailand*, eds. Michael J. Montesano, Pavin Chachavalpongpun and Aekapol Chongvilaivan (Singapore: ISEAS, 2012): 56.

<sup>232</sup> Walker, 209; Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 187; Ferrara, 45.

<sup>233</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 82.

delivery allowed him to implement initiatives directly and efficiently and thus build support for himself and his party, the creation of this new power network upset the long established and deeply entrenched paths of “Thai-Style” politics and democracy which, in turn, alienated many elite who had traditionally been at the centre of such paths.<sup>234</sup> Furthermore, Thaksin's dual track policy - one which saw populist policies for the rural population *and* the promotion of pro-business free market policy for *nouveau riche* like himself - alienated elite who had benefited due to not just the rewards associated with local project development but also with the global market. As Ferrara has argued,

“Thaksin's promotion of trade and foreign direct investment threatened the dominance that a few dozen Sino-Thai families had enjoyed since the later 1950s over commerce, banking, agribusiness and most manufacturing.”<sup>235</sup>

Thaksin's efforts at expanding this power network into other realms of influence, including within the media, civil society organizations, the independent regulatory bodies such as the Electoral Commission and Constitutional Court, and even the military, further threatened, if not outright disrupted the flows of power and influence held by this *ammarthaya*.

With regard to the influence upon the media, Thaksin looked to exert pressure and silence dissenting voices to an extent unseen since the state's fight against communism in the late 1970s. As several scholars have discussed, much of this media suppression was done through crafty forms of manipulation as opposed to outright control such as through the withholding of state advertising money and intimidation of journalists.<sup>236</sup> Nevertheless, Thaksin's approach to the independent media saw Thailand's ranking in the 2005 Reporters

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<sup>234</sup> Hewison and Kengkij, 180; Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 234; Ferrara, 53.

<sup>235</sup> Ferrara, 53.

<sup>236</sup> Pravit Rajanaphruk and Jiranan Hanthamrongwit, "Distorted Mirror and Lamp: The Politicization of the Thai Media in the Post-Thaksin Era" *Legitimacy Crisis in Thailand*, ed. Marc Askew (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2012): 170.

Without Borders' "World Press Freedom Index" slip from #59 to #107.<sup>237</sup> The targeting of senior media figures by the Thaksin-controlled Anti-Money Laundering Office, the calling in of editors for "chats", the withholding of the advertising budget of state enterprises from anti-Thaksin papers, the removal of critical programs from television under the guise of "technical malfunctions", and media takeovers by companies close to him were all part of the effort to build an alternative power network outside that of that of the traditional elite.<sup>238</sup>

Though not necessarily holding a position that would normally be classified as elite, NGOs were also subject to harassment by Thaksin's TRT insiders and not given the appropriate room to breathe. Many NGOs, which had served a critical function of being a watchdog of the government on issues like human rights, were not supported and sometimes even branded treasonous.<sup>239</sup> These manoeuvres were enacted not only to maintain a grip on power at the given moment but were also done in an effort to win an important ideological battle. Thaksin and the TRT could simply not allow anyone else to speak in the name of "the people" since this was at the core of the party's, and also Thaksin's, claim to legitimacy.<sup>240</sup> As such, despite the progressive nature of many of his populist policies, Thaksin managed to activate a sharp boundary between himself and many NGOs who may have been sympathetic to some of their new enemy's economic policies. Indeed, throughout the period of contestation, one of the most remarkable phenomena was the existence of economically progressive and leftist forces on both sides of the colour-shirt divide, many of whom have been drawn from the long extinguished People's Movement of the 1970s. While Thaksin brought some members of formerly radical political movements into his TRT team for the development of his populist program, other radicals of times past went on to join the Yellow Shirts in protest of some of Thaksin's pro-business policies and authoritarian governance

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid, 172.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid, 171.

<sup>239</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thailand*, 147.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid

tendencies.<sup>241</sup> As such, while Thaksin was once again able to incorporate many into his project, with this came a sharp demarcation of who was in and who was out.

At the level of official institutions, Thaksin's capturing of the so-called independent bodies - the Constitutional Court, the Elections Commission, and several other offices with mandates to deal with corruption - also provided him the opportunity to build a personal, though not liberal, system of checks and balances which would look to safeguard his rule against those who wanted him out.<sup>242</sup> By taking away some of the power levers which could be used against him by his enemies, Thaksin attempted to bring his outside forces in, providing protection through the control of certain state functions. At this level of officialdom, Thaksin also attempted to gain protection for himself, his project, and his outsider supporters through manipulation of the military ranks. By choosing several military men who were loyal to him for senior positions within the Thai military, including friends from the same 1973 graduating class of the Armed Forces Preparatory School, Thaksin tried to shift power away from the entrenched insiders of the armed forces who had long historical ties to other members of the old bureaucratic elite including within the civil service, the traditional political parties, and conservative elements attached to the palace.<sup>243</sup>

Given these developments it is clear to see that while Thaksin remained extremely popular with the historically shunned rural voter base for his attempt at bringing outsiders in, he also did much to shake up the existing power structures of the old elite, thus creating a large number of foes who were desperate to have him out. This manoeuvring however was insufficient on its own to have Thaksin deposed and, indeed, when the coup of September 2006 did occur it was this manoeuvring combined with some of his other controversial

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<sup>241</sup> Pasuk and Baker, "Thailand in Trouble", 224; Nick Nostitz, *Red vs. Yellow - Volume 1: Thailand's Crisis of Identity*. (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2010): 8.

<sup>242</sup> Kasit Piromya. "Thailand's Rocky Path towards a Full-Fledged Democracy" in *Bangkok May 2010: Perspectives on a Divided Thailand*, eds. Michael J, Montesano, Pavin Chachavalpongpun and Aekapol Chongvilaivan (Singapore: ISEAS, 2012): 163.

<sup>243</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 248.

decisions and the action they spurned from the public which allowed for the tanks to roll onto the streets of Bangkok. For certain, many ordinary citizens, predominantly from the capital's middle classes, would first have to take to the streets in a sea of yellow.

### **Lighting the Fuse**

As a result of the success of his populist policies and their consequent popularity with the rural majority, Thaksin too remained a very popular political figure on the eve of the 2005 parliamentary election, despite the fact that some key groups had begun to mobilize against him. Civil society groups which had previously supported the Prime Minister for his reform-minded approach were now openly opposing him for his flagrant authoritarian governing style and, in some cases, a direct conflict of interest that came about as a result of the previously discussed power manoeuvres. Thaksin's previously discussed attempts to control the media, the independent regulatory bodies, and the NGOs put him at loggerheads with many middle-class, liberal-minded Thais who were weary about the more heavy handed direction in which the TRT Prime Minister was taking the country.<sup>244</sup> Aside from these power-plays, several other of his policies pushed Thais who were concerned about the country's human rights record against Thaksin and the TRT.

One of the gravest concerns which was articulated by Thaksin's opponents was with regard to the Prime Minister's "War on Drugs" which looked to eradicate drug-running activities that were particularly prevalent in Thailand's Muslim majority Deep South.<sup>245</sup> Though the so-called "Southern Question" was already a sensitive issue given the existence of armed insurgent groups who demanded independence from Thailand, Thaksin was seen as

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<sup>244</sup> Michael J. Montesano, "Political Contests in the Advent of Bangkok's 19 September Coup" in *Divided Over Thaksin: Thailand's Coup and Problematic Transition*, ed. John Funston (Singapore: ISEAS, 2009): 3; John Funston, "Introduction" in *Thaksin's Thailand: Populism and Polarisation*, ed. John Funston (Bangkok: Institute of Security and International Studies Chulalongkorn, 2009): ix ; Terwiel 288; Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 228.

<sup>245</sup> Terwiel, 289; Pasuk and Baker, 228.

having exacerbated the problem with the controversial and illiberal tactics of the War on Drugs which had led to 50,000 arrests and claimed over 2000 lives, many of which were extra-judicial killings and thus without due process.<sup>246</sup> Although not everyone in the country was as disillusioned with these strong-arm measures (Walker has even suggested that many in rural areas were quite satisfied with both the approach and the result of the War on Drugs)<sup>247</sup> many higher income Thais, especially those of higher education levels in Bangkok, were appalled at the lack of justice and unnecessary violence that were transpiring under not just Thaksin's watch but under his very command.

Yet despite this magnitude of criticism that Thaksin received for his handling of the War on Drugs, the one issue that pushed many Thais over the edge and has continued to dominate debate about Thaksin has been the former Prime Minister's abuse of power with regards to money. This has been both in terms of his use of money to win elections and also his use of elections to win more money. This issue, though having reared its ugly head during his first term, became a major point of contention after the 2005 election which Thaksin and the TRT went on to win with a landslide majority, taking 375 of the 500 parliamentary seats.<sup>248</sup> It was clear that Thaksin's policies directed at rural voters including the 30 baht health scheme, the village improvement fund, and an array of subsidies from everything from computers to cattle had been extremely popular and, in fact, successful in the eyes of the rural electorate.<sup>249</sup> As such when it came time for the election of 2005, Thaksin and the TRT extended their commitment to a populist program both in style and substance.

Thaksin had appeared in the North and Northeast as a “man of the people” wearing blue jeans, giving speeches in Northern dialect, and joking about his own sex life. As Walker has acknowledged, the fact that Thaksin had been able to have himself recognized as a “son

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid

<sup>247</sup> Walker, 213.

<sup>248</sup> Randle C. Zeboli *Thailand: Economic, Political, and Social Issues*. (New York, Nova Science Publishers, 2009) : 4

<sup>249</sup> Nostitz, *Volume 1*, 8

of Chiang Mai” did wonders for him at the ballot box north of Bangkok.<sup>250</sup> Beyond this however, as Pasuk and Baker establish, Thaksin was able to promise a significantly improved set of policy measures.<sup>251</sup> Given the efficiency and effectiveness that Thaksin had shown in his first term, many voters were truly convinced that the “heart of the TRT is the people”.<sup>252</sup>

Though vote-buying has been a persistent though regrettable feature of Thai politics with local “strong men” having historically paid their clients for patronage, Thaksin was and continues to be harshly criticized for transforming vote-buying into a mass phenomenon, undertaken though the hands of a mass party.<sup>253</sup> It must be stated that the extent of vote-buying itself has been the subject of continuous debate among ordinary Thais and the country's politically oriented intellectuals. Some commentators have bemoaned the fact that policy provision through government channels and measures associated with any welfare-state worthy of the name have sometimes been branded as “vote-buying” and rightly so. However, despite this, one must be careful not to push too far the other way and suggest that Thaksin and the TRT's acquisition of electoral support was entirely clean. Several authors including Walker have documented that the TRT did in fact exchange money for support.<sup>254</sup> Though there is evidence to suggest that the TRT engaged in vote-buying to levels not exceeding more locally rooted instances of the past, the issue of Thaksin's vote-buying did become central for the Prime Minister's opponents who viewed the massification of “money politics” as severely damaging the respectability of the country's democratic process.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Walker, 207.

<sup>251</sup> According to Pasuk and Baker, among these policy measures were the extension of the village improvement fund, the guarantee of land deeds for every landholder, four new cheap loan schemes, free distribution of cows, training schemes for the poor, cheaper school fees, special payment for dropouts, educational gift bags for new mothers, care centres for the elderly, more sports facilities, cheaper phone calls end to eviction from slums, more cheap housing, lower taxes, improvements to the universal health scheme, and a deadline for the proposed 'end to poverty'.

<sup>252</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 228.

<sup>253</sup> Funston, “Introduction”, xviii.

<sup>254</sup> Walker, 209.

<sup>255</sup> Michael H. Nelson, "People's Alliance for Democracy: From "New Politics" to a "Real" Political Party?" in *Legitimacy Crisis in Thailand*, ed. Marc Askew (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2010): 123.

Despite the importance of this however, vote-buying was not the only issue of “money politics” that resulted in many ordinary Thai citizens coming to adamantly oppose Thaksin and the TRT's rule. In the 2005 election, the blurring of the lines between state and party financing made many uncomfortable with how the TRT was conducting its affairs. As was previously stated, Thaksin had engaged in many strategic power plays which looked to bypass the roles of the historically entrenched bureaucratic elite within the Thai state. At some points, such a strategy saw policy provision being conducted by Thaksin's well-financed political party and not the state ministries.<sup>256</sup> These actions, though certainly not a universal or even predominant phenomenon as some activists have overstated, gave credence to the idea that the TRT was engaged in a mass vote-buying scheme. On top of this, the allegation that the TRT was using state finances to fund its own party machine increased the strength of the argument that Thaksin was a manipulative authoritarian who was aiming to turn Thailand into a one-party dominated state in the model of Singapore under the People's Action Party or Malaysia under the Alliance/Barisan Nasional.<sup>257</sup>

As the weight of the argument increased, so too did the volume of criticism. Yet this issue of “money politics” was also not the straw which broke the camel's back. For our purposes however it is important to note that it certainly set the radical democratic contestation into motion. As Pasuk and Baker state in relation to the opposition to Thaksin not yet being mass-based,

“In late 2005, the opposition to Thaksin was largely confined to a politically sensitive urban minority - the press, intellectuals and activists, prominent citizens, political soldiers, and a few thousand who were excited by the novelty of a weekly political roadshow.”<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Walker, 209.

<sup>257</sup> Sripan Rattikalchalakorn, "Politics under Thaksin: Popular Support, Elite Concern" in *Thaksin's Thailand: Populism and Polarisation*, ed. John Funston (Bangkok: Institute of Security and International Studies Chulalongkorn, 2009): 8.

<sup>258</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 260.

With regard to the last of these, this was the roadshow of Sondhi Limthongkul, a business tycoon himself who had once been a supporter of Thaksin but turned against him when the Prime Minister had failed to politically support one of Sondhi's financiers, thus causing damage to Sondhi's direct business interests.<sup>259</sup> Though Sondhi had initially opposed Thaksin on a weekly political commentary television program entitled *Thailand Weekly*, Sondhi's harsh criticisms against Thaksin and the TRT, particularly directed against its vote buying and “manipulation of the masses”, saw Sondhi's program taken off the air on 15 September 2005 in one of Thaksin's infamous moves against media which had been critical of him.<sup>260</sup>

Ironically enough, of all these discussed alienated segments, it was this weekly political roadshow which would go on to serve as a sort of vanguard for the Yellow Shirted variant of Thailand's radical democratic politics of protest and the transformation of the general situation into one of mass mobilization. It can be said that the Yellow Shirt movement, though not yet branded as the People's Alliance for Democracy, began with the first stage show that Sondhi held at Thammasat University in the fall when thousands of his fellow anti-Thaksinites attended this live stage performance where Thaksin's corruption, human rights record, and neoliberal economic policies were publicly scrutinized and condemned.

Because Thaksin had threatened the traditional bureaucratic elite through his attempts to reroute power through his own networks *along* with having alienated liberal-minded elements in civil society, academia, and educated middle class Bangkokians as a result of his corruption and authoritarianism, the TRT had been able to severely upset the balance of forces which had been in place since the return to the liberal democratic order after the brief episode of military rule in 1991-1992. Some such as Michael Connors have gone so far as to

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<sup>259</sup> Nostitz, *Volume 1*, 7.

<sup>260</sup> Montesano, “Political Contests”, 2.

suggest that Thaksin unleashed a beast for having disturbed a much more structurally defined liberal-conservative pact.<sup>261</sup> Whatever the case may be, it is clear that Thaksin was able to bring together ideologically disparate forces to oppose his very rule. This conglomeration of what are frequently thought to be incompatible elements was even further complicated by members of progressive NGOs and trade unions who were opposed to Thaksin for his business-friendly policies of privatization and free trade.<sup>262</sup> As exiled Marxist academic Giles Ji Ungpakorn had convincingly demonstrated, many important as well as “rank and file” members of the Thai left including some associated with the rail workers union, the Thai Labour Solidarity Committee, progressive teacher's associations, NGOs, and former Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) members abandoned the popular and democratic will of the historically excluded and relatively impoverished rural populace in favour of an alliance with conservative forces.<sup>263</sup> As Ungpakorn argues, this bizarre alignment occurred for the reason that the left or the remnants of the People's Movement believed themselves to be “too weak” to mobilize against Thaksin on an individual class basis.<sup>264</sup> With the combination of all of these elements, what developed at Thammasat university was what Nick Nostitz has called “an almost impossible alliance of groups with a background in the people's movement, former supporters of the TRT, rightist royalists, military officers, parts of the Thai-Chinese business community, and citizen organizations.”<sup>265</sup>

### **Radical Democratic Contradictions**

As one key point of controversy, though this multi-sector, multi-class, and multi-ideological movement against Thaksin would go on to be self-described as the People's

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<sup>261</sup> Michael K. Connors, "Notes towards an Understanding of Thai Liberalism" in *Bangkok May 2010: Perspectives on a Divided Thailand*, eds. Michael J. Montesano, Pavin Chachavalpongpun and Aekapol Chongvilaiwan (Singapore: ISEAS, 2012): 99.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>263</sup> Ungpakorn, 66.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>265</sup> Nostitz, *Volume 1*, 8.

Alliance for Democracy, most commentators did not see very much democracy on display when it came to the content of their demands. Indeed, not a few analysts went as far in suggesting that both the structural makeup and the ideology of the PAD were nothing short of fascistic.<sup>266</sup> For certain, some of the goals of some very conservative segments of the movement unmistakably demonstrated such tendencies. This was particularly true of the proposed “New Politics” platform in which parliamentary votes would be divided by and cast according to social function to ensure that majority groups, particularly the rural electorate, could not be influenced by vote buying and other forms of “money politics”.<sup>267</sup> As such, the Yellow Shirts who began with their stepping out against the cronyism and authoritarianism of Thaksin at Thammasat University was a movement embodying a radical democratic form all the while exhibiting some clear radical anti-democratic content.

Of course, such a situation naturally raises a crucial question. Does this sharp division between form and content render the Yellow Shirt movement as unworthy of the radical democratic title and thus unsuitable as an object of investigation for this work? Though it is certainly open to debate, we have to suggest that the answer is no. The reason for this is easily explained. Throughout this work it has been the form that movements have taken rather than their ideological content that has allowed us to classify a movement's "stepping out" as radically democratic. Indeed, what has defined our understanding of a radical democratic instance of politics is a group mobilizing outside the assigned spaces and places of “politics as usual” in a demonstration of that group or movement's political equality. For this reason, the Yellow Shirts, especially its liberal and leftist elements, who engaged in mass mobilization outside of the assigned spaces of Thailand's normally bureaucratic manner of governance as well as Thaksin's own newly constructed political networks, were certainly

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<sup>266</sup> Jim Taylor, "No Way Forward but Back? Re-emergent Thai Falangism, Democracy, and the New "Red Shirt" Social Movement" in *Bangkok May 2010: Perspectives on a Divided Thailand*, eds. Michael J. Montesano, Pavin Chachavalpongpon and Aekapol Chongvilaivan (Singapore: ISEAS, 2012): 289.

<sup>267</sup> Nelson, 128.

participating in radical democratic action. Since the purpose of this work is to investigate the circumstances under which this *form* of politics remains possible, the Yellow Shirts and their fight against Thaksin remain an ideal movement for analysis.

The question of content however remains an important area of debate not just within radical democratic thought but also within political theory more generally. Indeed, many serious criticisms have been leveled against radical democratic thought for the potential relativistic direction that the framework can travel in when taken to its logical conclusion.<sup>268</sup> Without a doubt, the emphasis on humans' *political* equality has been an important corrective to other universalist theories of socio-political design which deem some as involved in meaningful speaking and others as simply “making noise.” Yet, as has become commonplace in assessments of prescriptive theories that have their bases in post-structuralist or neo-Aristotelian frameworks, radical democratic thought included, the lingering question of the ability to draw lines of acceptable socio-political content remains, leaving open the possibility for very undemocratic and inegalitarian political movements to be granted legitimacy. Of course, trying to resolve this question would require another book. Perhaps several books. It could be argued that this question of political vs. substantive equality has been and remains to be *the* question of progressive political thought of the last half century. Various radical democratic authors have attempted to solve this serious tension in a variety of ways. Honig has focused on the “new” to protect her theory from reactionary cooptation, Connolly has placed emphasis on “respect” as a core feature of his project, Rancière has made mention of the community as a “whole” to defend against particularism, and Mouffe, perhaps having engaged with this question most seriously of all, has theorized that radical democratic projects should be limited to those which base their claims around the twin poles

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<sup>268</sup> Indeed, after the initial publication of Laclau and Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* in 1985, Radical Democracy was met with strong criticisms from the traditional left for its abandoning of the class struggle as the central struggle for progressive forces. In the present day, Slavoj Žižek has been of the foremost critics. See his *Class Struggle or Postmodernism* in Butler, Laclau, Butler. *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*.

of liberty and equality. Whether such arguments are convincing or even internally consistent with their respective philosophical frameworks is a question for another day and for a work of a more strictly theoretical nature.

Certainly the programmatic content of groups such as the Yellow Shirts need to be subject to scrutiny. It is quite likely that the type of socio-political arrangement that some members of the PAD wished to see would be entirely opposed to all of these thinkers' own political projects. However, in some ways, this too remains ambiguous. It is simply too easy and too crude to suggest that the PAD was holistically fascistic. As has been demonstrated thus far, many liberal-minded Thais joined or sympathized with the PAD due to Thaksin's authoritarian manner of ruling which stifled and threatened the autonomy of civil society. Certainly such reasons fall under Mouffe's category of liberty. Likewise, many of the unions' and progressive organizations' fears about privatization and free trade were done in the name of equality. Here, another key problem with radical democratic thought becomes apparent. Though more theoretical works often conveniently underemphasize this (whether intentionally or unintentionally), it is obvious when studying actual movements that they are far from homogeneous. When it comes to the PAD, some members were fascistic while others were clearly not. How radical democratic thought can deal with this issue is something that will need to be elaborated on in future theoretical works.

Whatever the case may be, even if the PAD cannot be regarded as radical democratic in content, it certainly can be in terms of form. Again, it must be stated that this focus on form - of radical "stepping out" - is not without normative importance. In fact, this is quite the contrary. As all of the theorists have made clear, the ability for ordinary people to "step out" of their assigned places - often places of subordination - and demonstrate their political equality is an important corrective to political theory of the past which has often quite seriously neglected this key element of political subjectivity.

## The King's Colour

Thousands of Thais of various political stripes “stepping out” of their normal assigned socio-political spaces and also out of their homes and into the small confines of Thammasat University to hold Thaksin accountable for his abuse of power was a demonstration of this political equality despite the fact that the movement was, at this point, relatively small. Despite the movement calling for Thaksin's metaphorical head, with the protesters not posing much of a threat to the daily operation of the TRT government, let alone Thaksin's rule, the initial protests were given their space.

However, the capacity of the Yellow Shirts to threaten the government would soon increase. Though Sondhi's political roadshow had started quite modestly with a few thousand of his television followers, it quickly expanded as many ordinary Thais found that some of the anti-Thaksin themes which were being presented strongly resonated with them. As such, the rallies gradually grew in attendance and only after a few months the weekly “roadshow” was forced to move to the bigger location of Lumpini Park in central Bangkok. At this point, tens of thousands were joining the rallies, reaching a walloping 80,000 people by the end of 2005.<sup>269</sup> One reason for this swelling in numbers was for the fact that the TRT had attempted to shut down a live broadcast of the event that had been transmitted through a line that the government could not control.<sup>270</sup> The government's attempt to quiet the movement had given further validation to the protesters' original intent. As Pasuk and Baker also explain, libel lawsuits were filed against some of the rally leaders in an effort to limit the damage caused by the weekly protest movement.<sup>271</sup> Immediately it became clear that the TRT government was certainly not tolerant of this fledging movement gaining ground in Bangkok's central park. Yet, at the same time, it must be said that neither were they entirely intolerant of it.

Though it was clear that the government was keen on *controlling* the movement, they did not

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<sup>269</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 253.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid

<sup>271</sup> Ibid

go so far as to repress it. For despite the mobilization of 80,000 people against the government, the maintenance and also operation of TRT rule was not sufficiently threatened and the government could continue to point to its parliamentary majority for electoral legitimacy. However this too would soon change.

What had yet to occur was the other half of the “money politics” problem - Thaksin's use of electoral success to increase the size of his bank account. The revelation that Thaksin had flagrantly used his office as well as his parliamentary majority post-2005 to enrich himself and his family was the development that brought Thai citizens onto the streets by the hundreds of thousands. Though there were several instances where Thaksin was accused of profiteering off the back of the public including in land grabbing incidents involving family members and graft at the newly built Suvarnabhumi International Airport, the one case which truly enraged Thais of various political stripes was Thaksin's sale of his ShinCorp Telecommunications company to Temasek holdings, owned and operated by the Singaporean government. Since Thaksin had achieved his vast wealth through state concessions in telecommunications, many Thais accused him of being a self-interested and unpatriotic transnational capitalist who was, in the words of some, “selling away the country”.<sup>272</sup> In his own defense, Thaksin suggested that the sale was done to rid himself of any potential future accusation of conflict of interest. However, this explanation did not go very far in convincing many of Thaksin's opponents. As another major sticking point, Thaksin and the TRT had been found to have used their executive power to alter the law concerning the taxation rules on sales of Thai businesses to foreign entities. With this law put in place immediately before the sale of ShinCorp, Thaksin was able to complete the multi-billion baht deal tax free, a move which infuriated many hardworking and tax-paying Thais who resented the different

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<sup>272</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 261; Terwiel, 290; Nostitz, *Volume 1*, 7.

rules Thaksin was playing by to enhance an already substantial fortune.<sup>273</sup> As such, not only was the Prime Minister accused of damaging the Thai national interest but also he was seen as having used the power of his political office for quenching his own greed. From here, the radical democratic action against Thaksin took full flight.

The Yellow Shirt Movement which had begun with a few thousand of Sondhi's most ardent supporters opposed to Thaksin had grown to five and then six figures in early 2006 following the news of the SinCorp deal and the connected occurrence of tax evasion.<sup>274</sup> It was at this point that many of the previously discussed groups despite the many contradictions - workers' groups, NGOs, middle class Thais, students associations, and even some farmers' leaders - joined the protests en masse and coalesced into what was officially known as the People's Alliance for Democracy on 9 February.<sup>275</sup> Pasuk and Baker report that up to 200,000 demonstrators frequently participated in rallies throughout March and April, demanding that Thaksin get out of office or alternatively be removed.<sup>276</sup> Montesano reports that an even greater 300,000 PAD supporters rallied along the historical protest site of Rathchadamnoen Avenue on the evening of 25 March.<sup>277</sup> Since Thaksin was being presented as an anti-leader who was not just greedily enhancing his own purse but also corrupting the very moral soul of the nation through his acts of manipulation, many participants in the PAD's mass rallies called for the use of Article 7 of the 1997 constitution which gave the king the power in an emergency situation to remove an incumbent Prime Minister and appoint a new one.<sup>278</sup>

Such calls from some PAD members are certainly not difficult to comprehend. Thaksin, given his presidential style in a country where the role of the monarchy (or at least this monarch, King Bhumibol) is held in a near sacred position by the majority of the

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<sup>273</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin* 267.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid, 268.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid, 267.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid, 268.

<sup>277</sup> Montesano, "Political Contests", 5.

<sup>278</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 268.

population, had already made many Thais uncomfortable. Needless to say, Thaksin's clear disregard for public ethics did not improve his public image and resulted in several unflattering comparisons between himself and the king who was seen as having high moral resolve.<sup>279</sup> It is for this reason - the perceived loss of Thailand's moral direction - that Yellow, the king's birth colour, had been chosen as the colour of the anti-Thaksin camp's protest movement.

The calls for Thaksin to be put out of office by so many among the Thai masses was met with a level of appreciation from the bureaucratic elite which, as discussed, the Prime Minister had done much to alienate. As Pasuk and Baker identify, the leadership of the Yellow Shirts, despite the movement being mass-based, maintained the clear support, and thus certification, of powerful elements in the bureaucracy, the military, and the Privy Council.<sup>280</sup> As a result of both the growing size and capacity of the PAD movement and the support that the movement enjoyed within these powerful conservative elite circles, Thaksin's government, though certainly wishing to reel in the movement, was unable to do so because of its clearly weakened capacity. Thaksin and the TRT simply did not have control of the state apparatus to impose its will on the PAD protesters. This was despite the fact that the PAD had activated a clear boundary against them which would accept nothing less than the end of Thaksin's tenure, even if it meant the use of extra-constitutional channels. Of greatest importance, the one body whose withdrawal of support was most significant in this fissure was the military, whose connections to the old order made it very critical of Thaksin's corrupt presidential authoritarianism. As Pasuk and Baker poignantly state, “the army played a subtle but important role: by doing nothing.”<sup>281</sup> Protections for protests of up to 300,000 people were provided throughout early 2006 including during more disruptive demonstrations such as marches on the grounds of Government House and a mass procession through a shopping

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<sup>279</sup> Hewison and Kengkij 181.

<sup>280</sup> Pasuk and Baker, 267.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid, 270.

centre.<sup>282</sup> Here, radical democratic activities occurred as a result of a lack of state capacity due to a crisis of authority.

As a potential solution to what amounted to a crisis for the ruling government - one that would look to ensure that the TRT stayed in power - Thaksin had dissolved the parliament on 24 February and called for a snap election for 2 April.<sup>283</sup> As a classic manoeuvre of a populist, Thaksin was looking to legitimize his rule through an appeal to the ballot box and, due to his lack of concern for checks and balances and the freedom of civil society, the ballot box alone. For Thaksin and the TRT a large showing of support for the governing part in the election could serve as a mechanism of deactivation, silencing the claims of the protesters and triggering a retreat from the streets.

Thaksin however had not played his cards right. Indeed, one of the reasons why the PAD protests had reached 300,000 by the end of March was for the fact that Thaksin's yellow shirted enemies had judged the Prime Minister to be giving himself and his party an unfair advantage by providing only one month for the opposition parties to prepare for the elections.<sup>284</sup> Beyond this, from the PAD's standpoint, whether Thaksin could win an election or not did not change the fact that he was a corrupt leader who was morally bankrupting the country. With this, as part of the mass mobilizations that swept Bangkok in March and April was a call by the PAD for a boycott of Thaksin's snap election. As Nostitz has explained, the main opposition parties, the Democrats and Chart Thai, did just this - boycotting the election by not fielding any candidates.<sup>285</sup>

As a result of this boycott, the election result devolved into nothing short of a mess just as the PAD and the opposition parties had hoped it would. With the TRT running in a one horse race, Thaksin claimed victory. However, in many ridings, particularly in the

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Ibid

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Terwiel, 290.

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Nostitz, *Volume 1*, 8

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Ibid

traditional Democrat stronghold of the south, seats remained unfilled as the TRT was unable to win more than the 20% of all possible riding voters required for a party to win the seat.<sup>286</sup> The fact that some ridings did not have representatives along with the larger issue of the TRT having run uncontested made many of Thaksin's opponents as well as many other Thai onlookers launch a critique that the election was fundamentally undemocratic. As such, though Thaksin had first appeared ready to resume his role at the helm of the Thai government, after a meeting with the king on 4 April, Thaksin surprised many by announcing that he would take a break from politics.<sup>287</sup> Though the king seemingly intervened in the crisis to prevent the country from sliding further into chaos, the Thai head of state announced directly that he would not appoint a new Prime Minister as the PAD were requesting him to and instead asked the Supreme Court to take the lead in finding a solution to the impasse.<sup>288</sup>

Though it is open for debate whether such a decision would have been made without such prompting by the king, the Supreme Court announced that the results of the election would be voided for the reason that the electoral commission had not been “politically neutral” and thus had not created the conditions for a free and fair election.<sup>289</sup> With new elections called for mid-October -the long delay established in order to put together a new electoral commission - Thaksin resumed his role as Prime Minister.<sup>290</sup> This of course also led to the continuation of the mass Yellow Shirt protests that demanded his immediate removal. Throughout the spring and summer, large scale Yellow Shirt protests continued with the protection afforded to them by the military and members of the bureaucratic elite who had been alienated or threatened by Thaksin's manoeuvring and continued electoral success. However, it must be stated that this support of the PAD's radical democratic action was truly a two-way street. Just as the Yellow Shirt movement required these entrenched conservative

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<sup>286</sup> Terwiel, 291.

<sup>287</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 273.

<sup>288</sup> Terwiel, 292.

<sup>289</sup> Pasuk and Baker, 276.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid*, 277.

elements of the Thai state, so too did these elements need the Yellow Shirt movement to legitimize their own undemocratic, behind closed doors actions aimed at ousting Thaksin, despite some of the harsh ideological incongruences where they did in fact exist.

Indeed, when Thaksin did return to the helm, important members from different factions and functions of the bureaucratic elite began arranging for Thaksin's unconstitutional removal.<sup>291</sup> As Krittian has stated, “the gigantic scale of the Yellow Shirt movement was one of the decisive factors that prompted the President of the Privy Council, General Prem Tinsulanonda, to persuade certain segments of the of the leadership of General Sonthi to assume the roles that led to the staging of the 2006 coup.”<sup>292</sup> Among these was an important shuffling of military personnel which saw allies of Thaksin removed from certain crucial strategic posts.<sup>293</sup> In June 2006, Thaksin publicly suggested that extra-constitutional forces were working against him - a statement which further divided pro and anti-Thaksin forces, both within the state and civil society as many suggested that the Prime Minister's statement was indirectly implicating the king in a conspiracy against him and thus amounting to an instance of *lèse majesté*.<sup>294</sup> Thaksin's rumoured, though highly unsubstantiated anti-monarchism would continue to be a sharp boundary activator throughout the period of contestation, one that frequently made reconciliation all the more difficult.

As a result of this lack of control by the TRT, as we see with the Yellow Shirts in 2006 and as we will throughout the period of contestation, the continuation of radical democracy in Thailand came down primarily to the question of capacity. With Thaksin's government unable to act against the protesters due to this lack of capacity caused by state fracture, the Yellow Shirts were able to mobilize right up until the 19 September coup when

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<sup>291</sup> Han Krittian, "Post-Coup Royalist Groups: Re-inventing Military and Ideological Power" in *Saying the Unsayable: Monarchy and Democracy in Thailand*, eds. Soren Ivarsson and Lotte Isager (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Press, 2010): 212; Nostitz, *Volume 1*, 10.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid, 212.

<sup>293</sup> Nostitz, *Volume 1*, 10.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid; Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 278.

the military rolled the tanks onto the streets of Bangkok and overthrew the elected TRT government while Thaksin was away in New York City addressing the United Nations General Assembly.<sup>295</sup>

### **The 2006 Coup and its Makers**

As Askew has concisely summarized, the coup was “justified by its practitioners on the grounds of the Thaksin government's alleged corruption, the Prime Minister's polarization of the country, the undermining of the constitutionally mandated independent institutions, and Thaksin's alleged threat to the monarchy.”<sup>296</sup> The coup and subsequent installation of the interim military government severely hampered the possibility of radical democratic action with control of the opposition at the heart of its reason for being. For the Yellow Shirt movement, this did not at all matter. The reason behind their radical democratic action had now ceased to exist. Thaksin was out and like many other “tank liberals” residing within the confines of Bangkok, many Yellow Shirts took to the streets of the capital in celebration, bringing flowers to members of the military who had participated in the putsch.

Others, however, were not so thrilled. Thaksin, having been the first Prime Minister to have included a historically neglected segment of the population in the North and Northeast through an electoral platform, had remained a very popular leader with many right up to the day of the coup. This polarization set the stage for the period of contestation which would carry on for the next four years, reaching a dramatic climax in May 2010. Playing a central role in this period was the Red Shirt movement - officially known as the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) - which formed and began to mobilize shortly after Thaksin's ousting.<sup>297</sup> In terms of composition, most of the members of the movement were fervent supporters of Thaksin, if not as a man then certainly as a policy innovator, while

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<sup>295</sup> Terwiel, 292.

<sup>296</sup> Askew, "Contested Legitimacy", 2.

<sup>297</sup> Terwiel, 292; Nostitz, *Volume 1*, 12.

others were more critical of the ousted Prime Minister's authoritarian streak while remaining staunchly opposed to the undemocratic nature of the coup.<sup>298</sup> Though Thaksin's own democratic credentials were certainly questionable, many Thais, again particularly in the rural North and Northeast, were profoundly disappointed that their democratic choice was annulled by the bureaucratic elite and military enforcers.<sup>299</sup> As stated however, opposition to the coup was unable at this point to take a radical democratic form. Though various protests were organized against the military's action as well as the newly installed government, the Red Shirts were afforded very little space to manoeuvre. Several Bangkok-based leaders of the movement were arrested and roadblocks were set up along highways leading to the capital in an effort to restrict opponents of the coup and supporters of Thaksin from coming to Bangkok and demonstrating.<sup>300</sup> However, despite these limitations, of greatest detriment to the Red Shirts' radical democratic action - one that was firmly rooted in an ideology of anti-elitism and political equality - was the direct repression that the UDD faced at the hands of the authorities.<sup>301</sup> Given that the interests of the Generals, and the bureaucratic elite more generally, were diametrically opposed to members of the UDD, the capacity of the military government was able to ensure that the embryonic Red Shirt movement did not pose a threat.

Certainly such a situation as this one begs an important question. Are radical democratic actions possible under a military dictatorship? The historical record of Thailand during the last half-century alone is enough to answer this question in the affirmative. Indeed, many of the great political events of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century have been public expressions of equality against the hierarchy and elitism embodied by military regimes from Latin America to East Asia to the Middle East. However, given the direction of this book, we

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<sup>298</sup> Nostitz, *Volume 1*, 12.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid

<sup>300</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>301</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 292; Chairit Charoensin-o-larn, "Military Coup and Democracy in Thailand" in *Divided Over Thaksin: Thailand's Coup and Problematic Transition*, ed. John Funston (Singapore: ISEAS, 2009): 71.

are more interested in the question of how radical democratic forms of politics can *last*. Under military regimes it would seem that this possibility rests with either a) the regime allowing it (interests and capacity) or b) the regime being unable to control it (capacity). When a regime allows it, this can be attributed to the regime's perception that the opposing movement is unthreatening programmatically, in terms of its capacity to force change, or both. In many cases this is despite what the constitution may say about freedom of assembly. The fact that the Red Shirts were able to protest at all during the military period is a case in point. In terms of a regime being unable to control it, this can be attributed to a lack of control over the state's repressive apparatus (much like we saw with the Thaksin regime) perhaps due to fracturing within the armed forces and/or police. Once again, the fact that a movement's ability to "step out" and express its political equality in a radical democratic fashion depends upon the acquiescence or incapability of more dominant forces points to some serious concerns about radical democracy as a prescriptive political project. Once more, this is an issue which will be more thoroughly elaborated on in a later theoretical chapter. For now however it can be clearly stated that the Red Shirts' first attempt at a radical democratic "stepping out" against the military and their friends in the bureaucratic elite was thwarted by the military government whose goal of de-Thaksinizing Thailand through a non-democratic period of transition ensured that their opponents would be given little room to breathe.

It must be made clear that from the beginning the military and their backers in the bureaucratic elite had no intention of ruling directly over the country for very long. Such an action had certainly become viewed as illegitimate in the eyes of most Thais since, at least, the events of 1992. However, this did not prevent the *ammartnya* from stacking the deck in its favour during the transition period that ended with a series of new national elections in 2007.

One of the most important power plays that the junta used was the scrapping of the 1997 “People's Constitution” which had changed the electoral system to favour single-party majorities and the division of powers to create strong executives. Though these changes were originally designed to protect Thailand against the fractured party systems and weak Prime Ministers of the past, it had now become clear to conservative forces that such institutional arrangements needed to be shifted back to protect the country against the return of a Thaksinite majority government.<sup>302</sup> Likewise, increased authority was awarded to several internal security bodies that gave more power to the army to deal with “internal crises” as they saw fit.<sup>303</sup>

Yet even though the Constitutional Court had dissolved the TRT for electoral malpractice, banning 111 of its members for 5 years, and although Thaksin himself decided not to return the country for fear of charges against him for abuse of political office, a new Thaksinite party entitled the People's Power Party (PPP) rose from the ashes of the TRT to compete in the election of December 2007.<sup>304</sup> Though the military was resolved to make life difficult for the PPP by attempting to restrict some of its operations and pre-election activities, the replacement party of Thaksin's TRT managed to win the December 2007 election with its continued populist program, though falling short of an absolute majority with 226 of 480 seats.<sup>305</sup> This win, which demonstrated many Thais' continued support for Thaksin's policies, had also undermined the military's plans of ideological warfare which had branded populism as the modern day “red” equivalent of the 20<sup>th</sup> century communist threat. As Pasuk and Baker have demonstrated, the army was transparent in suggesting that their “...task from now on is

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<sup>302</sup> Vitit Muntarbhorn, "Destructing the 2007 Constitution" in *Divided Over Thaksin: Thailand's Coup and Problematic Transition*, ed. John Funston (Singapore: ISEAS, 2009): 84; Paul Chambers, Aurel Croissant, and Thitinan Pongsudhirak. "Introduction" in *Democracy under Stress: Civil-Military Relations in South and Southeast Asia*, eds. Paul Chambers and Aurel Croissant (Bangkok: Institute of Security and International Studies Chulalongkorn, 2010) : 15

<sup>303</sup> Paul Chambers, "In the Shadow of the Soldier's Boot" in *Legitimacy Crisis in Thailand*, ed. Marc Askew (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2010): 81.

<sup>304</sup> Terwiel, 293.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid, 294.

to win over the people at every level and in every level to turn support to the army, and be loyal to the nation, religion, and king.”<sup>306</sup> The army also had clearly outlined their four point program which had included 1) winning the peoples' admiration through being virtuous, 2) making allies with the civil bureaucracy, 3) implementing long-term policy goals to shut out populism, and 4) controlling local bodies.<sup>307</sup> Yet these too did not have their intended immediate effect. Furthermore, the re-election of a Thaksinite party had showed the strong desire for the TRT/PPP vision even in the face of intimidation from the armed forces who had been present at election booths.<sup>308</sup>

Because of this surprise result, anti-Thaksin forces in elite positions of the Thai state would have to find other avenues to dispose of their enemies once again. For the second time, this conservative bureaucratic elite would harness popular support and legitimacy for back door tactics through a resurrected civil society movement. With a “red friendly” government back in power, the Yellow Shirts once again took to the streets to “step out.”

### **Reactivating Boundaries**

From the beginning, the government of new Prime Minister Samak Sunduravej was placed in the unenviable position of facing many enemies from many positions within both the Thai state and society. Since the military had left the new government with a half-appointed Senate and court personnel which were friendly to the bureaucratic elite, the PPP began its administration with internal enemies that would look to constrain their ability to govern.<sup>309</sup> Likewise, the Thaksinite PPP was also forced to deal with Thaksin's old enemies in much of the academy and press.<sup>310</sup> However, just like in Thaksin's tenure, this “elite”

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<sup>306</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 301.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid

<sup>308</sup> Ibid, 308.

<sup>309</sup> Marc Askew, "Confrontation and Crisis in Thailand, 2008-2010" in *Legitimacy Crisis in Thailand*, ed. Marc Askew (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2010): 32; Chambers, Croissant, and Thitinan, 71.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid

opposition was only half of the story. Though the reaction was not immediate, when the PPP government moved to amend the military's constitution, Samak and the PPP were met with a revived Yellow Shirt movement. The fact that the PPP was looking to consolidate its power constitutionally in a style (if not in substance) reminiscent of Thaksin was enough to reactivate the brokerage among various enemies of Thaksin and also the boundary between themselves and the former Prime Minister.

As such, on 25 May 2008 the PAD held its first major action of the year with a march of 10,000 people from Makkawan Bridge to the Democracy Monument.<sup>311</sup> Just as they had stated in their direct opposition to Thaksin before the 2006 coup, the PAD condemned the PPP's "money politics" and alleged disloyalty to the country and went as far to suggest that the December 2007 election had been bought with Thaksin's money and that Samak was a mere stooge of the former Prime Minister.<sup>312</sup> At this stage, the protests remained unthreatening to the Samak government and as such were able to continue on without a substantial reaction from the government. This state of affairs, however, rapidly changed. The Yellow Shirts, given that their interests were expressed as being highly opposed to anything associated with Thaksin, were not satisfied with simply expressing their discontent. In a word, they wanted the PPP out. With this, and also with the Samak government uninterested in bowing down to the PAD's demands, the Yellow Shirts escalated their opposition throughout May and June.

On 20 June a large number of PAD demonstrators smashed their way through police barricades at Government House, the home of the Thai government's executive branch, and established a permanent protest camp on the building's grounds in an attempt to disrupt the daily workings of the Prime Minister and his cabinet.<sup>313</sup> The participants at this protest site provide strong indication of why this radical democratic action was able to continue despite

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<sup>311</sup> Nostitz, *Volume 1*, 17; Pasuk and Baker, 320.

<sup>312</sup> Terwiel, 294.

<sup>313</sup> Nostitz, *Volume 1*, 19; Terwiel, 295.

its aggressive tactics. As Pasuk and Baker state, along with the various brokered groups who participated with the PAD were select members of the army as well as Privy Council and coup instigator Prem's personal secretary.<sup>314</sup> This mechanism of certification of course did much to push any potential compromise beyond reach. Indeed, along with the obvious boundary activation that it entailed and the access to important state functions that came along with it, the certification also enhanced the Yellow Shirts' capacity at the expense of the government's, making a long, intense confrontation all the more possible. Radical democracy thus once again appears due to a lack of capacity of government to repress.

As a result of this impasse - the Samak government being seriously challenged by the PAD, but not to the point of being toppled - the PAD once again escalated their tactics, declaring on 25 August that they would instigate a "general uprising" to bring down the PPP government by force.<sup>315</sup> By this time, another mechanism of mobilization which could draw the two sides towards antagonism had come into effect with the Yellow Shirts having been able to broker more anti-Thaksinite support primarily from the Bangkok middle classes and thus swell its numbers. As a result of this, when the PAD decided to raise the stakes and invade the interior of Government House on 25 August, 30,000 members or sympathizers took part in the occupation which forced the government to flee, at first, to a military compound and then act as a government in a state of internal exile when it was forced to relocate to offices in Don Mueang airport.<sup>316</sup>

Here once more, as we encountered with the Croatian case, we must ask whether the use of force against one's opponents to achieve the desired political goals is what the radical democratic theorists have in mind when they speak about agonism and equality. Once again, it can be argued that the answer is a definite no although this creates a serious blind spot for their critical projects. If political movements "step out" only within the spaces tolerated by

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<sup>314</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 320.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid, 324.

<sup>316</sup> Askew, "Confrontation and Crisis", 36; Terwiel, 295.

their political opponents then the movements remain fundamentally subordinated. However, if they forcefully “step into” the realms previously controlled by their opponents like the Yellow Shirts at Government House, then one instance of domination/subordination is replaced by another. As such, in terms of the actual places and spaces of socio-political control, this middle ground of equality so central to radical democratic thought may not exist at all. Perhaps the closest it can come to existing is with what we see at this moment in the Thai case - not the complete domination of one group over the other but a situation where there is simply a stalemate due to the fact that neither group possesses the capacity to dominate the other despite their desires or interests to the contrary. Once again, the political commentator and theorist Antonio Gramsci gave the extended version of this state of affairs the name of “organic crisis”. Though both sides - supporters and detractors of Thaksin - wished to become hegemonic, due to a fracture within civil society's interests and the state's coercive apparatus, neither side could come to dominate the other. It must be made clear that this was not the result of a lack of desire to rule. The Samak government remained intent on staying in power and by the end of August it was clear that the PAD was willing to wrestle this power away from it by radical means. Of course, one of these tactics was to make the governance of the country impossible. As Askew states, “Crowd action and other coordinated activities were planned with the goal of paralyzing the administration, forcing a government collapse.”<sup>317</sup> In other words, this attempt to dominate was an attempt at “death through slow asphyxiation”. However, this was certainly not the only method. As Pasuk and Baker have shown, the Yellow Shirts also attempted to throw the PPP out and dominate through “death by blunt trauma”. As an important factor to note, many of the PAD guards who took part in the Government House occupation were strongly armed ex-military and ex-police.<sup>318</sup> Furthermore, though not matching the same sophistication of weaponry as these former

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<sup>317</sup> Askew, “Confrontation and Crisis”, 36.

<sup>318</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 325.

professionals, one haul of weapons captured by the police contained, “one air-rifle, 60 bottles of petrol, 1558 golf clubs, 248 steel bars, 185 wooden sticks, 50 square sticks, 48 flag poles, 20 swords or spears, 27 PVC pipe shields, 56 plywood shields, 55 slingshots, 185 marbles, 3 fire extinguishers and a handful of bombs and grenades.”<sup>319</sup> Though this increased capacity did not allow for the Yellow Shirts to become a revolutionary force, it did show their willingness not to be subordinated to the PPP government.

With both sides unwilling to have their interests subordinated, had one side possessed the capacity to dominate the other, such domination would have been enacted. As has been discussed previously, equality as the radical democratic theorists describe it would not have transpired as any expression of radical democracy would have been enacted within the confines and limits of the *inequality* established by the rule of the dominant group and thus would not be a true demonstration of equality. However, here, when analyzing the summer of 2008, we can say that equality truly did exist but only as a result of a general incapacity of either the PAD or the PPP government to dominate. The continuation of radical democracy in this case thus happens not as a result of the interests or demands of the contestants but only because of an organic crisis and a contingent lack of coercive capacity. With this more circumstantial and also incredibly unstable situation seemingly existing as the only circumstance whereby radical democracy can continue without subordination, both the possibility *and* desirability of radical democracy as a normative political project must be seriously questioned.

### **The Yellow Shirts Strike Again**

Throughout the autumn, this continuation of radical democracy through state fracture and organic crisis was unchanged. Though small clashes occurred between groups of Red

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<sup>319</sup> Ibid

Shirts who were keen on preventing another one of their elected governments from being toppled via PAD pressure, the contention did not devolve into a state of civil war.<sup>320</sup> For the most part, though such small clashes like the 1 September instance of fighting between Red Shirts and Yellow Shirts at Makkawan Bridge which resulted in the death of one UDD member did transpire, most of these standoffs throughout the full period of contestation occurred between the coloured shirt protest movements and their respective more powerful political opponents in government and state.<sup>321</sup>

In terms of specific actions, the radical democratic occupation of Government House continued due to its certification by the armed forces and other state functionaries. As Pasuk and Baker have shown, not only did the army not move against the PAD with its chief suggesting that he was a “soldier of the Thai people, not a soldier of the government”, the bureaucratic elite-friendly courts and some members of the police did their part by revoking the injunction to remove the occupiers, ignoring other injunctions which would have banned some PAD members, and not enforcing some arrest warrants.<sup>322</sup>

Throughout the autumn however, several developments did ensure that situation intensified and became further uncompromisable, once again primarily as a result of brokerage and boundary activation. First of all, on 9 September the army-installed Constitutional Court ruled quite bizarrely that Prime Minister Samak had breached the rules concerning politicians in high office by having accepted a small amount of money for his participation in a cooking show.<sup>323</sup> As a result of this strange infraction and even stranger interpretation of the law, Samak was forced to resign as Prime Minister, leaving the leadership of the PPP as well as the government in a void. As a result of this, the PPP selected deputy Prime Minister and former education minister Somchai Wongsawat as

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid, 324.

<sup>321</sup> Nostitz, *Volume 1*, 19.

<sup>322</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 325.

<sup>323</sup> Terwiel, 296.

replacement.<sup>324</sup> This move did nothing but infuriate the Yellow Shirts as the new Prime Minister had direct family ties to Thaksin, with Somchai having married one of the former Prime Minister's sisters. For this reason, not only was Somchai viewed as the leader of a corrupt and authoritarian party but also as a simple puppet of his brother-in-law who remained in self-imposed exile for fear of arrest within Thailand.<sup>325</sup>

With Somchai taking over from Samak, the already existing boundary between the red-friendly government and the PAD was significantly sharpened and consequently the Yellow Shirts stepped up the intensity of their actions to prevent Somchai and his cabinet from taking power and announcing their policy platform.<sup>326</sup> Along with various blockades and strikes by associated elements, the PAD tried to expand their demonstration of equality by attempting to blockade parliament itself.<sup>327</sup> This action however, involving thousands of mobilized Yellow Shirts, resulted in a serious clash with the police, most of who had remained firmly behind the elected government. As several commentators have pointed out, this clash, which witnessed a handful of deaths on both sides including a female teenage PAD protester, constituted a “massive public relations victory for the PAD” who were viewed as having been attacked by a red-sympathetic police force.<sup>328</sup>

The presence of bureaucratic elite representatives at this young woman's funeral including members of the armed forces along with Democrat Party MPs and even Queen Sirikit herself further certified the PAD's efforts at topping the democratically elected government, a pivotal event that would have serious repercussions in the months and, indeed, years to follow. One of the initial results of this event was the fact that it helped to consolidate an alliance between the PAD, the bureaucratic elite (including the upper echelons of the armed forces), and the opposition Democrat Party, all of whom were hell-bent on

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<sup>324</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 333.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid

<sup>326</sup> Terwiel, 296.

<sup>327</sup> Askew, "Confrontation and Crisis", 36.

<sup>328</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 333.

squeezing out the Thaksinite government and returning the country to the pre-Thaksin status quo. Though the PAD and bureaucratic elite had assisted each other in the 2006 ousting of Thaksin, the Democrat Party had now entered the alliance as a new key player. Also important was the identity shift that occurred within the ranks of the police. Though some officers had already sympathized with Thaksin, his policies, and the fact that the former Prime Minister has been one of them, the betrayal that many officers felt when they were condemned by the Democrats and left out to dry by the military pushed many officers directly into the Thaksin camp.<sup>329</sup> This of course resulted in the further fracturing of the Thai state's coercive apparatus.

These new dynamics directly played out in November and December of 2008 when the Yellow Shirts' radical democratic activity reached its peak. Throughout October and November, the organic crisis that had led to the maintenance of the radical democratic situation had continued with the PAD having further interfered with government ministries and offices.<sup>330</sup> While clashes did occur, such instances were brief and did not descend into civil war, though such a feeling was clearly in the air. For the PAD however, their mission had not been accomplished with Somchai and the PPP still in power. Once again thus the PAD escalated their tactics. On 22 November the PAD “announced a 'Final Battle' to drive Somchai Wongsawat and the PPP from power”.<sup>331</sup>

With the Prime Minister scheduled to return from a diplomatic overseas trip on 24 November, a large group of Yellow Shirts traveled to Bangkok's main airport, Suvarnabhumi International, to intercept Somchai's flight and prevent him from returning. As part of this radical action, the PAD blocked both entrances, occupied the passenger terminal, declared the airport another PAD encampment, and attempted to force their way into the control tower to

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<sup>329</sup> Askew, "Confrontation and Crisis", 40.

<sup>330</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 339.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid

gain information on Somchai's impending arrival.<sup>332</sup> As Terwiel explains, “the PAD took over the sound system and explained to the thousands of stunned passengers that they were there to block the Prime Minister's return.”<sup>333</sup> The airport authority opted to cancel flights and close the airport due to concerns over safety. Fearing a disaster, government officials decided for Somchai's plane to land at Bangkok's then domestic airport Don Mueang which the PAD also took over later in the day.<sup>334</sup>

Though the PAD had been unable to prevent Somchai from landing and resuming his role as the head of government, the occupation of the airports continued with the PAD announcing that the blockage would continue until the Thaksinite government resigned. Thousands of PAD supporters flooded into Suvarnabhumi to participate in the most radical action up to that point in the entire period of contestation during the last days of November and the first days of December.

The PPP government wanted none of this. With the PAD demanding nothing less than the government's political heads despite their electoral legitimacy, the two sides' interests were unreservedly incompatible and the government could simply not tolerate it. Aside from their own political security, hundreds of thousands of travellers remained stranded, the economy began to contract, and Thailand's reputation as a country safe for tourism was being damaged. As such, a state of emergency was declared within and around the proximity of the airport with the army and navy asked to help the police bring order to the situation.<sup>335</sup>

However, once again, radical democracy was maintained. The army, in alliance with the PAD, not only failed to move against the protesters but, in fact, helped to protect the Yellow Shirts from any action by the police.<sup>336</sup> As Pasuk and Baker indicate, army chief Anupong “sent military, and border patrol police 'to take care of the demonstrations...in case

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<sup>332</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 340; Nostitz, *Volume 1*, 43.

<sup>333</sup> Terwiel, 298.

<sup>334</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 340; Nostitz, *Volume 1*, 43

<sup>335</sup> Terwiel, 298.

<sup>336</sup> Chambers, "In the Shadow", 213.

the police thought of trying to disperse the assembly.<sup>337</sup> Radical democracy this was able to continue due to a lack of capacity on the part of the PPP government due to the certification of the Yellow Shirts by the leadership of the armed forces.

For the bureaucratic elite and also the opposition Democrat Party the Yellow Shirt occupation of Suvarnabhumi Airport was an ideal situation to have the PPP removed as this severe crisis spurred on by a mass movement provided both enough anxiety as well as legitimacy for this recently forged alliance to solve this impasse extra-constitutionally. As many commentators have explained, this alliance went to work on 2 December, nearly a week into the crippling airport occupation.<sup>338</sup> The manoeuvre began when the PPP failed to take the armed forces advice and resign. Quite suspiciously, the army-aligned Constitutional Court made a snap decision in what had been a prolonged court case regarding whether the PPP had engaged in large-scale vote buying in the December 2007 election. Without hearing final statements from the defense, the court ruled that the PPP was, in fact, guilty, thus dissolving the party immediately and banning its members, including Somchai, from participating in politics for five years in a similar fashion to the TRT dissolution of 2006.<sup>339</sup> Given this previous dissolution of a Thaksinite party by anti-Thaksin forces, the PPP had anticipated this possibility and, as such, had already constructed a new party shell - Phuea Thai (For the Thais) - to take its place. Upon finding out about the dissolution, the PPP/Phuea Thai demanded a new election to demonstrate its popular legitimacy through the ballot box. This demand however was never taken seriously as a different arrangement had already been manufactured behind the scenes by the military, the Democrat Party led by Abhisit Vejjajiva, and a defecting faction from the PPP.<sup>340</sup> Strategically, the PPP faction known as the "Friends of Newin" named after their leader Newin Chidchob, had not received any political ban from

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<sup>337</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 340.

<sup>338</sup> Ferrara 65; Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 341.

<sup>339</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 341.

<sup>340</sup> Askew, "Confrontation and Crisis", 43

the Constitutional Court for the reason that these 23 MPS were central to the military' and bureaucratic elite's plan of brokering a new Democrat-led government with the "Friends of Newin" crossing the floor to ensure the seats required. As several commentators have illustrated, the army, the Democrats, and Newin had all met at the military's behest to formally, though quietly, cement this alliance, forcing out the Thaksinite government, and satisfying the interests of themselves as well as the PAD who could now end their occupation of the airports.<sup>341</sup> As Ferrara has stated, "Newin's 'Friends' were bought in bulk on behalf of Abhisit's government with Prem and Anupong at least facilitating, if not directly orchestrating, the entire transaction."<sup>342</sup> Oxford-educated Abhisit Vejjajiva thus became the new Democrat and Yellow-friendly Prime Minister on 17 December.

## **Red Rising**

Quite predictably, this arrangement did not end the period of contestation. Though Abhisit's government immediately attempted to bridge the political divide through attempts at cooptation including a 2000 baht stimulus subsidy and the introduction of a universal social service scheme in order to incorporate some of the more popular policies of "Thaksinomics", such attempts did not have the desired effect.<sup>343</sup> The boundary which had been continuously activated on both sides of the Red/Yellow divide had simply become too sharp for modest policy efforts to result in demobilization via the mechanism of cooptation.

Already in the autumn of 2008, the Red Shirts had begun to remobilize and expand their numbers, particularly among rural voters, after Thaksin had been found guilty of abuse of power and sentenced to two years in prison in absentia.<sup>344</sup> After having attended the Beijing Olympics, Thaksin made the decision to stay in exile, floating between countries that

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<sup>341</sup> Ibid

<sup>342</sup> Ferrara, 90.

<sup>343</sup> Terwiel, 300.

<sup>344</sup> Askew, "Confrontation and Crisis", 40.

would not extradite him - first the UK, then the UAE, and finally Montenegro. From his position abroad however, Thaksin had been able to help rally the Red Shirts against the bureaucratic elite and military that had deposed him in the 2006 coup. Given that many ordinary Thai citizens felt as though anti-Thaksin and anti-democratic forces had been given a pass during the various demonstrations throughout the fall, many joined mass rallies, particularly in stadiums, to support the elected government and the democratic will of the people.<sup>345</sup> When the December “judicial coup” happened, the boundary between the supporters and opponents of Thaksinism became even sharper. Many Thais who had supported TRT and then the PPP had now witnessed their electoral choice annulled twice by extra-electoral, and more importantly elite-engineered means, which this time included the PAD affiliated Democrat Party who, despite denying it, had many connections with the anti-Thaksin movement. As such, what developed after the 2008 “judicial coup” was a clear anti-elite position among many ordinary Thais who, whether in love with Thaksin or not, demanded that their electoral choice be respected and their political equality be recognized.<sup>346</sup> With this, the number of Thais supporting the Red Shirts swelled dramatically. Though Thaksin remained a central figure for many Red Shirts and also did in fact bankroll their activities, for many within the movement, the political moment had moved beyond Thaksin and was now more a movement of principle, revolving around the idea that politics was not just the business of the military, bureaucratic elite, and aligned unelected Democrat Party but was rather anyone's business. With this, the radical democratic actions by the Red Shirts which were to sweep Thailand over the next two years were also built around a much clearer radical democratic program of *prai* (commoner) vs. *ammart* (elite).<sup>347</sup>

However, unlike the disruptive Yellow Shirt protests of the two years previous, the Red Shirts faced difficulties maintaining their radical democratic movement. This was for the

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<sup>345</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 339.

<sup>346</sup> Ferrara, 9.

<sup>347</sup> Hewison, 144.

fact that between 2009 and 2010 the Red Shirts continuously faced debilitating repression from the Democrat government who, with an aligned military who shared their anti-Thaksin interests, possessed the capacity to shut down their opponents when their existence became too threatening. Because of this, with interests diametrically opposed due to both sides' desire to have the other subordinated, and the capacity and willingness of the Democrat government to ensure this through force, the possibility of radical democratic continuation was interrupted between 2008 and 2010. Indeed, Red Shirt attempts to challenge their subordination to the military/bureaucratic elite/Democrat Party alliance was met with harsh repressive measures and the closing down of their forged democratic space in two violent episodes, the last of which in May 2010 resulted in the highest number of casualties in any crackdown since 1973.<sup>348</sup>

In both instances of serious repression, momentum was built on the Red Shirt side despite obstacles imposed by the Democrat government and the military before the radical democratic action was completely closed down. The first period of Red Shirt mobilization began after the “judicial coup” of early December with a small group of UDD members blocking access to parliament on 15 December, the day of the newly announced coalition that was brokered by the military.<sup>349</sup> Unfortunate for the UDD in the short-term, several of its leaders were arrested by the army who were stationed outside.<sup>350</sup> Fortunate for the UDD in the longterm however, this direct action on the part of the military gave credence to the Red Shirts' cry of “double standards” which suggested that while the yellow shirted PAD had been able to get away with the occupation of Suvarnabhumi Airport without punishment, the UDD faced persecution for an action of far less severity. Such an inconsistency further contributed to growing support for the Red Shirt movement with 50,000 attending a “Truth

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<sup>348</sup> Nidhi Eoseewong, "The Culture of the Army, *Matichon Weekly*, 28 May 2010" in *Bangkok May 2010: Perspectives on a Divided Thailand*, eds. Michael J. Montesano, Pavin Chachavalpongpun and Aekapol Chongvilaiwan (Singapore: ISEAS, 2012): 14.

<sup>349</sup> Nostitz, *Volume 1*, 44.

<sup>350</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 345.

Today” rally which denounced the Democrat Party, bureaucratic elite and military and which announced a mass rally against the government for 31 January.<sup>351</sup>

This event, in which tens of thousands participated, witnessed the issuing of an ultimatum to the Democrat government to arrest the guilty PAD leaders including those within the government itself, amend the constitution, and dissolve parliament or face an escalation of UDD action. When the Democrat government did not act in accordance with the UDD's demands, further rallies were held on 14 February, 24 February and 26 March.<sup>352</sup> On this latter date, with the UDD's requests not met, the Red Shirts led somewhere between 20,000 and 40,000 protesters from the large open space of Sanam Luang to the grounds of Government House to demand that the Democrat government dissolve parliament and call new elections.<sup>353</sup> During this rally, various leaders of the UDD including Thaksin himself through video call-in announced a further escalation of the Red Shirt protests to bring the elite orchestrators of the 2006 coup and 2008 “judicial coup” to justice and to end the “rule by unelected bureaucrats”.<sup>354</sup>

Up to this stage, the Democrat government had remained in a position of sufficient security to allow the protests to continue, despite their threatening tone. At this point in time, the Red Shirts had not interfered with the daily workings of the state and their lack of capacity ensured that the government did not face the possibility of revolutionary overthrow. As contributing factors, though it was clear that the Democrats did not desire a return to a Thaksinite government, their insistence that they were in fact a legitimate government made them reluctant to act against the protesters at this early stage.<sup>355</sup> Furthermore, the police, who

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<sup>351</sup> Nostitz Nick, *Red vs. Yellow - Volume 2: Thailand's Political Awakening* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2011): 7

<sup>352</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 345

<sup>353</sup> Ibid, 346; Nostitz, *Volume 2*, 9; Askew "Confrontation and Crisis", 48.

<sup>354</sup> Terwiel, 301.

<sup>355</sup> For an insight into this attempt at legitimacy building see: Foreign Office - Public Relations Department - Office of the Prime Minister (2009) *Inside Thailand Review 2009: Toward a Sustainable Democracy*.

would normally have dealt with such small-scale repression, had continued to sympathize with the Red Shirts as a result of the events of the year before and thus did not give the UDD protesters much trouble when they themselves took to the grounds of Government House.<sup>356</sup>

This however all changed in early April. A massive rally which would involve a march to Privy Council member and coup-instigator Prem's house was called for the 8<sup>th</sup> and was dubbed by Thaksin as a "People's Revolution", comparable in importance to the democratic uprisings of 1973 and 1992.<sup>357</sup> When the time finally arrived, 100,000 demonstrators took to the streets of Bangkok and blocked traffic throughout the capital. In conjunction with this massive urban blockade which was kept on staying put until new elections were called, a smaller group of more militant Red Shirts stormed the annual ASEAN summit in Pattaya with the police standing idly by.<sup>358</sup> With foreign diplomats having needed to evacuate the premises by helicopter, the Interior Ministry unleashed a group of "blue shirt" fighters to attack the Red Shirts in a preview of what was to come.<sup>359</sup> Fearing that the situation in the capital could spiral out of control and threaten the stability of the government, the military entered Bangkok at the Democrats' request with 10,000 troops on the Songkran (Thai New Year) weekend and dispersed the demonstrators with a massive display of force involving tear gas, water cannons, rubber bullets, and live rounds.<sup>360</sup> In response to this severe act of repression some Red Shirts "burned tires, hurled bottles of petrol, launched buses with their engines running, and exploded cylinders of cooking gas."<sup>361</sup> Fourteen leaders of the Red Shirts were subsequently arrested and the passing of an

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<sup>356</sup> Askew, "Confrontation and Crisis", 51.

<sup>357</sup> Michael J. Montesano, "Four Thai Pathologies, Late 2009" in *Legitimacy Crisis in Thailand*, ed. Marc Askew (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2010) :288; Nostitz, *Volume 2*, 14; Askew, "Confrontation and Crisis", 51.

<sup>358</sup> Terwiel, 300

<sup>359</sup> Claudio Sopranzetti, *Red Journeys: Inside the Thai Red Shirt Movement* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2012): 24.

<sup>360</sup> Nostitz, *Volume 2*, 23.

<sup>361</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 349.

emergency decree made public protest illegal for a month.<sup>362</sup> Here, an instance of radical democracy had been ended due to severely conflicting interests and one side's strong capacity for repression.

Despite this however, the potential for radical democratic instances of contestation to return at a later date was hardly ruled out. The Democrats, still claiming legitimacy, had a serious interest in demonstrating their liberal democratic credentials. Furthermore, with many key UDD leaders detained and other Red Shirts disillusioned as a result of the repression, the Democrats found themselves in the position to allow opponents to take to the streets again as they were now clearly back in a position of domination. The renewed Red Shirt mobilizations that began in the summertime demonstrated this dominant/subordinate relationship very clearly. Though the Red Shirts spoke of the “double standards” which had been made even more clear with the military's move against them in contrast to their complete complacency with the Yellow Shirts and though they demanded that Abhisit step down, rallies lacked the size of the previous spring with demonstrations only happening periodically and not in a manner which significantly interfered with the workings of government or Thai society for any prolonged duration.<sup>363</sup> Furthermore, the vigour of the previous spring had been lost. Instead of taking a radical direction involving some form of “stepping out” or “stepping into”, the Red Shirts instead focused their public energies on a petition addressed to the king which requested for Thaksin's exoneration and return to Thailand.<sup>364</sup> Clearly, the Red Shirts' actions were being tolerated as a result of their own subordination.

However this too did not last very long. The Red Shirts' interests remained strongly opposed to the status quo and perhaps even more so given the treatment they had received at the hands of those in power. In many ways, the Red Shirts were simply buying some time, preparing themselves more thoroughly for another challenge against Abhisit, his Democrat

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<sup>362</sup> Askew, "Confrontation and Crisis", 52

<sup>363</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid

Party, the military, and the bureaucratic elite. As Askew has argued, by mid-May the Red Shirt movement had already begun to “bounce back”, restructuring their organization, establishing provincial and district committees, and even organizing political education schools.<sup>365</sup>

### **Red Return**

By 2010, the Red shirts were ready to once again launch a radical democratic challenge against the government - one which would “peacefully” disrupt the Democrats in order to force them out.<sup>366</sup> The 26 February court decision on Thaksin's frozen assets was established as sufficiently symbolic to relaunch the movement. As expected, Thaksin was found guilty with 46 million baht being confiscated from his bank account.<sup>367</sup> With this decision - one which was received as an attack on their symbolic representative - the Red Shirts relaunched their large scale protests in March with 80,000 demonstrators, many bused in from the North and Northeast, attending near the Democracy Monument at Ratchadamnoen Avenue, the historical location of Thai protest politics. As Fullbrook has described, “The mood was joyous, the atmosphere almost like a carnival, meals daily, hundreds of speakers, and dozens of video screens.”<sup>368</sup> This time, as the organizers stated, the Red Shirts were there to stay and would not back down until parliament was dismissed. As such, as a form of emulation of the PAD's disruptive tactics in years previous, the Red Shirts established a permanent protest camp, complete with living tents, spaces for food and music, and, of course, large spaces for lectures and speeches. At nightfall they were joined by many

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<sup>365</sup> Nostitz, *Volume 2*, 24.

<sup>366</sup> For a view of the Red Shirts platform and the declaration of their peaceful intentions see: Taylor, 295

<sup>367</sup> Terwiel, 303.

<sup>368</sup> Fullbrook, 132.

supportive urban dwellers of different social classes from various shops, offices and factories and at weekends in early March, the number of supporters grew to over 100,000.<sup>369</sup>

On 20 March, a massive Red Shirt march snaked its way around Bangkok “receiving overwhelming displays of support from crowds which lined the city streets.”<sup>370</sup> With momentum gathering and Abhisit not responding to their demands, the number of protesters had grown to 200,000 by late March - a number which was threatening to the Democrats due to the Red Shirts’ potential capacity for clogging the capital as well as the functions of government to the point of collapse, not just in terms of the Democrats' rule but also in terms of order in the streets.<sup>371</sup>

As such, the Democrats began to attempt to coopt the radical democratic movement though the promise of a new election. However, at this moment, the two sides were simply too far apart in terms of the date for dissolution. As Askew has suggested, while Abhisit was asking for months, the Red Shirts were asking for days.<sup>372</sup> As a result of this impasse and also the Red Shirts' anxiety that the army might once again crack down on them before their demands were met, in early April the UDD escalated their level of provocation. Believing that the movement needed to put more pressure on the government through increased social disruption, a new permanent protest site was established at Bangkok's glimmering international calibre shopping district, Ratchaprasong, what Sopranzetti has referred to as “the quintessential space of inequality.”<sup>373</sup> As Terwiel has documented, on 3 April thousands of UDD members broke through police barricades with ease, blocked traffic and established rally sites in other Bangkok districts including the aforementioned Ratchaprasong.<sup>374</sup> Adding to this, Sopranzetti, in appealing to more symbolic imagery about the Red Shirts’ new

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<sup>369</sup> Terwiel, 304.

<sup>370</sup> Askew, "Confrontation and Crisis", 57.

<sup>371</sup> Marc Askew, "The Clash of March-May 2010" in *Legitimacy Crisis in Thailand*, ed. Marc Askew (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2010): 304.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid

<sup>373</sup> Sopranzetti, 25.

<sup>374</sup> Terwiel, 304.

encampment in front of CentralWorld shopping centre illustrates how a “new stage was set up in front of the third biggest shopping mall in the world.”<sup>375</sup>

Though the shifting of the protest’s size and scale was provocative in that it was suggestive that the standoff was now shifting in favour of the Red Shirts, it was not the only provocation. Throughout the course of the March and April demonstrations, several cat and mouse games between the Democrat-Army alliance and the Red Shirts over the control of the media, the use of coercive resources, and the deployment of the military had witnessed the UDD “stepping into areas” which jeopardized the security of Democrat rule and hence the interests of their partners in the army and bureaucratic elite. First and foremost, when the Democrats had tried on different occasions to bring the Red Shirts’ television station down, the protesters responded by taking it back by force.<sup>376</sup> As such, the Democrats feared that they were losing the battle of winning hearts and minds. Furthermore, and more threatening, was the dramatic invasion of parliament by 1000 Red Shirt protesters on 7 April who demanded to know why tear gas had been discovered among the authorities at the protest site.<sup>377</sup> With this, the ruling party began to feel as though they had lost control of the ability to govern and thus implemented the emergency decree which granted the government extended powers of censorship, arrest, detention, and the use of violence.<sup>378</sup> From this point onward, with the Democrats not ruling out the use of force, it became clear that the writing was on the wall for the Red Shirts’ radical democratic activity.

The straw that broke the camel’s back and resulted in the first round of repression against the Red Shirts on 10 April was the protest movement’s incursion into the base of a nearby army unit. With the Emergency Decree in place, suspicions of a coup d’état swirling,

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<sup>375</sup> Sopranzetti, 25.

<sup>376</sup> Terwiel, 307.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid, 305.

<sup>378</sup> Askew, "Confrontation and Crisis", 77; Tyrell Haberkorn, "Truth and Justice When Fear and Repression Remain" in *Bangkok May 2010: Perspectives on a Divided Thailand*, eds. Michael J, Montesano, Pavin Chachavalpongpan and Aekapol Chongvilaivan (Singapore: ISEAS, 2012): 34.

and sightings of troops being moved in to repress the protesters, a number of Red Shirts had marched in to catch them off guard which subsequently resulted in clashes.<sup>379</sup> At this point, as Terwiel has stated, “the government, having been sufficiently provoked by the UDD...lost its restraint.”<sup>380</sup> Tens of thousands of soldiers were sent in to dismantle the Red Shirts’ encampment at Phan Fa Bridge at Ratchadamnoen. Armoured vehicles chased demonstrators, water cannons were fired, and live ammo was shot into the crowd.<sup>381</sup> Many Red Shirts responded with makeshift weapons and petrol bombs. As a consequence of this first crackdown, the encampment at Ratchadamnoen was no more and twenty-five people, mostly Red Shirts, lay dead.<sup>382</sup>

However, this action did not end the Red Shirts’ attempt to bring down the Abhisit government. Indeed, for many, the repression and further double standards that they had faced drew the line in the sand even more sharply, activating a boundary against the government to the extent that only an immediate dissolution of the government along with justice for their fallen comrades would be acceptable.<sup>383</sup> Some more radical elements of the movement including the Red Siam faction went as far to suggest that now was the time for armed revolutionary action. As such, most of the Red Shirts who wished to keep on fighting - a vast number of tens of thousands - relocated to the alternative demonstration site at Ratchaprasong to continue their fight against the alliance.<sup>384</sup>

Despite their resolve however, it was clear that only two possibilities were likely for the Red Shirts - accept a compromise proposed by Abhisit and be subordinated until the next election, whenever that would be, or be more thoroughly wiped away by repression. Barring a split in the military, the possibility for revolution or war remained off the table. No longer

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<sup>379</sup> Nostitz, *Volume 2*, 22.

<sup>380</sup> Terwiel, 305.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid

<sup>382</sup> Ferrara, 161.

<sup>383</sup> Terwiel, 307.

<sup>384</sup> Askew, "The Clash of March-May", 310.

dealing with the Red Shirts as a protest movement, the government was now intent on handling the situation like war. After 10 April, Abhisit's government and the military had established the Centre for the Resolution of the Emergency Situation (CRES) which gave the military even further discretion in terms of required action and the use of force.<sup>385</sup>

Knowing that they faced a dangerous situation unprotected, the Red Shirts decided to barricade much of the three-kilometre area in Ratchaprasong with car tires and bamboo sticks.<sup>386</sup> From this barricaded position, over the course of the next month the Red Shirts played a protracted tug-of-war with the government, each making strategic moves to put themselves in the more favourable position. On 16 April for example, the government tried to send authorities to arrest a number of UDD leaders to weaken the movement though this, like several similar efforts, were foiled by uncooperative police.<sup>387</sup> Towards the end of April the Red Shirts had attempted to increase pressure on the government by expanding the impact of the protest through an attempt at establishing a new encampment at Bangkok's main financial district, Silom. This however was stopped by a heavily armed military blockade which would remain at the site for the duration of the midtown protests. At this stage, a new round of bargaining ensued. The Red Shirts, feeling closed in with the army at their backs and the weight of CRES hanging over their heads, softened their stance on immediate dissolution and promised to disperse if the government dissolved parliament in one month's time. This deal was firmly rejected by both Abhisit and army chief Anupong and as such the cat and mouse game continued.

Over the next two weeks tensions sharply increased which put pressure on the government to end the protest for both its own political interests, the interests of its allies, and for those who feared that the standoff could result in civil war. Grenades had been allegedly launched at apparently "neutral, multi-coloured, anti-protest" protesters at Lumpini Park

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<sup>385</sup> Ibid

<sup>386</sup> Ibid

<sup>387</sup> Askew, "The Clash of March-May", 311.

near the Red Shirts' southernmost point of occupation, an incident in which the UDD was implicated. On 29 April the Red Shirts had also raided a nearby hospital as rumours had circulated that soldiers had been stationed there and were waiting to attack them. To the disrepute of the Red Shirts, this rumour turned out to be unfounded, with many patients having been forced onto the street for no reason. As a final provocation, and the most serious of the three within the context of Thai politics and society, CRES claimed to have discovered a Red Shirt plot to overthrow the monarchy.<sup>388</sup> With a lack of substantial evidence provided however it is unclear whether such an action had actually been planned or whether it had simply been designed as a false flag to discredit the Red Shirts in the public eye.

These provocations were enough for the Abhisit government to lay out what would be its final serious offer. This was the so-called Abhisit "roadmap to reconciliation" which included commitments to the preservation of the monarchy, addressing social injustice, the regulation of the media to prevent the dissemination of false information, and the rules of democracy being discussed and re-evaluated.<sup>389</sup> In addition, dissolution was promised within four months and an election within six. These of course would be contingent upon the Red Shirts calling an end to their protests.

As many scholars have suggested, much of the Red Shirt membership was willing to accept most of this deal.<sup>390</sup> However, some points were cause for concern. First of all, the length of time the Democrats would take to dissolve was viewed as problematic as it gave time for the government to renege.<sup>391</sup> Second, and more importantly, with Abhisit and CRES being viewed by some as cold-blooded killers for their involvement in the 10 April crackdown, many Red Shirts demanded that there be no amnesty for anyone involved in the

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<sup>388</sup> Terwiel, 308.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid, 310.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid

<sup>391</sup> Ferrara, 164.

massacre.<sup>392</sup> With the Red Shirts unable to accept the proposed plan for these reasons, Abhisit withdrew the offer on 12 May.

With the interests of the government and its allies and the opposing Red Shirts having been shown to be irreconcilable, and with the Democrats clearly unwilling to cede rule, the army moved in to crush the protesters on 13 May.<sup>393</sup> Though the onslaught started slow with tear gas, rubber bullets and some live rounds from snipers from the 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup>, a live fire zone was established on the 17<sup>th</sup> which gave the 20,000 soldiers now on the ground the license to shoot anything that moved.<sup>394</sup> An option to surrender unconditionally was given by the government to the Red Shirts on the 18<sup>th</sup> and, though some had already fled for their lives, others continued on to the bitter end when the army cracked down with live rounds in a final push on 19 May which finalized the greatest episode of military repression since the 1970s. In total, fifty-five more lay dead.<sup>395</sup> In reaction to this state sponsored massacre, more radical elements of the Red Shirt movement set dozens of buildings in the capital ablaze, including the massive CentralWorld shopping centre, which nearly burned to the ground.<sup>396</sup>

In the aftermath of May 2010 the Red Shirt movement was severely weakened by the arrest and detention of most of its many leaders and organizers, many of whom were held on charges of terrorism.<sup>397</sup> In terms of the rank and file participants, the repressive reaction of the Democrat Party and the Armed Forces that had led to ninety-one deaths and many more injured resulted in the demobilizing mechanisms of disillusionment, abandonment and fatigue. Sopranzetti has documented how thousands of Red Shirts, many of whom who had traveled hundreds of kilometres from their Northern and Northeastern homes to claim their equality

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<sup>392</sup> David Streckfuss. "The Strategy of the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship on "Double Standards": A Grand Gesture to History, Justice, and Accountability" in *Bangkok May 2010: Perspectives on a Divided Thailand*, eds. Michael J, Montesano, Pavin Chachavalpongpun and Aekapol Chongvilaivan (Singapore: ISEAS, 2012): 274.

<sup>393</sup> Askew, "The Clash of March-May", 314.

<sup>394</sup> Ferrara, 165; Terwiel, 313.

<sup>395</sup> Ferrara, 165; Sporanzetti, 2.

<sup>396</sup> Askew, "The Clash of March-May", 315.

<sup>397</sup> Terwiel, 311.

against the *ammartnya*, left Bangkok feeling completely defeated.<sup>398</sup> Given these two factors, when the Red Shirts remobilized exactly one year later to commemorate the deaths of those lost to the bullets of the military, their incapacity and general unwillingness to try to topple the Democrat government, Abhisit and the military found their opponents unthreatening enough to let this remobilization occur. Once again this radical democratic stepping out was tolerated for the fact that its participants were not that radical at all.

### **Back to the Future**

In terms of justice being served in the eyes of the Red Shirts, the 2011 election of Thaksin's sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, with the Phuea Thai Party had eased many anxieties about the immediate political future and demonstrated once again to Thailand and the world how popular Thaksin's approach had been despite its many serious flaws and also many serious detractors. Yet though the first two years of Yingluck's rule were relatively quiet in terms of popular mobilization with Thailand trying to solve its organic crisis through various reconciliation efforts, 2013 witnessed the rise of a new “People’s Democratic” movement whose aim was to dispose of Thaksin's alleged cronyism and puppeteering once and for all, thus returning the country to the dizzying cycles of radical democratic disruption and overall political turbulence that had marked the previous seven years. As we will see, it also marked a return to the same dynamics of radical democratic allowance that were present during the state fracture or organic crisis years of 2006 to 2008.

As several commentators have noted, at the beginning of this re-launching of the anti-Thaksin movement, the Yingluck government was able to rest comfortably for several reasons. First and foremost, though opposition to the Thaksinite program remained, the Yingluck government was not widely viewed as having committed any errors reminiscent of

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<sup>398</sup> Spornzetti, 11.

previous Thaksin affiliated governments that could serve as a point of identity shift, brokerage or diffusion for the remobilization of the anti-Thaksin forces. Likewise, it was widely understood that, unlike during her brother's premiership, Yingluck had managed to forge a détente with the military through the granting of a high level of autonomy in terms of their administration as well as an inflated budget.<sup>399</sup> This situation of relative confidence however – one which allowed anti-Thaksin groups to continue their relatively small radical democratic oppositional activities – did not last as 2013 carried on.

As both Andrew MacGregor Marshall and James Ockley argue, the Yingluck government took several missteps as 2013 progressed that sparked the remobilization of the anti-Thaksin movement en masse and into the streets. First of all were the various failures associated with the Yingluck government's rice pledging scheme. As an effort to provide economic assistance to the heartlands of Phuea Thai supporters in the country's rice growing north and northeast, a scheme was created in which the government bought rice at a highly inflated price relative to its market value. While such a populist measure was popular amongst its beneficiaries at first, the scheme ran into several debilitating problems as the year progressed. Though the measure drew criticism from conservative voices who viewed such assistance as a waste of tax dollars, criticisms became louder and sharper once the scheme came to face severe financial difficulties. While the government had gambled that Thailand's high market share in rice would allow for the global price of the commodity to increase as a result of its hoarding, other rice producing countries flooded the market with their own product, keeping the global price of rice low. As a result of this, not only was the government stuck with overpriced rice that it was unable to sell in the global marketplace but was also forced to dip into other revenue streams in order to pay the farmers the guaranteed price.

While the government estimated the damages to be around a US\$3 billion loss, the Thai

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<sup>399</sup> Andrew MacGregor Marshall, *A Kingdom in Crisis: Thailand's Struggle for Democracy in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Zed Books, 2014): 196; James Ockley, "Thailand in 2013: The Politics of Reconciliation," *Asian Survey* Vol 54 No 1 (2014): 40.

Development Research Institute put the loss at an astonishing US\$13 billion.<sup>400</sup> This serious misstep, coupled with the fact that the scheme was “plagued with corruption”, provided the anti-Thaksin forces with one key justification for wanting the Yingluck government removed.<sup>401</sup>

This however was not the straw that broke the camel’s back. Rather, as Marshall argues, it was the attempts by Phuea Thai throughout 2013 to secure amnesty for Thaksin through the general reconciliation process that had been instituted in the wake of the May 2010 crackdown and the subsequent Phuea Thai election.<sup>402</sup> In a perceived trade-off that many on both sides of the political divide found controversial, several avenues were pursued by the ruling party to ensure that those who were facing charges of committing political violence throughout the crisis years would be allowed to walk free while those convicted of crimes that were deemed to have been politically fabricated would also be exonerated. For many in the Red Shirt camp, the amnesty granted to those facing conviction for political violence including murder was viewed with a great deal of apprehension and in some quarters, even a sense of betrayal, as it had been the Red Shirts who had suffered the most at the hands of the military in 2009 and 2010. The larger reaction however came from the side of the anti-Thaksin forces including the Democrat Party and the PAD, as well as many middle-class Bangkokians, who saw the amnesty as a politically engineered trick to get Thaksin off the hook for his various corruption charges and to allow him to return to Thailand. It was this sense of injustice that allowed for the anti-Thaksin position to be brokered and diffused once more and for opposition to his affiliates to take to the streets once more.<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>400</sup> Ockey, 40.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid

<sup>402</sup> Marshall, 198.

<sup>403</sup> Ockey, 44.

As Kuhonta and Aim argue, the developments that would eventually lead to the May 2014 coup, followed a very similar pattern to that of 2006.<sup>404</sup> As they explain, by the end of the year, when the government, after several failed attempts, was able to push through the amnesty bill on 1 November at 4 am, parliamentary and extra-parliamentary groups such as the Democrat Party, former PAD members, and several civil society groups, as well as many ordinary citizens “stepped out” to oppose the government’s amnesty proposal.<sup>405</sup> Many of these divergent actors joined what became known as the People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) led by former Democrat Party stalwart Suthep Thaugsuban.<sup>406</sup> As in previous iterations of anti-Thaksin movements, opposition began with large-scale demonstrations of up to 300,000 people but soon evolved into widespread occupations of government offices. Furthermore, just as it had occurred with the PAD demonstrations and occupations in 2008 and 2009, this radical democratic activity led by the PDRC was tolerated by Phuea Thai for the reason that without direct control over the armed forces, the government did not have the capacity to shut down the demonstrations and occupations. Indeed, as Marshall argues, well-aware of the military’s clear inclination to intervene in favour of anti-Thaksin forces for the protection of the old order to which they were part and parcel, this period of contestation in late 2013 witnessed “disciplined policing and active efforts by the government to avoid confrontation” which “thwarted protest leader’s hopes of inciting a major confrontation that could be used as a pretext for a coup.”<sup>407</sup>

Despite the efforts of the Yingluck government to avoid such a confrontation however, the persistence of the PDRC and the gradual reaction of pro-Thaksin forces ensured that this stalemate, and the continuation of radical democratic agonism that it entailed, would not continue. While the government had retracted the amnesty bill and attempted to demonstrate

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<sup>404</sup> Erik Martinez Kuhonta and Aim Sinpeng, “Democratic Regression in Thailand: The Ambivalent Role of Civil Society and Political Institutions,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* Vol 36 No 3 (2014): 344.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid

<sup>406</sup> Marshall, 202.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid

its popular mandate through a snap election called on 9 December, the radical core of the PDRC did not back down, instead opting to reframe its extra-parliamentary opposition in terms of “de-Thaksinizing” the Thai political system and “Reform before Election”.<sup>408</sup> Much like the PAD proposals of 2005-2008, the PDRC put forth proposals that would limit popular sovereignty via democratic mechanisms and ensure the dominance of the military and the bureaucratic elite in Thai politics. As Kuhonta and Aim illustrate, such proposals included a partially appointed lower house based on professional groups, a fully appointed upper house, no “career politicians” involved in the reform process, “good people” in power, and new elections only when all branches of government and the bureaucracy were “cleaned” of Thaksin’s influence.<sup>409</sup> In viewing the electoral mandate as illegitimate thus, the PDRC attempted to block the election that was held on 13 January 2015 in an occupation entitled “Shutdown Bangkok”.<sup>410</sup> While the PDRC came up short of being able to sabotage the election completely, their partial success in the blocking of voting booths in several parts of Bangkok and in the southern provinces did prevent the election from being completed, a development that led to Yingluck’s electoral victory being annulled by the Constitutional Court on 21 March.<sup>411</sup> It was at this point that a coup, and the end of the PDRC’s radical democratic contest – a goal that they themselves were hoping for – became immanent. From March onward, clashes between re-mobilized Red Shirt pro-government and intransigent anti-government forces grew in intensity and frequency, with the Centre for Strategic and International Studies documenting that protest sites became increasingly well-armed.<sup>412</sup> With talk of civil war and the division of the country also becoming common in the media, and the government unwilling to step down despite Yingluck being forced to resign by the courts, the

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<sup>408</sup> Kuhonta and Aim, 345.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid

<sup>410</sup> Marshall, 204.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid, 205.

<sup>412</sup> Phuong Nguyen, Gregory B. Poling, and Kathleen B. Rustici, “Thailand in Crisis: Scenarios and Policy Responses,” *A Report of the CSIS Sumitro Chair for Southeast Asia Studies*. (Washington: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, July 2014): 1.

military opted to declare martial law on 20 May before finally taking over control of the country officially on 22 May with Prayuth Chan-ocha designated as Prime Minister. Once again, the possibility of an agonistic occurrence of radical democratic contestation was cancelled out by the military that dispersed both the pro-government and anti-government forces in the subsequent days. While the military claimed that the threat of civil war was the main impetus of the coup, several commentators have identified that the military regime provided itself with a chance to reshape the Thai political system in a manner reflecting the demands of the PDRC, despite its insistence that it has taken a neutral stance with regard to pro and anti-Thaksin forces.<sup>413</sup> Given the frequency that the military has been shown to intervene on behalf of the old order and against those associated with Thaksin, such claims to neutrality are almost impossible to take seriously.

For our purposes however, besides the various lessons internal to Thai politics including the dangers of illiberal populism and the clear double standards which have existed as a result of the bureaucratic elite and military's role of political certifier, the period of 2006 to 2014 in Thailand speaks loudly about the circumstances necessary for radical democratic action. Quite simply, during times when the interests of opposing participants were compatible or unthreatening and thus resulted in the subordination of one group to another, radical democracy was able to carry on, though arguably in a manner that is hardly worthy of the name. However, given that mechanisms of mobilization were more common than demobilization, this was not the circumstance that best describes the Thai case. In contrast to this and more commonly, when interests were both incompatible and perceived as threatening, the continuation of radical democratic action became a question of capacity. When the capacity to repress existed, repression occurred as it did in 2009 and 2010. When it did not, repression became more difficult and the radical democratic action could continue onward as

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<sup>413</sup> Marshall, 206; Kuhonta and Aim, 345.

it did with most instances sparked by the anti-Thaksin/pro-bureaucratic elite forces. With this result, the Thai case forces us to ask a serious question of, other than in times of organic crisis, whether there really is such a space of democratic politics between the logic of domination and the logic of revolt.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Democratic Theory and the Curious Case of Singapore (1945-1970)**

#### **Another Singapore Story**

Singapore has a way of punching above its weight. Its universities have the reputation of producing some of the world's best technical minds, its "free port" status has made it one of the most important global financial hubs, and its prosperity and orderly society are hailed as a success story in a region filled with much poverty and political instability. All the more impressive is the fact that such heights were achieved by a post-colonial, multiracial island of less than 1000 square kilometres with no natural resources. Indeed, such has been Singapore's achievement that congratulatory statements like the one above are not only to be found in the official discourse of the ruling People's Action Party (PAP), a party which has maintained its grip on power since 1959, but can also be found throughout the classic works within the country's historiography. It is almost needless to say that this is for good reason. Quite simply, if success is defined as peace, order, and general prosperity, (particularly without looking at how these have been achieved) then Singapore has seen more than its fair share of success.

However far from needless to say, especially since it is not said enough in "official" versions of its history, is the fact that this has come at a cost. For despite much of the talk of the city-state being an "oasis of calm in a region of chaos", Singapore is among the Southeast Asian region's most questionable "democracies" when measured against an institutionalist liberal democratic standard. As many commentators are quick to point out, despite parliamentary trappings leftover from the era of British colonialism that include regular national elections, an autonomous civil society which could check and challenge the government has been close to non-existent. As sociologist Chua Beng-Huat has argued, this political situation of much "tension", particularly between the state's democratic and non-democratic features, has been the result of "a popular elected single-party dominant

government and the tendency of this government to impose, through the due democratic process, substantively highly anti-democratic laws and administrative regulations on society."<sup>414</sup>

It must be stated that most of these laws and regulations, though established during the 1960s and 1970s have lasted right up to the present day. Regulations such as the Societies Act have ensured that associations - whether cultural, occupational, religious or other - operate within the bounds of their "designated realm" and do not enter the "political realm" outside of the officially sanctioned government channels. Moreover, various trade union ordinances have prohibited the formation of autonomous labour unions outside the oversight of the government-sponsored National Trade Unions Council and forbid labour-initiated work stoppages. The press has also been highly regulated through the political manipulation of license issuance and the ability to assemble publicly has been highly restricted with Hong Lim Park only recently established as a place of legitimate, albeit registered, dissent. These, along with limited permitted campaign times before elections, the use of libel charges against critics with the assistance of an appointed judiciary, and general livelihood dependence due to the pervasiveness of the PAP government/state in housing, education, and much of the economy has done much to inhibit the growth of an effective opposition. This is not to mention the fear-inducing role of the Internal Security Act that, having been on the books in some form since the Malayan Communist Party's insurgency of the late forties and early fifties, provides the government with the tool of detention without trial when a political problem has been deemed a national emergency. Since the PAP and its leaders have always equated their rule with the national interest, opposition has been an all too risky endeavour.<sup>415</sup>

Though some scholars have suggested that Singapore has witnessed a "breakthrough" with the 2011 campaign and election success (though not victory) of the opposition parties, it

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<sup>414</sup> Chua Beng-Huat. "Arrested Development: Democratisation in Singapore," *Third World Quarterly* Vol 15 No 4 (1994): 655.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid

must be said that this type of electoral mobilization was still conducted within the terms dictated by the PAP. Despite some hope for a liberal democratic type of politics in the future, Singapore, as of 2015, remains a highly managed society. With a governmental system of control - one which boxes in would-be political actors into designated apolitical areas of management, and punishes those who cross the boundary into politics-proper, the operation of politics in the city-state is nearly the anti-thesis of good or true political activity as it is defined by the radical democratic theorists.

It is important to remember however that this has not always been the case in Singapore. During the 1950s and 1960s, as Britain gradually moved towards an exit from the Southeast Asian political arena and as local political contestants fought over the impending direction of the post-colonial state, Singapore witnessed more than a decade of political vibrancy and vitality by such a large number of participants that this immediate post-war period can only be described as radical democratic. As Carl A. Trocki and Michael D. Barr state in their introduction to their edited volume *Paths Not Taken*,

"The three decades from 1945 to the mid-1970s were characterized by extra-ordinary cultural, intellectual and political dynamism...Students, labour unions, ambitious political contenders, and representatives of the various ethnic communities all stepped forward to offer alternative visions of Singapore's future. They came from across the entire political spectrum and between them generated a ferment of ideologies, priorities, perspectives, and social visions such as mainstream "official" Singapore politics had never known before and has not seen since."<sup>416</sup>

They continue,

"For approximately three decades, politics in Singapore was pluralistic and relatively open, but by the end of the 1960s pluralism was fighting a rearguard action against the monopolisation of all public discourse - not just politics by the state."<sup>417</sup>

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<sup>416</sup> Michael D. Barr and Carl A. Trocki, "Introduction" in *Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-War Singapore*, eds. Michael D. Barr and Carl A. Trocki (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008): 6.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid

For this reason, Singapore, as a polity which drastically moved from a flourishing plurality with a popular impulse to take to the street to one in which the formation of civil society itself became punishable, provides us with a unique, if unexpected, case for our inquiry into the circumstances required for the possibility of continued radical democratic politics. One aspect of this marked transition which is very helpful to this study is the fact that the country went from a place of radical contention to radical closure in just over ten years. While the mid-1950s saw the expansion of radical claims of equality, particularly through contestations led by students and workers in a new climate of political freedom, the mid-60s saw the governing PAP, which had ridden these very movements into power, repress and control the activities of many of their previous bedfellows who were now taking issue with the party's direction in a newly sovereign Singapore.

It will thus be these tumultuous years that will serve as the basis of our investigation. As was previously stated in the introductory chapter, and also as will become clearer as the case study progresses, one standout reason for the inclusion of Singapore in the project is with regard to *how* Singapore closed down its deeply contestatory political scene. Up unto this point with our case studies, episodes of radical democracy ended with repression (or outright war) when the interests of contending actors were no longer compatible due to intervening mechanisms and one or both sets of actors had the capacity to shut the other down. By contrast, the continuation of radical democracy has generally been possible when interests were, or had become, compatible via intervening mechanisms or when potential antagonists lacked the necessary capacity for action.

Singapore, as it often has in comparative studies of politics, complicates this analysis. Though it will certainly become clear once again through examining the "Rendel Constitution Years" 1954-1959 that repression is the outcome when there exists a complete incompatibility of interests between contending sets of actors, the years after the PAP took power presents a

more mixed set of circumstances. While the repression of radical actors was maintained as a key tool of the PAP to rid Singapore of any opposing forces to its vision and its rule, this was conducted alongside a general co-optation of the mass of the population through public policies which were both popular and deemed to be effective. The PAP thus, beginning with its taking over the reins of power in the 1959 election, closed down its opposition via a mixture of coercion and consent. Although some fledging and eventually unsuccessful forms of radical dissent remained after the twin-strategy of carrot and stick, for the most part previous actors which were engaged in radical democratic opposition had either been swept away by crackdowns or brought into the PAP's framework via its social and economic program.

The difference however to be found in the Singaporean case as opposed to those of France (mid 1968), Croatia (1999), and Thailand (2011) is the fact that once compatible interests had been generally restored, radical democratic activities *could not* be resumed. Indeed, though immediate threats to PAP vision and rule had been eliminated through the aforementioned processes, expressions of political equality outside of the designated channels were simply no longer permitted. In other words, the initial compatibility of interests that was the result of the PAP ridding itself of its challengers allowed it, through both violence and provision, to forge a social contract whereby any forthcoming challenges to its vision or rule would be viewed as incompatible and thus repressed.

With this stated, it is clear that the Singaporean case demonstrates the existence of another important condition for the possibility of autonomous oppositional politics. In previous cases, radical democratic activity was tolerated up to the point where *immediate* interests remained unthreatened. When looking at Singapore ten years after the PAP's initial taking of power however, it becomes clear that the government's institutionalized intolerance towards any type of democratic actions outside of the official channels was not the result of

incompatibility with regards to immediate interests. Indeed clear hegemony of the PAP had been established in their first decade in office (1959-69). Not only was this a development demonstrated by the party's overwhelming electoral victories in this period but was consolidated with the rounding up of militants who posed a threat to their rule. This in turn gave the PAP an overwhelming capacity advantage over potential competitors. As such, rather than a result of immediate threats to its interests, it is clear that the PAP's intolerance for democratic opposition stemmed from a worry about its long-term interests, particularly in terms of its existence as a multiracial society following its divorce from Malaysia in 1965 and its potential as locale of economic growth through integration into the global capitalist economy. As such, rather than utilizing its newly forged alignment of interests in the polity and the establishment of its superior capacity to open up spaces for opposition, the PAP, fearing a slippery slope, took this opportunity to close any remaining spaces down.

As a result of the evidence provided by the PAP's activity in the mid to late 1960s, for the survival of autonomous oppositional democracy, not only must the *immediate* interests of contending actors be compatible, but actors who have the capacity to repress their opponents must have some tolerance for autonomous opposition, despite the potential that instances of radical democratic politics could come to jeopardize its *long-term* interests. Without this, as long as an anti-oppositional force has the capacity to arrest protesters, round up dissidents, and limit the organization-building capabilities of opponents, in turn limiting opposition size and counter-power, autonomous oppositional activity is bound to last no longer than a candle flame in a hurricane.

### **Setting the Stage: From Post-War to the Emergency**

As with many former colonial societies, the direction of Singapore's political development underwent a drastic change during the Second World War. With the Japanese

invasion of 1942, the longstanding myth of British superiority to the peoples of Asia was definitively shattered. Inspired by anti-colonial independence movements across the globe, progressives in Singapore began to believe that they too could take their seat as an independent and equal partner in the international community, in control of their own political, economic and cultural destiny. Combined with the United Kingdom's own realization after the war that it could no longer maintain its empire under serious financial and international ethical limitations, it was clear to everyone on the island that the future would be one of self-government and, eventually, independence.<sup>418</sup> The question from 1945 onward thus was who would compete for power throughout the transition period and, more importantly, would emerge as the government in a sovereign, self-governing Singapore. The answer to this question would without a doubt have a tremendous impact on the configuration and balance of interests in the post-colonial setting. This was particularly with regard to the potential share of the pie which would fall to the former colonialists, the local capitalists, the working class and, overlapping with these, the various races constituting this multicultural port city.

Although there were various political groups that came onto the scene in the postwar period, the limited franchise, itself a result of a restrictive citizenship law which included only British subjects, ensured that official politics remained exclusively an elite affair dominated by bourgeois political parties and associations with close ties to the colonial power and proposals that were thoroughly reformist in nature.<sup>419</sup> For the time being, due to their policy of a gradual phase-out of colonialism which would ensure the protection of their investments and their strategically crucial naval base, this was all that the British were willing to tolerate.<sup>420</sup> As Carl Trocki states with regards to the British,

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<sup>418</sup> Yeo Kim Wah and Albert Lau, "Independence: 1945 to 1964" in *A History of Singapore*, ed. Ernest C.T. Chew and Edwin Lee (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991): 117.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid

<sup>420</sup> James Low, "Kept in Position: The Labour Front – Alliance Government of Chief Minister David

“Their aim was to leave behind a government that they could continue to influence and that would defend their economic interests in the region. British banks, trading companies, agencies, insurance companies and industrial concerns owned or were deeply involved in the plantation, mining and shipping industries of Malaya, all of which were centred in Singapore.”<sup>421</sup>

More important developments however were unfolding in a parallel fashion within the realm of extra-parliamentary politics. Though the colonial government had only been willing to alter the constitution slightly in terms of official representatives, the liberal climate after the war, the increase in popular agitation as a result of a new anti-colonial consciousness, and the British colonial office’s attempt to slowly loosen its grip allowed for Singaporean civil society to operate in an environment of relative freedom. As Trocki has further argued, despite the desire to maintain a grip on their economic and military interests, even during the pre-war period of British rule civil society groups were more or less left alone by the colonial administrators as long as there was no attempt to overthrow the government or establish a trade union. However in this immediate post-war environment even the latter came to be deemed as acceptable and restrictions were generally lifted.<sup>422</sup>

A newly emerged Singaporean civil society was both an initiator and recipient of this newfound political openness. During this time period, activists were able to spread their wings, recruiting members for radically oriented political organizations which had previously been either outlawed or surveilled. As Yao Sochou has explained, this in turn led to the growth of labour unions and student associations which tended to put forth a multi-ethnic, socialist, and anti-colonial vision for the future of both Singapore and Malaya.<sup>423</sup> As previously stated, the rapid growth of this movement happened in large part as a result of the

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Marshall in Singapore, April 1955 – June 1956,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* Vol 35 No 1 (2004): 44.

<sup>421</sup> Carl A. Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control* (London: Routledge, 2005): 131.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid, 137

<sup>423</sup> Yao Sochou, “All Quiet on Jurong Road: Nanyang University and Radical Vision in Singapore” in *Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-War Singapore*, eds. Michael D. Barr and Carl A. Trocki (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008):179.

permeation of anti-colonial ideas and dreams among subjugated peoples across the Asian and African world. In radical democratic terms, those of the Singaporean left had indeed “stepped out” of their prescribed place in the colonial order in the name of equality to contest the rule the imperialists. As left-wing labour leader and future president of the Republic of Singapore Devan Nair stated about this time period, “the names and pronouncements of the Great Titans of this Asian Revolution – of men like Soekarno, Mao Tse Tung, Nehru and Gandhi, fired our imaginations.” With the growth of this local movement and also the political articulations of a better future that came to be expressed, debated upon, and put into action in strikes and demonstrations, Singapore had established a reputation “as a mecca for scholars, artists, intellectuals, and political exiles, and as a veritable hotbed of left-wing activity.”<sup>424</sup>

Among these actors who were keen on contesting the colonial status quo were Malay radicals keen on the progressive idea of a “Melayu/Indonesia Raya” which would unify the Malay world and reverse the divisions partially imposed by the various European colonialists as well as the Malayan Democratic Union (MDU), an association established by left-wing English educated intellectuals, who demanded an independent, multiracial, socialist and reunified Malaya that would include Singapore. Highly educated but denied access to top government jobs due to the rule of the foreign British, men of talent and anger had gone on to establish these organizations, hoping to use their training in politics and law to effect change.<sup>425</sup>

Of all of these bodies which gained traction in the immediate post-war period however, the most notable was the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). As Yeo and Lau have documented, through their cadres in leading positions in the trade unions, the MCP had some

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<sup>424</sup> Lily Zubaidah Rahim, “Winning and Losing Malay Support: PAP – Malay Community Relations, 1950s-1960s” in *Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-War Singapore*, eds. Michael D. Barr and Carl A. Trocki (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008): 59.

<sup>425</sup> Yeo and Lau, 112.

degree of influence over 51,000 workers.<sup>426</sup> Likewise, the MCP had also managed to expand their network of mobilization through cadres in other civil society groups including the aforementioned radical Malay organizations and the MDU. It must be stated here that despite the fact that Singapore had been administratively separated from the Malayan peninsula, the shared history and demographic makeup of the two entities made many believe that both their past and future were inseparable and that an independent nationhood would find its basis in a pan-Malayan form. This was particularly true of the leftist political parties including the MCP which did not accept the feudal, Malay dominated concept of Malaya put forth by conservative forces on the mainland. For this reason, the MCP found itself especially popular in Singapore, a city with a relatively small Malay population. As a result, those internationalists in Singapore who viewed racial politics with contempt found a sympathetic line with the MCP.

Yet this particularly idealist rationale was not the dominant reason for its large support base. The first major reason for its high level of support is quite obvious. As a communist party, the primary sector which it represented was the proletariat. In Singapore there was certainly a large one. Indeed, not only had the mass of workers been economically exploited by the colonial system, many of whom being subjected to a life of poverty in the overcrowded slums of Chinatown, but the political system had entirely excluded them from receiving any political representation since the vast majority of workers did not have the benefit of being British subjects. As with communist parties worldwide, the masses turned to the MCP in hope of political and economic emancipation. As Michael Fernandez and Loh Kah Seng have stated, “to many workers, the MCP appeared to be the most progressive force

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<sup>426</sup> Ibid, 118.

for resolving their economic problems, low wages, high cost of living, and shortage of rice.<sup>427</sup>

However it must also be stated that beyond this class rationale, the MCP had established a great foothold in Singapore because of the party's fundamentally Chinese membership. Singapore, after all, was a majority Chinese city. The attachment of Singaporean Chinese to the MCP in terms of the cultural connection stemmed from two events. The first was the heroic role of the MCP in fighting the invading Japanese during the war. Not only had the MCP been the only political party to take up arms in resistance in Malaya, but also the great courage shown by the party's Chinese comrades drew parallels with the struggles in mainland China. Overseas Chinese had strongly identified with war developments in China as it was still seen by them as the heartland of their civilization and the almost sacred centre of their cherished culture. The second event was the revolutionary takeover of their homeland by Mao Zedong which gave the local Chinese community a sense of pride that they had never previously felt. Having been historically divided, subject to the control of various foreign powers, and exploited to the point of economic backwardness, China's re-emergence under Mao and the Chinese Communist Party inspired many local Chinese in Malaya and Singapore to believe that their own future could emulate that of China in a proud, post-colonial, modern, and socialist direction. These post-war issues taken up by the MCP - domestic political control, an end to economic exploitation, and the goal of restoring pride to Chinese culture - would go on to provide the bases for most of the radical political challenges to the ruling parties right up to the late 1960s.<sup>428</sup>

Of course, these various issues also served as the springboard which catapulted these organizations into a general movement of anti-colonial and, indeed, radical democratic action

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<sup>427</sup> Michael Fernandez and Loh Kah Seng, "The Left Wing Trade Unions in Singapore, 1945-1970" in *Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-War Singapore*, eds. Michael D. Barr and Carl A. Trocki (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008): 208.

<sup>428</sup> Yao, 179.

between 1945 and 1948. Throughout this period most of these actions took the form of politically oriented strikes beyond the confines of sectoral issues of wage and working conditions. Rather, the vast majority of strikes served the purpose of confronting the exploitative economy of colonialism and as a platform for demanding the popular control of the economic and political institutions. As Lee Kuan Yew recalls in his memoirs, this expressed radicalism began immediately after the war with 7000 workers in the dockyards of Tanjong Pagar and the Singapore Harbour Board going on strike as a result of instigation by the MCP.<sup>429</sup> For certain, this was only the beginning. By Yao's count, 92 strikes of this kind occurred in Singapore between the years 1946 and 1947.<sup>430</sup> To demonstrate the intensity of contestation in Malaya as a whole during this period, Drysdale documents that around 300 major strikes, amounting to nearly 700,000 lost working days, were conducted in 1947 alone.<sup>431</sup> Without a doubt, the most impressive of these displays of discontent with colonial rule and the hierarchical organization of socio-political life that it entailed was the "hartal" of 29 January 1946. As Lee Kuan Yew describes,

"On 29 January 1946, in a demonstration of strength after the British military administration had detained a few communists, some 170,000 workers from hospitals, shipyards, the Naval Base, rubber factories, cinemas, cabarets and public transport stopped work and the shops closed."<sup>432</sup>

Given the form that these strikes took, this period of large-scale anti-colonial resistance can certainly be classified as radical democratic. By standing up in the face of the imperial power outside of the official, exclusive boundaries of the colonial socio-political partitioning and demanding that they be recognised as equals who were capable of running the country, these actions fall very much in line with what the radical democratic theorists

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<sup>429</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* (Singapore: Federal Publications, 2000): 70.

<sup>430</sup> Yao, 182.

<sup>431</sup> John Drysdale, *Singapore: Struggle for Success* (Singapore: Times Books International, 1984): 28.

<sup>432</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, 40.

view as a model for our current era. What was promising in Singapore was the fact that in these immediate years after the war, particularly 1946-1948, most of this activity was able to carry on without serious interruption.

Of course, there are discernible reasons for this. The first important factor lies with the British. Knowing that they were soon exiting Southeast Asia and that their interests now revolved around securing key economic and military assets under a friendly would-be local government, the British were more concerned with who had control within the halls of government than what was occurring in the streets amidst the hawkers and shop-houses. As long as the latter did not spill into the former, the British were able to tolerate much of the unrest when it did in fact spring up. As such, though there were some clashes with the imperial police and selective arrests of members of the MCP, at no time was there a sweeping crackdown or wave of repression.

Undoubtedly, much of this tolerance can be attributed to Britain's strategy for a safe pull out – one which would ensure that their ownership of certain capital and their naval base remained intact. Worried that outright repression would play into the hands of the communists, the colonial office was willing to concede the streets to left-wing forces in order to weaken the left's argument that the British were ruling tyrannically. For this fear of reprisal, it was against British interests to repress on these emerging anti-colonial forces including the MCP.

Indeed, during these years, the British had allowed for the MCP to operate in the open. Of course, such an arrangement was not a one-way street. The ability of the British to sit back and watch depended heavily on the strategies of the left-wing forces. It is important to note that from the end of the Second World War to 1948 the majority of leftist anti-colonial parties and organizations were committed to the constitutional and reformist route to political power and social transformation. Most importantly, this included the official position of the

MCP.<sup>433</sup> As such, though the visions of Britain and the anti-colonial organizations were certainly at loggerheads, the latter did not pose an immediate threat between 1945 and 1948, leaving the two sides' interests compatible enough to ensure that there was no cancelling out of one side by the other or a protracted conflict. In other words, the radical democratic situation could be maintained.

Had these left-wing parties, unions, and other organizations been committed to a revolutionary line, immediately threatening the interests of the colonial power through nationalization, it is doubtful that the British would have waited prudently as long as they had. What is certain is that this hypothetical state of affairs actually came to fruition in 1948 with a change of policy by the MCP in relation to their strategy on the peninsula. In mid-1948, the conservative Malay-dominated leadership in Kuala Lumpur had reached an agreement with the British on what was to be known as the Federation of Malaya. In essence, the agreement struck a balance between the traditional Malay leaders who had wielded power since the days of official feudalism and the British who, as they were in Singapore, were very keen on maintaining control of their business and trading interests and access to the sea. As a concession to a segment of the masses, and a precursor to the policies of the long-ruling United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the majority rural Malay population was awarded special privileges in terms of access to education and jobs. This proposal however was branded as reactionary and deemed entirely unacceptable to the MCP<sup>434</sup>. To communist eyes, not only would the British maintain control over their tools of domination, but the traditional hierarchical socio-political structure would also be maintained with the Malay elite in control and the other constituent races including the Chinese and Indians receiving no special benefit or a commitment to social transformation or independence.

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<sup>433</sup> C.C. Chin. "The United Front Strategy of the Malayan Communist Party in Singapore, 1950s-1960s" in *Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-War Singapore*, eds. Michael D. Barr and Carl A. Trocki (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008): 59.

<sup>434</sup> Drysdale, 28.

With the federal agreement having acted as a mechanism of defection, pushing the interests of the British and the MCP away from the realm of compatibility, the MCP called for a People's Revolutionary War and large-scale strikes ensued. Tactics, however, would soon be escalated. After several plantation owners were killed by MCP members, demonstrating to both London and Kuala Lumpur their intentions and capacity for action, the Emergency Regulations were enacted, giving the colonialist administration the ability to detain without trial. Given that the MCP had also been extremely active in Singapore over the three years previous, the Emergency Regulations were also put into effect on the island.<sup>435</sup>

The impact of these regulations on not just the MCP but also other left-wing organizations was devastating. Immediately the MCP was made illegal, forcing it to operate underground. Union leaders were thoroughly screened with those with radical leftist views being swiftly removed and, as for the unions themselves, federating became banned, limiting the bounds of operation to their respective trade<sup>436</sup>. For the next few years the unions were to be passive and apolitical. What is more however, especially for our purposes, is the effect that these emergency regulations had on all other political actors wishing to engage in some type of radical democratic activity. Not only were non-members or mere sympathizers of the MCP also affected by the legislation concerning labour organization and detention, but they were subject to a highly restrictive law which banned political parties and other organizations from holding public meetings with the exception of election time.<sup>437</sup> Further inhibiting to potential oppositional actors was the element of the new legislation which granted the authorities the power to detain without trial.

In sum, the end of the era of compatibility between the British and the anti-colonial left-wing forces in Singapore as a result of the rift caused by the larger issue of Malaya's future socio-political framework led to a situation whereby neither could tolerate the other. As

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<sup>435</sup> Chin, 60.

<sup>436</sup> Yeo and Lau, 124.

<sup>437</sup> Chin, 61.

a result of the British government's greater capacity at the time, the possibility of radical democratic activity was closed. Due to the numerical strength of the MCP, this closure was not selective and instead applied generally to the entire population for a period of several years.

This crackdown by the British on radical anti-colonial activity sent shockwaves through civil society groups which had been active in the mid-1940s, including the Malayan Democratic Union which dissolved itself for fear of arrest due to the communist links of some of its members.<sup>438</sup> While many activists temporarily gave up the fight during this Emergency, others took to the underground to continue on the struggle against the British in a much more clandestine form. This included the cell organization instituted by the MCP for its committed members as well as the Anti-British League (ABL), a “second chamber” of the MCP for fervent and generally English-speaking anti-colonialists who were yet to fully prove their worth to the communist cause<sup>439</sup>. In 1950 however members of the ABL were rounded up by the authorities and imprisoned for their subversive activities<sup>440</sup>. This move had the effect of further weakening anti-colonial civil society in Singapore for the meantime as it stripped the leftist organizations of potential leaders. Later however these arrests would prove to have been ineffective as they only strengthened the resolve of the imprisoned to combat the colonial regime and created anti-colonial martyrs for the people to later rally around.

### **Taking to the Streets: Hope in the Early 1950s**

For several years, Singaporean civil society operated in a state of passivity, not as a result of its own strategic making but because of a British imposed pacification. By 1952 however the general political climate was beginning to change. Due to the setbacks suffered

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<sup>438</sup> Dennis Bloodworth, *The Tiger and the Trojan Horse* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2005):

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<sup>439</sup> Ibid

<sup>440</sup> Chin, 61.

by the MCP in the guerilla war in the jungles of the peninsula, the Emergency situation had improved to the point that the British “began to allow for more freedom”.<sup>441</sup> Though this reopening was affirmed by the adoption of the Rendel constitution – the most liberal and democratic constitution that Singapore had seen up to that time – in 1954, the British authorities had begun loosening the restrictions on organizing and demonstrating in 1952. This, combined with the continuation of the miserable social conditions and associated grievances that were prominent in the 1940s, led to another explosion of political activism reminiscent of the previous decade. As Edwin Lee has stated with regards to the socio-economic situation of the 1950s,

“Singapore had high unemployment, a high birth rate, dilapidated housing, . . . and great disparity in the education system, and in career prospects, Chinese schools were underfunded, and their grads were unwanted in the civil service and western commercial firms where a knowledge of English was mandatory. These factors created a fertile ground for revolution.”<sup>442</sup>

One key point that this quote from Edwin Lee emphasizes is the fact that the British had demonstrated a commitment to political rather than socio-economic solutions to the problem of the Emergency. Indeed, rather than attempting to reform a social system that was demanding such reforms from below, the British utilized political tools, often via constitutional fiddling to stop the communists from gaining ground. This not only included the repressive policies of the Emergency regulations but also the political openings offered up in 1952 and 1954 in the hope of undercutting the leftists' argument that the British were ruling oppressively. As such, the newfound openness of the British in the early 1950s came not only from an ideological commitment to democracy (albeit one that would prove to be

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<sup>441</sup> Yeo and Lau, 128; Fernandez and Loh, 210.

<sup>442</sup> Edwin Lee, *Singapore: The Unexpected Nation* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2008): 133.

quite malleable when its interests were threatened) but as a strategic concession aimed at taming the anti-colonial beast.<sup>443</sup>

As many commentators have argued with regards to the strategy of the left-wing anti-colonial forces in the 1950s, the provision of political space only emboldened their activities and increased the force of their demands.<sup>444</sup> As Mao Zedong stated, “the enemy retreats, we pursue.” And pursue they did. From 1952 to 1956, Singapore witnessed an intense period of radical democratic activity involving strikes, demonstrations, rallies, marches, and sit-ins on a monthly, if not weekly, basis.

One point that needs to be clearly made however is that despite the apparent feeling of “revolution in the air”, during this period the left-wing anti-colonial forces did not act in a revolutionary manner. As will be shown, during these two decades of political vibrancy and, particularly, leftist militancy, Singapore never witnessed a “storm on the winter palace” moment. In fact despite the anti-colonial political aims of the unions, students associations and other organizations involved in the movement against the British, actions were not generally taken in an effort to “capture” any key sites, locales, or levers of power other than those done electorally. This is in a marked contrast to the Croatian and Thai cases where government buildings were directly targeted and occupied for increased leverage and, sometimes, to obtain access to the levers of power themselves. Likewise, as we will see, unlike the case of France where in late May 1968, a number of radically aligned workers started to occupy their factories and run them autonomously from their bosses, Singapore's radical unions, many of which had some ties to the MCP, did not attempt to appropriate the means of production directly at the site of the workplace.

It is important to note that the strategies of radical actors upon both of these sites of power – the halls of government and the workplace – were directly related to the dwindling

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<sup>443</sup> Chin, 62.  
<sup>444</sup> Ibid.

strength of the MCP after having suffered through the Emergency regulations. First, although the colonial authorities did indeed loosen their grip on civil society's ability to organize and be active in the political arena, this tolerance did not extend to the MCP as a result of its violent attempt to overthrow the conservative alignment of forces (the British and the traditional Malay elite) across the causeway. As a result of this, the MCP was forced to adapt and, subsequently, adopt a clandestine mode of operation. This of course had several repercussions.

The first important significant consequence of this was that the MCP could not attempt to organize the masses on its own. Rather, a national front strategy would be needed whereby cadres would be planted in anti-colonial bodies such as the trade unions, student associations, and respectable radical political parties in an attempt to rebuild a movement in line with communist aims.<sup>445</sup> With this, those activities which the MCP did have some influence over were directed towards provocation, and not revolution, in an effort to improve the living standards of the workers, free up space for further mobilization, and expose the colonial government's, and later colonial-backed government's, reactionary nature with the ultimate aim of improving the standing of the Communist Party. To ensure a more capable force in the future, the Party thus had to accept subordination to the British as well the colonialists "chosen sons" in the meantime. Compatible interests between the colonialists and the communists thus went on to contribute in part to the continuation of radical democratic activity from 1952 to 1956.

Yet also, despite the prevalence of equating the activities of the postwar left in Singapore with those of the MCP, particularly in the "official" Singapore story approved by the PAP, other accounts of these years in Singapore's historiography provide ample evidence to suggest otherwise. These of course include, but also transcend, the very telling fact that the

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<sup>445</sup> Edwin Lee, 103.

authoritarian PAP has historically used the brandishing of political enemies as communists as a tool of legitimization. Most famously, and as we will see later in this historical inquiry, this brandishing served to add legitimacy to the arrest and detention of 163 left-wing opponents of the PAP in 1963 – none of whom were given a trial or had these claims substantiated by the ruling party.<sup>446</sup> Furthermore however, both Trocki and Chin have argued that, despite the rhetoric of the all-pervasive Communist Party, the set-backs that the communists had endured as the result of the round-ups and repression of the Emergency left the MCP in too weak of a state to have a real leadership role when it came to the strategy or the direction of the left-wing forces in Singapore, despite having various cadres inside the island's labour and student movements.<sup>447</sup> This problem of being unable to direct the movement would go on to create serious problems for the MCP as the radical democratic activity of labour and the students increased autonomously of any directive of the Party and jeopardized the possibility of gradually building a common front with a common strategy that could eventually take political power under the MCP's leadership. Expressed as a typical communist insult against those who abandoned the party line of building a base in favour of direct action, the MCP blasted many of the workers and the students in Singapore for being “adventurists” and “ultra-leftists”.<sup>448</sup> Whether radical democracy is a form of ultra-leftism which is ill-fit for advancing the causes so powerfully demonstrated on the street is a question that needs to be saved for a more dedicated theoretical discussion in later chapters. For now however it can be said that, though the politically active workers and students of Singapore may or may not have been “adventurists” or “ultra-leftists”, by not falling directly under the influence of the MCP's network of control, they most certainly displayed radical democratic credentials.

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<sup>446</sup> Poh Soo Kai, Tan Kok Fang, and Hong Lysa, “Preface” in *The 1963 Operation Coldstore in Singapore: Commemorating Fifty Years*, eds. Poh Soo Kai, Tan Koh Fang, and Hong Lysa (Kuala Lumpur: Strategic Information and Research Centre and Pusat Sejarah Rakyat, 2013): xvii.

<sup>447</sup> Trocki, *Singapore*, 114; Chin, 63.

<sup>448</sup> Chin, 64.

This combination of planned activities for provocation rather than revolution and activities which expressed greater autonomy and spontaneity had the effect of influencing the scope and manner of the “stepping out” that became prevalent during this period. Though this stepping out did involve actors stepping into the street, by not “stepping into” these particular areas rendered off-limits by the colonial regime, the anti-colonial forces should certainly not be described as revolutionary. In fact, since the purposes of most of these actions was not to negate their opposition through the use of force, but to demand changes with regard to tangible policy areas including, education, language, and citizenship, as well as the shifting of constitutional power away from the colonizer towards the colonized through an expression of equality in the street, the actions of the left-wing forces were very much in line with what the associated theorists have described as radical democratic politics. Of course, much like the other cases, and much like what has already been said about the Malayan Communist Party, with this stepping out being conducted under the auspices of British domination, radical democratic actors demonstrated their equality within a position of subordination, inequality, and a paternal form of toleration. This was punctuated by the fact that even non-revolutionary, democratic actions were deemed to be “stepping in” too far and threatening British interests or more conservative visions of Singapore.

Many historians and political commentators point to the postal strike of 1952 as the specific event which marked the resurrection of Singaporean civil society after the suffocating restrictions of the Emergency<sup>449</sup>. What started as a seventeen-day strike over pensions and salary revisions became an incredible boost of confidence to workers who now believed that they could challenge the government on the wider question of sovereignty and socio-political control. In large part, this was a result of the postmen having won the strike

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<sup>449</sup> C. Mary Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009): 249; Lee Kuan Yew, 104; Drysdale, 42

with the support of other unions.<sup>450</sup> As Lee Kuan Yew states after having served as the postmen union's legal advisor, the highhandedness that the government had shown the workers in dealing with the issues at hand in bargaining – a commitment which had been limited at best – exposed the general lack of concern the British showed towards those who lived and worked under their rule and brought other unions into the street against them. Popular opinion of the colonial regime was shifting, thus increasing workers' militancy.<sup>451</sup> As a result of this mechanism of diffusion, with the British capitulating to the strikers' demands in order to prevent any further expansion of the union mobilization, the colonialists had shown a chip in their armour when dealing with domestic disputes. Much like the wartime situation with the Japanese invasion, the British incompetence in managing the demands and subsequent actions of the postmen and their sympathizers made the multitude believe that “the government was vulnerable when subject to scrutiny.”<sup>452</sup>

As such, though a deal had been struck to put an end to this particular instance of confrontation and street politics, the idea that the British were vulnerable to pressures from below served as an activating mechanism of defection which would go on to drive a wedge between those associated with the colonialists – the British themselves and those local political elite aligned to them – and the mass of workers and students who were becoming increasingly politicized by the influence of the radical unions, associations, and organic manifestations of protest as well as the errors of the authorities. Knowing that progressive changes were now possible, to win the support of the popular classes who were becoming further disillusioned with the colonial government, these radical organizations and actors increased their presence among these social sectors for further changes. As such, with the mechanism of diffusion being instituted by actors who were determined to contest some key interests of the British and the aligned local elite, not only would a greater amount of radical

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<sup>450</sup> Drysdale, 42.

<sup>451</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, 73.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid, 76.

democratic activity come to fruition, but the limits of what the authorities would tolerate would come to be challenged.

One sector of Singaporean society which was most definitely swept into action by the mechanism of diffusion were the students of Singapore's unfunded and dead-end Chinese schools. The hopeless circumstances of these Chinese schools in the 1940s, much like the issues of poverty and housing, had carried right through to the 1950s with little improvement. With stable, well-paying jobs only within the reach of the English educated, the destiny of proletarianization made the Chinese students ideal candidates for rebellious activity, particularly once the British had shown some vulnerability and once radical ideals became diffused by fellow students, faculty, and associated labour leaders. Once again, the successes of Mao in China and the recent victories of local Singaporean labourers had done much to inspire the students. As Huang Jianli has stated,

“Driven as much by their youthful raw energy, idealism and romanticism as by their freedom from career considerations, family burdens and property ownership, students occasionally surged to the forefront of national politics and exerted an influence out of proportion to their numbers and became a force to be reckoned with.”<sup>453</sup>

The one issue that first propelled the students into action against the authorities was the British decision to enlist the young Chinese to fight for the colonial armed forces.

<sup>454</sup>Given the general level of antipathy towards the British due to the conditions previously discussed along with a fundamental lack of political representation, students at the main Chinese language schools, namely the Chinese High School and Chung Cheng High School were quick to rally against this in what became known as the “May 13<sup>th</sup> Incident” - the first serious display of radical democratic activity in this period which would be undertaken by the students.

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<sup>453</sup> Huang Jianli. “The Young Pathfinders: Portrayal of Student Political Activism” in *Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-War Singapore*, eds. Michael D. Barr and Carl A. Trocki (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008): 59

<sup>454</sup> Huang, 189; Bloodworth, 103; Fernandez and Loh, 103.

Huang describes that the plan to contest the British authorities on this issue was a very well-organized affair. With around 900 students having packed themselves in lorries to attend a “fictitious picnic”, the students were brought to the centre where they were to march to the Padang – home to the offices of the British rulers.<sup>455</sup> However, during this procession – one which had formed a line some 200 yards long – the marchers were interrupted by the police. Fearful of what may occur if the protesting students reached the offices of the administrators, the police attempted to halt the movement of the students. At this point the authorities had already believed that militant students were about to venture too far into an area of British control and with one of their interests at the time being centred around maintaining order to guarantee a smooth exit with a moderate government left behind, police intervention was utilized as a precautionary measure. This manoeuvre however proved to be a costly error for the colonial administration as they had underestimated both the zeal and capacity of the Chinese students. As soon as the police attempted to close down this nascent form of radical democratic activity, the students’ vigour intensified. When the police moved in on them, the students responded by lining the railings of the road, linking arms, and singing “unity is strength” as an act of civil disobedience. The police however were unwilling to stand for this act of defiance and continued with their effort to shut down the students' demonstration, first by trying to rope them to the railings and second by forcing them away when the first effort failed.<sup>456</sup> When this second effort also proved ineffective, the police lost control of the situation and what had begun as a rather mild radical democratic action morphed into a running battle, giving 13 May its “bloody” reputation. As Bloodworth describes, “students ran, rallied, stoned the upcoming riot squad, and squatted behind screens of schoolgirls.”<sup>457</sup> As he further documents, one policeman was “hit with a flying stone and hospitalised with a

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<sup>455</sup> Huang, 187.

<sup>456</sup> Bloodworth, 105.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid

broken head and six others had been stabbed.”<sup>458</sup> Various accounts state that around 50 were injured when the dust was clear.<sup>459</sup>

However, due to the previously mentioned zeal and capacity of the students, the dust was not clear for very long. Indeed, the issue of national service for the colonial power had not been resolved and the students had come to attract the sympathy of other anti-colonial forces. Lee Kuan Yew, who also came to support these students as their legal advisor stated that in response to the authorities crackdown, “students mounted camp-ins, and protests...(and) tried to enlist the support of other students, parents, shopkeepers, and local Chinese leaders.”<sup>460</sup> The demonstrations and camp-ins of which he had spoken began the next day when between 2000 and 2500 students locked themselves inside Chung Cheng High School, demanding “total exemption” from national service and forming a bargaining team to achieve it.<sup>461</sup> Included in its set of demands was the unconditional discharge of 48 students who had been arrested the day before.<sup>462</sup> Along with some of the left-wing labour unions, the more conservative and business-affiliated Chinese Chamber of Commerce also sided with the students on the basis of protecting the Chinese culture and took up the task of negotiating the national service policy for the students.<sup>463</sup> For this reason, the British not only had to tolerate this new radical democratic action but also had to negotiate its original position.

The crackdown on the students the day before, rather than acting as a tool of demobilization instead became a mechanism of activation, diffusing the anti-colonial position both within the student body and among other bodies. This in turn increased the students' capacity and made a fresh crackdown unlikely as such a move could have jeopardized the British ability to have a moderate political party in power to maintain their interests once it

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<sup>458</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>459</sup> Huang, 189.

<sup>460</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, 84.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid, 105; Lee Kuan Yew, 85.

<sup>462</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, 84.

<sup>463</sup> Bloodworth, 105.

was time to leave. This limitation included not being able to alienate the Chinese Chamber of Commerce (CCC) who provided the British with potential moderate allies. As such, this radical democratic activity continued for the reason that the interests of the students and the interests of the colonial rulers had become compatible, despite being in disagreement about the issue of national service.

When the first round of negotiations led by the CCC failed due to the government's unwillingness to meet all of their demands, the students resumed their sit-in with 2500 locking themselves inside in Cheng Chung High School once again. From this point a tug-of-war between the students and the authorities ensued until the government was finally forced back to the negotiation table. This battle of wills, which saw the authorities act cautiously in their use of repressive measures, included a siege of the high school to starve the students out and a counter-manoeuve by the students which included another break-in and sit-in on 1 June at the equally radical Chinese High School and the formation of pickets and barricades. As Bloodworth describes, "the camp-in lasted 23 days and was a model of good housekeeping. Sections by 'responsible' students received visiting parents, ran the commissariat, detailed pickets, monitored hygiene, provided a wall newspaper and political instructions, and issued statements to the press."<sup>464</sup> Eventually after no response from the government, the students went on a hunger strike.<sup>465</sup> It was after three days of this final action that the government agreed to postpone national service. This however came with the condition that the Chinese High School would be closed altogether "if students didn't behave and go home."<sup>466</sup>

Though the British proved willing to compromise, allowing for further radical democratic action in the future, including by the students themselves, this came at a price. Most obviously, through the battle over the national service issue had swung in their favour

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<sup>464</sup> Bloodworth, 106.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid; Lee Kuan Yew, 85.

<sup>466</sup> Bloodworth, 107.

as a result of their struggle, the Chinese students were still living under colonial rule, subject to the dictates of the British authorities and the ever present threat of the British gun.

Furthermore, though they did not show their teeth so directly during the demonstrations and sit-ins, the authorities took more indirect measures to prevent such radical displays of opposition from becoming a threat to their key interests. As such, not only were seven of the students' ringleaders arrested after the events but, during the period of contention itself, eight members of the university socialist club were arrested for pro-student articles being published in their anti-colonial newspaper *Fajar* during a raid on University of Malaya hostels on 28 May.

The continued tolerance of radical democratic action after these initial student engagements thus should not be separated from the so-called preventative measures taken by the authorities that were thought to have taken some of the bite out of the student movement. Manoeuvres such as these – arrests and detentions before and after episodes of radical democratic contestation to weaken the threat posed by opposition – became a key feature of political strategy to, on one hand, publicly display compromise and legitimacy and, on the other hand, eradicate any opposition worthy of the name. The appearance of this tactic also came along with another which would become common strategy of ruling groups on the island. This was the technique of closing down political space on the back of a compromise which had been reached on a particular point of contention. This technique appeared with regard to the issue surrounding the students' enlistment in September 1954 when “the government announced that it would give itself powers to close down any school that did not comply with the schools ordinance.” As will come to be of greater importance to our inquiry later on, the closing down of space *as a result* of compromise as opposed to its absence provides us with an important circumstance needed for radical democratic activity to operate. This is for the fact that a compromise made between previously contending forces,

particularly if this compromise is institutionalized, can result in a trade-off whereby concessions are provided with the understanding that future oppositional activity looking to renegotiate or altogether shatter these terms of compromise outside of the designated political channels will not be tolerated.

Of course, although such a method of closing down one's opposition can be effective, an entire polity cannot be closed down this way, at least not permanently. As the radical democratic theorists have pointed out, such hegemony or “policing” is always incomplete due to a “lack”, the logic of identity/difference, the ability of humans to forge “the new” or the impossibility of eradicating “the part which has no part”. Because of this, radical democratic activity always has a chance of getting itself off the ground. As we have seen in this inquiry, this does not necessarily mean that it will stay there. In this hypothetical situation of a highly hegemonized polity with an anti-democratic leadership (not so hypothetical when looking at Singapore's later years) radical democracy does indeed have a chance to get off the ground although it faces very difficult odds of being sustained. For if much of the polity has traded away its ability to “step out” for concessions, those who have prohibited the “stepping out” will have an enhanced capacity, partially through enhanced legitimacy, to carry out repressive measures against actors engaging in radical democratic activity. By having control of the sites where potential political issues could arise – transforming them into issues of management and thus potentially facilitating legitimacy and ideological hegemony for those in power – arenas which could be utilized to increase the capacity of the opposition fall directly into the hands of government, in turn increasing its capacity. This of course also includes the coercive apparatus which makes opposition forces all the more weak and coercion all the more easy. Given these circumstances, when those in power are unable to tolerate opposition properly defined, the chances of radical democratic activity being sustained are complicated. In 1954, with the imposition of the Schools Ordinance after a deal had been brokered, Singapore

received a hint of what was to become political reality in just a decade's time. In 1954 however, despite the appearance of regulating manoeuvres like the Schools Ordinance, spaces of dissent were plentiful and radical democracy was able to continue.

### **Joining the Party**

Despite the aim of this inquiry, it is important to state clearly that though activities we can describe as radical democratic in nature were a very marked feature of political contestation during this time period, it was certainly not the only one. For certain, the various groups who were struggling for radical changes in Singapore were not simply content with constituting a radical opposition. Indeed the very *raison d'être* of the anti-colonial struggle was to take political power and remake the Singaporean polity into one which was sovereign and, for most of the anti-colonial forces, to put Singapore on a path of modernization and development following some kind of socialist formula. With this, those anti-colonial forces which had the capacity to do so did not only try to influence policy or to create new institutions from the outside-in. Rather, they also attempted to gain a foothold in enough locations of influence to eventually take political power. In the Singaporean case, this “inside-outside” approach, as it has conventionally been with so many other masses movements, included an essential role for political parties.

It must be stated that much the radical democratic literature has not been overly concerned with either political parties (perhaps with the exception of Mouffe) nor, for that matter, the goal of many political parties which is taking political power – gaining hold of the significant parts of the state apparatus through the control of government posts, constitutionally or unconstitutionally. We have already seen in previous chapters that the theoretical framework of the radical democratic thinkers has been one in which the exercise of power through such channels is not understood as being political but rather as politics’

very opposite. Indeed, with the attempt to assign ordered places and spaces through institutions, even in the case when such arrangements are authorized or legitimated by procedures which would conventionally be understood as democratic, the arrangements that such procedures and their outcomes entail – electing an official for one's representation, agreeing to be catered for by a certain law, association or provision, or acquiescing to majoritarian designs – are deemed to be inegalitarian, subordinating, an imposition of order on anarchy, a boxing-in of possibility, and a negation of “the new”.

This argument, as we have already established, is not without reason or merit. Quite the contrary, given how often “the political” has been closed down in the name of political rightfulness, both historically and contemporarily, such thinking is not simply a theoretical intrigue but rather a necessity. However here once again through our inquiry we reach a limit to the radical democratic approach. This limit stems from the fact that within this type of framework, the only type of activity which can be envisioned as being a truly democratic act is oppositional activity. While it has been adequately demonstrated by the theorists that opposition and, further, radical opposition is an irrevocable aspect of politics properly conceived, it certainly cannot be equated to politics itself.

As has been established with the previous cases, opposition does not occur for the sake of itself. At the core of every instance of opposition is a vision, ideology, program, or even single issue or principle that the opposition actors have in conflict with those in power and, more specifically, the socio-political manifestations of their ideas. The end goal of course is not merely to voice displeasure (although this may very well be the form that it takes) but to have the socio-political reality altered to be in line with this opposition's own vision. Though particular changes of this nature are most certainly possible from a position of opposition, provided there is enough capacity to force a concession, the most effective way of ensuring the change is to have command over the levers of power in the polity. Of course, in

modern socio-political designs, these levers are part and parcel of the state apparatus. The need to have control over these levers through control of the state apparatus becomes even greater when the interests between the agents of opposition and the agents of power are incompatible to such an extent that concessions are simply not enough to satisfy the opposition's interests. As a consequence of this, attempts to gain hold of the state apparatus often occur, as it is this which can fulfil the entire *raison d'être* of the opposition group itself. With this sated, and as will be further argued in the conclusion of our inquiry, the radical democratic theorists should be criticised for failing to fully appreciate the programmatic core of every political project – a piece of perceived truth which lends itself to achieving its attainment *regardless* of the form. As such, rather than viewing institutions as the polar opposite of oppositional politics or, as some would have it, politics plain and simple, they ought to be understood as a logical extension of any political project whose subscribers wish to see it manifested as socio-political reality.

Undoubtedly it would be unfair to collapse each of the radical democratic theorists' frameworks into the same general category of critique without deconstructing each of their respective arguments. This task will be more thoroughly taken up in the theoretical chapter along with some of the other lingering questions which have arisen from previous cases. For now however it can be said that there is a clear tension between the “negative” and “positive” elements of radical democratic thought – the elements of critique and elements of construction to be found in every political project. Though it will be made clear that some thinkers recognize this more than others, this tension poses a fundamental problem for the actualization of radical democracy.

For example, in her latest work *Agonistics*, Chantal Mouffe criticizes both William Connolly and Bonnie Honig for overemphasizing the Arendtian and Nietzschean moments of opening within agonistic politics. As Mouffe argues,

“The main shortcoming of agonistic approaches influenced by Arendt and Nietzsche is that, because their main focus is on the fight against closure, they are unable to grasp the nature of the hegemonic struggle. Their celebration of a politics of disturbance ignores the other side of such struggle: the establishment of a chain of equivalence among democratic demands and the construction of an alternative hegemony. It is not enough to unsettle the dominant procedures and to disrupt the existing arrangements in order to radicalize democracy.<sup>467</sup>

This belief in the necessity of pursuing hegemony and thus political power makes Mouffe much more comfortable with institutions. The problem for Mouffe however is the fact that her own promotion of agonism falls victim to this very critique. If an aspect of hegemony is exclusion – drawing a line between what (and who) is acceptable and unacceptable in the polity – then, as has been argued in this inquiry, the existence of agonism in a polity remains highly contingent on the competing forces. While Mouffe paints a picture of competing actors recognizing their own particularity and thus leaving space open for others to compete for hegemony, she also demonstrates the inherent universality at the heart of every political project which provides the very basis for not only rallying and pursuing political power but also for closing down spaces and attempting to maintain this closure. These two elements are certainly at odds with each other. Mouffe seems to hedge her bets on political actors operating only within the realm of consent – that opposing groups, whether in or outside a position of power, recognizing their own particularity will agree to compete for hegemony openly without resorting to coercive means. In this world political actors would lean further towards particularity than universality. As has been shown through this inquiry however, such a situation is not always possible, depending heavily on the core interests of the forces involved.

For the purposes of our discussion of Singapore, the anti-colonial political parties who were vying for political power in the early 1950s would be both recipients and arbiters of discussions regarding what radical democratic activities would be permitted during the next

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<sup>467</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (New York; Verso, 2013): 14.

two decades of Singapore's transition towards a sovereign state. Though there were others that were noteworthy, the most important of these was the People's Action Party (PAP) which, formed in 1954, went on to become the governing party in 1959 and has remained as such ever since.

In Singapore's historiography, the formation of the PAP has been given a very thorough discussion. Most commentators attribute the rise of the PAP to various developments although the most common factor identified was the marriage of convenience between first, the nationalist, left-leaning (socialist to social democratic) English educated lawyers and academics who were respectable in the eyes of the British and second, the Chinese educated labour and association leaders who carried the masses through their organizations and had sympathies and, in some cases, links with the influential MCP.<sup>468</sup>

For many of the English educated who included Lee Kuan Yew, disillusionment with colonial rule had set in while studying in England. Having witnessed the decline of the empire from the imperial centre and having been influenced by the radical anti-colonial intellectual currents of the day, these elite returned to Singapore with the intent of winning political power and dismantling British colonial rule. The problem however was the lack of a mass base. With the electorate being gradually expanded by the British, including with the forthcoming Rendel Constitution which would increase the number of eligible voters and which would expand the number of elected seats to 25, such mass support was to become indispensable to the goal of achieving political power through the ballot box.<sup>469</sup>

This critical mass of supporters was to be found in the Chinese speaking working-class. By aligning themselves with their labour and association leaders and taking on the masses' interests as their own, the English educated were hopeful that a non-revolutionary and democratic road to independence (and, for some, socialism) could be forged by a new

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<sup>468</sup> Diane K Mauzy and R.S. Milne, *Singapore Politics Under the People's Action Party* (New York: Routledge, 2002): 17.

<sup>469</sup> Bloodworth, 78; LKY, 81.

mass-based party. For the Chinese educated leaders and other actors who had more radical visions of Singapore's future, such an alliance was also beneficial. While these English educated were anti-colonial and leftist enough to forge an alliance with, they also provided a more legitimate cover to their more radical aims which, tied to those of the MCP or not, could not be presented so openly in a time when Britain's strategy dictated toleration for those forces which did not highly threaten their various strategic and economic interests. As such, much like their adversaries, the radical left also had to “go slow”.<sup>470</sup>

Much of the radical democratic activity of the previous three years had highly contributed to fostering the alliance which would eventually become the People's Action Party. Indeed, while the Chinese masses and their labour and their association leaders had been on the front lines of the postal strike of 1952, the 13 May incident and smaller contestations in between, it was the English educated nationalists who had supported them through their writing, through their encouragement of sympathy and solidarity through their own organizations, and sometimes even through their legal defence. For certain, one reason why Lee Kuan Yew had been able to build his profile as an able and determined leader was as a result of his defence or advisory to the postal workers in 1952, the naval base workers in 1953, and the Chinese students in 1954. As Drysdale has stated, after these episodes, Lee had come to be seen “as a radical and effective spokesman for workers.”<sup>471</sup> During this time period more unions asked for his support and, given the political capital this entailed, Lee was happy to oblige.<sup>472</sup> Lee himself has stated that due to both the vibrancy shown by the anti-colonial forces, particularly the unions, and his success in supporting them, “friends and I were now convinced that in the unions we would find the mass base...and the political muscle we had been seeking.”<sup>473</sup>

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<sup>470</sup> Joseph B. Tamney, *The Struggle Over Singapore's Soul* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996): 4.

<sup>471</sup> Drysdale, 42.

<sup>472</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, 76.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid

Lee's representation of radical organizations and associations also had the effect of expanding his network of radical elites for the eventual formation of the PAP. Lee, through visits to their prison camp, became acquainted with Devan Nair, James Puthuchery, and Samad Ismail, all former members of the anti-British league who had been imprisoned during the British crackdown in the Emergency years and who still carried a large following in the various English and Malay speaking labour unions and radical organizations. Through his representation of Chinese workers and students, Lee also came to be affiliated with Fong Swee Suan and Lim Chin Siong, both of whom would come to have massive sway over the Chinese electorate for their radical anti-colonial position and their unflinching support of the workers through the leadership positions they respectively held in the Singapore Bus Union and the Factory and Shop Union. Meetings which had been occurring during this period in Lee's basement involving Lee's own closely linked political allies, and these other radical actors resulted in the formation of the People's Action Party on 21 December 1954.<sup>474</sup> With both sides, the moderates and radicals or, as much of the literature describes it, the non-communists and the pro-communists, each being in need of each other for a different political purpose – for one, genuine mass support and the other, a more acceptable party shell – the PAP was formed as a tenuous alliance of circumstances, a factor which would shape both the near future of party politics in Singapore as well as the future possibility for radical democracy.

However before they could have a greater role in determining the extent to which radical democratic activity would be tolerated, in 1954, as a mass opposition party which had yet to have any seats in parliament, one of its goals was to encourage radical opposition, particularly street politics, and build its own standing as an anti-colonial and socialist party by supporting it. How far these activities could “step into” realms deemed off-limits would

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<sup>474</sup> Bloodworth, 87; Drysdale, 83.

depend on another tenuous partnership – that of the colonial authorities and David Marshall's Labour Front (LF) led coalition government elected in 1955.

### **David Marshall's Game**

As previously stated, as part of their policy to gradually move themselves out of the Singaporean political arena and do so in a way that did not encourage revolutionary action, the British brought forth the Rendel Constitution to shift more portfolios into local hands, partially democratize the election and operation of government, and absorb some of the radical pressure from below. Yet the fundamental problem for the party which would take the helm in the 1955 election – eventually the aforementioned Labour Front – was the fact that they would be limited in operation by a restrictive constitution that still provided substantial powers to the British. This included the local government having to work with three appointed ex-officio British parliamentarians who were not only required to sit on the Chief Minister's cabinet but also hold the key portfolios, particularly with regard to defence and security.<sup>475</sup>

It must be said that this imposed coalition with the British was not something that the Labour Front had wanted. Indeed, any party having to govern in accordance with the checks and limitations laid out in the Rendel Constitution would most definitely be accused of being nothing more than the “running dogs” of the British. Not wanting to be outflanked by any other party, the PAP had recognized this all important fact and had fielded only four candidates in the 1955 election to fiercely oppose the constitution and whichever party took power, discrediting the old colonial structures with a new facade and demonizing the new

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<sup>475</sup> Turnbull, 259.

government as lackeys.<sup>476</sup> With their newfound mass support, the PAP won all four of the seats they contested with electoral support from organized labour and the Chinese students.<sup>477</sup>

The big surprise in the election however was the Labour Front ultimately taking the reins of power with the Malayan affiliated Alliance party joining as junior coalition member.<sup>478</sup> First of all, it was understood that the Rendel constitution had been “tailored for the pro-UK Singapore People's Party.”<sup>479</sup> However, as James Low has identified, the British had fundamentally erred, not being able to truly appreciate the strength of the left-wing anti-colonial forces that had developed in Singapore. According to him, “the possibility that these leftist political parties could appeal to a newly enfranchised electorate in a nationalistic mood appears to be lost on the colonial establishment.”<sup>480</sup> Further, as Mary Turnbull states, “the right-wing parties were rejected because of their association with the old regime and the failure to appreciate a changed electorate...The future belonged to politicians of the left who aimed to seize self-government as quickly as possible and to build up mass support against colonial rule.”<sup>481</sup>

With the PAP having resigned itself to a pragmatic position of disloyal opposition, it was Marshall and his Labour Front which thus came to power with a platform of “dynamic socialism” which included promises of independence, merger with Malaya, the Malayization of the civil service, the abolishment of the Emergency Regulations, the extension of citizenship to more Chinese workers, and multilingualism in the legislature.<sup>482</sup> Immediately however, the Labour Front government was faced with some serious challenges.

Though it had been the leftist forces on the ground that had launched Marshall into power, the Labour Front had a weak connection to the labour organizations and other

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<sup>476</sup> Drysdale, 99.

<sup>477</sup> Yeo and Lau, 133.

<sup>478</sup> Drysdale, 99.

<sup>479</sup> Low, 44.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid 45.

<sup>481</sup> Turnbull, 260.

<sup>482</sup> Bloodworth, 138.

associations that housed these radical voters, as many of these supporters had already been brought under the umbrella of the PAP and, from a distance, the MCP. Though the assessment may be slightly harsh in terms of the Labour Front's vision, Trocki has suggested that the LF had “virtually no grassroots organization, no clear policies, and very little cohesion.”<sup>483</sup> On top of this, though the party's rhetoric centred on “dynamic socialism” its composition suggested that it was more or less a bourgeois party, housing English educated lawyers, public servants, some members of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce who, as Trocki again identifies, had only “some connections to unions” and “some socialist ideas”.<sup>484</sup>

Whether or not the LF was a firm believer in anti-colonialism and socialism is a matter of historical interpretation. Some commentators have argued that because Marshall did not carry the same level of mass support as the PAP, he and the Labour Front were forced to take a more radical stance towards the British and demand more autonomy in domestic decision-making and freedoms to organize in the schools, factories, and the streets.<sup>485</sup> Others such as Low have been more sympathetic to Marshall in viewing the Chief Minister as a left-leaning liberal who genuinely desired bringing down colonial rule brick by brick with his insistence on the maximum amount of freedom for Singapore vis-à-vis the British through constitutional interpretation and a forgiving attitude towards the workers.<sup>486</sup> Others simply saw him as naïve, misunderstanding the strength of the left and the influence of the MCP.<sup>487</sup> Yet, whatever the rationale for his actions, in 1955 the LF under Marshall created an environment in which the anti-colonial left-wing forces were increasingly free to organize as well as mobilize. Marshall's fulfilling of his electoral promise in having the Emergency Regulations rescinded played a large part in this.<sup>488</sup> This of course boded well for radical

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<sup>483</sup> Trocki, *Singapore*, 120.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid, 119.

<sup>485</sup> Turnbull, 261.

<sup>486</sup> Low, 46.

<sup>487</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, 109.

<sup>488</sup> Low, 46; Fernandez and Loh, 211.

democracy. It was clear that the interests of Marshall, being compatible with those of the radical forces in civil society, would allow for radical democratic activity to flourish much more than it had been able to in the early 1950s.

This new state of affairs came to be tested in mid-1955 in what would later simply be known as “Hock Lee”. In late April, in celebration of the one year anniversary of the formation of the Singapore Bus Worker's Union (SBWU), chairman and PAP affiliate Fong Swee Sua mobilized 1200 striking busmen in front of the Hock Lee Bus Depot in an attempt to take over the company union that represented many of the busmen at the Hock Lee bus company. In doing so, 36 buses were immobilised.<sup>489</sup> In response to this militant action, the company resisted by firing 229 workers who belonged to Fong's SBWU. This step immediately spurred on the workers to increase the ferocity of their action and soon, taking a page from the Chinese middle school students' book, declared a hunger strike and set up an all night picket at the gate of the depot.<sup>490</sup> Having “stepped into” an area deemed off-limits by the police, an attempt to break up the blockade in front of the depot resulted in skirmishes and subsequent injuries to fifteen strikers. Not intimidated however and determined to continue the strike despite the aggression of the police, the bus workers stood firm. On the next day they were joined by 1000 sympathetic workers and students at the depot.<sup>491</sup> Though more skirmishes unfolded between the strikers, their sympathizers and the police, Marshall's government did not wish to call for a complete crackdown. For reasons that were a matter of conviction, strategy, or both, Marshall was very reluctant to use force in handling the militancy of the strikers. As Low has stated, though “Britain were pressing for stronger measures, the government was reluctant to permit 'even the minimum amount of force' to suppress the demonstrations for fear of undermining support...Britain wanted to restore order

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<sup>489</sup> Drysdale 106, Bloodworth 179.

<sup>490</sup> Bloodworth, 179; Drysdale, 106.

<sup>491</sup> Fernandez and Loh, 212.

but Marshall refused to have foreign troops kill his people.”<sup>492</sup> As a result of this compatibility of interests between the Labour Front and the strikers, this “stepping out” of the workers was able to continue without facing a serious crackdown despite some mild clashes with the police.

This stalemate however was not to last as the strikers were determined to force a resolution that would swing in their favour. In fact, the workers at one point believed that they had attained just this. After the latter weeks of April were spent in standoffs with the police, the Marshall government, for the previously discussed reasons, had been quick to broker a deal between the bus company and the workers who were framing the issue of unionization into a larger matter of autonomous labour organization and economic exploitation in a colonial society. At the bargaining table a deal had been struck whereby the dismissed workers would be reinstated. However, when the bus company refused to recognize the return of the workers, the angered union saw its members take to picketing again. At this point, the intransigence of the company had pushed the strikers into a more militant mood.<sup>493</sup>

This in turn tested the patience of the British who were growing frustrated with Marshall's inaction. How the British would respond to this would prove to be a factor of great importance for though Marshall's own interests were compatible with the strikers, they were less so with the British who believed that Marshall was increasingly losing control of the situation. Furthermore, as a result of the limitations of the Rendel Constitution which still provided the British with the final word on matters of internal security, the capacity which stemmed from Singapore's coercive apparatus was fundamentally split between the colonial and domestic power. As such, despite interests being compatible between Marshall and the strikers, with the British still having the last word on security as well as an overwhelming

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<sup>492</sup> Low, 48.

<sup>493</sup> Bloodworth, 180.

capacity to ensure it, the final outcome depended more highly on the compatibility between the interests of the strikers and the colonialists. At this juncture, with the strikers intensifying their demonstrations, and with the looming threat that the contention might spill over into a general uprising or mass movement against the colonial regime, particularly as a result of the politicization of the strikers through the radical union leaders and, more distantly, the MCP, the British began to add further pressure on the Marshall government to shut down the demonstrations<sup>494</sup>. The card that the British played and would play from this point onward was that of *Merdeka* – independence. According to most analysts of this period, without Marshall being able to demonstrate sufficient control over internal security, the British could not surrender sovereignty to Singapore.

As Lee Kuan Yew has stated in his memoirs, this carrot caught Marshall between the anti-colonial forces and the British. Marshall's interests, securing sovereignty, and perhaps even full-fledged independence for Singapore was placed at loggerheads with ensuring continued radical support for his own party and his own social liberal vision. Marshall thus proceeded in a way that, if successful, would allow him to maintain both. He would reluctantly allow for tougher action against the demonstrators when they heightened the United Kingdom's security fears while later negotiating with the radical forces with a commitment to securing for them the best possible deal. As a result of this, the limits for radical democratic activity under the Marshall government were set.

With the intensification of the strikers' ferocity and the British waving the *Merdeka* card, on 8 May the riot squad was called in to scatter the strikers. Since the police did not use much force, the strikers held firm.<sup>495</sup> On 10 May however the authorities escalated their efforts at dispersion by attempting to push strikers away with a water cannon. This action and the subsequent clashes which ensued as a result of this instigation left nineteen injured and

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<sup>494</sup> Low, 48.

<sup>495</sup> Drysdale, 107.

eight taken away on stretchers.<sup>496</sup> These injuries served as a boundary shift. With the strikers as well as the general population viewing this act as one of colonial oppression, an anti-colonial sentiment became diffused across more sectors of the polity, particularly in the already politicized realms of organized labour and the Chinese schools.

At worksites across the island, including at the six other bus companies, workers responded to the events at Hock Lee with sympathy strikes.<sup>497</sup> Bloodworth has stated that, at this point, the government could not afford to delay.<sup>498</sup> On 12 May, the police moved in on the demonstrators, hoping to end the blockade of the bus depot once and for all. More clashes occurred although the extent of the battle in the street only reached an unbridled point when 20 truckloads of Chinese middle school students descended on the strike site, escalating the clashes to pitched battles in the streets.<sup>499</sup> As Bloodworth has described it,

“Sporadic skirmishing blew up into an organised and bloody riot after a convoy carrying 20 lorryloads of students converged on the inflamed tissue of streets around the depot to double the number of workers and casual hooligans already engaged in mayhem, and the police were forced to use tear-gas in three pitched battles with belligerent mobs up to one thousand strong.”<sup>500</sup>

At this point, with what had begun as a radical democratic action having descended into a street battle due to the firm positions of both the strikers and the authorities, UK troops were brought in to close down the revolt.<sup>501</sup> As many historians and analysts of this episode have described, the disorderly scene involved thousands of rioting students and strikers engaged in the throwing of stones and bottles along with the burning of cars, while the police ran them down with tear gas and the odd use of firearms from the Hock Lee Depot all the

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<sup>496</sup> Bloodworth, 180.

<sup>497</sup> Fernandez and Loh, 212.

<sup>498</sup> Bloodworth, 180.

<sup>499</sup> Chin, 64.

<sup>500</sup> Bloodworth, 180.

<sup>501</sup> Low, 48.

way to Tiong Bahru several kilometres away.<sup>502</sup> Though the fighting lasted all evening, by morning the police and the British forces had ended the uprising although only after four had been killed and 31 more had been injured.<sup>503</sup> Radical democratic activity against the injustices of colonial rule was thus shut down in the name of protecting the British security interests which were directly threatened by the strike turned anti-colonial uprising. As Lee Kuan Yew has described, “13000 workers, men and women in 90 commercial and industrial enterprises went back to work.”<sup>504</sup>

Marshall however would undermine these same British interests by playing the double game through negotiation that would permit him to carry the radical voters that swept him into power. It would also, as Marshall himself stated, foster a “bourgeoning hope that existing political democracy might lead us to freedom and healthy government.”<sup>505</sup> As Low has stated, Marshall's response to the unrest was moderate, putting the fate of the workers' struggle to government directed arbitration and mediation. To the dismay of the bus company, Marshall had come to a temporary understanding with the radical unions by ensuring that the workers had received what they had demanded. As Bloodworth describes, the strikers won every point they had contested: “destruction of the rival union, reinstatement of dismissed workers, and strike pay for the whole period of the dispute.”<sup>506</sup>

Despite this victory for the workers, one which would encourage greater radical democratic activity in the future, not everyone was satisfied with the outcomes of Hock Lee. For one, the British had pushed Marshall to reintroduce the Emergency Regulations despite his previous move to abolish them in line with his electoral platform.<sup>507</sup> This of course was unacceptable to the anti-colonial forces including the same labour unions which had been

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<sup>502</sup> Edwin Lee, 107.

<sup>503</sup> Drysdale, 108.

<sup>504</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, 107.

<sup>505</sup> Edwin Lee, 108.

<sup>506</sup> Bloodworth, 181.

<sup>507</sup> Trocki, *Singapore*, 121.

involved at Hock Lee as well as the Chinese middle school students. This latter group had also become further aggrieved since, as a punishment for their participation in the demonstrations and subsequent unrest, three of the Chinese middle schools were closed and handed a list of students who had 14 days to “show why they should not be struck off the register” in early May.<sup>508</sup>

Unable to accept the government's insistence that the students should not be engaging in politics, 2000 boys and girls, one year after the 13 May incident, barricaded themselves in Cheng Chung High School and the Chinese High School, demanding an end to the Emergency Regulations, an unconditional reopening of the schools, the registration and recognition of their student association, and a solution to the longstanding problem of the unequal treatment of the Chinese language schools when compared to their counterparts of other languages.<sup>509</sup> While the students planted themselves in their schools for weeks in an effort to bring Marshall and his government to the bargaining table, one of the radical unions, the Singapore Harbour Board, undertook a sympathy strike which would continue for an entire two months.<sup>510</sup> By mid-May seven bus companies had also stopped in sympathy, a move which resulted in the arrest of Fong Swee Suan as well as six others on charges of political coercion.<sup>511</sup> With this, not even a month after the incident at Hock Lee, both Marshall's LF government and the British faced a new episode of radical democratic activity that put both domestic and colonial powers in a precarious position.

Marshall, once again looking to be the champion of the people, did not wish to use force and desired negotiation. The British, knowing that another direct crackdown could have negative repercussions for their “go slow” exit, were willing for the time being to accept Marshall's tolerance of the workers and students for strategic reasons. A message from the

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<sup>508</sup> Huang, 189.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid

<sup>510</sup> Ibid

<sup>511</sup> Ferandez and Loh, 214.

colonial governor Lennox-Boyd to British Prime Minister Anthony Eden that same month demonstrates that the colonial office, given the strength that the left had recently displayed, was very intent on Marshall staying in power for the time being. As Lennox Boyd wrote,

“If Marshall's coalition threw its hand in or were driven out of office it would be necessary either at once to suspend the constitution or to hold a fresh general election. The latter of course would almost certainly secure the return of a government so much further to the left than the present one that the suspension of the constitution would still before long become unavoidable. The consequences of suspending the constitution are not easy to predict but might very well be damaging and ought not to be induced if they could possibly be prevented.”<sup>512</sup>

For certain, throughout 1955, radical anti-colonial forces expanded greatly, particularly in the labour unions headed by Lim Chin Siong and Fong Swee Suan. Whereas membership in the Singapore Factory and Shop Workers Union (SFSWU) had been 372 at the beginning of 1955, by the end of the year, numbers had swelled to an extraordinary number of 30,000. For the unions as a whole, the numbers increased from 81,741 to 148,112<sup>513</sup>. As such, in order to contain the left, the British would have to find a local politician more willing to repress and detain actors who threatened their interests more than Marshall was willing to. For the time being however, without the option of a compliant domestic leader who would take the brunt of the backlash away from their own colonial office, a crackdown on radical democratic activity or, even further, a suspension of the constitution was not the preferred course of action. Marshall would simply have to suffice.

Given their determination to protect their strategic and commercial interests, one can imagine the discomfort of the British who watched Marshall not just placate but cozy up to the forces that threatened these very interests. As Fernandez and Loh state, Marshall had come to a “makeshift truce” with the unions which included the re-repealing of the Emergency Regulations and the release of Fong Swee Suan after only one month of

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<sup>512</sup> Low, 50.

<sup>513</sup> Fernandez and Loh, 212.

detention. In terms of the students themselves, Marshall reopened the schools, promised negotiations with regard to Chinese education, as well as the Chinese students' union.<sup>514</sup> As Bloodworth describes, Marshall's compromises had been a complete success for the radical forces since “he had given the Hock Lee strikers what they wanted, forgiven the students their sins and their sit-ins, placated the workers of Singapore Harbour Board, released Fong...and left the left with a series of victories to celebrate.”<sup>515</sup>

Marshall's love-in with the left did not end there. Suggesting that he understood the plight of the Chinese middle school student, Marshall engineered the All Party Committee on Chinese Education which looked to improve the standard of Chinese education on the island and, in turn, resolve a key issue which was fuelling the students' political participation. Among the secured victories for the students as well as those involved in Chinese education as a whole, were commitments to bilingual primary education, equal grants for all language streams, equal pay for teachers, and more opportunities for graduates.<sup>516</sup>

Once again however, an attempt to close down political space after the brokering of a deal appeared as a strategy of the ruling power. Under pressure from the British, Marshall had offered the students the registration of their student union only if it did not participate in politics or in any industrial action.<sup>517</sup> Though they were reluctant to do so as a matter of principle, the students accepted knowing that they could later ignore it anyway. The students were well aware of the double game Marshall was playing and that it was not in his interest to repress them outright without any later negotiation. Moreover, being bold and ideologically driven, the students were also willing to take their chances. However, overall, the knowledge that demonstrations could produce tangible results led to a clear intensification of radical democratic activity across various sectors. As Lee Kuan Yew has stated in his memoirs, as a

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<sup>514</sup> Bloodworth, 183.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid, 187.

<sup>516</sup> Turnbull, 265.

<sup>517</sup> Ibid.

result of Marshall's strong desire to negotiate and avoid violent conflict, “every worker and cadre in Singapore knew that they had a government they could use for their own purposes.”<sup>518</sup>

Radical democratic activity thus thrived. Lee Kuan Yew described the nine months between April and December 1955 as a “strikefest”. In his estimation, there were roughly 250 stoppages.<sup>519</sup> According to Bloodworth, one million man-hours were lost in total, a number seven times greater than in 1954.<sup>520</sup> Mary Turnbull has demonstrated that this labour unrest transcended matters of wage and involved workers stepping out of their roles to question the nature of colonial rule. As she has argued, “of nearly 300 strikes in 1955 only 1/3 involved claims for better wages and conditions while the rest were sympathy strikes or demands for the release of imprisoned trade union officials.”<sup>521</sup>

Crucial to developments over the next few years, another parliamentarian had also begun to play his own double game. This of course was none other than Lee Kuan Yew. During the All Party Committee on Chinese Education, while the left wing of the PAP had viewed the provision regarding the students' political activity as “colonial prudery”, Lee had openly supported it.<sup>522</sup> Like Marshall, and indeed much more so since much of Singapore's left-wing anti-colonial forces were situated squarely within his own party, Lee, with his desire to lead Singapore into independence and eventual merger with Malaya, had to satisfy both the colonialists' security concerns while staying loyal to the left of his party, some of whom had links to the MCP. Though it was Lee who had suggested that Marshall's impotence stemmed from his “being caught between the colonialists and the communists”, Lee too was placed squarely in this dilemma – one which began to drive a wedge between the already rickety alliance of moderate and radical factions of his party, both on the issues of political

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<sup>518</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, 109.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid

<sup>520</sup> Bloodworth, 195.

<sup>521</sup> Turnbull, 264.

<sup>522</sup> Drysdale, 124.

freedoms and the nature of the social transformation that would occur once Singapore gained its independence.<sup>523</sup>

Such a double game being played by Lee was clearly demonstrated by Lee between the Hock Lee incident and the All Party Constitutional talks which took place in London in April 1956. Since many of his own party supporters, including some top members, had been involved in the Hock Lee incident and the subsequent altercations surrounding the Chinese students, the PAP faced accusations of being a far-left party which was merely a front for the MCP. However, to this accusation, Lee restated his party's position that though the PAP stood for a non-communist, socialist, democratic, and independent Singapore, he would not “join the colonial bandwagon” in anti-communist hysteria.<sup>524</sup> The people, he said, if given choice would choose communism over colonialism and he would not fight the communists for the sake of colonial rule. The goal of the PAP, “if given its rights”, was thus to provide a democratic alternative that would be committed to the improvement of Singaporeans' livelihoods, free from colonial rule. In order to carry the Chinese speaking masses, Lee, though distancing himself enough from the MCP, publicly sided with the radical forces against colonial rule.<sup>525</sup> At least in terms of opposition rhetoric, Lee had spoken directly to the working masses on issues that mattered to them. As Trocki has stated, “the PAP appealed to the people and promoted workers rights, a policy of democratic socialism, abolition of the Emergency Regulations, and an end to colonial expansion.”<sup>526</sup> In terms of the promotion of a free and active civil society, Lawson has argued that “Lee had been a liberal champion of political and civil rights...protested the repression of political activity by trade unions and other civic leaders...(and) argued to conduct peaceful, constitutional protests under any

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<sup>523</sup> Ibid

<sup>524</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>525</sup> Ibid, 124.

<sup>526</sup> Trocki, *Singapore*, 121.

banner.”<sup>527</sup> For these reasons, Lee had continued to be a popular figure in the eyes of the workers and students he had represented as legal advisor only a few years before.

When it came to dealing with the British however, including at the 1956 constitutional talks, Lee played a different hand of cards altogether. The talks had come about as a result of a constitutional deadlock that had been manufactured by Marshall when he had requested Singapore's governor, Robert Black, for four deputy ministers to bolster the standing of his Chief Minister's position. When Black refused, Marshall demanded constitutional talks, stating that it needed to be made clear who ruled – Singapore or London. James Low has argued that what Marshall was looking for was the most liberal interpretation of the constitution that the British would grant for the promotion of democracy in Singapore.<sup>528</sup> Willing to discuss the obstacles that needed to be overcome before they could leave Singapore with their interests intact, the British accepted these constitutional talks which were scheduled for April.

Marshall, with the backing of the leftist forces, and knowing that Malaya was on its way to independence with British approval, demanded the same for Singapore – *merdeka* or bust. Signatures supporting the demand were collected – 167,000 in total – and a *merdeka* rally was organized at Kallang airport at which six British Members of Parliament were invited to witness both the mass support and readiness for Singapore's independence. What could have been a grand opportunity to push the constitutional process forward however was squandered as a result of the riotous scenes which unfolded in front of the six MPs very eyes. At the rally, 3000 radicals shouted insulting slogans at the British while the communist sympathizers held banners of Mao and middle school students imitated the Chinese communists by dancing the “yangko”.<sup>529</sup> When 300 members of the crowd charged the police

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<sup>527</sup> Stephanie Lawson, “Sanitizing Ethnicity: The Creation of Singapore's Apolitical Culture,” *Nationalism and Ethnic Problems* Vol 7 No 1 (2001): 70.

<sup>528</sup> Low, 50.

<sup>529</sup> Edwin Lee, 122.

and the stage collapsed, forcing Marshall and his guests to flee, the event could most certainly be classified as a failure. As Low has argued, “UK parliamentarians were undoubtedly convinced that subversion was indeed threatening a helpless SLF (Labour Front) government”.<sup>530</sup>

When the all-party constitutional talks were held in London, Marshall's insistence that Singapore be granted full independence which, most importantly, would include complete control over internal security, the British representatives balked. Given the current strength of the radical forces which has been fostered under Marshall, Britain was in no position to offer a package of full sovereignty which could endanger their interests if the appropriate actors could not be controlled and forced out of the political arena. As Low has stated with regard to the British position, “The strategic importance of Singapore combined with the serious threat and the unstable political situation...make it impossible for Her Majesty's government to concede complete independence in normal commonwealth pattern.”<sup>531</sup>

Britain had been willing to offer sovereignty up to the point of retaining control over internal security and the ability to revoke the constitution however Marshall was unwilling to accept what he, and also the left, saw as fundamentally colonial designs.<sup>532</sup> It is essential to note that one participant in the all-party conference who had been willing to accept the British offer was Lee Kuan Yew.<sup>533</sup> From this point on, Lee's own double game began. As has been previously stated, while Lee had presented himself as a champion of political freedoms to the masses, particularly to the labour unions through his own representations of them, behind closed doors in the company of more conservative politicians and Whitehall, he had shown himself willing to sacrifice these more liberal aspects of his proposals to achieve independence more quickly and, more importantly, to consolidate his and his party's chances

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<sup>530</sup> Low, 58.

<sup>531</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>532</sup> Drysdale, 150; Bloodworth, 208.

<sup>533</sup> Edwin Lee, 124.

of being favoured by the British as the leader and the party to take power once independence was finally granted. As Edwin Lee and Trocki both state, Lee Kuan Yew had made several inroads with key British statesmen during the conference and had found himself becoming rather popular. Not only did these officials find Lee at home with British ways but, through his willingness to co-operate with them on issues pertaining to their interests in a would-be post-colonial Singapore while simultaneously maintaining the confidence of the Singaporean left who had flocked to his party, they had discovered Lee to be an astute politician who could contain the imminent threat from the island's radicals.<sup>534</sup>

For the time being however, Lee would remain in his role as an anti-colonial rebel-rouser to continue with the solidification of the People's Action Party. He would soon be provided with a golden opportunity to do just that as a result of the much sterner actions of the next Chief Minister, Lim Yew Hock.

### **Carrying a Big Stick**

After failing to secure *merdeka* for Singapore, Marshall resigned as he had promised to and Lim Yew Hock, who had been Marshall's deputy, took power on 7 June 1956. In terms of the compatibility of interests between Lim Yew Hock and the radical forces active in Singapore, it has to be said that anything resembling a mutual understanding was nowhere to be found throughout Lim's tenure. For certain, Marshall's failure to secure a new and favourable constitutional arrangement vis-à-vis the British as a result of security concerns provided the impetus for Lim to attempt to rid Singapore of all the unwanted elements – radical students, militant workers, communist members and sympathizers – that the British viewed as threatening. Marshall's failure and the British insistence that security would be essential for any granting of sovereignty thus had served as a mechanism of certification,

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<sup>534</sup> Ibid; Trocki, *Singapore*, 124.

pushing the government and the radical forces away from compromise and towards an antagonism that would satisfy British demands. As a result, democratic organization, including radical democratic activity would to come to suffer a harsh fate. According to Drysdale, the formula for Lim Yew Hock was quite simple: “get rid of the radical forces and security would be allowed.”<sup>535</sup> As Trocki has suggested, “Lim was only too willing to work with the British. He took quick steps to cripple the labour unions and to quell the Chinese students. A new wave of arrests and detentions followed and the scope for open political action was again decreased.”<sup>536</sup>

One question that is imperative to answer is why the British were able to allow such a purge (one which was fairly long in duration, lasting from 18 September to 27 October) when they had been careful not to conduct their own purge under Marshall for fear of radicalization. One reason for this is that the British had found their man to do it for them. Though many in Singapore would view Lim Yew Hock as nothing more than a puppet of the British, a local leader engaging in repressive activity could be framed as being more legitimate. More importantly however was the colonialists' newfound faith in Lee Kuan Yew and his ability to handle the radical left which had, in large part, come under the PAP's umbrella. Whereas under Marshall the British had worried that a shift in the electorate further to the left would be nothing short of a disaster for the upkeep of their strategic and commercial interests, with Lee's PAP increasingly looking like the anti-colonial party that the masses would turn to, the consequences of allowing Lim Yew Hock to crack down on the radical leftists were not so grave.

Though often the arrest and detention of antagonists can result in the interests of *active* opponents becoming compatible through the re-establishment of one set of actors' subordinate position, thus allowing for the continuation of radical democratic activity, this

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<sup>535</sup> Drysdale, 153.

<sup>536</sup> Trocki, *Singapore*, 121.

scenario did not immediately occur under the Lim Yew Hock government. Instead, during the brief period of his rule, the arrest and detention of certain radicals acted as a mechanism of activation as opposed to deactivation as such crackdowns shifted the identities of previously moderate opponents of the government into fervent ones who were, in turn, willing to take to the street, threaten the government further, and provoke more repression. As Bloodworth describes it, “the purge began on 18 September when seven leading left-wing activists were picked up – six of them for banishment to China – and the Singapore Women's Federation was deregistered along with a Chinese Brass Gong Musical Society that had been making too much noise of the wrong kind.”<sup>537</sup> Along with this, three middle school teachers were detained as well as two members of the executive committee of the Singapore Chinese Middle School Student Union (SCMSSU).

Immediately, these initial assaults on the radical post-colonial forces garnered a massive response from other groups of sympathetic workers and students who wished to demonstrate their opposition to both “the British and the shameless colonial stooge.”<sup>538</sup> Ninety-five unions with 700 delegates met at a civil rights convention organized by union activist Jamit Singh. As Bloodworth states however, despite this appeal made by the people, “Lim Yew Hock and his ministers were not to be deflected from their mission to convince the British that Singapore would be safe in their hands.”<sup>539</sup> Thus, despite protests, more were arrested including four militant members of the SCMSSU<sup>540</sup>. As for the Chinese middle schools, two teachers were fired for having instigated their pupils and 142 students were put on a list for expulsion from the middle schools. On 24 September, Lim took the fateful step of reversing Marshall's earlier decision and dissolved the SCMSSU. This was followed by a further assault on the radical associations connected with the students, including the

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<sup>537</sup> Bloodworth, 215; Lee Kuan Yew, 124.

<sup>538</sup> Turnbull, 265.

<sup>539</sup> Bloodworth, 121.

<sup>540</sup> Turnbull, 265.

Singapore Primary School Teachers' Association and the Singapore Chinese School Parents' Association.<sup>541</sup>

This belligerence on the part of the government had the immediate effect of propelling the middle school students occupying the schools on 11 October. Just as they had done before, the students readied themselves for a siege. In order to support a long-term camp-in to oppose Lim Yew Hock's attacks on labour, the Middle Road unions, the bus workers, and sympathetic farmers raised money for the students' act of resistance while providing them with "sugar, biscuits, soft drinks, vegetables and rice."<sup>542</sup> In further acts of solidarity, sympathy strikes were undertaken by the unions "under the common principle of preserving human rights" and 2000 middle school students walked out of their own schools to widen the base of the anti-government forces' support.<sup>543</sup> To increase pressure on Lim Yew Hock, on 22 October militant students from the two main Chinese high schools spread themselves across the island to protest in front of the gates of other schools.

While the anti-government stance was being diffused, pushing the two sides away from a compromise, Lim was standing firm with regard to his task of putting actors hostile to Britain's interests out of operation. The government continued with its closing down of space for political organization by banning all cultural associations affiliated with the middle schools and arrested eight members who headed these groups. Most threatening to the prospect of continued radical democratic activity in the short-term was Lim's suggestion that the police would be utilized to end the students' occupation. With the anti-government mobilization having grown to the extent that Lim's plans could be jeopardized by a further radicalization of the workers and the students, the government's tolerance for the radical democratic activity of students and their sympathizers was wearing thin. In reaction to this

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<sup>541</sup> Huang, 191; Chin, 64; Turnbull, 265.

<sup>542</sup> Bloodworth, 217.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid

impending act of coercion, the students created barricades out of their school chairs and desks and, in doing so, faced a small scuffle with the police.<sup>544</sup>

This particular episode of contention reached its tipping point on 24 October after a PAP rally in support of the students at Beauty World amusement park on Bukit Timah Road. While the rally, attended by supportive unionists had initially been mild, particularly as it had not “stepped into” any area deemed threatening to the government, when hundreds of more militant demonstrators were transported to the students' protest site at Chung Cheng High School in a demonstration of strength and likewise, capacity, Lim felt sufficiently threatened to have the police move in on the students and workers<sup>545</sup>. From the moment the police closed in on the protestors, the state of affairs which could clearly be described as radical democratic shifted to one of antagonism – first of attempted repression and then war in the street. As Yeo and Lau document, 4000 assembled students were swiftly attacked by the police.<sup>546</sup> With the supporters of the students on site, the confrontation outside of the school on Goodman Road erupted. Violence spread throughout the city with workers and students fighting with the police in the street and several public buildings, including the Tanjong Katong post office and the Geylang police station, were attacked.<sup>547</sup> As Turnbull has described, the police counter-attacked, traffic stopped, buses and cars were stoned by protestors, tear gas and batons were utilized by the officers, police cars were turned over and set alight, and the rioting spread all the way north to Rochor Road.<sup>548</sup>

At this point, for fear of entirely losing control of the situation, Lim Yew Hock and his cabinet with the clear backing of the British increased the intensity of repression on the radical forces active in the street. After a curfew had been implemented throughout the night, by morning “army helicopters and armoured cars took up pre-arranged assignments” with

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<sup>544</sup> Ibid, 218.

<sup>545</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, 126.

<sup>546</sup> Yeo and Lau, 136.

<sup>547</sup> Drysdale, 156.

<sup>548</sup> Turnbull, 266.

military roadblocks planted and riot squads on-call throughout the city.<sup>549</sup> With the extra manpower as a result of the inclusion of British coercive forces, the government and their British backers seized the opportunity to end the student occupation. Police surrounded the two schools and offered the students ten minutes to evacuate. When the students failed to comply, they broke through the barricades and tossed in tear gas and smoke bombs to force the students into surrender. In an effort to avenge the fate of the students, the union mobilized more of their associated labourers for a general strike. Bloodworth explains that this strike was of massive proportions, involving 24,000 busmen and factory workers and 10,000 employees of the naval base union. Unfortunately for the unions, the imposition of a daylong curfew reinforced “with tight police control at key junctions and helicopters overhead fitted with loudspeakers ensured that the government kept them in check.”<sup>550</sup> By the end of the episode 13 had died, 123 were injured, and more than 1000 were arrested.<sup>551</sup> In terms of physical destruction, 70 cars were damaged, two schools lay razed, and two police stations were ravaged.<sup>552</sup>

Furthermore, as a consequence of the government's overwhelmingly superior capacity, in large part due to the certification of the British, Lim Yew Hock was able to capitalize on the violent episode and detain a large number of political actors that had been identified as dangerous radicals, fundamentally threatening to British interests. As Edwin Lee has explained, “between September and November 1956, 300 activists were arrested and 10 key organizations were banned.”<sup>553</sup> In terms of the most crucial consequence of this purge, the vast majority of these arrests and detentions involved elements within the major opposition civil society groups, including the People's Action Party, after the street confrontations in October. Lee Kuan Yew argues in his memoirs that “the riots, arson, and

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<sup>549</sup> Drysdale, 155; Bloodworth, 219-220.

<sup>550</sup> Turnbull, 266; Lee Kuan Yew, 126.

<sup>551</sup> Drysdale, 157, Bloodworth, 220.

<sup>552</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, 129.

<sup>553</sup> Edwin Lee, 137.

bloodshed had given the government reason to arrest all their main targets within the next 24 hours.”<sup>554</sup> In terms of the organizations which faced deregistration were the Farmers' Association, the Women's Association and, most critical of all, Lim Chin Siong's Factory and Shop Workers' Union. Indeed, it was the unions that suffered the most from Lim Yew Hock's purge. After the incidents of October, a total of 74 unions were raided by the police. The result of these incursions was the rounding up of some of Singapore's most competent radical leaders, all who, whether having links to the MCP or not, were viewed as dangerous to the vision of Singapore put forth by the British, Lim Yew Hock, and, despite his appeals to the left, Lee Kuan Yew. Among the Middle Road union leaders arrested and subsequently imprisoned were Lim Chin Siong, Fong Swee Suan, Devan Nair, James Puthuchery, Sandra Woodhull, and Chian Chian Thor.<sup>555</sup>

As a result of these developments, radical democratic activity was able to continue in Singapore but only off the back of significant purges and crackdowns which greatly weakened the degree of radicalism and militancy of anti-government forces and fundamentally relegated them to a subordinate position in relation to both the Lim Yew Hock government and the colonialists. Once again, the ability to demonstrate one's equality was only made possible through an arrangement of power in the polity which was fundamentally unequal.

### **Moving Towards Merdeka**

The story of the next several years was not one of repressing radical democratic actors but rather of power struggles both within and between political parties for the extension of influence within the constitutional arrangements of politics normally, if incorrectly, defined. Given the previous discussion of the less than democratic tactics utilized by several actors

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<sup>554</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, 127.

<sup>555</sup> Huang, 191; Edwin Lee, 138.

when playing the political game in Singapore, it almost goes without saying that though the goal of various rising stars in the political scene at this period was political power or influence within the constitutional arrangement of power, this does not mean the various rising stars involved were unprepared to use undemocratic means. Indeed, while liberal democratic forms of legitimation gradually increased, undemocratic means of containing opposition and shoring up support grew in tandem. The effects of such methods of control would do much to alter the circumstances that determined whether radical democratic forms of politics could continue or not.

For example, following the purge and crackdown enacted by Lim Yew Hock, radical democratic activity was able to continue in opposition to the government which now had a history of violent repression behind it. In large part, this was the combined result of the Labour Front needing to appear as democratic as possible in the eyes of the electorate and the serious incapacitation of the left post-purge. For the radical anti-colonial forces, regrouping and rebuilding was a top priority. By all accounts, such redevelopment happened quickly. New unions such as the Singapore General Employees Union (SGEU) replaced dissolved ones such as Lim Chin Siong's SFSWU and a “second team” of left-wing PAP members replaced the “first team” of militant party leaders who were detained by Lim Yew Hock in the purge.<sup>556</sup>

The fact that the PAP as a whole was not banned and the entirety of its membership not rounded up was telling. Though the party faced criticism, particularly in the English language press, for inciting the students against the government and for being nothing more than a communist front organization, the British knew full well that the radical electorate would swing further left after Lim Yew Hock alienated working-class Chinese voters with the purge. Since the PAP still maintained the support of the radicalized sectors and since the

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<sup>556</sup> Edwin Lee, 138.

British had come to trust Lee Kuan Yew as a reliable ally, the British could not have permitted the disbanding of the PAP in its entirety for fear of losing its buffer between themselves and the radical ground forces.<sup>557</sup>

As for Lim Yew Hock's rationale for not detaining Lee Kuan Yew and the other PAP moderates, though many have historically argued that there had been no collaboration between Lee and Lim on this or later purges and that Lim was simply marching to the beat of the British drum, newly released information based on previously classified British intelligence suggests that Lim and Lee had agreed on the need to dampen the strength of the radical forces in Lee's party to ensure the furthering of the constitutional talks with Britain and, eventually, merger with Tunku Abdul Rahman's more conservatively configured Malaya.<sup>558</sup>

To the public however, Lee had been careful not to show himself selling out the party's anti-colonial, socialist vision in order to maintain the left's support. As Drysdale has stated with regard to the PAP's precarious situation, "it was imperative to organize people so that they were on your side; they would only rally to your side if they were convinced you were committed to social revolution."<sup>559</sup> As such, the PAP continued to portray itself as the champion of the workers and the students through the denunciations of the LF government, their alternative proposals, and their expressed opposition to Lim's detentions which they described as colonial and reactionary.

More cracks within the ranks of the PAP began to show however when Lee more clearly exposed the double game he was playing by agreeing to the constitutional proposals

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<sup>557</sup> Ibid

<sup>558</sup> Geoff Wade, "Operation Coldstore: A Key Event in the Creation of Modern Singapore" in *The 1963 Operation Coldstore in Singapore: Commemorating Fifty Years*, eds. Poh Soo Kai, Tan Kok Fang, and Hong Lysa (Petaling Jaya and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia Strategic Information and Research Centre and Pusat Sejarah Rakyat, 2013): 18.

<sup>559</sup> Drysdale, 163.

laid down by the British in 1957.<sup>560</sup> At this point, with the security situation more favourable to the British than it had been under Marshall, Lim and a new All Party Delegation had agreed to a new constitution which granted what was later described as “three-quarters independence”.<sup>561</sup> Despite the delegation's assertion that progress had been made, the constitution did not substantially diverge from the arrangements Marshall had rejected before the purges. Though the assembly would be expanded and composed of completely elected members and the strength of the Chief Minister and his cabinet would be enhanced, including increased control over internal security, foreign affairs were to remain in British hands and the constitution could still be repealed from London. Moreover, an Internal Security Council composed of 3 Singaporeans, 3 Britons, and 1 Malayan – who was given the final vote in anticipation of Singapore's future reunion with the peninsula – would preside over those internal security issues understood to be emergencies in the eyes of the participating parties. Furthermore, anyone who had been arrested for subversive activities would be unable to run in the constitution's initiating election in 1959.<sup>562</sup>

While Lee Kuan Yew had agreed to this arrangement, the left wing of his party as well as the re-emerging supporting unions were clearly disturbed, displaying their displeasure by not attending the celebratory rallies when the all party team returned home.<sup>563</sup> For the radicals, such a constitution was an insult to the idea of Singaporeans being able to determine their own political and socio-economic future, as it provided the British and the British-aligned forces an overabundance of reserve power to ensure that their own arrangements were maintained.

Though it was later chastised by the “first team” of PAP radicals from their cells in Changi prison, it was Lee Kuan Yew and the moderates' acceptance of this proposal that

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<sup>560</sup> Turnbull, 266; Lee, 139.

<sup>561</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, 132.

<sup>562</sup> Yeo and Lau, 137.

<sup>563</sup> Bloodworth, 231.

pushed the “second team” of PAP radicals to attempt to take control of the central executive of the PAP.<sup>564</sup> As a result of a faulty internal election system whereby anyone with a membership card could vote for the executive, the “second team” of radical PAP members, who had strong links with the unions, brought in hundreds of workers with unauthorised membership cards to vote out the current executive dominated by Lee Kuan Yew and the moderates. When the left managed to force out three of the moderates in top positions, though not Lee Kuan Yew, and bring the share of party executive members to a draw – 5 for the moderates and 5 for the radicals – Lee Kuan Yew made a strategic decision of resigning from the party executive, leaving the party in the hands of the radicals and withdrawing the moderate shell that the PAP had provided the radical left with.<sup>565</sup>

Unable to tolerate an opposition party (and in all likelihood, governing party after the next election) in the hands of actors whose interests were fundamentally incompatible with Lim Yew Hock and his backers, Lim enacted a second purge on the PAP's “second team” executive through the arrest and detention of its affiliates who were stationed in their union headquarters on Middle Road.<sup>566</sup> Once again, the strength and capacity of the left had been deteriorated through repressive measures and, once again, radical democratic actions – namely, protests against the arrests – were tolerated as a result of this incapacity.

In terms of party politics and those waging the so-called constitutional struggle, Lim Yew Hock's second purge allowed Lee Kuan Yew to suspiciously retake control of the party, one which he found hollowed out of its radical left-wing leaders after two successive and successful purges by his supposed nemesis Lim. Though Lee Kuan Yew has stated in his memoirs that he did not owe the Chief Minister anything for ridding his party of the biggest competitors to his rule and to his vision of a post-colonial Singapore, several commentators have suggested that Lee knew very well that a crackdown on the radical forces within his

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<sup>564</sup> Mauzy and Milne, 40.

<sup>565</sup> Ibid

<sup>566</sup> Drysdale, 182.

own party would be beneficial for maintaining his leadership, future rule, and vision for the country and that leaving the “communists” out in the open under Lim was the ideal way for this to happen.<sup>567</sup> Once again, more recent sources drawing from the archives of British intelligence suggest that Lim and Lee had, during one of the All Party constitutional meetings, come to an understanding on this issue.<sup>568</sup> To the masses however, Lee continued to play the same double game he had started playing during Marshall's Chief Ministership. Rather than suggesting that the arrests were a necessity, once again the PAP presented them as anti-labour, undemocratic, and reactionary.

With the 1959 elections around the corner and new citizenship laws having expanded the electorate and thus the number of working-class Chinese voters immensely, the PAP, with their strong links to this sector, was in pole position to take political power. By campaigning on the basis of freedom of the detainees - many of whom were popular heroes with the workers and students – the PAP furthered its chances of securing victory in the election. Radical democratic actions thus, like demonstrations to demand the release of the prisoners, could be co-opted for the PAP's election purposes. As Ong Chit Chung has argued, the PAP's vertical connections greatly facilitated this process of diffusion. According to him, “in terms of mass mobilization the PAP had greater manpower because of the large pod of voluntary helpers from the trade unions and Chinese schools.”<sup>569</sup>

Furthermore, along with their progressive program of a greater share for the workers, a reformed education system, and a commitment to solving the housing problem, there were several other factors that propelled the PAP into government-to-be position. First and foremost was the popularity of the municipal government under the PAP's Ong Eng Guan who was elected to the mayoral position in 1957. As a firebrand with a gift of rhetoric, Ong

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<sup>567</sup> Ibid

<sup>568</sup> Wade, 18.

<sup>569</sup> Ong Chit Chung. “The 1959 Singapore General Election.” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* Vol 6 No 1 (1975): 80.

had been loved by the workers in cramped and crumbling Chinatown for his anti-colonial speeches and populist approaches to service provision which put him directly in touch with his voters. Though the municipal government of Ong had not been well administered and had also had the effect of scaring several foreign businessmen away who feared what might happen to them if the PAP took power nationally, the party had been a success in the eyes of a large part of the electorate.<sup>570</sup>

Also, as Ong Chit Chung has argued, the PAP did not merely present itself as a populist party in the run-up to general election of 1959 and rather had put together a program that was more comprehensive and pragmatic than any other party. A path for industrialization was clearly sketched out and some socialist ideas, such as the nationalization of existing industries, were rejected for the purposes of maintaining desperately needed foreign capital. The “politics of the rice bowls” in which the PAP was engaging was attractive as it not only promised redistribution but also development through social transformation.<sup>571</sup> Compared to the parties who had no clear ideas about transforming Singapore including, particularly, the LF government, who had also been caught taking a bribe from the Americans in an effort to maintain the status quo, the PAP's electoral victory was all but assured.<sup>572</sup>

### **The People's Action Party and its Discontented**

When the PAP did win the election in a landslide, capturing 43 of the 51 seats, Singapore was changed forever. Holding political power from this year onward, the effect that the PAP would come to have on Singapore was immense. As some have argued, the PAP and its leader Lee Kuan Yew have become inseparable from the modern “Singapore Story” itself.<sup>573</sup> For scholars of the city-state, the 1960s are understood to be crucial years as many of

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<sup>570</sup> Ibid, 83.

<sup>571</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>572</sup> Ibid, 79-80.

<sup>573</sup> Ernest Koh Wee Song, “Ignoring History from Below: People's History in the Historiography of

the important developments which would stay with Singapore right up until the present occurred during the PAP's first decade in power. For our purposes, this is no different as the PAP's coming to power marked, first, the return of significant radical democratic actions against the government and second, as their tenure stretched on, radical democracy's disappearance through an effective closure orchestrated by the PAP.

The reason for the return of radical democratic activity after three years in which major political manoeuvres were conducted at the party level, was a predictable split between the PAP's moderate leaders who, in their eyes, pursued more pragmatic policy options to ensure economic development and their left-wing supporters who became disillusioned with the PAP's insistence on capitalist development, merger into a conservative and “neocolonial” Malaysia, and the PAP's attempts to co-opt civil society. As we will see however, while radical democratic activity was able to thrive between 1959 and 1963 due to the PAP's inability to come down hard on the left for fear of alienating its own support base, by 1963 the PAP moderates had succeeded in winning much of the citizenry over as a result of steady economic progress, improvement in workers' conditions and the success of the housing program. As a result of these successes, the PAP faced little resistance to its co-optation of large segments of civil society through PAP-aligned unions and associations. As such, although the interests of former antagonists were made compatible, the majority of disputes between the government and civil society came to be channeled through fundamentally inegalitarian government-sanctioned bodies and thus did not take the form of a radical democracy's “stepping out”. This on its own of course was not enough to end the possibility of radical democracy. However the incapacitation of the left – both in terms of supporters and institutions – that came as a result of these identity shifting techniques provided the PAP with

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Singapore,” *History Compass* Vol 5 No 1 (2007): 12.

the opportunity to shut down its opposition, both through sweeps and street repression, without fear of reprisal.

This type of repression on an incapacitated left would continue throughout the decade and render radical democratic activity an impossibility. This is of particular intrigue after the 1963 Operation Cold Store purge of the left and the several episodes of repression that followed. Though the left had been incapacitated as a result of the co-optation of what was formerly a radical civil society by the PAP, it was in the interest of the government to crack down on the leftists as, according to their Malayan certifiers, it was the only way that Singapore could have gained entry to and maintained its position within Malaysia.

After the Malaysian experiment had ended for Singapore in 1965 however, Lee Kuan Yew no longer had any external government certifying his actions and the party no longer had any interests threatened by radical forces on the ground. Indeed, if the leftist forces had been incapacitated before Coldstore, the rounding up of around 150 of its most important and able leaders left it as a shell of its former self. As a crucial observation for our inquiry into the necessary circumstances for radical democracy, though the capacity of the left would become diminished to the point whereby they were no longer threatening to the PAP's interests and clearly in a subordinate position, the PAP, as a matter of principle, would not permit any opposition to its decisions outside of official channels. As opposed to a reaction against democratic challenges to its immediate interests, the PAP closed down opposition out of a lack of faith in democracy being able to secure its *long-term interests* including social peace, communitarian organization under technocratic leadership, and economic growth.<sup>574</sup> Although by the mid-1960s, this vision was not being substantially threatened, particularly as a result of their exit from Malaysia and the “siege mentality” this put most Singaporeans in, as well as the successes of co-optation previously mentioned, the PAP repressed those who

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<sup>574</sup> Trocki, *Singapore*, 129.

were deemed to be potentially threatening to these long-term interests. As previously stated, given their ideological and institutional hegemony as a result of the material benefits they were able to secure, such repression was able to occur without ever upsetting their hold on the institutions – civil society groups and the coercive apparatus – needed for radical democracy to have a fighting chance under an undemocratic regime.

What this means for our inquiry is the fact that long-term interests matter. Whether or not immediate interests are fundamentally threatened by a set opposition actors at a given juncture, if one side has no commitment to true opposition for fear that it could later upset the apple cart and, further, maintains the capacity to ensure that it only exists for the most fleeting of moments before the guns are brought in, then sustained radical democratic activity as the theorists wish to see it is not possible. In this way, Singapore is not unique since other contemporary and historical single-ideology authoritarian and totalitarian regimes with a high capacity have managed to make any form of radical democratic opposition very difficult. What is unique about this case however is how *complete* political space in Singapore was closed down by the PAP after political opposition had been so vibrant. Indeed when repression was used on those elements it could not co-opt in the mid-1960s onward, the PAP had no reason to worry that it had lost the consent of civil society and that its rule was coming to be challenged. Despite some very real legal limitations on political mobilization, the absence of a sustained large-scale radical democratic movement against the PAP in the late 1960s and beyond, particularly within an atmosphere of relatively little repressive violence speaks to the effectiveness of this closure. With ideological rigidity and high capacity through a near complete control of civil society, the PAP ensured that radical democracy was nearly impossible.

The closure enacted by the PAP was conducted in a relatively short time period, being quite complete when Singapore exited Malaysia in 1965. Even before their election, the PAP

had given some indication that political plurality was not something high on their agenda. Though they had promised to release the left-wing detainees which had been arrested in Lim Yew Hock's purge, Lee Kuan Yew only released those of political importance and forced these selected leaders to sign a document entitled “the ends and means of socialism” which committed them to the PAP cause as a condition of their release. This however did not deter them from attempting to reorganize and redirect the unions and other associations they had been leading before the arrests.<sup>575</sup>

The moderate PAP leaders however were unwilling to let this unfold. Though Lee Kuan Yew and the moderates had spoken of democratic socialism in their appeals to the masses, the path to economic development that they wished to pursue involved controlling the workforce to increase production, austerity to increase savings for growth, and a policy of “industrial peace with justice”, all for the purpose of attracting multinational capital to state-directed projects.<sup>576</sup> As Turnbull has argued, “the immediate problem was to achieve financial confidence, and strong government was needed to introduce a planned economy, to take a firm action to curb population growth, and to discipline workers.”<sup>577</sup> Fernandez and Loh state that some of the key pieces of legislation which looked to turn the unions into “partners of the establishment” were amendments to the trade unions ordinance which gave the government “vast powers to deregister unions deemed to be acting against workers’ interests.”<sup>578</sup> As part and parcel of this legislation, unions would also have no right to appeal. Furthermore, in order to curb the number of strikes, the PAP moderates had included provisions for binding collective bargaining and arbitration processes – a move that shifted power away from labour to government appointed mediators. A rule against federating was also designed to ensure that issues did not become taken up across trades, thus limiting the scope for sympathy or

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<sup>575</sup> Edwin Lee, 151 and 161.

<sup>576</sup> Turnbull, 276.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid

<sup>578</sup> Fernandez and Loh, 216.

politically oriented stoppages. For the left, who had once viewed Lee as the guarantor of their labour rights, at this point began to have serious doubts about his leadership which was bringing Singapore down a path of capitalist development and authoritarian controls on organization.<sup>579</sup>

As time passed during the PAP's first several months in office, further criticisms were being launched at Lee from the left, within his own party and beyond, as a result of Lee's lurching to the right upon becoming Chief Minister. Among the issues that many radicals were gravely concerned about were the party's top-down decision-making process, a failure to respect freedoms of the press, speech and assembly partly due to the imposition of the Societies Act which prohibited organizations from "crossing the boundary into political matters," and the failure to release all of the political detainees.<sup>580</sup> These, combined with the issues surrounding the government's new direction in dealing with organized labour, made many on the left in Singapore become weary of the party they had given their support to in hopes of political and socio-economic emancipation.

Initially, however, this discontent did not have the effect of propelling the radical forces currently behind the party in power into radical democratic action against their own party. For a large number of Singaporeans, Lee's immediate efforts to solve the longest lingering and most pressing problems, including the vertical income divide, the housing shortage, and the underfunding of education, demonstrated that the PAP was indeed living up to its promises and working in the people's interest.<sup>581</sup>

The debate surrounding merger would change all of this, drawing a sharp line between supporters of two very different paths Singapore could take on its way to being a constituent state of the new Malaysia; one of economic and political pragmatism and the other of rights, internal sovereignty, and socialism. Unfortunate for the PAP moderates lining

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<sup>579</sup> Ibid, 274.

<sup>580</sup> Bloodworth, 298-305.

<sup>581</sup> Edwin Lee, 166 and 174 and 176.

Lee Kuan Yew's cabinet, the debate surrounding merger – the issue which would go on to launch the left back into radical democratic action and threaten their rule – stemmed from its failure, or lack of willingness, to resolve the other aforementioned issues of labour rights, democracy, and control of internal security that had already created discontent among Singapore's left.

Although all progressive parties in Singapore had campaigned with an expressed commitment to an eventual merger with Malaya, knowing that Singapore's viability as an independent nation-state was highly doubtful and that Malaya was a natural fit given their historical and cultural connections, no-one had expected serious talk of merger so quickly. The reason for merger to so suddenly appear on the radar occurred as a result of Malaya's leader, Tunku Abdul Rahman growing increasingly worried about the rise of the radical left in Singapore which could potentially create a “Cuba” that conservatively aligned Malaya would have to deal with just years after fighting the MCP in its own jungles. The event that triggered this worry from the Tunku was the by-election victory of Ong Eng Guan, former mayor of the municipal government, who had defected from the PAP to run against them on a platform that directly appealed to many of the left's post-1959 concerns.<sup>582</sup> Though no leftist himself, many commentators suggest that the populist leader resented the PAP and Lee Kuan Yew for having used his own popularity in the municipal government for their electoral purposes without providing adequate compensation in terms of his post-1959 cabinet position. As a result, Ong had been willing to use whatever method was available to have his vengeance and thus jumped on the leftist bandwagon when the opportunity presented itself. The consequences of this proved to be enormous as Ong's victory at Hong Lim provided the Tunku with the belief that Lee Kuan Yew was losing control of his party and that, therefore, merger would need to

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<sup>582</sup> Wade, 24.

be sped up for the purposes of containing Singapore's radical left.<sup>583</sup> This was also the case for the British who viewed the Tunku's conservative political and economic framework as ideal for the protection of their commercial and economic interests.<sup>584</sup> Most importantly however, the news of the Tunku's newfound desire for merger was also music to the ears of Lee Kuan Yew. Not only, as Drysdale states, was the common market with Malaya “the cornerstone to future industrialization” but subsequent merger with the federation and containment of the left would ensure the continuation of Lee's own rule during a time when his popularity with the radical forces which had pushed him to power had begun to slip.<sup>585</sup>

For Singapore's radical left however, such a merger that would place them at the mercy of the conservative Tunku and the continued undemocratic and illiberal Internal Security regulations would be nothing short of a neo-colonial plot to suppress the left for a Malayan social order which they viewed as semi-feudal and as guaranteeing the continuation of exploitation at the hands of foreign capitalists. As such, the first occurrence of a radical democratic “stepping out” by the Singaporean left against the PAP occurred with the “Big Six Unions” along with 42 smaller ones protesting the PAP's merger proposal and putting forth a call for the abolition of the Internal Security Council and what they described as “genuinely full internal self-government”.<sup>586</sup> Included in this were demands for the release of all outstanding political detainees, the allowance of union federations, and the “liberal granting of citizenship and democratic rights”.<sup>587</sup>

Since Lee Kuan Yew and the moderates were certain about moving towards a merger that were acceptable to the Tunku and the British, the left-wing of the PAP were prepared once again to utilize an inside-outside approach, “ready to make a bid for the leadership of

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<sup>583</sup> Sunil S. Amrith, “International and Political Pluralism in Singapore, 1950-1963” in *Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-War Singapore*, eds. Michael D. Barr and Carl A. Trocki (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008): 46.

<sup>584</sup> Drysdale 246.

<sup>585</sup> Ibid; Wade, 20.

<sup>586</sup> Drysdale, 263.

<sup>587</sup> Edwin Lee, 181.

the party by bringing the government to its knees, constitutionally through parliament and by strike action through the unions.”<sup>588</sup> In terms of parliamentary means, the PAP radicals fired a warning shot by instructing their followers through associated unions and other organizations to support the former Chief Minister David Marshall who was running against the PAP in a by-election in the Anson constituency on an anti-merger platform. When Marshall won the by-election with the support of the radical forces, the left-wing of the PAP were emboldened in the belief that they could take control of the party and, thus, the government and went so far as to meet the top British official in Singapore, Lord Selkirk, to inquire whether the British would allow the PAP's left-wing to take power constitutionally.<sup>589</sup>

At this point, Lee Kuan Yew had no choice but to attempt to force out the left wing of his party and fight them openly or risk losing control of the PAP to members who had now shown themselves to be enemies. With a confidence motion passing by a slim margin of three votes Lee was able to force out 13 defectors who had shown themselves to be in the anti-PAP-merger camp of Singapore's radical left. With this, a new party, the Barisan Socialis (BS, Socialist Front) was formed with the popular union boss Lim Chin Siong selected as leader.<sup>590</sup> Though Lee Kuan Yew has stated in his memoirs that he was delighted to have broken with the “communists” as they had interfered with the ultimate goal of attaining merger with Malaya, he faced a challenge of pushing through the merger plan via referendum after having lost to the Barisan not only 13 parliamentarians but a large number of grassroots party branches, labour unions, as well as many leaders of the People's Association and Work Brigade which had been initially established by Lee and the other moderate members of the PAP to counter left-wing influence by actors associated with the radical unions and the MCP.<sup>591</sup>

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<sup>588</sup> Drysdale, 272.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid, 182.

<sup>590</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>591</sup> Ibid

The real battle for merger had thus begun. For Lee it was a battle that needed to be fought openly, at least for the time being, despite the fact that the radical left, including many former members of his own party, had shown their vision of Singapore and Malaysia to be entirely hostile to that of Lee. Though the left would now embark on a series of radical democratic mobilisations in what AV Scott has described as an “orgy of strikes, go-slows, sit-downs, etc.,” Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP moderates could not crack down on the radical left for fear of losing more of their mass base and, subsequently the referendum vote and the 1963 election which, if lost to the Barisan, would leave merger dead in the water.<sup>592</sup> As Drysdale states, “the agitation had to be contained by the government in such a way as to ensure that no legitimate charge of police repression could be made by the Barisan Socialis because this would have tainted the government with the charge that its policies in practice were no different from those of Lim Yew Hock or the colonial government.”<sup>593</sup>

As a result of this, with the interest of the PAP and the left being compatible for the time being, radical democratic activity could be sustained in Singapore for what would prove to be the last time. Once again, politically motivated strikes with anti-merger demands engulfed the streets. As Edwin Lee has documented, a total of 96 occurred between July 1961 and January 1962.<sup>594</sup> Turnbull has suggested that in 1962 a total of 160,000 man-days had been lost in a stark contrast to the 26,500 which had been lost in 1959.<sup>595</sup> Furthermore, student agitation had again been used by the left to build a united front against the PAP. Indeed, when the Chinese middle school students boycotted their examinations after the PAP initiated reforms to Malayanize the curriculum – a move which was condemned as reactionary – the left-wing unions and the Barisan Socialis stood by in solidarity, attempting

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<sup>592</sup> Drysdale, 300.

<sup>593</sup> Ibid

<sup>594</sup> Edwin Lee, 185.

<sup>595</sup> Turnbull, 280.

to bridge the students' own vision of a socialist Singapore with their own and condemn the “reactionary political arrangement” towards which the PAP was directing Singapore.

Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP moderates however were extremely adept at handling this radical democratic, anti-merger activity. In a style which reflected tactics utilized by Chief Ministers past and which would come to exemplify the PAP way of doing politics over the next several decades, Lee and his moderate allies in cabinet employed a combination of democratic and undemocratic techniques to shift the identities of opponents away from one of antagonism to one of compatibility and to “nail the communist lie” that only they could represent the masses. In dealing with the anti-merger strikers led by Lim Chin Siong and his break-away Singapore Association of Trade Unions (SATU), rather than sending in the police or troops to end the “orgy” of unrest, the PAP ensured that strikes being conducted by the workers of the government sponsored National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) received a fair deal from their employers, taking the wind out of the sails of the radical unions' arguments that the government was against the interests of the workers. As Fernandez and Loh state, NTUC sponsored strikes between 1961 and 1963 resulted in an average increase of 11% in weekly wage, “making worker believe NTUC was independent of the government and served their interests.”<sup>596</sup> When it came to handling the radical students and their boycotting of their examinations, rather than brining in police, Lee brought in parents whose role was to provide cover for students who wished to write.<sup>597</sup>

Along with appealing to this silent majority, Lee had already enacted some educational reforms to appeal to previously militant students of the 1950s who were now in university. To win over some of the students who had been politically active at the radical Chinese middle schools and who were now studying at the equally radical and MCP influenced Nanyang University, previously denied civil service positions were opened up for

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<sup>596</sup> Fernandez and Loh, 220.

<sup>597</sup> Ibid.

Chinese speaking graduates.<sup>598</sup> Moreover, in an attempt to ameliorate the problem of the Chinese educated only being able to aspire to second-rate jobs, a number of places for Chinese educated students were opened up at the University of Malaya.<sup>599</sup> In terms of spending on education, the PAP had made an astonishing commitment to its overall improvement having increased the education budget from \$600,000 to \$10,000,000.<sup>600</sup>

Education was not the only realm in which the PAP was able to expand its mass appeal and build its hegemony in Singapore. As Turnbull has argued, in terms of the success of the PAP's new housing program, the Housing and Development Board “built as many housing units and shops in its first three years as the Singapore Imperial Trust (the colonial body previously responsible for housing) had constructed in the whole of its 32 year existence.”<sup>601</sup> Along with this, health facilities had improved, a women's charter was enacted, and the economic development plan was ahead of schedule. Quite simply, as Turnbull summarises, “the first few years of self-government brought material benefits to large numbers of people.”<sup>602</sup>

Though the administering of these successful policies via what Antonio Gramsci described as “passive revolution” a large segment of the citizenry found much faith in the direction that the PAP was taking Singapore, as previously stated, Lee's party also utilized some undemocratic and manipulative tactics to bolster support for its merger plan and the essential referendum vote in the summer of 1963. The first of these was Lee Kuan Yew's use of the national airwaves to outline the so-called “communist conspiracy” threatening Singapore. Though we have already discussed the inconsistencies and improbabilities within Singapore's “official history” regarding the extent of communist penetration, at this point, one important note can be added. This is the fact that while Lee Kuan Yew suggested that the

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<sup>598</sup> Edwin Lee, 176.

<sup>599</sup> Ibid, 174.

<sup>600</sup> Turnbull, 284.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid

<sup>602</sup> Ibid

“communists” - the Barisan – were planning on engaging in “violent insurrection” against the state, recently released British intelligence has also shown that not only were the Barisan's direct links to the MCP tenuous, but there was little proof to suggest that members of the Barisan were planning on utilizing pre-orchestrated violent attacks.<sup>603</sup> As Geoff Wade has suggested, the official investigation after the later arrests of dozens of suspected communist subversives produced very little to substantiate this claim.<sup>604</sup> With this said, despite the fact that the MCP was active in Singapore to some extent, it is also the case that, like other political leaders in the Cold War era, Lee Kuan Yew used the “communist bogeyman” as one technique of persuasion to discourage citizens from voting against the PAP's proposal.

The second piece of manipulation that the PAP used to ensure that referendum votes were directed its way was framing of the referendum question itself. As many opposition actors were quick to recognize, the list of possible merger alternatives did not include an option to reject merger altogether. A full discussion of the manoeuvring, rhetorical games, and appeals, including one to the United Nations, which were involved in the referendum question are beyond the scope of this inquiry. At several points, both the PAP and the Barsian incorrectly suggested to the public that each other's merger plans (at this point the Barisan had put forth a proposition of 'full merger in a confederation' with local control of internal security since “no merger” was off the table) could result in a significant number of individuals losing their citizenship upon entry to Malaysia, discouraging potential supporters. While the PAP's plan had been publicly clarified by the Tunku, the Barisan's was not, in part due to their own organizational failures and in part due to not having the Tunku on their side. To counter potential confusion, the Barisan thus advised the public that those who were against the PAP's plan for merger ought to spoil their ballots. As a result of the lack of clarity

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<sup>603</sup> Wade, 33 and 40.  
<sup>604</sup> Ibid, 64.

due to the PAP's manipulation of the referendum ballot and campaign, many analysts stated that the Barisan was indeed placed in a disadvantaged position.<sup>605</sup>

As Drysdale suggests however, the result of the referendum was unclear right up to the date as “huge rallies for both the PAP and BS produced an atmosphere of uncertainty as to how many would cast votes in line with the Barisan's advice.”<sup>606</sup> The results, however attained, were clear. The PAP's merger plan had received 397,626 votes while 144,077 had left their ballots spoiled. As Drysdale goes on to state, it was nothing short of a “decisive victory for Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP”.<sup>607</sup>

In a situation such as this one, it is always difficult to measure how much of one's support was the result of processes of legitimation and how much was the result of manipulation. For the PAP, this did not matter. The result had provided them substantial proof that they no longer required the support of the radical left to ensure their political survival. With the PAP having established their own “non-communist” mass base through a series of identity shifts which were a result of a policy provision, persuasion, and manipulation, they could now rid themselves of “the tiger” that they rode into power and crush those who were directly threatening to their vision of Singapore and Malaysia, and fundamentally, their own hold on political power. Interests were no longer compatible and radical democracy would soon come to an end.

### **Radical Closure**

The closing down of radical democratic activity in Singapore unfolded in three distinct phases. First there was a period in 1963 whereby the PAP repressed its rivals which had been posing a threat to their rule as well as to those other parties who were responsible for stitching together Malaysia – namely, the conservative Malayan elite at the head of the

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<sup>605</sup> Edwin Lee, 200-209.

<sup>606</sup> Drysdale, 311.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid, 312.

United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and the British colonial office. Second, there was the period between late 1963 and 1965 when, as part of Malaysia, the PAP collaborated with the central government's authorities to further repress remaining elements of the Singaporean left who were resisting the imposition of the new Malaysian socio-political order. Finally there was the period between 1965 and 1970 whereby the PAP, though not being significantly threatened by an entirely defeated left, repressed lingering elements of the labour and student movement on the basis of implementing a new national ideology of order, stability, and elite decision making for the long-term interest of economic development.<sup>608</sup>

The beginning of the end for radical democratic politics in Singapore clearly began in 1963 with Operation Coldstore which, on 2 February of that year, involved the arrest and detention of 113 radical left-wing political actors as a result of the combined decision of Malayan, Singaporean, and British leaders.<sup>609</sup> As Geoff Wade has argued, these arrests “essentially eviscerated” the political left in Singapore, leaving “the field open for merger with little dissent, and (removing) the major objection the Tunku held to Singapore merging with the Federation. Above all, it removed key opposition leaders in challenging the PAP in general elections 7 months later.”<sup>610</sup> With the Tunku generally worried about the effect that the radical left could have in the new Malaysia if left to organise, the neutralization of its key members was a precondition for allowing Singapore into the federation. As Wade further demonstrates through the use of previously undisclosed British intelligence documents, Lee Kuan Yew had actually been willing to commit to these detentions in 1962, but only on the condition that Kuala Lumpur would take the blame for the arrests. Lee at this point had been worried about his support base amongst the masses and thus had been unwilling to publicly support the repressive manoeuvre.<sup>611</sup>

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<sup>608</sup> Trocki, 138.

<sup>609</sup> Wade, 15.

<sup>610</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>611</sup> Ibid.

However, once the referendum had shown that the PAP had carried enough of its own support, Lee became willing to attach his name to the measure. When many of the organizations of the Singaporean left declared solidarity with an anti-colonial rebellion in Brunei against the wishes of the British and Malayan leaders who wished to include Brunei as part of Malaysia, Lee Kuan Yew seized the opportunity to crack down on the leftists as dangerous traitors. As such, with the operation going ahead, several key figures who had opposed Lee Kuan Yew and the merger plan were rounded up including 24 members of the Barisan Socialis, 21 union leaders, 7 leaders from the rural associations, 13 members of the student movement, and 5 journalists in the name of protecting Singapore from a “desperate attempt” by the left to further the “communist conspiracy”, a claim that that has never truly been substantiated in court.<sup>612</sup>

Though SATU's May Day rally of that same year was allowed to proceed due to its unthreatening nature, a later attempt in May by sympathizers of the detainees and Barisan members to confront the government over the arrests was met with force. As Bloodworth has described, “200 demonstrators including leaders of the Barisan and relatives of the detainees marched to the Padang...demanding the release of the prisoners.”<sup>613</sup> When the protestors tried to break their way through a police cordon however, a confrontation ensued with bottles and placards being used by the demonstrators and batons by the police. As Wade states, as a result of this action, nine Barisan assemblymen were arrested and charged with attempting to overawe the government by criminal force, unlawful assembly, rioting and assaulting police officers.<sup>614</sup> Space for radical democratic activity was becoming increasingly difficult to find. It was becoming clear that any set of actors, institutionally bound or not, who acted on a *modus vivendi* different from that of the government was finding itself unable to carry on their activities due to government restriction or repression.

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<sup>612</sup> Bloodworth, 400; Poh et al, xvii.

<sup>613</sup> Bloodworth, 403.

<sup>614</sup> Wade, 65.

As punishment for holding up anti-Malaysia banners during a protest brought on by the visit of Japanese delegates prior to the 1963 general election, seven main unions constituting the backbone of SATU were provided with notices of dissolution while three of the largest ones had their bank accounts frozen as a result of the Registrar of Societies accusing them of “engaging in political action” due to their anti-Malaysia stance.<sup>615</sup> We can see here that the circumstances for radical democratic activity were moving from the compatibility of short-term interests to the compatibility of ideology and long-term interests. For those that it could not arrest or detain, the government freely used its power to deregister and dissolve associations that it felt were “stepping into” the realm of politics and threatening its political vision of Singapore in Malaysia or its economic vision of having a compliant workforce for the sake of economic growth. With the left having been defeated in the referendum and severely incapacitated by Operation Coldstore, opponents of the PAP's direction could not muster enough support to fight it. As Turnbull states, “within a few weeks of the formal inauguration of Malaysia, the political situation in Singapore was more firmly controlled than at any time since 1955.”<sup>616</sup>

Some actors however would try and continue the fight after merger with Malaysia and the PAP's election victory in September 1963. Through a combination of the continued popular support that had seen them through the referendum, the weakening of the opposition after Coldstore, and the imposition of several restrictive electoral rules, the PAP comfortably won the general election of 1963.<sup>617</sup> Though it was clear that Lee had established hegemony in Singapore and that his party's interests were no longer being threatened to the same extent as they had once been, the PAP continued to with its efforts to restrict its opposition in collaboration with its parent government in Kuala Lumpur.

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<sup>615</sup> Lee, 244; Bloodworth, 409.

<sup>616</sup> Turnbull, 240.

<sup>617</sup> Lawson, 71.

The first target that Lee Kuan Yew went after was Tan Lark Sye, the chancellor of Nanyang University who was seen by the PAP as the protector of the radical Chinese students and alleged front man of the MCP. Along with the rescinding of Tan's citizenship on 26 September the police were authorised to raid the Nanyang campus, arresting 20 students and alumni associated with the radical left.<sup>618</sup> Huang describes how “the next morning, about 2000 students held an emergency meeting to launch a classroom boycott from 3 October” with another 800 gathering at City Hall to appeal to Lee Kuan Yew on 7 October. With both Lee and the Malaysian government having their sights set on weeding out subversives at the universities, the government initially ignored the protests.<sup>619</sup>

What the government was not willing to ignore was the response of labour to the students' demands. Bloodworth describes how SATU had called a general strike for the purposes of supporting the students and rallying against the impending deregistration of their largest unions.<sup>620</sup> However, mere hours before the strike was due to start on 8 October, the police were sent in to arrest 17 more union leaders including SATU president S.T. Bani in what was labelled operation Pechah.<sup>621</sup> As Bloodworth states, when workers in 105 companies still came out, the steel-helmeted riot squad were on the streets in force to “dissuade the zealous from unwise gestures”, troops were on stand-by and more than 190 people were arrested.<sup>622</sup> The strength of the left-wing forces in Singapore was being chipped away and radical democratic activity was being met head on with repression and detention. As another major blow to the left, all three of SATU's main unions were deregistered. Due to the previous successes of the NTUC in securing increased material benefits for its workers, many labourers “jumped ship” from the deregistered SATU unions to those of the government sponsored NTUC. Fernandez and Loh demonstrate that by the mid-1960s the

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<sup>618</sup> Huang, 192; Bloodworth, 414.

<sup>619</sup> Huang, 192.

<sup>620</sup> Bloodworth, 414.

<sup>621</sup> Ibid, 415; Lee, 244.

<sup>622</sup> Ibid

NTUC had increased its membership from 28,000 to 150,000.<sup>623</sup> The colonial administration's old technique of reducing political autonomy in exchange for material benefits appeared on a mass scale, placing the majority of those who once constituted a radical opposition directly into the hands of the government.

During 1964, the PAP in conjunction with Kuala Lumpur had also eventually manoeuvred to reduce the political autonomy of the students and cracked down heavily on student-led radical democratic activity. Huang states how on 5 June 1964, "a six point accord was swiftly announced, vowing to transform the university into a purely scholarly institution, without any obstruction or influence by any political parties and subversive activities."<sup>624</sup> This was followed up on 27 June by 1000 Malaysian security personnel being brought onto the Nanyang campus to arrest 50 students the Malaysian government accused of being communists.<sup>625</sup> Under pressure from the government, Vice Chancellor Chuang Chu-lin was made to resign after being accused of being a communist and the university underwent a reform, "dismissing more than 100 students, administrative staff and canteen workers."<sup>626</sup>

Despite the repression and detentions that radical actors were facing during this time period, the students committed themselves to further radical democratic activity though each effort could clearly not be sustained for very long. Their pursuit of a socialist Malaya and a politicized university was simply incompatible with the interests of the UMNO and the PAP who believed in a more conservative social order and a depoliticized, functionalist university. With the government's greater capacity, the students would continue to have their stand shut down. As such, when militant Nanyang students once more engaged in a hunger strike and led a protest march to condemn the government's "cleanup" of the university, no discussion or negotiation on the basis of equality followed and the police were again utilized to bring an

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<sup>623</sup> Fernandez and Loh.

<sup>624</sup> Huang, 193.

<sup>625</sup> Ibid

<sup>626</sup> Ibid

end to the demonstration.<sup>627</sup> What followed took, what was by this point, a very familiar pattern to foster demobilization and co-optation. As Huang describes,

“soon after, stern regulatory measures were put in place to confine the organisations and activities of all student bodies within Nantah (Nanyang), such as restricting membership to a particular faculty or department, imposing faculty advisory roles on meetings and publications, and a whole range of penalties from warning letters to expulsions and detentions. However, as part of a two-pronged approach to limiting student political activism, pro-government student bodies were deliberately set up to recruit their own pool of student supporters to serve primarily as monitors.”<sup>628</sup>

Though Huang describes a two-pronged approach, it is clear that a three-pronged approach would best describe this common strategy of the PAP when it came to managing political contention. Indeed, while the first two prongs attempted to regularize the mechanism of co-optation, the third prong was only utilized for those would not defect and whose identity would not shift. As we have seen with the handling of the labour movement, while the first prong consisted of imposing a tight, hierarchical regulatory framework to limit the space for potential outside challenges to the government and channel demands into structures that served a legitimating function, and the second involved providing a set of concessions to dampen the strength of demands and limit the space for potential inside challenges, the third prong was repression of those who “stepped out” of their designated space to contest the order being imposed. The distinction between the closing down of radical democratic activity in Singapore and in the other cases we have analyzed becomes clear when looking at the divergent responses to “stepping out” and “stepping into”. With regard to the other cases, “stepping out” of an assigned space in the name of equality to bring forth a point of contention with those in power was not enough for radical democratic activity to be repressed. This was also the case with the Singapore of the 1950s. As we have seen, only when radical democratic actors “stepped into” an area which directly threatened this power's

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<sup>627</sup> Ibid

<sup>628</sup> Ibid

interests did repression become the response. In Singapore in the mid-1960s however, “stepping out” itself became a sufficient reason for repression to occur. For this reason, since every act of “stepping out” does not necessarily entail immediate interests being threatened, a fact which became evident in Singapore as a result of the clearly established hegemony and overwhelming capacity of the PAP and its certifiers, it must be stated once more that radical democracy can come to an end for the incompatibility of long-term interests, specifically if “stepping out” itself is viewed as unacceptable for the reason that it opens the door to potentially destabilizing forces vis-à-vis the social order and the imperatives of economic development at a later date. This three-pronged approach – regulation and concession (taken together, co-optation) for those “inside” and repression of those “outside” came to dominate Singapore during the independence period and, until very recently with the onset of the so-called “new normal”, had been a key feature of the PAP’s political strategy.

In 1965 Singapore's merger with Malaya came to an abrupt and dramatic end. Throughout the two years, the two entities had been living in an unhappy marriage, with disputes over taxation, representation in the federal assembly, the common market and the industrialization policy, and, most importantly of all, the competition which developed between the PAP and the UMNO and their respective visions for Malaysia. While the Tunku and the UMNO had pressed into Singapore to defend the special privileges of the Malays which they believed were as applicable on the island as they were on the peninsula, the PAP had moved to compete for a share of power in Kuala Lumpur with their “Malaysian Malaysia” concept which looked to dismantle some of the privileges Malays enjoyed in favour of a more multi-cultural civic nationalism. While the former's actions brought race riots to Singapore between Malays and Chinese in 1964, the latter's made Lee Kuan Yew a wanted man on the peninsula and created the conditions for further violence. As a result of

this, the Tunku insisted that Singapore leave the federation – a decision that the PAP leadership accepted, though reluctantly.

Thus on 9 August 1965 Singapore became one of the world's smallest, and least likely, independent states. In terms of domestic politics, the fallout from the Malaysian experiment was far reaching. First of all, as a vulnerable city-state with a tiny internal market and almost no natural resources Singapore was facing many uphill battles. The result of this was the bolstering and proliferation of the PAP's anti-oppositional ideology for the pursuit of economic development if not survival. As Turnbull states,

“The concentration on the economy accounts in large measure for the vigour with which the PAP came to discipline the labour force, for its zealous reinforcement of internal security laws to suppress political instability and for its ruthless opposition to political challengers whose alternative policies threatened to detract from the single-minded pursuit of economic efficiency.”<sup>629</sup>

Though, once again, such action would require a high degree of organization and also a certain degree of violence when opposition did arise in an “outside” radical democratic form, the PAP would have a much easier time in dealing with opposition than they or other Singaporean governments had experienced in the past. In reference to the general outlook of the population in 1967, fuelled by successes like the housing program and the general increase in affluence, Chin states that “it was clear that the mood of the population in 1967 was solidly behind the ruling leadership in its fight for the territorial and economic survival of the republic.”<sup>630</sup> For some, the mechanisms of identity shift and defection from the radical forces as a result of these PAP successes in co-optation helped ensure their dominance as well as their capacity advantage.

Of course, there were several incidents which gave rise to radical democratic activity although, once again they, were efficiently and thoroughly repressed. Radical democracy in

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<sup>629</sup> Turnbull, 240.  
<sup>630</sup> Chin, 64.

Singapore had become nearly impossible. The riots which had taken place in 1964 had contributed to this new state of affairs as it brought further restrictions on public assembly which had initially been introduced by the PAP upon taking power in 1959. Ethnic associations were now restricted by the confines of the Societies Act, unable to put forth any political demand outside of the associational panels and committees established by the PAP. Race riots which occurred in 1969 in Malaysia, though not in Singapore, furthered the acceptance of the PAP's policy just as it furthered the restrictions. Ethnic politics being taken to the street had been made impermissible.<sup>631</sup>

This three-pronged approach which had more recently been applied to ethnic organisations, continued to be tested by students and what remained of the labour movement over the next decades in fits and starts of radical democratic activity that were halted quite squarely at the end of a police baton. In 1967, after important restrictions to the Trade Union Act were implemented that restricted the scope of labour-related issues that could be taken up by the unions, only 3 unions out of 26 asked to participate in a work stoppage actually did so. When only 600 workers of these unions marched on May Day – a number which paled in comparison to the tens of thousands which had participated in such actions less than a decade before, the workers clashed with the police in an act of desperation, leading to an arrest of 46.<sup>632</sup> Drysdale states that by this time, due largely to the growth and redistribution which had come as a result of the PAP's development and labour policies, and as a further sign of successful co-optation and identity shift, most workers had become more interested in working with the government than against it. With the continued support of most workers and little to worry about in terms of a backlash against their disallowance of an independent civil society, the PAP could continue to act upon their anti-oppositional ideology for the sake of perceived long-term interests.

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<sup>631</sup> Trocki, 131.

<sup>632</sup> Drysdale, 400.

In June, further acts of desperation which saw a radicalization of tactics against the PAP were committed by old labour militants and left-wing supporters, including individuals associated with the Barisan who were boycotting parliament in protest over the PAP's manner of ruling since 1963. As Bloodworth describes, “gangs of freedom fighters up to 300 strong” attacked the American Embassy, the Central Fire Station, 3 branches of the PAP, and two police stations “smashing windows, breaking up furniture, tearing out fans, and burning old cars.” Repression and control from one side had clearly given way to bursts of violence on the other. When 500 protesters demonstrated in front of Changi prison days later, the police immediately moved in and made 350 arrests. The radical movement which had provided Singapore with a strong anti-colonial and anti-authoritarian voice in the 1950s and early 1960s had been thoroughly defeated with the support of labour itself. The union-backed 1968 labour laws and the 1971 establishment of the National Wages Council, though contributing to economic growth, drove the nail into the coffin of political autonomy, placing serious restrictions on strikes and then pre-empting them altogether. As symbolic as it was real, the street itself was rendered off-limits for the demonstration of equality, cutting the people off from the place where politics is truly worthy of its name.

The last set of political actors to have their radical democratic activities extinguished were the students of Singapore's tertiary educational institutions, particularly the infamously militant Nanyang University. After separation from Malaysia, as educational reform was deemed necessary to transform the universities and polytechnics into institutions of nation-building and economic growth, the PAP imposed a series of far-reaching changes to ensure an enhanced quality of education, a program which fit the needs of a new “multi-racial” nation-state, and the depoliticization of the campuses to put into practise their anti-oppositional ideology of order and control. The students were to learn that the strategies which had served them well in the past, especially in the Chinese High Schools, would no longer be tolerated.

Thus in late 1965 when the government and the university administrators agreed to implement a program of bilingualism at Nanyang and “massive student demonstrations broke out” with “vehement charges of Anglicization being levelled at the government”, the PAP had little interest in discussion or negotiation. Though for a few months the students engaged in sporadic marches and a boycott of classes and examinations, the government responded with a heavy hand, detaining and expelling large numbers of students.<sup>633</sup>

The following year, two more of the PAP's interventions into the operations of the university brought on another wave of demonstrations and, once again, another wave of repression. Applying to university students across the island, the PAP had implemented a vetting system of “suitability certificates” in order to screen students of their political backgrounds before entering a tertiary educational institution in one of its most infringing attempts at closing down political space on campus. The discontent which arose from this issue was combined with the frustration of Ngee Ann College students who had had their degrees replaced with diplomas on the basis of their not having received a bilingual education. For many students, university autonomy had been placed under attack by a government who was using the institutions for political engineering. As a result of this, the two issues were given a common platform, led by militant students at Nanyang under the banner “Nantah Students for University Autonomy and Students Rights Action Committee”. Huang describes how massive protests were launched in October 1967 with thousands of students barricading Ngee Ann College, demonstrating in front of City Hall, and, on the 20<sup>th</sup>, occupying the Ministry of Education for six hours. In early November some clashes with the police occurred in front of City Hall, putting the government on guard. By mid-November, with the government unwilling to reconsider its stance and wishing for an end to student politics – the *raison d'être* of security certificates in the first place – the PAP moved in on the

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<sup>633</sup> Huang, 194.

students at Ngee Ann, ending the demonstration. Eighty were subsequently expelled and 50 more who hailed from Malaysia received banishment orders.<sup>634</sup>

As a result of these brief radical democratic episodes, over the next several years further reforms involving restructuring the student unions and restricting their activities to non-political ones were implemented in an effort to confine the students' discontent as the PAP and compliant university leaders transformed the schools into institutions whose primary role was to serve the interests of the nation-state – interests, particularly on the point of economic development and social order which were one and the same with those of the PAP. However, just as it was with labour, the government utilised a three-pronged approach to bring the students into their framework. As the concessionary prong to the approach, students were given space to participate in campaigns and authorized demonstrations that considered more general humanitarian causes and international issues not involving Singapore including campaigns against the Vietnam War and South African apartheid.<sup>635</sup> Yet, once more, to step outside this boundary and to claim one's equality in relation to the operation of the university, let alone the operation of Singapore, was to invite repression. With this, the university, a space which had always carried with it its own version of the agora and, as such, had served as a crucial space of autonomy from those who were intent on ordering the world, had become a tool of this ordering it once so fervently opposed. Though from time to time over the next few decades some students with great courage would attempt to “step out” from this ordering in a recognition and demonstration of their equality, the espoused long-term interests and capacity of their patron would go on to ensure that this space was not open for very long.

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<sup>634</sup> Ibid

<sup>635</sup> Ibid

## **Conclusions**

Reading through the literature of the Lion City, one is struck by how dominant the officially sanctioned trajectory of Singapore's path from “chaos to order” and “underdevelopment to development” is reflected in the works of historians and other academics. One story however which has received less attention, despite its importance to understanding the closed nature of contemporary Singapore, is the narrative of how a vibrant, politically active, and deeply contestatory polity was transformed into one in which politics that resembled anything other than management came to be condemned and repressed, all within a matter of two decades. As we have seen via this inquiry, from a place whereby unions, students associations, and other civil society groups could often launch radical opposition in an atmosphere of relative freedom in the 1950s, by the mid-1960s interests, ideologies, and identities had shifted to such a degree that any political activity conducted outside of the official channels established and overseen by the ruling party, regardless of the strength of the opposition, could be “put back in place” with little popular resistance.

We have seen that in the early 1950s, after the neutralization of the MCP during the Emergency, political activity of a general anti-colonial nature continued to bloom as it had immediately after the war. With the British wishing to gradually pull out from Singapore without provoking the masses into revolutionary actions which would jeopardise their commercial and strategic interests, crackdowns upon the workers and students were only conducted when these interests were demonstrably threatened. Radical democratic activity could thus continue as a result of a compatibility of interests. The same can be said during the period of David Marshall's Chief Ministership between 1954 and 1956. This was despite the fact that this state of affairs was becoming more difficult to maintain as a result of the mechanism of diffusion in which radical political actors, particularly in the unions and the student associations, convinced many of the islands underclasses to join in their struggle

against colonialism. This in turn had the effect of pushing the government and the radical groups away from a state of interest compatibility. The primary reason for the continuation of radical democratic forms of politics during this time period was the result of the expressed interests and estimations of David Marshall. In attempting to woo both the radical forces for their support and the British for the granting of Singapore's independence, Marshall was reluctant to repress the workers and students during their demonstrations and only did so when the British pushed him to. As has been demonstrated however this failure to take a sufficiently tough stance cost Singapore an earlier achievement of a more progressive constitution and also cost him his job. As a result of this failure, Lim Yew Hock's interests were quite different in nature. Pushing hard for a better constitution for Singapore, Lim was able to close down many instances of radical democratic activity which were viewed as threatening to Britain's and hence Singapore's constitutional interests. At this point in time, the British had also had their interests shift as a crackdown on the radical forces at this point in time would most likely push Lee Kuan Yew's PAP into power, a man and a party that they were now assured would defend British interests.

As a result of the diffusion achieved by the PAP, an identity shift had occurred amongst the workers and the students whereby the PAP, with their public stance of anti-colonialism and socialism, came to be seen as the champion of the masses. When Lee did eventually take power in 1959, radical democratic activity stemming from those associated with the left wing of his party was able to continue, as Lee required the mass base to keep his party in power. When a split occurred within the PAP on the issue of merger and many of the left-wing forces abandoned him as a result of his own public identity shift – one which included support of undemocratic internal security laws, his attempt to tame labour, and his willingness to throw the Singaporean left into the lion's den of conservatively aligned Malaysian – defection occurred and radical democratic activity reached new heights on the

island. At this stage, due to the fear that repression of the left might result in a backlash and jeopardize the PAP's rule, interests remained compatible and radical democratic activity was able to carry on. After the referendum of 1963 demonstrated significant mass support for PAP as a result of an identity shift within the masses – one which was secured through persuasion and manipulation as it was through material improvement - Lee's repression occurred on those forces that were seen as threatening the PAP's entrance into Malaysia and, later, its continuation in the federation.

Upon being forced out of Malaysia in 1965, the PAP's reason for repression moved from incompatibility of immediate interests to incompatibility of long-term interests. Having attained an increased capacity due to its popular support and the co-optation of the previous radical forces it had achieved during its six previous years of rule, the PAP, ruling over a population whose identity had become more closely aligned with them, was able to impose its ideology of social order for the sake of the long-term interest of economic development with little resistance and subsequently come down harshly on those who attempted to step out of its system of ordering. This was in spite of the fact that, due to this large-scale co-optation, the PAP's interests were not being sufficiently threatened. Long-term interests thus, and not simply interests immediately under threat, were shown to be crucial for the continuation of radical democracy. The radical Chinese students had once shouted “the enemy retreats, we pursue!” From the late 1960s it was clear that another of Mao's dictums had proved to be more appropriate. Among other things, power does grow from the barrel of a gun. Until this day this narrative remains as the “other Singapore story” - a story of how an island of much politics drifted into an embodiment of politics' diametric opposite.

## Chapter 6

### **Radical Democracy *Par Excellence*? Revolution and Reform in France's May 68**

#### **Contesting the “Divine Surprise” Thesis**

May 68 was an event like few others in 20<sup>th</sup> century France. Yet it must be stated that, despite everything we can learn from its careful analysis, approaching the events of May 1968 in France in such an empirical way is a difficult task. What makes this so? There are undoubtedly a few intertwined reasons for this.

One of these is the pervasiveness of what can be called the “divine surprise” thesis of May 68. For certain, one of the mantras of the events is that, given the sociological conditions in the heart of the “*Trente Glorieuse*” of economic prosperity, the student strikes which evolved into a nationwide stoppage involving 10 million workers are simply inexplicable. Often, this type of understanding has emanated from certain birds-eye view historical analyses that tend to focus on limited potential causal factors including the general popularity of the political elite, economic growth at a macro level, and factors related to international relations. For example, accounts of the events such as those of McMillan's *History of Twentieth Century France*, while useful for providing a neat and detailed chronology of the events, maintains the position that May 68 came as a “surprise” due to the fact that “the liquidation of the Algerian War, the reaffirmation of France on the world scene, continuing economic expansion and the personal authority of de Gaulle seemed to indicate the advent of a new era of strong government and political stability in France.”<sup>636</sup> More internationally focused accounts such as Martin's *De Gaulle's Cold War* have also put forth a similar line of reasoning. According to Martin, May 68 is difficult to explain as “the economy was growing

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<sup>636</sup> James McMillan, *Twentieth Century France: Politics and Society in France 1898-1991* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2009): 177.

despite a slight slow down in the previous year caused by the West German recession and de Gaulle remained popular in spite of uproar over Quebec and Israel.”<sup>637</sup>

Though there is certainly no doubt that an uprising of such magnitude during a period of relative economic and political stability challenges many of the assumptions we often hold with regard to the conditions for such episodes to occur (thus making it a good candidate for our project), the reliance on this “divine surprise” argument should be criticized for two reasons.

First, from a sociological point of view, by evaluating the events via a focus on the happenings at the highest levels of the state as well as through aggregate levels of support for the political class, including de Gaulle, a wide array of social issues, many of which were experienced at the level of the everyday and provided the impetus for actors to take to the streets are severely underemphasized. Although it will be later argued that systemic and structural tensions in education, in the workplace, and in the political system as a whole did not ensure or directly determine that a large number of the French “stepped out” of their usual roles and into the streets, rector’s offices and boardrooms, to underestimate these underlying concerns in French society is to misunderstand what was of central importance to the strikers and protesters and, thus, why they “stepped out” in the first place. For this first reason thus, this type of “divine surprise” analysis seems to miss the mark. Second of all, and building on the first criticism, such an analysis betrays the subjectivity of actors - students, workers and farmers who took to the streets in larger numbers with both clear grievances stemming from these social issues as well as a desire to shape their political community. Since subjectivity has been found to have been such a central and defining element to the events, types of explanations which discount this essential factor should be seriously scrutinized.

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<sup>637</sup> Garrett Martin, *General de Gaulle’s Cold War: Challenging American Hegemony 1963-1968* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013): 185.

This, however, is not the only form of the “inexplicable” analysis. Rather, a more sophisticated form of it has come to be advanced from French philosophy, particularly emanating from the works of Gilles Deleuze and Alain Badiou. Ironically, the issue with these accounts is the fact that they have given the role of a new subjectivity too much weight. The analysis of the events from these two thinkers have their bases in the age old Hegelian and Marxist critique of empiricism from the point of view of historical materialism as well as from more postmodern variations of Hegel's understanding of the rise of new ways of being in the world. In some political philosophy, including some of which we have already seen with Connolly and Honig, this is often discussed in terms of “becoming”. As it relates to our discussion, there have been many political thinkers (including many French thinkers) who have viewed the events in this way - as an embodiment of a new form of being, transforming human relations in the realms of the economy, politics and everyday life and emancipating human possibilities that previously lay dormant or unrecognized underneath the old order of things. Indeed, the most popular of these theorizations have been those of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in “May 68 did not take place” and in the work of Alain Badiou, most explicitly laid out in *The Communist Hypothesis*.<sup>638</sup> Although Deleuze and Badiou had their fair share of intellectual disagreements, one thing that they did agree upon was the fact that May 68, as an event embodying an entirely new way of being, cannot be understood with pre-existing concepts and categories which belong to the old order of things. For thinkers such as these, empirical analyses of events like May 68 fundamentally miss the point of the newness and radical transformation which lies at the heart of the event. Categorizing, classifying and “doing sociology” in general are thus inherently promoting a type of conservatism.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to put forth a rebuttal to this claim. Though such an argument may be convenient to advance one's philosophical position, it is of little help to the

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<sup>638</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, "May 68 did not take place" in *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews, 1975-1995*, ed. David Lapoujade. (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007); Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis* (New York: Verso, 2010).

social scientist and also the political organizer. If May 68 was indeed a *revolution manquée* or a short-lived expression of radical democracy, and being held up as model to be emulated, then it is undoubtedly beneficial to investigate the factors which made it a short-lived opportunity. Doing otherwise would seem to be the equivalent of shooting in the dark. While this comes across as a strategic concern, there is also a crucial philosophical and social scientific element to this. Much of this revolves around the fact that shots (theoretically as well as in the world of living, breathing people) are always shot against something already standing, some set of socio-political arrangements already rooted. One can accept that something new can come into the world while remaining within the confines of the old, or confines more generally speaking. The problem with thinkers like Badiou seems to stem from the fact that they do not recognize these confines, their type of historicism placing too much emphasis on “the new”. May 68 surely involved its fair share of newness. Indeed, this newness has been frequently identified by participants and commentators alike as one of the defining characteristics of the events.

In their most common iterations, they have been described as “*décloisonnement*”, “*désectorialisation*” and “*rencontre*”.<sup>639</sup> As Bertraux describes, the defining feature of May was the fact that individuals, previously divided into sectors and roles which only allowed for hierarchical and vertical communication, were able to break this structure through a refusal of these divisive roles in the streets, schools, and factories and communicate laterally and in a more egalitarian manner.<sup>640</sup> In terms of this egalitarianism, as Cohen adds, this refusal of roles was not just across sectors but also with regard to the usual “chain of command” within them and within the political community as a whole, allowing for communication “without

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<sup>639</sup> Xavier Vigna and Michelle Zancarini-Fournel. “Les rencontres improbables dans ‘Les années 68,’” *Vingtième Siècle Revue d’histoire* No 101 (Jan-Mar 2009): 165-167.

<sup>640</sup> Daniel Bertraux, Daniele Linhart and Beatrix Le Wita, “Mai 1968 et la formation de générations politiques en France,” *Le Mouvement social* No 143 (Apr – Jun 1988): 83-84.

mediation” and the proliferation of real political equality.<sup>641</sup> As a result, one of the special characteristics of the May movement (though, as we will see, not in its entirety) was that the functionalist divisions of socio-political life temporarily collapsed in the name of equality. As Kristin Ross has described,

“May 68 in fact had little to do with the interest of the social group - students or "youth" who had sparked the action. What has come to be called "the events of May" consisted mainly in students ceasing to function as students, workers as workers, and farmers as farmers. May was a crisis in functionalism.”<sup>642</sup>

As previously stated, this account of the events is not simply one that has been imposed from the outside by academics and other commentators. Rather, a plethora of testimonies speak to this account of the events quite clearly. For example, we can take the testimony of a young worker speaking of the events in the middle of May,

“ 'We', the multitude, the crowd of citizens, anonymous and generally mute, spoke. 'We' spoke. We spoke therefore for the first time in a long while, and 'we' did not only speak of the weather and the nice temperature but of politics and of everyday life, and in another way, how everyday life is the consequence of political life.”<sup>643</sup>

Likewise, we can take the testimony of a participating student from the *Ecole Supérieure d'Agriculture d'Anger*,

“The memory that we kept is that we were able to speak with everyone; that we were truly living in a different world. It was a bit of a dream.”<sup>644</sup>

Finally, we can take the testimony of Jacques Guilhaumou, an ordinary student who previously had no involvement in politics, let alone of the militant student type that initially propelled the movement in late April and the beginning of May,

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<sup>641</sup> Evelyn Cohen, “L’ombre portée de Mai 68 en politique,” *Vingtième Siècle Revue d’histoire* No 98 (Apr-June 2008): 19.

<sup>642</sup> Ross, 24.

<sup>643</sup> Bertraux et al., 81.

<sup>644</sup> Ibid, 81.

*“...la classe politique pratique toujours la division de l'écoute. Ce qu'elle dit suppose un non-dit, une part cachée, partition que mai 68 avait un temps bonnie dans une pure transparence de l'événement.”*<sup>645</sup>

Undoubtedly, Badiou and Deleuze would point to these examples of the deeply transformative nature of May 68 as embodying the new subjectivity that they believed the events to be producing. However here is where the difference lies between our respective approaches. Though the events of May embodied undeniable special qualities, it did not change the nature of politics tout court. Like other historical breaks with France's past, whether successful like the Revolution of 1789 or unsuccessful like the Revolution of 1848 or the commune of 1871, May 1968 was a period of contestation, which, by its very nature, involves political opponents. Similar to other periods of contestation in France's history, May 68 fell along a clear left-right divide though, of course, like most episodes of contention, we will see that the balance of forces was nowhere near as clear cut as this. Indeed, in 1968, it was not only the protagonist left that was divided but also the country's right. Just as this complexity is needed to understand these other historical events, understanding May 68 thus calls for a carefully crafted analysis of the relative strengths of these contenders, the nature of their projects and demands, the various institutions that supported them, their overall capacities, and the various mechanisms which shifted the tide throughout the course of events. All of this needs to be analyzed in conjunction with this aforementioned “newness” - particularly the new forms of subjectivity and being that emanated from progressively oriented participants. As with our own concern for and study of the circumstances for radical democracy, it is also imperative to understand the circumstances that allowed for these new forms of being to open up and, eventually, be shut down. For this reason, philosophies of revolutionary subjectivity and forms of social organization are simply not sufficient to

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<sup>645</sup> Jacques Guilhaumou. “Mémoires d’un étudiant en mai 1968: le flux des manifs et le protagoniste de l’événement,” *Le Mouvement social* No 233 *Mutations de la science et des universités en France depuis 1945*. (Oct-Dec 2010): 170.

understand what May 68 was, how it evolved, and why it did not last. To achieve this goal, we need to commit to something more akin to historical sociology than historicist philosophy. With this stated, it should be clear that, while maintaining the position that May 68 did embody something special that we can describe as “the new”, as an episode of political contention like any other, we can evaluate May 68 in an empirical fashion. To conclude this short theoretical interlude, we can thus state that despite some claims that May 68 is inexplicable due to its historical position within the “*Trente Glorieuse*” or as a result of its “opening up of the new”, an empirical account of the events is far from impossible.

This is not to say however that we need not be careful with the type of empirical analysis undertaken. In a similar vein to the approach that has been utilized in previous chapters, it is important that the type of sociological analysis employed does not obscure the important role that actual actors with actual demands played during the episode. May 68, after all, was an event embodying some key features of radical democratic thought, hence its selection as a case study in this work. The full correlation between theory and the event will be demonstrated later. For now however it can be said that one important radical democratic element of the event is the fact that actors did, for varying lengths of time and in varying degrees, “step out” of their usual sociological roles and made demands above and beyond them, or at least beyond what structuralist social scientific accounts often ascribe to them. Much like our other cases, this is what makes the analysis a challenge though, once again, not an impossibility. As Kristen Ross has stated,

“The invention during the movement of forms of activity that put an end to representation and delegation, that undermined the division between directors and subordinates, practices that expressed a massive investment in politics as the concern of each and every individual and not just the concern of specialists - such an experiences threatens everything that is inscribed in our repertoires for describing everyday life, all the various ways we have to represent the social, all of the finite number of representations to which we can appeal.”<sup>646</sup>

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<sup>646</sup> Ross, 11.

As a consequence of this, while it is essential to take into account the previously mentioned structural issues that had been plaguing France up to the period, specifically in the form of some of the contents brought into the streets to publically raise as “wrongs”, we cannot make the mistake of allowing these structural issues to overdetermine the demands made and directions taken. With this stated thus, we cannot simply superimpose the overarching claims of many sociologists onto the events which suggest that they were at their heart an “Oedipien conflict”,<sup>647</sup> a rebellion of youth reflecting a large-scale “coming of age”, a step into the self-actualization stage of Maslow's hierarchy of needs,<sup>648</sup> a process of delayed modernization<sup>649</sup>, the result of urbanization, a mismatch between social forces in society lying between two stages of capitalism,<sup>650</sup> an old-fashioned class conflict,<sup>651</sup> or a generational clash. Rather, if and when they became themes during the period of contention, it is because, in an event which centred so much around the “retaking of speech”, such themes came from the mouths of participants through their very conscious dreams and demands and not as the result of “historical forces” which carry actors unconsciously to their fate. Indeed, May 68 remains a special event to many because it, above and beyond other events, provided weight to the old and cherished Aristotelian argument that human beings, capable of thought and speech, are the ones who make the political community. In short, it was May 68 which brought back the agora.

With this stated, we are in a better position to explain why it is necessary to study May 68 as a case study in our inquiry into the necessary conditions for radical democratic politics. First and foremost, much like the other case studies which have been analyzed, the type of political engagement which typified May 68 - that of students, workers, and farmers

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<sup>647</sup> Dominique Damamme. “Mai-Juin 68: crise du consentement et ruptures d’allégeance” in *Mai-Juin 68*, eds. Dominique Damamme et al. (Paris, Les Editions de l’Atelier, 2008): 16.

<sup>648</sup> Jean-François Sirinelli, *Mai 68: L’événement Janus* (Paris, Fayard, 2008): 102.

<sup>649</sup> Chris Reynolds, *Memories of '68: France's Convenient Consensus* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011): 19.

<sup>650</sup> Alain Touraine, *Le Mouvement de mai, ou le communisme utopique* (Paris, Fayard, 1998): 296.

<sup>651</sup> Damamme, 16.

“stepping out” of their places of political subordination, affirming their equality, and challenging the Gaullist oligarchy and hegemony in the streets schools and factories - fits well with the radical democratic theorists' normative project of active, equal, and oppositional politics. This is undoubtedly with good reason. For certain, radical democratic theory is one of the many intellectual offsprings of May 68. Both within France and around Europe more generally, the events of May in France as well as events of a similar vein in Italy, Germany, and Czechoslovakia gave rise to a series of theoretical projects that challenged the high modern forms of liberal democratic capitalism, “actually existing socialism”, and accompanying civil society organizations such as the Moscow-directed Communist Parties and trade unions as well as the liberal and structuralist Marxist theory which legitimized them.

As we have already seen in the introductory chapters, though our selected political theorists all have divergent starting points, the geneologies of their thought can be traced to the intellectual shake-up post-68. For some, the events of May were closer to home and heart than others. For Jacques Rancière, for example, the essential components of his thought cannot be separated from his direct participation in the events in Paris and his break with the structuralist Marxism of his intellectual master Louis Althusser which he saw as being incapable of accounting for or promoting subjective participation in political struggles. Indeed, Rancière's entire understanding of “the part which has no part” stems from the “stepping out” on the part of students, workers, and farmers who did not only demand improvements with regards to their interests, corporately defined, but as equals to the oligarchies of the politicians, bureaucrats, the school administrators and the union bosses.

Chantal Mouffe, though a Belgian and too young to have directly experienced the events of May, was nonetheless, with her partner Ernesto Laclau (who as a radically oriented Argentine, also lived with the ramifications of Argentina's own progressive uprising in 1968) was directly subject to the sweeping changes in continental philosophy in the wake of 1968 in

the 1970s and 1980s. Though grounded in Marxism, Mouffe's thought became influenced by the wave of post-structuralism which swept continental philosophy as a result of the discontentedness and confusion which had arisen as a result of the limitations and exclusions of liberal and Marxist thought when it came to issues of both participation and identity recognition in political life. This was a shift that has gone hand in hand with the proliferation of the so-called “new social movements” - students, feminist groups, minority empowerment groups, gay rights groups etc. - and the inability of the official left and their exclusively class oriented politics to adequately incorporate them. Since the events of 1968 are viewed as the opening of this intellectual transformation, Mouffe's thought can be said to have had its origins within the “newness” central to the events of May 68.

Though the links between Bonnie Honig and William Connolly and the events of 68 are more tenuous than with the other two due their American origins and their slight distance from Marxism, intellectual links can certainly be established. For Connolly, much like Mouffe, his philosophy of agonistic respect is rooted in the Nietzschean critique of modernity which proliferated post-68 as a result of the rigidities of the modern state, its insistence on economic modernization and rationalization, its spiritual alienation, and its resulting restriction of human possibility and difference. Undoubtedly, much of Connolly's thought can be found within the slogans and performances of May 68 and subsequent years, and though the link may not be entirely direct, the spirit of 68 certainly resonates in much of his thought.

As for Honig, her thought is, of the four central to this work, the furthest removed from the events of 68 and of France and Europe more generally. Indeed, a return to Arendt and to “the political” after the end of the dominant “social” conflict of the Cold War are the central elements informing her thinking. However, despite this, with her thought located within the radical American tradition which finds some of its influences from the student protests against the Vietnam War and which, in subsequent years, has been influenced by

continental philosophical trends, Bonnie Honig's thinking has also been influenced by the participatory spirit of May 68. Likewise, with an explicit focus on “the new” - stemming from the philosophies of becoming via Nietzsche, Heidegger and, most explicitly, Arendt, Honig's thought carries with it many of the post-foundational, anti-reification elements that were so central to the student, worker and feminist critiques of the Gaullist order in 1968, which, though founded on Republican principles, had been deemed insufficient in the realm of everyday life, particularly in terms of the antiquated hierarchical and paternalistic administration of education and university life, the lack of organizational space on the factory floor, and the continuation of fundamentally patriarchal social institutions. As such, though less directly connected to the events of May 68, Honig is undoubtedly a bedfellow of those who have more direct intellectual links to these events.

With this brief biographical analysis of the authors at the heart of our study, the links between the events and their attached intellectual developments including radical democratic theory should be fairly clear. Following this, the need to assess May 68 as a case study in our inquiry into the necessary circumstances for radical democratic contestation becomes essential. If May 68 is in fact the example of radical democracy *par excellence* for the reason that it has been so central to the development of this body of theoretical work, then coming to an understanding of the circumstances that allowed for the May 68 events to flourish when they did becomes absolutely imperative. It is for this reason that we can proceed confidently with our case study.

### **Understanding May 68**

It will be argued in this chapter that the same combination of factors that have been central to understanding radical democratic possibility in the previous cases – namely interests, capacities, and mechanisms - can also explain the existence of radical democratic

forms of contestation, while they lasted, in France during May 68. Of course, central to understanding this opening and subsequent closure also requires coming to an understanding of the contending forces involved. As we have already seen, it is clear that the events of May 68 did not unfold in a vacuum. Despite the presence of new and inspiring forms of organization in the streets, some of which that can be rightly seen as embodying a new form of subjectivity or being, the progressive forces of May who were the carriers of this “newness” also came up against the forces of the old. Rather than simply being swept aside by revolutionary fervour in the streets and in occupied factories across the country, these older, more established forces did what they could to push back when they found it possible as well as try to dampen the strength of their leftist opponents through co-optation. The fact that these older forces constituted the government, one which had a significant backing among large segments of the population due to a shared vision of the organization of French socio-political life and was in large part legitimated by the leadership of France's foremost political saviour Charles de Gaulle, and also had legitimate access to the French state's undivided coercive apparatus, gave them a capacity advantage over the forces of the left.

As a result of this, any explanation of May 68 must deal with the political tug-of-war that gave the events their shape. This of course includes our own analysis of May 68 as an instance of radical democratic activity. For us, understanding how so many students, workers, and farmers were able to take to the streets cannot be separated from the political space that was opened at the expense of their Gaullist opponents. Likewise, understanding why the dramatic uprising came to an end can also not be understood without taking into account the manoeuvres made by the old order under threat. As previously stated, this calls for analyzing the radical democratic moment of May 68, as we have done with the other cases, as a period of contentious politics.

As such, to continue with our argument made throughout the work, we will demonstrate that radical democracy in May 68 can be understood as having occurred due to an intersection of the compatibility of interests between contending forces, a balance of capacities conducive to toleration, and adjoining mechanisms which pushed the contenders closer to this state of affairs. While it has been demonstrated that this set of analytical tools have been fruitful in terms of explaining the continuance of radical democracy in the previous cases, this framework fits especially well with the May 68 events as it is a framework that allows for us to adequately account for the subjective and constructed worker and student demands in an event which fundamentally breaks with structuralist and culturalist expectations. Indeed, as we have seen, it has always been a wonder of many how middle-class students and a relatively affluent proletariat in a liberal democratic society were on the cusp of making revolution or, at least, willing to take to the streets in the largest showing of opposition to the traditional socio-political order that France had ever seen. Once again, although there were certainly a plethora of structural problems in France in 1968, without exploring the aspirations of May's participants, it is incredibly difficult to judge what changes they were imagining and demanding with regard to their daily lives and what structures they felt were inhibiting their realization. As Kristen Ross has relayed from a blackboard at Nanterre in the midst of the events, "structures don't go down to the streets."

Yet, though this may indeed be the case, we also do know that even autonomous agents must operate within a context. As such, though participants in the protests, strikes, and occupations of the relatively short but intense period tried to launch their transformative project into French socio-political life, their success depended on how their interests stood up in relation to their opponents, including with regard to the willingness to act and the willingness to abide by certain institutional norms, their relative capacity to manoeuvre which involved questions of size, coercive ability, and the control over politically relevant spaces,

and the external mechanisms which assisted in radically shifting the direction of the events through mobilization and demobilization. In this chapter, it will thus be argued that the possibility of radical democratic action in May 68 should be viewed as the result of specific alignments between contending forces within these categories.

### *Interests*

Much like the other cases, we will find that periods in which there was a compatibility of interests were, albeit ironically, more conducive to the continuation of radical democratic action than those of incompatibility. At the beginning of the events when the participants consisted of a few hundred students engaged in anti-war activities at Nanterre's campus, the Gaullists did not see a substantial threat to their interests and therefore left the problems of the university to be dealt with in its own realm. Despite this initial hands-off attitude from the heights of state, the university authorities saw the students as a threat to the ordinary functioning of the university and called in the police to make several arrests. As a result of these developments at the university, this approach of the government could not be maintained for long. By the first week of May, after several stages of escalation involving arrests and counter-protests and several thousand students effectively shutting down the Sorbonne in the centre of Paris and making larger demands, the authorities' toleration of the movement came to a temporary close. As such, from 3 May until 10 May, the student movement, which had also become more militant as a counter-measure, was faced with increasing restriction and, at key moments, repression at the hands of the police.

From 10 May onward, the situation in terms of interests became more complex. For one, since the initial support for the students was transformed into a much larger movement against the Gaullist order itself, particularly due to the inclusion of nearly 10 million striking workers and the rejection of compromises, there was certainly a sharp boundary activated

between pro and anti-government forces. This, however, did not translate into incompatible interests for several central reasons. First and foremost is the fact that, as a result of the massive growth and militancy of the movement, it was no longer in the interest of the government to put an end to the uprising in its entirety for fear of completely losing legitimacy and possibly facing revolution. The direct consequence of this was continued demonstrations and occupations while, under the leadership of Pompidou, the government tried to negotiate its way out of its crisis. On the other side of the barricades and factory walls, though there was widespread agreement on the need for the current Gaullist order to be replaced by something else, the leftist forces could not coalesce into a movement that articulated moving beyond demonstrations and occupations. As such, though there were clearly revolutionary forms of organization on the ground, the forces were not revolutionary in a Leninist sense, and thus limited themselves to forms of militant oppositional politics. Since these forces were still accepting their subordination, interests remained compatible and radical democratic activity was able to be maintained.

This continued to be the case when the majority of the movement's participants coalesced around parliamentary and electoral options rather than a revolutionary political position around the time that de Gaulle returned from Germany and rallied Gaullist supporters on 30 May. This transitioning from a revolutionary political answer to a reformist one opened the door to more concessionary avenues for answering the social question. As a consequence of this, interests were placed in a much more compatible state than they had been since the beginning of the crisis, and many of the remaining demonstrations, strikes, and occupations were allowed to carry on temporarily as they fizzled out as a result of reform processes in labour and education. By mid-June the situation had returned to that of early May. With the great mass of students and workers having stepped back “into place”, only the more militant participants wished to carry on with their more revolutionary demands and

non-conciliatory stance. Able to rid themselves of this hangover due to the diminished strength of the militants, and wishing to return the country to a state of Gaullist normalcy, the government cracked down on the militant participants in mid-June, even going so far as to ban public demonstrations for several months. An incompatibility of interests thus brought an end to the more militant aspects of radical democratic activity in June 68. Only until several months later when the threat of leftist forces seemed weak did interests enter a state of compatibility and the street was opened up for action once again.

### *Capacity*

In May 68, unlike with some of the other cases, the coercive apparatus remained completely in the hands of the government. As a result, the capacity change that matters here is that which took place on the side of the students and workers. Throughout the two-month period, the capacity that these progressive forces held was a key variable as to whether the interests of the old order were being threatened. In this case, the access to weaponry was not as determining as the numerical size of the movement. More importantly, the sites of power they controlled at varying points in the episode directly impacted how the Gaullist authorities could respond to the actions of the movement when their interests were found to be threatened. The different responses of the government before and after 10 May are telling in this respect.

Before 10 May, the students had “stepped into” places that provided them with little leverage over the government including the Sorbonne, the streets of the Latin Quarter, and the Odeon theatre. As a result of this limited capacity on the part of the movement, the authorities were able to intervene, sometimes repressing and sometimes restricting the movement.

However, after 10 May the numerical and geographic explosion of the movement occurred due to the inclusion of workers, farmers, and newly activated students. In less than a week, the movement grew from the thousands to the millions, making intervention far more difficult. Furthermore, though access to coercive resources was unchanged, an increasing number of sites of central importance for the operation of the Gaullist socio-political order became occupied and controlled by the movement in cities across the country. This included spaces central to transportation, production, education, the distribution of goods and services and, in some cases, administration which effectively paralyzed France. For fear of losing political control via potential delegitimation as well as the inability to corral opposition of such scale, widespread repression remained off the table until the workers and students reduced their capacity through mass demobilization and the ceding of important locales of leverage as a result of the compromises of late May and early June. As such, radical democratic activity could continue after 10 May due in part to the more balanced capacities of the government and movement. Only when the capacity of the movement was downgraded to a pre-10 May state after the majority of participants had accepted a concessionary and parliamentary route did the government have the capacity to repress what remained of the militant actors.

### *Mechanisms*

In comparison to our other case studies, mechanisms that shifted the direction of actors via the shifting of interests and capacities were of even greater importance in May 68. This could be said to come as no surprise give the rapidity of mobilization and also demobilization that occurred in the very short episode. However, there is an extremely counter-intuitive element to the perpetuation of radical democratic activity during the month of May. This is the fact that, although a sharp boundary was activated between the Gaullist

forces and the participants in the movement after 10 May and an anti-order position was increasingly diffused from this point until the end of the month, these cleavage inducing mechanisms did not push the sides far enough apart and towards a state of affairs whereby radical democratic activity was closed down during this time period. Ironically thus, the time period of greatest division when 10 million had paralyzed the country is the time period where radical democracy was most possible. As we will also see, the time period in which radical democratic activity was closed down ran concurrently with the period of least mobilization. This clearly shows that mass mobilization in-itself does not equate to an incompatibility of interests and capacities. Indeed, the three elements need to be analyzed as they exist in combination with each other in order to obtain a clear picture of the overall possibility for radical democracy. In this case study, there are clearly two combinations that are imperative to understanding why an openness to radical democratic activity existed during a time of much division.

The first combination is that of the mechanisms of diffusion and brokerage and the interests of the progressive forces on the streets. Undoubtedly, the diffusion of an anti-Gaullist position in light of the government's crackdown in the early weeks was key to the mass mobilization in mid-May. However, it is important to note that this was a diffusion of a very general nature across a broad set of actors. The lack of diffusion of a more directly revolutionary position as a result of divergent interests among different mobilized groups as well as the inability of the more militant actors to broker a united front left the movement in the realm of opposition oriented politics. As such, though participants had mobilized en masse, the type of diffusion that had taken place did not place the interests of the two opposing sides into a state of incompatibility.

The second combination is that of the diffusion of a certain “repertoire of contention” and the resulting boost in capacity for the movement. As we have already seen, the openness

to radical democratic activity in middle of May was also a result of the Gaullists being unable to act coercively for both reasons of logistics and legitimacy due to the growth in capacity of the May movement. It is crucial to note however that this balance of capacities was a direct result of a diffusion of a certain manner of contesting the government and its order, known in studies of contentious politics as a “repertoire of contention”.<sup>652</sup> Indeed, with the spread of the strike and occupation as the dominant strategy of opposition and the ensuing national paralysis, a balance of capacity was achieved which was conducive to the continuation of the radical democratic state of affairs until the boundary between contending forces became deactivated in later stages. We will see that it was in these later stages, from the end of May until the June parliamentary elections, that the majority of participants in the events returned to their lecture halls or their factories due to the mechanism of co-optation appearing in many different forms, including in concessions for the workers, education reform for the students, and mainstream political representation for the majority of participants. Since it had been more institutionalized bodies such as the political parties and the government itself who had been able to broker agreements, as opposed to the more militant and revolutionary participants, the majority of actors in accepting these proposals consented to what amounted to a less threatening subordinate position, shifting the balance of interests to a more compatible state, and thus allowing for the continuation of radical democratic activity until engagement was no longer required by them. As previously stated, for those militants who were not willing to accept co-optation, interests had once again become incompatible, capacity had dramatically shifted in favour of the government, and the Gaullists had the green light to move in on them. From here, the “beach” that had been unearthed in the early days of May was paved over to the sound of police sirens.

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<sup>652</sup> For a discussion of repertoires of contention, see: Charles Tilly and Sydney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)

## **The Student Movement and its Origins**

Previously apolitical subjects may take to the streets without institutional prodding or being pushed by “historical forces”, but they certainly do not happen out of the blue. Indeed, the issues which students, workers, and farmers brought into the streets, faculties, and factories had been brewing for some time. As Ross has argued, May 68 "was an event with a long preparation, dating back to the mobilization against the Algerian War and with an immediate afterlife continuing up until at least the 1970s."<sup>653</sup> This is no less true for the students' engagement which has often been the foremost “object” of analysis when it comes to May 68. If this is not for the reason that the most romantic elements of the events - the assemblies, the posters, the colourfully creative language, and the insistence that “beauty is in the street” - emanated from the students, it is because the beginning of the events of May began with student clashes with the police at the Sorbonne on 3 May. Though it will become clear enough that the events were far more than students making student related demands and that many student participants came to support the idea of a complete overturning of the hierarchical socio-political order of de Gaulle's France, this cannot be understood without explaining how issues of importance in the 1960s - the Algerian and Vietnam wars and the modern mass bureaucratic university - translated into calls for changes - sometimes reformist, sometimes revolutionary - in the streets of Paris and other French urban centres.

Like other Western countries in the post-war period, France was witnessing a change in consciousness among many of its youth. While in the period before and during the two world wars, students had played a more marginal role in political life, the post-war period saw a growth in the number of students becoming engaged in politics, both with regard to matters at the universities and lycées as well as with regards to national and global affairs. As many commentators have identified, though the more militant and leftist politically engaged

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<sup>653</sup> Ross, 26.

students constituted a minority of those attending the lycées and institutes of higher education, they were an incredibly important minority. Not only were they responsible for providing the initial spark via the confrontation with the police on 3 May at the Sorbonne, but they also played a key role, in a metaphorical sense, in filling the air with fuel, having provided a counter-discourse and counter-spaces to the postwar socio-political order which many of them viewed as unacceptably hierarchical, technocratic, unresponsive, and non-participatory in their design to facilitate, manage and rationalize capitalist development and the consumer society.<sup>654</sup>

As stated by many militants during the early and mid-1960s, and later to be expressed by many more during May 68 in their demanding of changes to the education system, the university had become a key component of this inflexible Gaullist order. Many commentators on the period have shown that many students had come to see the university system as a type of assembly line whereby later employment opportunities were limited to being placed in the *cadres moyens* - as future teachers or low level civil servants - within a grand design of distributing functions to meet the needs of the managing classes - the country's political and bureaucratic elite and connected capitalists who were trained at France's more exclusive and selective *Grandes Ecoles*.<sup>655</sup> As McMillan has argued, "they wanted an education that would guarantee them employment in an increasingly competitive job market without however reducing them to mere lackeys of the capitalist system."<sup>656</sup>

The fact that the university had come to serve this allocation purpose as opposed to facilitating students' desire for participation in the economy and polity had also created an undesirable quotidian existence at the campuses. With the universities being utilized as a training facility for a post-war France whose economy had become increasingly urban, based on a modern industrial basis as opposed to the agricultural economy of the pre-war period,

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<sup>654</sup> Damamme, 122; Reynolds, 38.

<sup>655</sup> Reynolds, 85; Damamme, 116; Touraine, 30.

<sup>656</sup> McMillan, 179.

tertiary education had undergone an incredible massification.<sup>657</sup> Indeed, in the mid-1960s the student population in France had grown by a remarkable 1000% since the beginning of the Second World War.<sup>658</sup> A lack of adequate infrastructure which resulted in serious overcrowding and a general lack of student resources - those to deal with “stresses, failures and social activities” - combined with a system designed to fill social functions rather than to foster dynamism and meet students' life aspirations.<sup>659</sup> As Reynolds has argued, "the accumulation of these problems created a situation where material conditions were deplorable, contact with professors impossible, and enrolment available only in programs that offered little chance of employment."<sup>660</sup> On top of all of this, students had virtually no space to launch internal criticisms in terms of these issues, let alone to participate directly in the operation of the university. As a result of this, not only did representative bodies such as student unions have little or no incorporation into official channels for deliberation on issues central to student life and education in the university, but also political activity and freedom of expression on campus were extremely limited.<sup>661</sup> Taken together with strict rules on sexual behaviour, including, most famously, “nocturnal visits”, many students - particularly those on the militant left - viewed the administration of the university as being conducted with an intolerable “father knows best” attitude.<sup>662</sup>

It must be stated that a segment of this critical knowledge of a somewhat Marcusean framework that the students imparted came not only from their daily experiences but was a result of the emergence and proliferation of neo-Marxist analyses of the state and society in sociology departments across the country including at Nanterre in the Parisian suburbs whose militant students' movements would go on to play a most central role in the beginning of the

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<sup>657</sup> Damamme, 114.

<sup>658</sup> McMillan, 179.

<sup>659</sup> Damamme, 114.

<sup>660</sup> Reynolds, 87.

<sup>661</sup> McMillan, 179.

<sup>662</sup> Boris Gobille. *Mai 68* (Paris, Editions La Découverte, 2008): 10.

events of late April and early May.<sup>663</sup> Such ideas were also explored by militant students around the universities at neighbouring bookstores, for example at the famous Maspero in the Latin Quarter of Paris.<sup>664</sup> As Ross has argued,

“A reading culture - made up of the books and journals of the critical anti-Stalinist Marxism that flourished from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s in France, along with the third-worldist texts edited and translated during the same time seems...to have produced an extremely articulate cross-section of high school and university students, knowledgeable in world affairs, non-xenophobic in their outlook, and capable of mounting an argument.”<sup>665</sup>

This quote by Ross illuminates the second issue of importance that the students carried into the political arena during the 1960s up to the eve of 1968. This was the perceived historical continuum of imperialism running from France's war with Algeria in the early part of the decade to the United States' war in Vietnam which had escalated in the latter part of it.<sup>666</sup> For many students in France, both France's own colonial war with Algeria and the United States' aggression in Vietnam were worthy of moral condemnation based on the loss of innocent lives and, for some students, the subjugation of foreign peoples to European masters. However, it was the more militant leftist students who went as far to make the connection between domination at home and what amounted to global domination by the imperial powers. As Ross has argued, this connection came as a result of the belief that “all revolutionaries are involved in the same struggle: French workers, the North Vietnamese, and even French students have the same enemy, namely imperialist capitalism.”<sup>667</sup>

Once again, intellectual trends in liberal arts faculties as well as in Latin Quarter bookstores such as Maspero, helped provide a counter-space and counter-discourse to mainstream liberal political thought and the Gaullist socio-political order through the

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<sup>663</sup> McMillan, 179.

<sup>664</sup> Laurent Jalabert, “Aux Origines de la génération 1968: Les étudiants français et la guerre du Vietnam,” *Vingtième Siècle Revue d'histoire* No 55 (July-Sept 1977): 76.

<sup>665</sup> Ross, 87.

<sup>666</sup> Gilles Richard, *Mai 68...et après? Une nouvelle donne politique* (Bordeaux: Centre régional de documentation pédagogique, 2008): 58.

<sup>667</sup> Ross, 80; Vigna and Zaccarini-Fournel, 165.

dissemination of “third worldist” thought - a rough conglomeration of various literatures which viewed capitalism as operating through a global system of political inequalities that were to be found in varying degrees and forms in both the “metropolises” and “peripheries”. For the militant students, once again in a type of Marcusean analysis, since the industrial proletariat - the traditionally held agent of human emancipation - had been incorporated into the bureaucratic and technocratic system of domination through the reformist labour unions and communist parties of the west and the “revisionist” apparatus of “actual existing socialism” in the Soviet Union, the anti-colonial peasant of the third world, along with the students of the first, became the best hope for renewal of the revolutionary socialist project.<sup>668</sup> As a result of this, many of the militant students who wished to take a stance against global imperialist capitalism activated themselves in opposition to the Algerian and Vietnam wars in solidarity with the resistance groups in those countries, often through the adoption of “heterodox Marxisms” which were “anti-Leninist and non-hierarchical” and which tried to “establish links between intellectuals, students, workers, and peasants”<sup>669</sup> as well as turning to the examples of Vietnam and Cuba for inspiration.<sup>670</sup>

As Ross, Vigna and Zacarini-Fournel have described, many militant students also turned to Maoism and, if not the real Chinese Cultural Revolution, then at least the anti-hierarchical, anti-bureaucratic and anti-revisionist imaginary that surrounded it.<sup>671</sup> Maoism also became a better supported ideology among students because, unlike classical versions of Marxism, which gave primacy to the industrial proletariat in the struggle against capitalism, Mao's “fundamental notion of the people” included workers, peasants, radical intellectuals, and students and thus provided the French militant students with a set of ideological tools to adequately make the links between their own struggles in the university and the struggles of

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<sup>668</sup> Ross, 85; Bertraux, 77.

<sup>669</sup> Gobbille, 29; Vigna and Zacarini-Fournel, 165.

<sup>670</sup> Jalabert, 77; Reynolds, 37.

<sup>671</sup> Ross, 85; Zacarini-Fournel, 165.

anti-colonial forces abroad. As a result of this, Maoist groups such as the *Parti communiste français marxiste-léniniste* as well as students of Maoist influence were active alongside other far-left student groups including the Trotskyist parties, the Situationists, and anarchists.<sup>672</sup>

As a result of their ideological opposition to both the function and administration of the university, as well as the continuation of imperialist aggression by the major powers throughout the 1960s, militant students and sympathizers had been active in French political life right up to the events of May 68. After student involvement in the Algerian War had ended in 1962, students had turned their attention to the issues surrounding education. By the years just preceding 1968, this culminated in opposition to the ill-conceived Fouchet reforms - a set of proposals by the Ministry of Education which looked to “professionalize” students' programs by more directly linking them to employment and by introducing a more restrictive process of selection. While the Ministry believed that the reforms would alleviate the problems of university massification, the militant students and others of a similar perspective viewed this as furthering the assembly line nature of the university, further reifying the stratification in society between technocrats and subordinates, and limiting future opportunities for advancement and participation, altogether contributing to the prolongation of modern forms of domination. Along with taking on other issues such as the restrictions on sexual freedom on the campuses, from March 1967 to February 1968 protests concerning educational issues proliferated in Paris and in other French university towns.<sup>673</sup>

Though further demands to scrap the Fouchet reforms and to end the rigidities of the education system later appeared during the May events themselves, it was anti-Vietnam activism which kick-started the flooding of students into the streets from the 3<sup>rd</sup>. According to Jalabert, student opposition to the Vietnam War, particularly around the issue of French

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<sup>672</sup> Gobbille, 12.  
<sup>673</sup> Ibid, 13.

complacency in supporting the United States, began in February 1965 when a number of influential public intellectuals including Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir instituted the *Mouvement de la paix* to demand an international conference for peace. As Jalabert describes, *l'Union nationale d'étudiants français* (UNEF), the largest student union in the country, was quick to respond to this call, in part due to the radical nature of their leadership.<sup>674</sup> In a support statement aimed at the *Mouvement de la paix*, UNEF stated that it, “reaffirms the position of total solidarity of the French students with the just cause of students and the South Vietnamese people who are struggling historically under the direction of the FNL for national liberation and strongly condemns the American raids against Vietnam.”<sup>675</sup>

This statement marked the beginning of student involvement against the Vietnam War, stemming from both UNEF and other student and teaching unions which formed the *Collectif intersyndical universitaire d'action pour la paix au Vietnam* as well as less institutionalized groups more militant and further to the left. These included not only previously formed anti-war groups but also the previously mentioned far-left student groups: Trotskyists, Situationists, anti-revisionist and anti-Communist Party Marxist-Leninists, Maoists and anarchists.<sup>676</sup> From 1965 until 1968, many French students demonstrated that they were prepared to take to the streets en masse against the mainstream political order.

It can be said that the radical democratic activity of May 68 underwent a prologue of sorts with the demonstrations against the Vietnam War that grew in size as the month of May 68 drew nearer. After planning for an action against the war in June 1965, the *Collectif intersyndical universitaire pour la paix au Vietnam* held a highly successful anti-war week during 18-25 November of the same year.<sup>677</sup> At this point in time, 4000 people took part in

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<sup>674</sup> Jalabert, 70.

<sup>675</sup> Ibid

<sup>676</sup> Gobbille, 12.

<sup>677</sup> Jalabert, 70.

what amounted to “the first protest of scale against the war.”<sup>678</sup> Participation continued to grow during the next year's demonstration in May 1966 and by the time of its next iteration on 21 October 1967, 30,000 people took to the streets of Paris to express their opposition.

Perhaps the greatest reason why the anti-war protests of the late 1960s have a smaller place in the French collective memory as well as historical record is the fact that, unlike in early May 68, these demonstrations did not provoke the repression of the authorities. Quite simply, the relatively small scale of the protests, the fact that its aims were of moral condemnation and not squarely directed at the government nor Gaullist regime ensured that the Gaullists' interests were not threatened. Further, because the demonstrators during these protests did not interrupt nor jeopardize any key spaces and places for the functioning of the Gaullist regime, the interests of the demonstrators also remained compatible with those of the government.

This, however, was not to be the case in the immediate build-up to the events of May. Reynolds and Gobbille have both suggested that there had been serious divisions between student groups during the late 1960s, not just in terms of factionalism within the far-left, but more importantly between more moderate and more radical student groups, especially in terms of UNEF's relations to the organizations of the far left.<sup>679</sup> As we have just seen, despite the fact that UNEF had been operating under the leadership of student radical Jacques Sauvegeot and also despite UNEF going on to play a much more militant role in the midst of May, the *Collectif intersyndical universitaire* of which UNEF was a part had not taken the demonstrations to a more contentious scale and, in February 1968, had shown that they were not willing to do so even when confronted with repression, though limited, by the forces of order. Indeed, between 19 and 22 February the collective was able to co-ordinate an event entitled “three days for Vietnam” which, in a “symbolic preview” of May 68, saw 5000

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<sup>678</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>679</sup> Reynolds, 87; Gobbille, 13.

students occupy the Latin Quarter, distributing tracts, postering, “renaming” streets in honour of the Vietnamese, and, most importantly, bringing together diverse student groups of the left for a common cause.<sup>680</sup> However, this commonality was temporarily broken after the state, for the first time in dealing with the anti-Vietnam War protests, slightly showed its teeth by arresting several of the participating militant youth after they had confronted the police, an action that the more moderate UNEF, at this time, was unwilling to involve itself in.

Just as we have seen from previous cases following a radical democratic “stepping out”, the “stepping into” areas deemed off limits by the dominant force in a confrontation, whether for the purposes of protecting particular levels of power or maintaining control over the functions of the desired socio-political and socio-economic arrangement, exists as a crucial development which renders interests incompatible. This, in turn, results in either repression or in the dominant force having to retreat while maintaining its overall position. From this date of 22 February to the beginning of the May events on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, a distinct pattern of contestation was set that saw sporadic periods of radical democratic activity cross the line into spaces and places deemed off limits by the university authorities leading to the delimitation of the radical democratic “stepping out” through interventions by the police. At this point however, with only a handful of militants confronting the overall socio-political arrangement, the dominant forces at the heights of the state were not even made to retreat, let alone feel threatened in terms of the survival of their order. As a result of this, the students were left to be dealt with by the university rector and his personal calls to the police. Given the absence of any necessity to completely close down the movement in the eyes of the government, this gave the students some space to continue with their radical democratic activities, despite facing the police when they were deemed to have pushed too far.

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<sup>680</sup> Jalabert, 74.

As a result of this relative openness, there emerged a growing militancy of the far-left student groups in reaction to the arrests made during the “three days for Vietnam” in February, along with the increased aggression of the United States. Ross explains that during a protest against the war as well as previous arrests on 20 March, a student broke a window of the American Express building along Rue Scribe, leading to further arrests including those of the perpetrator and supporters.<sup>681</sup> In a continuation of the spiral pattern of militant action, subsequent intervention by the police, and reprisal by the militants, a group of far-left students from Nanterre led by Daniel Cohn-Bendit formed the 22 March Movement to fight against the previous student arrests.<sup>682</sup> Three hundred members strong, on 22 March, the students marched through their campus in the western suburbs of Paris and occupied the university's administrative tower, including the council chamber. In their statement denouncing the “bourgeois university” and in their renaming an amphitheatre “Che Guevara” they made their ideological position clear to both the university administration as well as the student base.

This, of course, had consequences, both in terms of further mobilization and the reaction of the authorities. Once again, these two outcomes were intertwined in what amounted to a further spiralling of contention. In terms of its immediate effects on mobilization, the 22 March Movement's critique of the bourgeois university was one which resonated with a large number of other militants and other students more generally who had experienced the alienating conditions over the previous few years. As such, the critique being launched from Nanterre's council chamber acted as a form of brokerage, linking the previously unconnected world of student radicalism with the typically apolitical student who was experiencing university life and the French education system in a manner that the militant students were describing. As Touraine states, the fact that the far-left groups were not

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<sup>681</sup> Ross, 85.

<sup>682</sup> Sirinelli, 62.

only speaking the language of, what would appear at the time as, a distant prospect of revolution, but were launching powerful critiques against “the contents of teaching methods, the absence of spaces and the problem of selection.”<sup>683</sup> Although in late March this brokerage had been limited in part because UNEF, the largest and most influential student union, had yet to certify the actions of the 22 March Movement on account of its radical tactics, this was soon to change. As Touraine has further argued, the student movement continued to pick up steam because the militant students “were able in a few weeks to conquer a vast audience at Nanterre and create the embryo for the critical university.”<sup>684</sup> Reynolds supports this in stating that by “using the growing tension within the universities and the ongoing issue of the Vietnam War, these militants awakened the consciousness of the silent student mass and were fundamental in triggering the 1968 call.”<sup>685</sup>

Of course, what also pushed this along was the continued interference of the authorities, both at the university and in terms of the wider forces, as well as the combative reaction of some students on the far right. Indeed, after the occupation of Nanterre's administration tower, several more arrests had been made and clashes occurred between the 22 March Movement, security forces, and some students of the far right.<sup>686</sup> When these events brokered more support for the militants and another anti-imperialist rally was scheduled for the following week, rector Pierre Grappin, preventively closed Nanterre between 28 March and 1 April in an effort to avoid further escalation and potential occupation. For Grappin, the militant students had clearly “stepped into” spaces that interrupted the running of the Gaullist order university and thus required closing down. This

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<sup>683</sup> Touraine, 64.

<sup>684</sup> Ibid

<sup>685</sup> Reynolds, 88.

<sup>686</sup> Sirinelli, 62; McMillan, 180.

became more apparent by the disciplining that was given to several members of the 22 March Movement.<sup>687</sup>

However, such actions - the temporary closing of the university and the rounding up of militant activists - backfired on the Nanterre administration as it would later backfire on the administration of the Sorbonne as well as the Gaullist administration. Rather than demobilize the students, the actions of Nanterre's rector only served to validate the claims that the university was rigid and paternalistic and thus activated a boundary between themselves and the students that saw many previously apolitical students take sides against the administrators, pushing the groups away from potential compromise.

Though their numbers were still relatively small, Touraine suggests that the militants were able to recruit around 1000 new ardent supporters from this period through April.<sup>688</sup> As a result of this gradual growth, the Nanterre administration remained unable to control the 22 March movement. Indeed, during the temporary period of closure between 28 March and 1 April, 200 militants occupied an amphitheatre at the Sorbonne in the centre of Paris in an initial attempt to expand the movement horizontally across campuses. Though, once again, this attempt at brokerage had no short-term gains since UNEF had condemned this move as overly aggressive, this shift toward the centre of Paris as a rallying point would go on to pay high dividends in terms of placing the events on centre stage and assisting in turning them into events of national importance. Furthermore, when the campus was reopened on 2 April, a fresh round of agitation began with several more sit-ins organized on the theme of anti-imperialism - events which were increasingly characterized by demands for amnesty for those participants who had been arrested and/or subjected to forms of academic disciplining or penalization.

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<sup>687</sup> McMillan, 180.

<sup>688</sup> Touraine, 64.

While instances of students' radical democratic "stepping out" continued throughout April as did the repressive, though limited, shutting down of these instances for having jeopardized the operation of the Gaullist university, culminating in the arrest of Cohn-Bendit and other 22 March Movement leaders along with the more permanent closing of Nanterre until September, by the end of the month, neither the university authorities nor those of the state truly understood the extent to which a radical critique of both the university and society itself had been diffused in the previous few weeks. As Bernard has argued, this can be clearly seen through the very limited reforms that the university proposed for the reopening of the university in September, including changes to the dormitory system and the appointment of a second dean.<sup>689</sup> A statement by Pompidou, who had, up to this point, not shown much public apprehension about the student agitation, also highlights the fact that the government had severely underestimated the depth of antipathy held against it. When asked whether he would refrain from his state visit to Afghanistan, Pompidou replied,

"I do not see why I would cancel this visit. We have never been in such a good situation: no risk of a confidence motion, no worries for employers, nothing prepared by the unions until September. It is only those "enragés" from Nanterre who are agitating."

Little did Mr. Pompidou know that everything would change in a matter of days. It would take a much greater level of repression to contain the students' radical democratic movement, if only for the reason that the situation had moved further towards the revolutionary.

### **The Student Question**

With the closure of Nanterre and the appearance of eight militant students in front of a disciplinary commission, the 22 March Movement had organized a rally of around 300 to 400

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<sup>689</sup> Mathias Bernard, "L'état en Mai 68" in *Mai-Juin 1968: Huit semaines qui ébranlèrent la France*, eds. Xavier Vigna and Jean Vigreux (Dijon: P U de Dijon, 2010): 132.

students on 3 May.<sup>690</sup> This rally had also come to be supported by other radical groups including the Trotskyist parties as well as UNEF which had been drifting leftward as a result of the growing involvement of the state seen throughout the month of April and the negotiations between the militant groups and UNEF's leader, Jacques Sauvegeot. The brokering of this horizontal alliance did much to increase the potential capacity of the student movement and also diffuse a more radical anti-government position among less active union members. This however was not enough to give the majority of students a reason to take to the streets to demand changes to the hierarchical university and stratified society which it served. It was the police repression on this day of 3 May which birthed this critique as a living breathing movement.

Fearing a repeat of the episodes which had taken place at Nanterre, the rector “suspended classes at the Sorbonne too and called in the police to prevent disorder.”<sup>691</sup> As Ross has argued, this was a very dramatic step to take. As she states, “never before had the police entered the Sorbonne - not even the Germans had violated that sanctuary.”<sup>692</sup> What would activate many students and sympathizers against the police and, by extension, the Gaullist order was the brutality with which the evacuation of the Sorbonne was conducted. As several commentators have described, when the police moved in to forcibly remove the students and the students attempted to resist, they were met with the now infamous *matraquage* - the violent use of the baton, as well a “liberal use of tear gas.”<sup>693</sup> Of an even more damning nature, when around 1500 to 2000 sympathetic students who had caught wind of the happenings through word of mouth in and around the Latin Quarter came to the aid of their fellow students under attack, they were also met with this extreme use of force, unseen

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<sup>690</sup> Richard, 59; Sirinelli, 73.

<sup>691</sup> McMillan, 180; Reynolds, 1.

<sup>692</sup> Ross, 29.

<sup>693</sup> McMillan 93, 137; Reynolds 1.

since Algeria, by around 1500 officers.<sup>694</sup> At the end of the 3 May episode, 590 students had been arrested and the Sorbonne and the entire Latin Quarter had been occupied by the police.<sup>695</sup> As several commentators on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May have described, it was this event, seen as illegitimate and as an affront to human dignity, that not only shifted public opinion in favour of the students, but also turned previous political neutrals of the student world, albeit with several nascent grievances towards the Gaullist university and the state, into participants in a radically oriented movement. Accounts of this important identity shift and the subsequent brokerage which drove a crucial wedge between the students and the state are quite plentiful. As Pierre Grappin stated after the events,

“The reaction of the students, not only to the action of the police, but to their simple presence...is a visceral reaction, a reflex allergy. Most of the students were apolitical in the beginning, they disapproved of the incidents at Nanterre. But they were instinctually on the side of the 22 March group...because the police were there and that signified for them an intolerable repression.”<sup>696</sup>

Commenting on the events of 3 May, Chris Reynolds has furthered this analysis stating that, “the imprisonment of a number students, the occupation of the Sorbonne by the police and their omnipresence in the student Latin Quarter provided enough ammo” for the militant minority to attract support from the wider student population.<sup>697</sup>

It is certainly true that, at first, many of these students were “political virgins” and “that the roads of compassion more than the roads of ideology brought them into the terrain of politics” with many protesting first and foremost against the aggression of the police and the unwillingness of the Gaullist state to hear speech instead of mere noise.<sup>698</sup> However it must be stated that over the next ten days and beyond, students, militant or otherwise, entered this opening in the tens of thousands fostered by opposition to the police oppression to

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<sup>694</sup> Ross, 29; Richard, 60.

<sup>695</sup> Reynolds, 1; McMillan, 180.

<sup>696</sup> Ross, 28.

<sup>697</sup> Reynolds, 1.

<sup>698</sup> Sirinelli, 97.

“become subjects”, participating in horizontal speech about both the future society and the organization of daily life, as well as making demands, whether reformist or revolutionary, in terms of both the education system and the socio-political ordering of France itself.<sup>699</sup>

Stepping out as equals, discussing in the streets about the collective future, and confronting the Gaullists as though they were an arbitrary power certainly displayed some ideas that are held in high regard within radical democratic thought.

Despite this however, unlike the more sporadic episodes of April, the students' radical democratic "stepping out" in early May was faced with more serious limitations, most notably the restraints and, frequently, the outright repression of the government through the use of the state apparatus. Yet it also must be said that at other times the movements' resemblance to what the theorists have described as radical democracy was lost due to the actions of the students themselves. During the early stages of May between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, the students were far from united behind any program, let alone a revolutionary one. As we have stated, while some of the more militant students and sympathizers of the far-left were calling for a revolutionary transformation of French socio-political life with various forms of socialism in mind, others saw political and social reforms as sufficient while others did not extend their critique far beyond the realm of the university.

However, even if the students had been more or less united on the question of revolution, they would not have had the capacity to entertain this option. The students simply did not have the manpower to carry out such an audacious task on their own. As we will see, this is what prompted the more radical students to call upon the workers in mid-May with varying results. Yet, with that said, despite this lack of a united revolutionary program and revolutionary capacity, this did not prevent students of the radical left from using violent tactics to have their demands met, namely amnesty for the arrested students, the evacuation of

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<sup>699</sup> Bertraux, 81.

the police from the Latin Quarter, and the reopening of the Sorbonne. Of course, in terms of the balance of power, it may seem absurd to compare the violence of students - the throwing of broken pavement and Molotov cocktails - to the awesome power of the state in what Sirinelli calls the “era of the B52”. However, as we have seen, and perhaps to its detriment, the use of coercion to any degree matters for the normative project associated with radical democratic thought. This is for the reason that, once again, radical democracy is a theory of political equality, a theory of agonistic respect which tries to confront domination as well as the need for the negation of one's opponent.

We can see here that the case of France during May 68 brings us back to a dilemma that we first encountered with the Croatian case and subsequently witnessed in the analyses of Thailand and Singapore. This is the fact that, despite “stepping out”, radical democratic actors can never “step into” a place of equality. First, if they “step out” and do not “step into” any space or place that challenges the interest of the dominant force, they are found to be submitting themselves to a position of subordination. If they “step in” too far and threaten the interests of the dominant force, they are likely to face repression, putting them back into a position of subordination. If they “step in” all the way and take political power, they themselves become an agent of domination, thus not respecting the political equality and agonistic respect that radical democracy is founded upon. This is also the case if, as we have just described, a contending force with apparent radical democratic features uses coercive means to achieve its goals. Though we will deal with this theoretical problem and its implications for radical democratic thought at our next stage of the work, we can see that these dynamics were apparent during the students' initial period of radicalization from 3 to 10 May.

Being utilized more frequently and in a more severe manner than in the month of April which had been more sporadic and allowed for a relative flourishing of radical

democratic activity, during these eight days, the students often faced the heavy hand of the state and, at times, responded with their own spells of violence, frequently defensive, though sometimes as a matter of provocation. Beginning from the time that the police attacked them at the Sorbonne and around the Latin Quarter, the students, who had raised barricades both in defiance and for protection, had begun to articulate their demands. It was within these barricades - a space of about 2 or 3 kilometres - that the students would, over the next several weeks, “retake speech”, discuss horizontally, and participate in what Ross has described as the pleasurable work of “taking charge of their conditions of activity and existence...of producing a different social organization altogether.”<sup>700</sup> Indeed, it was in this very commune that the various debates between and within different revolutionary and reform-oriented organizations took place.

However, at this early stage, the mass of students who had flocked to the streets of the Latin Quarter had neither the collective will nor the capacity to put pressure on the Gaullist order with programmatic demands. Since on the 4<sup>th</sup>, the police had been ordered to occupy the area in and around the Sorbonne in an attempt to reorder the Latin Quarter and since four student protesters had been arrested and given two months in prison on the 5<sup>th</sup>, the immediate concerns of the students in the streets revolved around reasserting control over their student spaces.<sup>701</sup> For the more militant students and their sympathizers, this would serve as a rallying cry before being able to push for anything of a more transformative nature. Strategically, this remained the only option since the swelling of student support in the Latin Quarter, including the institutional support of UNEF and the teaching associates' union of SNESup, had directly stemmed from what had been viewed as oppression and a glaring example of the rigid and authoritarian nature of the Gaullist socio-political order.

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<sup>700</sup> Ross 103, Sirinelli 141.

<sup>701</sup> Michelle Zacarini-Fournel, “Genre et politique: Les années 1968,” *Vingtième Siècle Revue d’histoire* No 75 Numéro special: *Histoires des femmes, histoire des genres*. (Jul – Sept 2002): 134; Pudal, 190, Richard, 60.

For certain, the ruling power at this stage did not see much of a need to seriously engage with the demands of the students. Since the students had interfered with the running of the Gaullist ordered university, a social function that they could not concede to radically-oriented students nor encourage through the granting of amnesty, the authorities believed that it was in their interest to repress the students even as the demonstrations spread across France, unaware of the repercussions this would later reveal. As such, the police, particularly in the French capital were quick to repress the students when they attempted to push the government, however lightly, into acceding to their demands. For example, on 6 May “roaming student demonstrations” that pushed up against the police forces in an attempt to have their demands heard and escalate the government's crisis were met with the violent reaction of the police using more tear gas and a very liberal use of the baton.<sup>702</sup> With this, along with the combative tactics of the demonstrators – “breaking and throwing of the pavement, fires, the building of barricades, the throwing of diverse objects”- radical democratic activity gave way to something more akin to a battle. This was most clearly exemplified in the clash that resulted from a protest called by UNEF and SNESup. Having departed from the oft-used starting place of Place Denfert-Rochereau, when the demonstrators reached Saint-Germain-des-Prés and were met by the police, violent confrontations ensued that lasted until 1 am and resulted in 600 injuries and 122 arrests.<sup>703</sup>

The 7<sup>th</sup> saw a similar series of events transpire, albeit with a heightened intensity as a result of the repression carried out the day before. With several other student organizations joining in the condemnation of the repressive methods of the police, somewhere between 30,000 and 50,000 protesters accepted the call from UNEF and joined a cortege which once again began its march from Place Denfert-Rochereau.<sup>704</sup> In recognizing the growing strength

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<sup>702</sup> Bernard Pudal, “Les événements de mai et juin 1968: bref récit chronologique” in *Mai 68*, eds. Damamme et al. (Paris: Les Editions de l'Atelier, 2008): 190.

<sup>703</sup> Pudal, 190; Richard, 60.

<sup>701</sup> Pudal, 190; Guilhaumou, 171.

of their movement, the students marched down the Boulevard St. Michel, declaring with much irony to the forces of order and the mainstream media who had tried to play down its strength, “We are a faction!”<sup>705</sup> As Jacques Guilhaumou, a participant in the movement has stated while reflecting on this day, with the growing confidence of the students, the march saw participants make an array of demands both in terms of ones directly related to student issues and others which were of a wider, more transformative nature. The Gaullists and the forces of order under them, however, failed to hear these demands and also remained intransigent on the students' primary concerns of the police retreating from the Latin Quarter, amnesty for the arrested students, and the reopening of the universities.<sup>706</sup> As a result of this, just as the day before, when the students tried to push out of the Latin Quarter they were met by the police. At Montparnasse, confrontation escalated into violent street battles, resulting in 474 more arrests.<sup>707</sup>

In Paris, the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of May proved to be quieter days, at least in terms of the lack of confrontation in the streets and some were beginning to wonder if the movement was losing steam.<sup>708</sup> However, during these 48 hours, several key developments unfolded that helped to push the movement along. Taking their cue from Paris, students in many provincial faculties also took to the streets in solidarity and in some cases occupied their faculties, for example in Rennes.<sup>709</sup> In western France, particularly in Nantes and Brest, this was carried even further with students joining workers and farmers in *L'ouest veut vivre* (the west wants to live) movement, beginning with a mass demonstration of roughly 100,000 people who were protesting the lack of amenities, high unemployment, and the general disparity which existed between Brittany and the Loire and the rest of France. Though the linking of radical students and anti-capitalist unionists occurred in the west in what was originally a separate

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<sup>705</sup> Guilhaumou, 171.

<sup>706</sup> Pudal 191; Richard 60.

<sup>707</sup> Pudal, 191.

<sup>708</sup> Sirinelli, 141.

<sup>709</sup> Ibid; Pudal, 191.

thrust from the events of Paris, they came to represent what could be achieved through a combined movement.<sup>710</sup>

Back in the capital, support for the students had reached new heights after two days of repression had further solidified public opinion against the authorities and the police with 61% of the country feeling that the students were right to be taking action.<sup>711</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre as well as other intellectuals had expressed their solidarity with the protesters and a number of lycée students had followed suit by going on strike themselves, thus further amplifying the breadth of the movement.<sup>712</sup> However, the most important development that occurred over this two day period was the realization of the student unions and other radical groups and participants that their demands, both immediate and programmatic, needed further support if they were ever to be translated into actual socio-political transformation. Indeed, over the previous six days, pleasurable work had been done by the various student participants, displaying their subjectivity, discussing horizontally, and demonstrating their equality to a Gaullist order whose insistence on legitimately speaking for the citizens they thoroughly and wholeheartedly rejected. “Let no-one speak in our place!” scrawled on tracts distributed in the Latin Quarter and bellowed out in those same streets does encapsulate best the world that many in the movement of May were trying to construct. Yet the students knew that, for the time being, such a construction was wholly contingent on its toleration by the dominant Gaullist force. It had been made clear over the last two days of repression and fighting in the streets that their demands could only go as far as the authorities allowed them to go - that their radical democratic activity would face closure and the *matraque* the moment it inched too far. Yet the alternative was to submit themselves to a subordinate position of acquiescence which, given the intensity with which they were making their immediate demands, would have been completely unacceptable. The demands thus sent them in search

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<sup>710</sup> Reynolds, 107; Vigna and Zacarini-Fournel, 171.

<sup>711</sup> Sirinelli, 141.

<sup>712</sup> Pudal, 191.

of more powerful allies. And it would be the demands that determined the form that their political activity took, whether in subordination or revolt.

The powerful allies that the students had been looking to were none other than France's relatively powerful and also relatively militant labour unions, the Communist Party-affiliated *Confédération générale du travail* (CGT) as well as the *Confédération française démocratique du travail* (CFDT). During 9 May, representatives from UNEF met with delegations from both the CGT and CFDT to discuss a collective action - negotiations which culminated in the agreement to hold a large demonstration in Paris with the *Fédération de l'éducation nationale* (FEN) as a participating member.<sup>713</sup> As Richard has described however, these were difficult negotiations as the language of the radical students and the more bureaucratic and institutionalized unions were quite different, as were the cultures and manners of doing politics.<sup>714</sup> Moreover, what the two sides were looking to achieve through this compact at this point in time was also divergent. For although the unions since 4 May had denounced the police repression and the reactionary state, they were not speaking the language of revolution and socio-political transformation as some of the far-left student groups had been doing. This was particularly the case with the *Parti communiste français* (PCF) associated CGT who, like its political master, had identified a streak of "adventurism" in the students' barricaded insurrection and as such, for both ideological and strategic reasons, were weary of supporting the students without having an influence as to the direction the movement would take. McMillan nicely connects these ideological reasons when he states that, in the PCF's eyes:

“Only the PCF stood for the real interests of the workers, recognized the need to negotiate with bourgeois state on their behalf and prudently avoid giving the army an excuse to smash the institutions of organized labour.”<sup>715</sup>

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<sup>713</sup> Richard, 63.

<sup>714</sup> Ibid

<sup>715</sup> McMillan, 182.

While the ideological reason thus stemmed from the party's orthodox Marxist faith in the industrial proletariat's role as the “subject of history”, maker of any real socialist revolution, and sole legitimate representative of the workers, the strategic reason revolved around their fear of jeopardizing their gradualist “union of the left” strategy that they had been pursuing since the early 1960s in the wake of the Algerian War.<sup>716</sup> As a result of this stance, on 3 May, the secretary of the PCF Georges Marchais had written in response to the student uprising that it was a “false revolution to be unmasked”, designed by anarchists and stemming from the bourgeoisie.<sup>717</sup> On 4 March, while the PCF softened its stance and supported the students in their struggle against the police and the university authorities, they appealed to the students to follow the party line. By 9 May, though the position of the PCF and CGT had not substantially changed, they along with the CFDT recognized that their own bargaining position could improve by taking to the streets in support of the students' immediate demands.

On 10 May thus, UNEF, FEN, SNESup, and *l'Union des grandes écoles* (UGE) along with the CGT and CFDT collectively denounced the police repression, the continued closure of the universities, and arrest of the students in a joint communiqué.<sup>718</sup> Once again, the groups demanded amnesty for the students, the evacuation of the police from the Latin Quarter and the reopening of the faculties. The demands were not only bolstered by the support of the trade unions but by a number of new lycée and university students who had been encouraged to go on strike and face the state due to the boundary activation and identity shift fostered by the police repression over the previous several days as well as the brokerage of previously unconnected sites through the diffusion of an anti-government position via the radical students. The recent certification of this by the unions had also bolstered the movement through an increase of strength and legitimacy. These mechanisms of mobilization

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<sup>716</sup> Ibid

<sup>717</sup> Reynolds, 40; Gobile, 93.

<sup>718</sup> Pudal, 191; Richard, 61.

pushed the students further away from a compromise with the Gaullists, paving the way for a large-scale clash.

On the side of the authorities, not only the persistence of the movement but its growth had shifted the degree to which its interests were being threatened. The students had already interfered with the operation of the Gaullist educational order but after a week in the streets and an increasingly strengthening movement the Gaullist socio-political order as a whole was beginning to be threatened. This meant that the authorities were now willing to pursue the avenue of the negotiation table and, if failing, would resort to a wholesale clearing out of the protesters from the Latin Quarter. Sirinelli documents a meeting between the chief of police and the Minister of the Interior where it was decided that any prolongation of the students' agitation would be catastrophic.<sup>719</sup> In the eyes of the dominant Gaullists, the students had now “stepped in” too far and their militancy could no longer be tolerated.

With this, 30,000 lycée and university students came once again throughout the day to protest at the Place Denfert-Rochereau. As Chris Reynolds describes, these young students as well as other youth - particularly young workers – “threw up the barricades in the Latin Quarter while Alain Geisman, Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Jacques Sauvegeot negotiated with Alain Peyrefitte, the Education Minister.”<sup>720</sup> Sirinelli further describes that additional meetings to defuse the growing crisis had taken place between interim Prime Minister Jovis Joxe (Pompidou was still in Afghanistan believing that the issue was only confined to the students), Rector Roche and representatives from UNEF and SNESup. More spontaneous attempts to come to some type of agreement had also been made by a group of students and professors who had demanded to see the rector.<sup>721</sup> However, by 1:45 am it had become clear that the negotiations had failed. At the crux of the impasse had been the unwillingness of the authorities to reopen the universities. According to Sirinelli, Alain Peyrefitte had not been of

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<sup>719</sup> Sirinelli, 157.

<sup>720</sup> Reynolds, 1.

<sup>721</sup> Sirinelli, 149.

the opinion that the conditions were correct for a recommencement.<sup>722</sup> Yet the students were not willing to concede on this issue. As such, they maintained their position behind the barricades on Boulevard St. Michel and Rue Guy-Lussac in the Latin Quarter.<sup>723</sup> The statement of Daniel Cohn-Bendit following the failed attempts at having student demands met clearly demonstrates the position of the many students who remained firm and stayed put in the Latin Quarter. As Cohn-Bendit stated at 1:45 am,

“We didn't engage in negotiations; we said to the Rector: 'What's happening this evening in the streets is that an entire youth is expressing itself against a certain society. We said to him that in order for there not to be any spilling of blood it's necessary that the police leave the Latin Quarter, and that as long as our demands aren't met we know that the demonstrators will remain behind their barricades.”

*Le Monde*, who had printed Cohn-Bendit's statements continued to describe the position and resulting consequences:

“Over the airwaves, the students affirm the complete solidarity with these statements. These statements made it clear that the chance for an immediate compromise has become non-existent and the test of strength that was feared now seems the most probable eventuality.”<sup>724</sup>

As *Le Monde* had stated, it was the “test of strength” which came next. With negotiations failing, the police were given orders to “retake the barricades and absorb pockets of agitation.”<sup>725</sup> What followed was another very violent night - one which lasted until 6 am, culminating in 367 injuries, 460 arrests, and the burning of dozens of cars.<sup>726</sup> McMillan describes the turbulent scenes in stating that “students hurled stones and Molotov cocktails at the police and even innocent bystanders, including Red Cross volunteers indiscriminately.”<sup>727</sup> Once more, despite the forceful response of the students, most observers within the general

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<sup>722</sup> Ibid, 146.

<sup>723</sup> Richard, 61.

<sup>724</sup> *Le Monde*, 12-13 May 1968, translated by Mitchell Abidor. Simon Fraser Archive of the May Events.

<sup>725</sup> Sirinelli, 152.

<sup>726</sup> Reynolds, 2.

<sup>727</sup> McMillan, 180; Sirinelli, 152

public saw the state as having unjustifiably acted with far too strong a hand.<sup>728</sup> Press reporters had displayed what were “undeniable scenes of brutality” and many were particularly upset by these strong-arm tactics of the *Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité* (CRS), an aggression which was coupled with the negative image of the CRS officer whose helmeted and black-booted figure produced intimidation and memories of the German occupation some twenty-five years ago. Ross argues that such repressive actions, sometimes even breaking the bounds of controlling student militants, provoked a middle-class support that had been gradually building since 3 May. As she states,

“the tendency, particularly on the part of the CRS to conduct 'blind attacks' (on activists and passersby) had the effect of producing sympathy in middle class observers and bystanders not initially well disposed to the students.”<sup>729</sup>

For the Gaullists however, their crackdown on “the night of the barricades” had created much graver worries than the sympathy of the middle classes towards the students. This was for the reason that, while the support of the middle classes would provide legitimacy to the actions of those on one side of the political divide or the other, they would only play a background role in the first half of May as they were, for the most part, not the people who would take to the streets and halt the functioning of French socio-political life en masse. Rather, this role continued to be taken up by two different sets of actors, albeit in a fashion that saw them “step out” of their usual social position and establish horizontal links and even identification with each other against the Gaullist order.

This first group continued to be the students. As Sirinelli suggests, the second “divine surprise” of May 68 was the fact that the *piétons de mai* - namely, the students demonstrating on a daily basis - did not flee after the police crackdown on the night of the barricades. Rather, with a growing condemnation of the government's tactics, the students' position within the

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<sup>728</sup> Sirinelli, 177  
<sup>729</sup> Ross, 30.

Latin Quarter came to be fortified. Likewise, the government, having believed that the unrest could be attributed to a handful of student radicals, failed to appreciate the deeper reasons for the students taking to the street. As we have seen, both the revolutionary and more reform-minded students had expressed their desire for sweeping changes with regards to both the university and the socio-political order as a whole and this would not be satisfied with the Gaullists merely meeting its initial three demands. The government thus, including Pompidou who on his return from Afghanistan had decided to reopen the Sorbonne, had failed to recognize that a “return to normal” would simply not suffice. For, in their quest to democratize the university and, indeed, France, and do away with the rigid, hierarchical, and technocratic structures, once Pompidou fulfilled his promise he made on the 12<sup>th</sup> and reopened the faculties on the 14<sup>th</sup>, the students duly occupied it and blocked the resumption of its operation.<sup>730</sup>

This, however, would not have been possible if it had not been for the capacity boosting brokerage of the other important group of political subjects who, from the 11<sup>th</sup>, took to the streets en masse, and, in interrupting the functions of Gaullist socio-economic life, paralyzed the country and placed a tremendous amount of pressure on Pompidou, de Gaulle, and the entire order. These, of course, were the large number of French workers who first marched in solidarity with the students on the 11<sup>th</sup>, participated in a general strike on the 13<sup>th</sup>, and continued the stoppage and, at times, the occupations of their factories against the wishes of the union bosses from the 14<sup>th</sup> onward, culminating in roughly ten million on strike by the 20<sup>th</sup>.<sup>731</sup>

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<sup>730</sup> Pudal, 191.  
<sup>731</sup> Ibid, 192.

## **The Social Question**

If we analyze this development through the lens of mechanisms of mobilization, it would seem as though an identity shift of workers which placed them squarely against the Gaullist order both in ideology and praxis, the brokerage of an alliance between radical students and radical workers, and a diffusion of militant tactics which effectively shut down the country and placed the worker-student alliance directly at loggerheads in terms of interests vis-à-vis the Gaullist regime. Yet, despite the influence of these mechanisms which pushed the two sides to a breaking point, this fortnight between the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 24<sup>th</sup> was the time period in which radical democratic activity was able to most fully persist.

As we will see in greater detail, there were two fundamental reasons for this. The first rested with the interests of the Gaullists. With the movement having undergone a very dramatic scale shift - from a street opposition numbering in the thousands to one in the millions - the government could no longer rely on repression to control the growth of the movement and protect its own interests. Given the militancy and revolutionary fervour of many workers, outright repression would have directly played into the hands of those who already viewed the regime as illegitimate and who potentially had the numerical strength to overthrow it. As a result of this, de Gaulle, and especially Pompidou, had to resort to less coercive measures to prevent the movement from fulfilling its political potential. Here we can see that radical democracy carries on not because there is a strong compatibility in terms of the actors' divergent visions of the political community but because any mass repression carried out through the state would have jeopardized the rule and hence the interests of the dominant Gaullist force.

As we also see however, this outcome could only be the case because the potential of the movement during this two-week period was channelled into neither a revolutionary nor concessionary form. Rather, given the reluctance of various radical sub-groups in the general

movement, both students and workers, to latch onto a concessionary, reformist endgame, these actors continued with militant actions including occupations and the rejection of solutions put forth by the government and the reformist trade unions in an effort to maintain the possibility of a radical political breakthrough. However, since none of the established institutional bodies who had the capacity to take revolutionary action - most notably, the previously discussed PCF - were unwilling to show this flag, the direction of the movement hung in the balance and the radical democratic nature of the episode in this time period carried on. Touraine summarizes this well when he states, “the movement was therefore stuck between its will to struggle and its capacity to revolt.”<sup>732</sup> Having latched on to the workers as a result of ideological sympathy and in the hope that the great proletariat might be able to carry its movement further, it was this maintenance of the radical democratic nature of the workers' movement that also allowed for the continuation of the “student commune”.

For certain, the support that the workers showed to the students on 11 May when many workers marched with them against the police repression in various cities across France, and even furthered with the national strike and 2 million solidarity march participants (one million in Paris alone), was the type of alliance that the more radical students had been hoping for all along.<sup>733</sup> As Touraine states,

“For the students, the workers were an immense force and above all the revolutionary class *par excellence* identified in the great socialist struggles and in the Soviet revolution....() it was necessary to leave the university ghetto where the strike risked to become tasteless, to be trapped in corporatism, to not worry the holders of power.”<sup>734</sup>

Ross furthers this by relaying the message from Daniel Bensaid that, “all the symbolic accoutrements of early May, the pseudo-insurrectional demos, the forests of black flags, the barricades, the campus occupations - all these transpositions inspired by workers

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<sup>732</sup> Touraine, 55.

<sup>733</sup> Vigna, 168.

<sup>734</sup> Touraine, 62.

traditions should be understood as a semantic ensemble, a language by which the student movement sought to address itself to workers, over the heads of bureaucratic leaders to create a community between two worlds that hitherto had been closed off from one another.”<sup>735</sup>

The students, however, like other participants in the May 68 movement would not have initially expected this one day national strike to evolve quickly into a general strike involving millions of labourers as a result of a revolt of rank-and-file workers against the union bureaucracy. Indeed, during the million-man march through Paris which witnessed students and workers link arms from the Place Denfert-Rochereau, the CGT, following the gradualist strategy of its PCF directors, had already passed conditions on the unfolding of the protest, suggesting that it must be carried out calmly. Furthermore, when the police came to meet the protesters along the march route, the CGT had given the order for dispersion - a move that was strongly contested by Daniel Cohn-Bendit and some of the radical student leaders.<sup>736</sup>

However, just as the students had demonstrated their subjectivity and equality by “stepping out” and declaring that no-one could legitimately speak in their place, so too would the workers vis-à-vis their union bosses. For during the protest on the 13<sup>th</sup> as well as in similar marches across France, several developments occurred that brought the anti-Gaullist movement to new heights. First of all, while the CGT had decided to turn back and disperse when faced with the oncoming police, a large number of workers returned to support the students after some clashes had transpired between themselves and the police.<sup>737</sup> As several commentators have argued, the solidarity that was demonstrated by the students and workers left an impression on many working-class participants and gave them inspiration to broaden

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<sup>735</sup> Ross, 106.

<sup>736</sup> Christian Bardou et al. “Deuxième Partie” in *Mai 68....et Après? Une nouvelle donne politique*, ed. Gilles Richard (Bordeaux: Centre régional de documentation pédagogique, 2008): 259.

<sup>737</sup> Ibid

the extent of their own movement against the Gaullist order.<sup>738</sup> In cities within provincial France, including in Nantes and Brest for example, where the *L'ouest veut vivre* movement had been struggling against the local factory bosses, radical workers and students had also been forging a powerful alliance that was also beginning to realize its own potential for radically altering their terms of existence.

The result of these developments was an opening for the workers movement to “step out” and carry into the streets with them a number of issues that had been of great concern to them during the previous half-decade and, at many times, had been acted upon through militant struggle. Once more, just as it was with the militant students, the May 68 involvement of the workers had clear historical antecedents. As such, though the workers did demonstrate their subjectivity in taking these issue to the street and, in some instances, making their desires real through the occupation of their factories, the actions of the workers, even on such a mass scale, were less of a divine surprise than some commentators have made it out to be.<sup>739</sup>

First and foremost, despite the fact that the French economy had grown and there had been the development of a newfound prosperity in the post-war years or *Trente Glorieuse* of 1945-1975, issues of a political and socio-economic nature were still prevalent. At the level of politics, there had been a great deal of dissatisfaction with the Gaullists manner of governing after what had amounted to a near electoral defeat in 1967. As McMillan states, “the government's response to the near electoral defeat was to resort to decree rule in economics and finance from April to October 1967, which created unease if not crisis.”<sup>740</sup> Furthermore, workers, particularly those of progressive political thought were also suspicious

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<sup>738</sup> Ibid; Sirinelli, 187.

<sup>739</sup> Richard, 62.

<sup>740</sup> McMillan, 178.

of the Gaullists' "full use of the powerful modern state" which included stringent controls over broadcasting and print media.<sup>741</sup>

It goes without saying that this political dominance was perceived as going hand in hand with protecting the economic dominance of the modern capitalist managerial class, a perception that was both facilitated by the strength of radical political and union forces such as the PCF and CGT as well as the *Parti socialiste unifié* (PSU) and the CFDT. While the strong electoral and union membership presence of the PCF and CGT showed a large portion of the French working class to be comfortable with the principles of Marxism-Leninism, the strong support of the PSU and CFDT demonstrated that other members of the French working-class were willing to support other left-wing projects including *autogestion* - workers self-management - made somewhat popular through the anti-Stalinist model of Tito's Yugoslavia. As Sirinelli argues, the historical role of workers in various defining struggles throughout French history and the continued presence of a working-class culture in France created a scenario whereby workers were highly conscious of anti-labour developments, whether led by the bosses or directly by the French state, and were quite willing to act in opposition to perceived wrongs.<sup>742</sup>

Throughout the 1960s, there had been many identified grievances. As previously stated, while the country had experienced a great economic boom, wages had not grown in proportion and the divide between workers and management had grown.<sup>743</sup> In terms of workplace rights, unions faced serious restrictions on organizing and, as MacMillan describes, there had been a history of factory owners turning to the riot police and their use of violence to discipline workers who were deemed to have been acting out of line. Furthermore, in a similar vein to the students and clearly a linking point between the two worlds, workers had

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<sup>741</sup> Ibid, 179.

<sup>742</sup> Sirinelli, 187.

<sup>743</sup> McMillan, 181; Richard, 62; Touraine, 292.

experienced a great deal of alienation in the hierarchical operation of the factory, with there being little chance of “having a say” in its running.<sup>744</sup>

The critical viewpoint with which many French workers understood these issues had prompted them to take action through strikes and other forms of labour disruptions throughout the post-Algeria 1960s in all regions of France.<sup>745</sup> As it directly relates to the developments of May 68, it must be stated that while these struggles were frequently conducted on the bases of improving material gains and other “bread and butter” issues and often restricted themselves to the confines of union directives, often they superseded them and put into question the organizing principles of the factory, the polity, and even their own unions.<sup>746</sup> As Ross states,

“ ‘Workers’ demands were not always limited to economic gains, but began towards a questioning of the model of production, the power structure of the unions and, beyond that, the model of Gaullist society itself.”<sup>747</sup>

Of course, it must be kept in mind that not every struggle graduated from the level of material concerns to that of control over the workplace, just as not as every worker subscribed to the radical position that control over the means of production and/or the state was the end goal of the workers movement. Like the students, divisions between reformers and revolutionaries of different shades were present throughout the 1960s and, as we will see, played a fundamental role in ending the radical democratic nature of May 68 by eventually leading the brunt of the workers down a reformist path. Yet, nonetheless, despite these divisions, the workers had displayed a high degree of militancy in pushing for both concessionary and revolutionary goals from the mid-1960s leading right up to 1968. These militant and sometimes violent struggles had included the wildcat strikes of miners in 1963,

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<sup>744</sup> McMillan, 181.

<sup>745</sup> Ross, 32.

<sup>746</sup> Ibid

<sup>747</sup> Ibid

the strike of Renault workers at Flins in 1964, the strike of Naval workers at Nantes in the same year, and Le Mans workers in 1967.<sup>748</sup>

By 1968, France had seen its number of working days lost to strikes and other work stoppages increase year after year. While 2.2 million working days had been lost in 1966, over 4 million had been lost by 1967.<sup>749</sup> Even before the events of May and June, 1968 was proving to be no different. In January, Caen had witnessed a strike that took on several features of what would come to pass during May 68. For one, what had begun as a strike at the Saviem factory over salary issues and the right to organize, transformed into a struggle of greater significance when students and farmers also stopped their respective functions to protest in solidarity.<sup>750</sup> However, during a collective rally by the CFDT and attended by several other unions including the CGT, *Front ouvrière* (FO), FEN, and UNEF, the demonstrators were attacked with tear gas, resulting in a riot which lasted several hours and which resulted in 18 injuries and more than 40 arrests along with some damage to cars and public property.<sup>751</sup> The episode at Caen demonstrates that not only were workers already willing to join in alliances with students and other supportive groups but that they were ready to contest the bosses and the forces of order in the streets. This, of course, gave an indication of what was possible in future struggles including, unknowingly at the time, May 68.

Also, ironically, before the events of May had begun to sweep the country, the CGT had already agreed to make the month of May 1968 “the month of youth” and had been organizing a three day series of protests between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>.<sup>752</sup> This, of course, is ironic for two reasons. First of all is the fact that members of the working class had coincidentally chosen the month of May as the month for fostering connections between labourers and students before there had been any indication that the month, and particularly its first ten days,

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<sup>748</sup> Ross, 32.

<sup>749</sup> Richard, 62.

<sup>750</sup> Ibid, 23-25.

<sup>751</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>752</sup> Ibid

were going to be marked by and remembered for an unprecedented “stepping out” on the part of youth in the student struggle. The second irony however stems from the fact that it had been the CGT who had initially called for this alliance of workers and youth – the same CGT that had been weary of the student militancy which entered the spotlight on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and that continually tried to corral the student participants, as well as others, into a position accepted by the PCF throughout the duration of the May movement.

With that said, it is important to note that while the recent history of union militancy was an important factor in having workers participate in the events of May en masse, it was equally important that there had existed an initial radical critique of the union apparatus, particularly when they seemed to be defending the status quo of corporatism and holding back workers from taking a more revolutionary position vis-à-vis the capitalist class and the aligned managers in the state. Indeed, for many radically oriented workers, they had come to understand the union elite as part and parcel of the modern managerial system and thus complicit in the system of domination. As McMillan argues, this was particularly the case for younger workers, stating that they were “disaffected with the unions, particularly with the CGT which since strikes of ’47 and ’48 had given the position of impotence” often giving more effort to the ritualistic commemoration of past struggles as opposed to the fostering of new ones.<sup>753</sup> This, of course, did not apply to everyone. While some were more than willing to struggle against the direction of their union, others were more willing to tow the line. Once again, as we will see, this became one of the fundamental divisions that later affected the closure of May 68.

In the beginning, however, the workers divisions were less apparent and together they impressively paralyzed the country in solidarity with the students, pushing the Gaullists to the point of having to take them extremely seriously, even if specific demands or a specific

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<sup>753</sup> McMillan, 181.

direction remained unclear. Given the developments in the years leading up to May 68, we can see that many workers had already undergone an identity shift which placed them against their bosses and the Gaullist order as well as, in some cases, against their union leadership. Brokerage between student struggles and workers struggles had already taken place at various points throughout the 1960s and these connections were sure to be furthered by some, despite the reservations of important bodies like the CGT. What the violence and associated paternalism of the first days of May had done was push these mechanisms further and, most importantly, have them diffused. It is perhaps the degree of this diffusion that is most remarkable even now.

On 13 May, carrying over from struggles concerning the reduction of the working hours without compensation in January and spurred on by the militancy of *L'ouest veut vivre* movement, workers at Sud-Aviation in Nantes had called for a general strike and occupation of their factory.<sup>754</sup> On the 14<sup>th</sup>, 2000 workers held firm on their promise, taking over their factory and detaining their director. On the same day, workers at the Renault-Cléon factory in Normandy and the Flins factory at Boulogne-Billancourt were also occupied without authorization from their unions. By the end of the day, 3000 were on strike across the country.

On the 15<sup>th</sup>, the confidence that had been found through the events of the day before carried over into both the student and workers' struggles that were beginning to move in the same direction. In the Latin Quarter, many students of fine arts occupied their studios and began to produce posters to assist with the diffusion of the general strike.<sup>755</sup> Furthermore, 2500, including many in the world of art and drama, occupied the Odéon theatre to demand changes to the bureaucratic and rigid organization of the arts in France.<sup>756</sup> With regards to the continued spreading of the strike amongst the workers class, workers at Cléon de la Regie put

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<sup>754</sup> Pudal, 191; Gobbille, 14; Bardou et al., 259.

<sup>755</sup> Pudal, 191.

<sup>756</sup> Gobbille, 15.

a halt to operations and occupied their factory.<sup>757</sup> Four other factories in the d'Elbeuf region quickly followed suit.

In a major blow to the Gaullists, *l'Office de Radio-Diffusion Française* (ORTF) went on strike and, in doing so, weakened the ability of the government to control the flow of television and radio information regarding the events. Bardou and others have described that the ORTF had been deigned specifically so that, through it, the government would be able to monopolize televised information. As he explains, “every day the interministerial liaison officer for information communicated to the editing managers of ORTF the authorized subjects and those that were banned.”<sup>758</sup> In terms of the events of May, these channels of control ensured that the first two weeks of the protests and occupations had been minimized in scale and importance. As such, “the majority of those employed by ORTF put themselves on strike and demanded the liberty of information, along with their own demands.”<sup>759</sup>

As part of this rapid mobilization, Ross describes how action committees – groups of roughly ten to fifteen people – began to organize by profession or neighbourhood to assist with the general strike. By providing material aid to strikers, members hoped to prolong the strike and push it towards a position by which it could potentially bring about radical transformation. It was clear that the idea of revolution was certainly in the air although there had yet to emerge any force that could carry these developments to their revolutionary potential. By the end of the 15<sup>th</sup>, the number of strikers had reached 11,000 and though this had been the result of some rapid growth in the movement, it had not yet reached the point whereby it had the capacity to overthrow the Gaullists. For this reason, and the fact that the government could not risk repressing a spiralling strike, interests remained compatible and the movement maintained its radical democratic form.

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<sup>757</sup> Pudal, 191.

<sup>758</sup> Bardou et al., 264.

<sup>759</sup> Ibid

The movement however would continue to grow. Indeed, on the 16<sup>th</sup>, strikes had begun at the French national railway SNCF while the largest factory in France - Renault-Billancourt, with its 35,000 members - was occupied by its workers. Accompanying these major strikes were other stoppages, affecting a dozen enterprises in La Havre region, several aeronautic and chemical companies in the Basse-Loire region and at Renault-Flins.<sup>760</sup> Within the student commune of Paris, assemblies were continuously held and UNEF presented its “student power” program that included a demand for the autonomy of the faculties. However, unwilling to tread a concessionary path in its wish to push for a more radical transformation, its leadership also included in its statement a call for the extension of the struggle to the arts and information sectors as well as a greater junction between students and workers.<sup>761</sup> As stated earlier, the unwillingness of important actors like UNEF to entertain a concessionary solution at this point while also lacking the capacity for revolution was also a factor contributing to the movements’ radical democratic form. By the end of 16 May, the number of strikers had reached 75,000.<sup>762</sup>

Yet, due to the continuation of the spiralling increase in mobilization, the events of the next five days created the possibility of a major turning point for the movement, particularly for those militants – both student and worker – who wished to see the Gaullist managerial system of capitalism thrown out with de Gaulle, and the universities, factories, and state apparatus placed under the democratic control of the workers. In a remarkable surge, the strike had grown to 300,000 by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup>, over a million by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup>, two million by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>, 7 million by the end of 20<sup>th</sup>, and an extraordinary 10 million by the end of the 21<sup>st</sup>, effectively paralyzing the country in the greatest general strike France had ever encountered.<sup>763</sup> In those five days, major industries and public service

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<sup>760</sup> Richard, 66; Gobbille, 35.

<sup>761</sup> Pudal, 191.

<sup>762</sup> Bardou et al., 259.

<sup>763</sup> Ibid

providers had all been faced within the strike including RTP plastics, the Rhodiaceta textile plant, PTT post and telecommunications, the Paris metro, most of the automobile industry, and even the banks and *grands magasins*.<sup>764</sup>

Furthermore, adding to the strengthening of the movement was the increased solidarity that been forged between students and workers in an effort to further the aims of militant groups on both sides. As Vigna and Zacarini-Fournel have documented, many important connections had been made between radical students and radical workers. These included instances at the Boulogne-Billancourt factory when 3000 students marched from the Latin Quarter to join the workers occupation, outside the Citroën plant in the suburbs of Paris in an attempt by the students to rally immigrant workers, and at the Rodiaceta factory in Lyon where links between students and workers were made between workers and sociology students. It is crucial to state that in the majority of cases, the links between students and workers were made possible as a result of the openness of the CFDT towards students and their role in the greater struggle. Richard suggests that the fostering of such connections between workers and students fit well with the CFDT's quest for self-management – a project of democratic characteristics that contained similarities with many of the radical students' insistence on the autonomous and participatory university.<sup>765</sup> As a result of this, the connections made were those of a two-way street with CFDT members such as workers from Rhône-Polenc de Vichy meeting faculties as Censier in Paris and workers from Renault at Cléon meeting faculties from Rouen at Mont Saint-Aignon.<sup>766</sup> In a further effort to strengthen the alliance and thus the force of the general strike, the CFDT also held a jointly organized conference on the direction of the movement.<sup>767</sup> Beyond these strengths, the workers and students also seemingly had an advantage given the state of crisis that the government found

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<sup>764</sup> Jean-Emile Vié, "Mai 68 a Nantes," *La Revue administrative*, 51e année No 303 (Mai-Juin 1998): 455; Bardou, 259; Vigna, 169.

<sup>765</sup> Richard, 68.

<sup>766</sup> Vigna, 169.

<sup>767</sup> Ibid

itself in. As the Prime Minister's aid, Edouard Ballardur, wrote in his diary regarding the May events on the 21<sup>st</sup>,

“almost all the factories are closed or occupied. The government is struggling against all fronts: against the students, against the unions, against the political parties.”<sup>768</sup>

De Gaulle had returned from a state visit to Romania on the 18<sup>th</sup>, the day that the number of strikers had swelled incredibly from 300,000 to 2 million and his statement of “reforme oui, chienlit non” had done nothing to stop the escalation of the strike.<sup>769</sup>

Furthermore, Pompidou's government, which had failed to put an end to the student movement through the re-opening of the Sorbonne and which had been facing a confidence motion in the national assembly since the 14<sup>th</sup>, also seemed to have little idea as to how to solve the crisis.<sup>770</sup> At this point in time, the trade unions were not willing to negotiate and the use of force was still too dangerous of an option. As Sirinelli argues, while the government did not want to appear weak, it believed that firmness could have seen the situation “skid out of control.”<sup>771</sup>

### **The Political Question**

However, despite all of these developments that seemed to push the movement of May towards a more revolutionary position, it had not in fact moved beyond the confines of a protest movement of an incredibly large scale. Undoubtedly, the radical students and workers had “stepped out” of their subordinate positions of the lecture theatre and factory floor and took to the streets as the Gaullists' equals although it is clear through both their words and actions that they wanted much more than this. Indeed, for the radical students and workers, success would be measured on the basis of whether the Gaullist socio-political order was

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<sup>768</sup> Bardou et al., 269.

<sup>769</sup> Vié, 455; Pudal, 192.

<sup>770</sup> Sirinelli, 180.

<sup>771</sup> Ibid

replaced by one in which the economy and administration of the polity were placed under the control of the popular classes. However, it was becoming increasingly obvious that there were also many who did not share these goals, despite the fact that ten million workers were on strike. And this was not just true for the Gaullists. It was also true of the unions – particularly the CGT – who, as the intensity of the strikes escalated, tried to restrict workers’ demands to material ones so as not to jeopardize the electoral-based “union of the left” strategy pursued by its political puppet master, the Parti Communiste Français.<sup>772</sup> As Gobille has stated, “though support came from the base, it was very quickly controlled by the unions’ apparatuses.”<sup>773</sup>

The CGT and PCF were thus showing the same strong reluctance to the spontaneous strike that they had since the beginning of the student events. This attempt to channel the strike took several other forms. One important tactic aimed at limiting the intensity and revolutionary fervour of the mass stoppage was to limit the connection between students and workers. As a result, unlike the CFDT who had been encouraging the alliances made between students and workers, the CGT stated that it “was against all tentative exterior mixing in the driving of the workers’ struggle”. Consequently, in strikes controlled by the Communist CGT, student interactions with workers were often kept at bay. Although this was framed as a matter of ideological purity, it also served as a way to contain the strikers and students within the “logic of the police” in a Rancièrian sense. As Ross explains, separating the students from the workers was done in an effort to maintain these groups within their usual sector and, hence, sectoral demands – ones which could be dealt with through the confines of the established institutions of the CGT and PCF, as opposed to more cross-cutting transformative demands which evaded their control.<sup>774</sup> This disagreement between the CGT and CFDT on the role of the students in the struggle was also to be found when it came to several other

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<sup>772</sup> Reynolds 40; Richard 65.

<sup>773</sup> Gobille, 37.

<sup>774</sup> Ross, 32.

issues. As Richard states, while up to 21 May there had been a series of meetings between the CGT and CFDT for the purpose of putting together a collective program, the two were faced with a “constant divergence”, disagreeing about all points on material issues except for that of social security.<sup>775</sup>

Moreover, in terms of the left-wing political parties, while they were attempting to have the government removed through a confidence motion in the national assembly, none of the major parties of the left had abandoned the parliamentary road to political change. This included the PCF who, though having called for a “common program” and having formed “popular committees” had no intention of moving away from its gradualist and “union of the left” pathway to socialism.<sup>776</sup> As a consequence of this, the PCF continued to use its trade union presence through the CGT to rally the workers behind the party line. However, just as it was with the unions, the political parties of the left were weary of working with each other. This was particularly true of the other leftist parties aside from the PCF as they saw the weakening of the government coupled with the anti-bureaucratic nature of some aspects of the strike as a chance to jockey for political power without having to rely on the Communists.

Despite all of these developments however, it is also crucial to understand that these divisions were not just playing out between the unions or the political parties but amongst participants in the movement themselves. Indeed, as we have highlighted earlier, a large number of students and workers participating in the movement, if not simply interested in sectoral demands, were interested in socio-political transformation of a more reformist nature, fully within the bounds of the reformist unions and mainstream political parties. As Reynolds states, “while the strikers may have been enthusing about a complete overhaul of the system, the reality was that any formal demands were strictly related to material issues.”<sup>777</sup> This would go on to play many students and workers into the hands of these reformist unions and

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<sup>775</sup> Richard, 70.

<sup>776</sup> Ibid

<sup>777</sup> Reynolds, 67.

political parties who had begun their serious attempts at channelling the movement into their organizations now that the government had tumbled into a serious position of weakness and there was an opportunity for power to shift through the traditional institutional channels of politics.

For these reform-oriented participants in the movement, the end of the strikes and occupations would thus be contingent on having their demands met by these organizations. In this case, it can be said that the radical democratic form that the movement had embodied was also due in part to the initial inability of these historically progressive institutions (at least vis-à-vis the Gaullists) such as the unions and the left-wing political parties to embody and fight for these demands. The radical democratic activity of these more reformist participants in the movement was thus contingent on political impasse – one based on the scenario of having had no one to speak in their place as opposed to a firm commitment to the maxim “let no-one speak in our place”. As such, while these reformist workers and students had “stepped out” into a position of equality with the Gaullists and other political representatives, their demand would drive them back towards a position of subordination. The consequences of these dynamics for radical democratic thought will be analyzed later. For now, however, we can say that this division between radical and reformist participants was becoming apparent despite the enormous showing of solidarity through the sheer number of strikers and that this would set the stage for the remaining few weeks of the events. Indeed, it seemed at this stage that the radical democratic form that the events had taken would be no more once the movement either became revolutionary through the work of the radical students and workers on the ground or, in stark contrast, was co-opted into a subordinate position through the work of the Gaullists and the left-wing trade unions and political parties who had much to gain through a more institutional struggle.

For the revolutionary forces within the movement, this latter possibility was something that was beginning to unfold before their eyes and as causing great anxiety. A statement from the Trotskyist *Jeunesse communiste révolutionnaire* (JCR) summarized this fear:

*“Today the centre of gravity of the struggle has moved from the faculties to the factories. The contesting of the bourgeois university has been transmuted into the contesting of capitalist society. For let us not be fooled: if the workers occupy businesses in their millions it isn't simply to obtain satisfaction of their salary demands. The question of power is posed, in the company and in the society. It is the fate of the regime which is at stake.*

*The young workers, the students who are at the spearhead of the struggle don't want their movements to end up like the movements of '36 and '45. The movement of 'unequalled breadth' must not give birth to a mouse! We must occupy the faculties, the offices, the factories!*

*We will stay there!*

*Don't allow the bourgeoisie or social democratic parties, the Mitterands and the Guy Mollets, to negotiate the return to order in exchange for a ministerial chair.*

*Don't allow the union leadership to negotiate the return to work in exchange for advances that are perhaps considerable but which will be rapidly gnawed away by inflation and work speed ups...*

*We will construct at our work places, independent of the apparatuses of the state and the bosses, organs of popular counter-power. We will impose the departure of de Gaulle and the establishment of a workers government.”<sup>778</sup>*

Most certainly, strategic and ideological appeals such as this one were important for the radical actors like the JCR to push the struggle towards a revolutionary end at a time when the trade unions and more mainstream political parties were looking to move in and carry the events to what has been described as the “political” stage of the events. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> a new opportunity arose to mobilize idling actors when the confidence motion against Pompidou's government failed, temporarily leaving the events without a parliamentary solution and leaving the Gaullist political order in place. The government's prohibition on the

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<sup>778</sup> Found within a Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire Tract, 21 May 1968.

return of Daniel Cohn-Bendit from Germany was also able to mobilize students in the Latin Quarter, some of whom, since the beginning of the general strike, had become increasingly absorbed into the more counter-cultural, as opposed to political, elements of the student commune.

As a consequence of these events, the next few days witnessed a fresh round of militancy from the radically oriented students and workers who were not only up against the Gaullists but also the more moderate forces looking to channel the movement. By the 27<sup>th</sup>, as a result of this militancy and several important developments that unfolded in the week leading up to it, the events seemed to enter the territory of revolutionary potential. Starting small on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, between 6000 and 7000 students from the Latin Quarter marched to the national assembly to contest the continuation of the Gaullist government.<sup>779</sup>

The next day on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, after a cabinet shuffle was announced with Pompidou remaining as Prime Minister, the confrontations in the Latin Quarter intensified, with the barricades reappearing and 5000 protesters involved in violent clashes with the police.<sup>780</sup> As several commentators have stated, these clashes, which were more a matter of militants wishing to confront the Gaullist order head-on than one of state engineered violence, pushed beyond what we could describe as a radical democratic form. Rather, they appeared as insurrectionary yet without the capacity to follow them through to a political end.

On 24 May, this direct clash intensified in scale. Up until this point, as Sirinelli describes, de Gaulle had been fairly distant, holding the opinion that the events did not belong to “the great historical struggles” and that they were thus to be dealt with at a level other than himself. However, with the country still completely paralyzed and the clashes of the previous few days worrying the authorities, de Gaulle had begun to change his mind.<sup>781</sup>

The President thus, against the recommendation of Pompidou and other officials, announced

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<sup>779</sup> Sirinelli, 260.

<sup>780</sup> Ibid, 264.

<sup>781</sup> Sirinelli, 260.

via radio and television a referendum on his presidency as a way to bring an end to the events in a manner more favourable to the Gaullists.<sup>782</sup> While promising the “renovation of the university, society, and the economy” and a commitment to a new socio-political arrangement that would foster “participation”, by posing the event’s puzzle in terms of “me or the chaos” the radical students and workers rejected the call outright and demonstrated against the proposal for the duration of the day and night, leading to the “second night of the barricades”.<sup>783</sup>

As Martin has argued, during the address, de Gaulle “looked more like an out of touch old man than the usual towering figure people were used to” and that the call for a referendum seemed far removed from the protesters’ demands.<sup>784</sup> Sirinelli has gone as far to suggest that the protesters were fundamentally perplexed and found the proposal hilarious.<sup>785</sup> As Cohen explains, “the social movement and particularly that of the students rejected massively the principle of participation which appeared like a disqualified proposition since it emanated from the general and an initiative which began from the summit of the state” and that the radicals saw this as a matter of “I participate, you participate,...they profit.”<sup>786</sup>

During the day, over 100,000 protesters, mostly composed of workers and members of the various action committees, marched from the Gare de Lyon to the Bastille. In a tract signed by all of the participating action committees, their rejection of de Gaulle’s as well as others’ attempts at co-optation and a return to the hierarchical normal was firmly rejected. The tract, embodying the insistence on equality that been central since the beginning of the movement, read:

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<sup>782</sup> Pudal, 192.

<sup>783</sup> Sirinelli, 264; Bardou et al., 61; Pudal, 192; Richard, 75; Reynolds, 2.

<sup>784</sup> Martin, 189.

<sup>785</sup> Sirinelli, 264.

<sup>786</sup> Ross, 69.

*“No to parliamentary solutions where de Gaulle leaves and management stays.*

*No to negotiations at the top that only prolong a moribund capitalism.*

*No referendums. Enough of the circus. Don’t let anyone speak in our place.”<sup>787</sup>*

There are several important elements to note when discussing what followed from this march. First of all, the first serious clashes of the day were witnessed when sympathetic students from the Latin Quarter were forcefully redirected back to it by the CRS in an effort to separate the students from the workers. Just as it was with the CGT, as the movement had grown in a way that witnessed the birth of cross-sector alliances, the Gaullists were adamant on ensuring that the students were separated from the workers. Once again, this was to ensure that sectoral demands could be dealt with in isolation, preventing the formation of popular demands that could unsettle the governments’ rule.<sup>788</sup> The radical students however were to accept neither the insistence on a referendum nor the “resectoralization” of the issues which the movement had originally launched itself against in the name of horizontality and equality. As Sirinelli describes however, once again the form that this student response took was not one of agonism. Rather, the students who participated in the clashes against the forces of order during the “second night of the barricades” fought them as an enemy to be destroyed. Their desire for radical change amidst an opportunity window they believed to be closing with de Gaulle’s referendum announcement pushed them in this direction. Sirinelli describes that on this second infamous night, the barricades were much higher and stronger than they had been previously, fires were set around the Latin Quarter including at the Panthéon, tools were used for smashing up the street and cutting down trees, and Molotov cocktails were thrown at the police until 6 am.<sup>789</sup>

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<sup>787</sup> Ibid

<sup>788</sup> Ross, 69.

<sup>789</sup> Sirinelli, 264.

The result of these developments according to Sirinelli were not to the benefit of the radical members of the movement who wished to see themselves become a revolutionary force, as the violence of the night had tipped public opinion back against the students. Unlike in the first days of the events when members of the public, particularly the middle classes, had supported the students against what they had perceived as the heavy handed reaction of the authorities, by this point in time, after weeks of unrest, many in the “silent majority” had begun to see the radical students as agitators and as impeding a “return to normal.”<sup>790</sup> Though this change in public opinion did not affect the immediate revolutionary potential of the movement, its effects would come to be felt in the near future.

The second important element of the 24 May march that is essential to come to terms with is the role that the CGT played in the organization of the day’s events. While we have seen that some of the more radical participants in the march, particularly those stemming from the action committees, declared that they would not accept negotiations at the top which would prolong a moribund capitalism, it would become clear that achieving negotiation with the government was their primary reason for joining and helping to organize the demonstration. This, of course, was done in line with the PCF’s directives of not allowing the movement to spin out of control. To the delight of the major trade unions, including the CGT and CFDT, negotiations between the unions and the Prime Minister were arranged for the next day in response to the demonstrations and were to be held at the Ministry of Social Affairs on Rue de Grenelle.<sup>791</sup>

For the first time since the beginning of the events, the government and the unions had decided to discuss an end to the stoppages and occupations and, in doing so, take the wind out of the sails of radical actors who wished to push the movement towards revolutionary ends. As one point of convergence, neither the CGT nor the Gaullists desired a

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<sup>790</sup> Bardou et al., 267.  
<sup>791</sup> Pudal, 192.

revolution to be carried out by those who were advocating for it, although it was a second point of convergence that brought them to the bargaining table. For both sets of parties, 25 May had become the date when both sides could achieve what they wanted before the events were taken beyond their control. For the Gaullists, the catastrophic failure of de Gaulle's referendum call and the riotous scenes that followed had threatened its rule to the point that it had to be willing to concede in order to ensure that it remained in power and that the overall socio-political order that it presided over remained intact. On the side of the CGT, with the government having been backed into a corner as a result of the "second night of the barricades", the opportunity had arisen to achieve the maximum "without jeopardizing the social climate".<sup>792</sup> In other words, the CGT had found itself in a position where it could extract considerable concessions for its members while also preventing the movement from taking a revolutionary turn that its master, the PCF, did not control, and also preventing a state crackdown on organized labour that would threaten the PCF's long-term strategy.<sup>793</sup> Indeed, the same principles that shaped the CGT's strategy at the beginning of May had taken on an even greater urgency with the growth of the movement outside the PCF's party line. With regards to the CFDT, though they had been more willing all along to support the growth of the movement, even to a potentially transformative end, the desire of the CGT to negotiate to some degree forced their hand as they did not wish to be left out of a concessionary agreement if there was also going to be no revolution as a result of the powerful and numerous CGT's and PCF's apprehension about pushing further.

Georges Pompidou along with Minister of State and Employment Jacques Chirac and Minister of Social Affairs Jean Jeanney met with Georges Séguy and Henry Krasuki of the CGT and Eugène Deschamps of the CFDT. By 27<sup>th</sup> May, after 36 hours of negotiation, all sides had come to an agreement and the unions were ready to present the offer to the base for

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<sup>792</sup> Ibid

<sup>793</sup> McMillan, 182.

approval. Of the most important concessions won by the unions for the workers were a wage increase of 10% by the end of the year, a 35% increase in the minimum wage, guarantees on the protection of union activity in the workplace, and employer payment for 50% of the time lost during the strike.<sup>794</sup> As some commentators have suggested, this deal appeared to be a victory for both the government and the workers.<sup>795</sup> Indeed, Reynolds states that, “the concessions offered by the government were considerable and included certain elements that the trade unions had been demanding for some time.”<sup>796</sup>

However, May 68 was to have one more “divine surprise” – better understood as one last demonstration of equality on the part of radical workers against both the political representatives and their own union leadership who had wished for them to return to their roles and positions within the hierarchical socio-political order. As Reynolds further describes however,

“Georges Séguy, immediately after the end of negotiations, attended a meeting at the bastion of the working class at Boulogne-Billancourt, in which he outlined the concessions gained, the workers rejected the agreement, causing a sensation.”<sup>797</sup>

With workers at Citroën, Sud-Aviation, and Rhodiaceta also rejecting the offer, some commentators have argued that an overthrow of the Gaullist regime was now more possible than ever.<sup>798</sup>

There were, however, several key components to this stage of the events that strongly suggest otherwise. First of all, it was clear that momentum had swung against the Gaullists and that, provided an opportunity to take control of the Elysée Palace or National Assembly, the Gaullists could have found themselves out of power and replaced by a “popular government” of the left. However, the pathways to such an outcome, other than that

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<sup>794</sup> Bardou et al., 266.

<sup>795</sup> Richard, 76; Reynolds, 49.

<sup>796</sup> Reynolds, 49.

<sup>797</sup> Ibid

<sup>798</sup> Pudal, 192; Bernard, 4; Richard, 76; Bardou et al., 267; Sirinelli, 274.

of legislative and presidential elections were only two: abdication on the part of the government and the subsequent handing over of power to the left-wing political parties or, on the contrary, the movement taking over the reins of political power by force. While the Gaullists would have certainly dreaded this first option as it might have witnessed the Communists having control over the levers of government to some extent, the imposition and management of such an arrangement from the highest rungs of the state and which would have most likely included other more mainstream left parties could hardly be classified as revolutionary.

Beyond this though and of greater importance is the fact that abdication was highly unlikely. It is true that after the rejection of the Grenelle agreements and the rallying of leftist forces during the following two days, de Gaulle had mysteriously disappeared for several hours before visiting General Massu at a French armed forces base in Baden-Baden, in what many analysts believe was the president's effort to ensure that he had the backing of his military.<sup>799</sup> We also know in hindsight that de Gaulle returned to Paris to fight on and, indeed, succeeded after calling for general elections, rallying a mass number of supporters to the streets, demobilizing the strike, and seeing his political party defeat the left-wing parties in a most convincing manner.<sup>800</sup> This level of support itself shows that Gaullism was nowhere near a dying force in French political life. Furthermore, we can confidently state that even if de Gaulle had abdicated and not returned to Paris, there is little to suggest that the government under Pompidou would not have struggled on without him. Indeed, to believe otherwise is to conflate Gaullism with the personality of de Gaulle and to misunderstand an entire political order – one compromised of thick networks of political figures, bureaucrats and business people, and fortified by the deep trenches of state institutions, the coercive apparatus, and mass support within civil society – with the presence of one man. Surely,

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<sup>799</sup> Bardou, 269; Pudal, 193.

<sup>800</sup> Richard, 86; Bardou, 273.

whatever de Gaulle had been thinking, the tireless work of Pompidou to bring an end to a crisis of what was also his order, as well as the many efforts of the extra-parliamentary Gaullist networks to rally support for the government after the Grenelle rejections<sup>801</sup> demonstrated that there would have been no abdication.

As for the revolutionary option, though the militant workers who had rejected Grenelle and the radical students who had supported their strikes and occupations since the second week of May were demanding a revolutionary breakthrough, they simply did not have the capacity to do this on their own. The army and police forces had shown themselves to be firmly behind the government and, as such, these militants needed stronger allies to force the government's hand. Unfortunately for them, these were not forthcoming.

It is crucial to note that, though many analysts of the last days of May point to the Gaullist mass rally on the 30<sup>th</sup> as the moment when the revolutionary option was closed down, it is more accurate to state that this window had been closed in the two days between the Grenelle rejection and the mass rally of Gaullists – 28 and 29 May. Indeed, a large number of participants in the movement had already decided to back political parties and institutions with a reformist and electoral line, including that of the Communist Party, in the days following the Grenelle rejection. In fact, with divisions persisting, particularly between Communist and non-communist supporters, a large number of participants came to support three different reformist fronts – one led by the PCF and supported by its various organs, another led by the PSU under Pierre Mendès-France and supported by UNEF and the CFDT, and one which was further to the centre led by the *Fédération de gauche démocrate socialiste* (FGDS) under François Mitterand.

On 27 May, the day of the rejection of the Grenelle agreements at the base, this second reformist front, led by UNEF and the PSU and including the FEN, CFDT, and

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<sup>801</sup> François Audigier, "Le Malaise des jeunes Gaullistes en Mai 68," *Vingtième Siècle revue d'histoire*. No 70 (April-June 2012): 73.

dissidents from the CGT came together at the Charléty stadium in the outskirts of Paris to put forth a “political translation” of the social movement untainted by the bureaucratic, domineering, and gradualist brush of the Communists.<sup>802</sup> Increasingly anxious that the political space was going to be dominated by the PCF and FGDS, participants in this front wished to create a political body that could stay committed to the more radical demands of the more militant worker and student participants without being squeezed out.<sup>803</sup> However, with this front depending on the might of the parliamentary PSU and the influence of moderate left figures such as Pierre Mendès-France, this front was forced to advocate for an “overthrow of the government and revolution” through the ballot box. As a result of this attempt to meet their demands, adherents to this nascent political force ended the radical democratic form of their participation through their own submission to mainstream political forces.

Similar dynamics were also apparent within the PCF and FGDS reformist fronts. After the rejection of the Grenelle agreements that it had itself approved through its connections with the CGT, the Communist Party presented the idea of a “popular government” under its direction to ensure that it did not lose out to either the Mendès-France or Mitterrand fronts. As Reynolds has stated, in response to the involvement of the other two forces, “the PCF made it known that any political alternative would not be possible without its inclusion.”<sup>804</sup> The proposal of inclusion and not one of leading a revolutionary surge demonstrated that the PCF viewed the political opening post-Grenelle as an opportunity to push for its gradualist “Union of the Left” strategy as opposed to an assault on the bourgeois state.<sup>805</sup> Because of this, though the PCF and CGT mobilized a massive march in Paris which passed through the city’s bourgeois quarters, its adopted position demonstrates that it was

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<sup>802</sup> Reynolds, 3; Bardou et al., 268.

<sup>803</sup> Sirinelli, 278.

<sup>804</sup> Reynolds, 41.

<sup>805</sup> Ibid, 182.

done more to increase its bargaining power with the FGDS and to force the government into elections than as the indication of any revolutionary challenge.<sup>806</sup> Once more, not only did the PCF and CGT prove themselves to be two of the biggest obstacles to revolution, but also to the radical democratic form of politics as a result of the constant co-optation of worker grievances for the purpose of their party's long-term strategy.

Though clearly more moderate than the other two anti-Gaullist fronts, François Mitterrand and the FGDS had also presented a radical set of proposals in order to win the support of the many workers who had been taking part in the strikes and occupations since the middle of May. Among these proposals were the suggestions that there had been no state since the beginning of the month and that Pompidou's government no longer had any legitimacy.<sup>807</sup> Unlike the other two anti-Gaullist fronts, which had emerged in the days following the Grenelle rejection however, Mitterrand and the FGDS, located among France's traditional oligarchy, had few organic links to the movement of May and, as such, was criticized as being opportunist by political opponents.

As we have already briefly described, in terms of the reformist fronts' opponents, 30 May was the day in which the Gaullists began to regroup. After the disappearance of the General had fostered great anxiety amongst some of the government's supporters, his quick return coupled with a denunciation of the "*chienlit*" of the few weeks previous, the apparent "communist plot" behind it, and his rallying cry to defend France, both in the general elections announced for June and immediately in the streets, was immediately met with great enthusiasm among many Parisian conservatives with nearly a million participating.<sup>808</sup> Though the Gaullist networks had been planning the march for some time, the spontaneity

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<sup>806</sup> Pudal, 193; Guilhaumou, 178.

<sup>807</sup> Pudal, 193.

<sup>808</sup> Ibid 193; Cohen, 22; Damamme et al., 168; Ross, 58.

and size with which it unfolded surprised even them.<sup>809</sup> Of course, since the interests of the 30 May protesters went hand in hand with those of the Gaullists, this “return to the agora” was tolerated by the government.

As previously stated, though this mass pro-government march that swept Paris was not the determining factor with regards to the left-wing political parties opting for an electoral route, the hundreds of thousands who had so fervently taken to the streets on the 30<sup>th</sup>, waving the *tricolore*, singing *La Marseillaise* and shouting support for the General and which was replicated in other cities on the 31<sup>st</sup>, signalled a shift in momentum and a relegitimization of the government.<sup>810</sup> As Cohen has stated, part of this relegitimization must be attributed to the fact that the Gaullists had shown their level of support in the streets – the very territory on which the leftist forces had been claiming their power since the beginning of May.<sup>811</sup> For these additional reasons on top of what were already their established parliamentary programs, the leftist political parties stated that the electoral route opened by de Gaulle was the best possible means to “fight against the reaction” and to “explain the goals of the socialist movement.”<sup>812</sup>

This move away from the revolutionary project as well as the radical democratic form was not to be accepted by everyone, however. Indeed, the manoeuvring of the government and the mainstream leftist forces had not altered the nature of the division between radical and reformist participants of the movement. As such, when the three principal parties in all three of the anti-Gaullist reformist fronts accepted de Gaulle’s election call, the more militant workers and students who wished to continue the radical struggle viewed all three as having given in to opportunism. Indeed, there were several militants who saw the elections as nothing short of a betrayal – as a co-optation of the movement’s

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<sup>809</sup> Franj Georgi, “Le Pouvoir est dans la rue: la manifestation Gaulliste des Champs-Élysée (30 Mai 1968),” *Vingtième Siècle Revue d’histoire* No 48 (Oct – Dec 1995): 49.

<sup>810</sup> Sirinelli, 257.

<sup>811</sup> Georgi, 54.

<sup>812</sup> Cohen, 22; Georgi, 48.

revolutionary thrust in the interests of the hierarchical and capitalist order as well as the oligarchic institutions, and as ensuring the maintenance of the Gaullist socio-political arrangement.<sup>813</sup> As Cohen explains, many saw the acceptance of elections as having sold out the principle of “no mediation” that pervaded in earlier days in May and also having sold out the youth who, if under the age of twenty-one, could not participate in elections.<sup>814</sup> Along with many militant workers, particularly in metallurgy and automotive, who also felt as though the unions and political parties had betrayed the revolution, a number demonstrations and occupations continued around France. Tracts handed out during a demonstration led by UNEF, who had not supported the PSU’s acceptance of elections, showed this frustration quite clearly and called for a renewed militancy and commitment to revolutionary change. The statements were many:

*“Elections, treason.”*

*“This is only the beginning, let’s continue the fight.”*

*“Elections, poisoned gift.”*

*“Power does not rest in the ballot box, it is taken in the factories.”*

*“The vote changes nothing, the struggle continues!”<sup>815</sup>*

As May turned to June however, the militants’ desire for revolutionary change and even their radical democratic forms of protest would be gradually thwarted. Several important developments had brought the militants to this position of hopelessness. First of all, though militant workers and students who wished to carry on the revolutionary struggle could point their fingers at the leadership of the left-wing political parties and trade unions for having first channelled the movement and then betraying its revolutionary goals, these

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<sup>813</sup> Cohen, 22.

<sup>814</sup> Ibid

<sup>815</sup> Ibid

reformist institutions could never have been able to take this approach if there had not been a large number of the movements' participants who were willing to submit to the leadership of the left-wing political parties in hopes of having their demands met. The fact that the majority of workers returned to their workplaces at the request of their unions and accepted the Grenelle agreements on a sectoral basis after the struggle had become one of classic party politics during the first two weeks of June demonstrates that a large number of participants in the workers movement had been willing to accept parliamentary resolutions to the events.<sup>816</sup> For other moderates who had gone on strike not for the purpose of political transformation but for mere material improvement, ending the stoppage with the Grenelle agreement in hand was found to be perfectly sufficient. Others, as Reynolds states, despite having been on the side opposed to "order", simply desired a return to normalcy. For these more conservative elements among the workers movement, having the garbage collected and having gas available once again were not understood as being part of political strategy of co-optation but rather appeared as a "return to peace" – the very type of peace that de Gaulle's speech had rallied those of the right around.

In terms of the student movement, divisions that had also been apparent throughout the events came to have a similar effect as divisions had had on the workers. While there were thousands of radical students who wished to carry on with the egalitarian politics emanating out of the Latin Quarter, others of more reformist stripes had been gradually demobilized as a result of having some of their demands regarding the organization of the university taken on board by the Gaullists in the midst of the crisis. For many students, rather than the critique of the bourgeois university being extended to the contestation of capitalism, a more flexible and accessible campus is all they had originally wanted. Reynolds has

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<sup>816</sup> Pudal, 193.

described how the majority of French students were fairly ambivalent about the leftist model.

As he states,

“Beyond the colourful utopian debates on how to revolutionize society, the symbolic barricades, the riots and the desire to see a convergence of the working class and student strikes, existed a national movement made up of students and members of the university teaching staff (particularly young assistants) who discussed and formulated clear sets of proposals for the reform of high education.”<sup>817</sup>

Among these demands were the reorganization of teaching, the inclusion of training and interdisciplinary courses, the joint management of the campuses, the reformulation of exams and assessment, and the promotion of greater student autonomy.<sup>818</sup> First taken into consideration during the crisis, many of these demands were met in the Faure reforms months after the events of May 68. Demobilization through the negotiation and meeting of demands, or what we have called the mechanism of co-optation, along with the previously discussed general electoral demobilization, was directly responsible for reducing the militant students to a small minority.

We have already stated that the majority of workers and students being demobilized through the mechanism of co-optation not only ended the revolutionary dreams of the militants, but it also affected their ability to express their demands in a radical democratic form. As such, while the government allowed for co-operative strikers to have their stoppages fizzle out while negotiations on the return to work were nearing completion, those workers and students that persisted with their militant rejection of the Gaullist order and, at this point, who were deemed to be interfering with order in general, were met with the violence of the state.

In the middle of May, for fear of a revolutionary reprisal stemming from ten million workers on strike, the Gaullists had been unwilling to use large-scale force to shut down the

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<sup>817</sup> Reynolds, 90 and 112.

<sup>818</sup> Ibid

movement. By the first week of June however, with the majority of strikers having accepted an electoral solution combined with the concessions of Grenelle and the majority of students having accepted a concessionary reform process, the radical workers and students were stripped bare of their protection that permitted them to demonstrate their equality in the streets. De Gaulle and Pompidou no longer had anything to fear when cracking down on dissenters who were interfering with their interests, including their present interest of re-establishing order after four weeks of what had been, in their eyes, “*chientit*”. As a result, the “beautiful work” that Ross had described came to a violent end on multiple occasions in June: in the CRS violence at Renault-Flins on the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup> which forced the workers back to work, in similar instances at the Peugeot factory in Sochaux and at Sud-Aviation at Nantes on the 11<sup>th</sup>, in the banning of demonstrations and eleven radical organizations in the Latin Quarter on the 12<sup>th</sup>, in the forced evacuation of the Odéon theatre on the 14<sup>th</sup>, in the forced evacuation of the Sorbonne on the 16<sup>th</sup>, in the evacuation of all remaining occupation of all other illegally occupied buildings on the 26<sup>th</sup>, and at the *Ecole nationale de beaux arts* on the 27<sup>th</sup>.<sup>819</sup>

On the 30<sup>th</sup>, the day of the legislative election, as a result of the reaction against the “*chientit*”, the repatching of French right due to some well-timed Algerian war crime amnesties, the division of the left, and its failure to separate itself from the troublemakers, the Gaullists were swept back into power in a majority government. The radical democratic activity of May 68, along with its revolutionary potential, was officially dead and buried.

## Conclusions

After having studied the events of May 68 in some detail, it can be said that the overall episode falls into five distinct periods of differing lengths that can be classified

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<sup>819</sup> Pudal, 193; Bardou, 273; Vigna and Zacarini-Fournel, 137; Damamme et al., 193-194; Richard, 80; Reynolds, 80; Vié, 456.

according to the possibility for radical democratic activity. The first period of relative openness lasted from mid-March to 3 May 1968. It is true that one could certainly select an earlier date to begin the inquiry since sporadic forms of contestation against the Gaullist socio-political order had flared up from 1967. Likewise, many of the movements that were active during the events of May had their antecedents, if not their very origins, in the pro-Algerian independence movement of the early 1960s. However, most commentators on the time period point to mid-March as this marked the beginning of the anti-Vietnam war student agitation at Nanterre which, after several arrests and confrontations with the police, was diffused across the student population with more domestic student issues being taken on board and links being made between imperialism abroad and the authoritarian and hierarchical socio-political arrangements at home. This period was marked by a continued spiralling of the confrontation with more militant demonstrations resulting in further arrests and university closures that, in turn, spawned even larger and more militant demonstrations. Though the nascent movement thus faced some repression at the hands of the police via the university rector, the hands-off approach of the state allowed the movement to grow and for the radical democratic form to persist, albeit in a position of subordination. Eventually, due to the closure of the suburban Nanterre as a result of increased student militancy, the demonstrations moved into the heart of Paris, particularly into the left bank of Paris at the Sorbonne – the famed institution that would become the symbolic heart of the May events.

Starting on the 3<sup>rd</sup> however, this first period of relative openness came to an end. The size and militancy of the movement had reached the point whereby a specific interest of the Gaullist elite – namely the continuation of the academic year and the running of their university system – became threatened. In an attempt to stop the momentum of the student movement, the authorities moved into the Latin Quarter and cracked down heavily on the students. This marked the beginning of a second period characterized by a standoff between

the students and the forces of the state. In this period from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup>, the authorities continued to limit the movement of the students via a heavy police presence in the Latin Quarter, the continued occupation of the Sorbonne, and the frequent use of repression. While negotiations between the education officials, representatives from the government and the students were being held, radical democratic activity remained restricted and in a tenuous state as a result of the heavy hand of the government.

This, however, was not to last. Due to the intransigence of the government and the violence the police had used at several points during the week, particularly during 10 May during the “night of the barricades” when negotiations had failed, public opinion had turned against the police, Pompidou’s government, de Gaulle’s presidency, and, indeed, the Gaullist order which many believed was too centralized, bureaucratic, non-participatory and inegalitarian. As a result of the identity shift, brokerage, and diffusion that these actions activated, support for the students swelled, the number of bodies in the streets grew, and government no longer had the capacity to restrict this expression of radical democratic opposition without seriously jeopardizing its interests. In short, though a clear boundary had been established as a result of these mechanisms of mobilization in response to the repression, the government began to face a movement of such capacity that its larger interests, namely its very hold on power and its very order could be threatened if large-scale force was used.

It is at this point that many authors have suggested that the episode moved into a revolutionary situation. There are several reasons for this type of evaluation. The primary one is the fact that on 11 May a large number of France’s trade unions had moved in support of the students, calling for the reopening of the universities, the release of the Nanterre and Sorbonne detainees and the withdrawal of the police from the Latin Quarter. The escalation was furthered when brokerage between students and workers and a diffusion of the anti-Gaullist critique resulted in two developments. First of all, the workers began making their

own demands in relation to the workplace. Taking advantage of the space opened by the students, factory after factory was closed down in a rapidly accelerating general strike, placing severe pressure on the government with nearly 10 million workers on strike by 20 May. Along with the strike's massive scale, what gave the movement a revolutionary, and also radical democratic, appearance was the form this movement took. Though it would become increasingly clear that divisions persisted among the participants, it was still apparent that a large number of students, workers, and farmers had "stepped out" of their corporate or sociological positions by making demands beyond what their usual role would imply and, instead, directly questioning the right of the representatives to rule, govern and manage their affairs. What many of the participants were thus engaged with was a demonstration of their equality and putting into action a performed rejection of the hierarchical and corporatist Gaullist order.

By late May, the students' occupation of the Sorbonne after Pompidou had agreed to open it, the unions' initial refusal of the concessionary Grenelle agreements, and the widespread rejection of de Gaulle's offer of a referendum on his presidency, alongside the continued brokerage between many students and workers demonstrated a radical democratic refusal of reabsorption into the "police order", the repackaging of hegemony, or the stifling of the "new". For many participants as well as commentators, it appeared that a radical transformation of the socio-political order was underway. Yet, at this point in time, the movement maintained a radical democratic form and did so for two central reasons. The first, as was previously stated, was the government's inability to contain or crack down on the movement due to the movement's capacity and, in turn, the potentially revolutionary repercussions that could ensue thereafter – an outcome that could have devastated the maintenance of Gaullist interests.

The second reason however rests with the interests of the progressive forces. Fundamentally, the movement was divided between various factions who had divergent visions and strategies for change. As an essential element to this division, none of the major players with the capacity to challenge the Gaullist order were either taking a revolutionary line or putting forth a revolutionary strategy, most notably the highly influential *Parti communiste français* and their associated organs. As a result of this, it also must be stated that the left was *limited* to a type of radical democratic, agonistic form. Though it was clear that most actors had some mutual grievances at the lowest common denominator including a wish to have Gaullism disposed of, there was no coherent set of interests collectively established and forged into a common program and also no real cross-cutting organized force which looked to challenge the Gaullist order in a revolutionary manner. Thus, while there were many radical actors in the streets wishing for nothing less than a revolution, they did not possess the capacity to carry it through. Though quite a damning indictment, radical democracy in this scenario simply appears as a symptom of a collective incoherence and incapacity. Thus, though many analysts have looked at the cross-sectoral connections made in the streets as ground breaking and revolutionary in political terms, the scenario appears more as a stalemate or an impasse. As it was with the Thai case, the idea of a Gramscian “organic crisis” can also be applied here. With neither of the sides in contention able to assert or reassert its hegemony, radical democratic struggle was the only form the movement could take.

This however was to change once the May events moved from what commentators on the events have described as its “social phase” to its “political phase”. This was a stage marked by many reform-oriented students and strikers rallying behind certain institutionalized political forces who were looking to steer the movement towards a parliamentary direction. This however did not change the potential for radical democratic

activity by these participants. This is for the reason that by accepting the institutionalized and parliamentary road called for by figures on the mainstream left such as Francois Mitterand, Pierre Mendès-France and the PCF in response to de Gaulle's calling of a legislative election and its own mass rally on 30 May, many of the would-be revolutionary forces submitted themselves to "the rules of the game" and thus were no longer an immediate threat to the Gaullist order. Indeed, the shift towards an institutionalized "political" solution was a turning point in terms of the movement's demobilization. With many of May's participants having accepted a position of subordination to one of several left-wing political parties in hope of electoral victories, the broad cross-sectoral alliances between workers, students, and farmers dissolved and the majority of actors reverted to more corporately defined identities and demands aimed at party leadership. This however also provided the opportunity for the government to provide immediate concessions, particularly in terms of education reform and labour concessions, and helped to further erase the boundary between the government and the movement through co-optation.

Coupled with the restoration of the regime's capacity as a result of the tremendous support shown for de Gaulle by the "silent majority" and the support of the military elite, protests and strikes by actors who had submitted to the Gaullist solution were thus allowed to fizzle out in the beginning of June as negotiations concerning the return to work were finalized with the knowledge that the government's interests were no longer being threatened by these actors. Radical democratic activity could thus continue because interests had become increasingly compatible. Once again, as we have already seen with some of the other cases, a worrying contradiction appears when it comes to the circumstances necessary for radical democratic activity to take place – namely, that radical democratic activity is allowed to persist at the moment when it has lost its radical nature. When it is radical however, in the

sense that that it looks to overturn the existing order, it cannot help but become either an agent of domination if it succeeds or a victim of repression if does not.

Indeed, this latter possibility was what was witnessed at the end of the events in June. With Pompidou and de Gaulle having affirmed their capacity and demobilized the radical opposition to the point that what remained was limited and isolated, a revolutionary threat was no longer in the cards. As a result of this, it was no longer contrary to their interests to crack down on the hardliners who were disrupting the Gaullist order to return France to a state of normalcy. As such, the police were sent in to clear the Sorbonne and the Odéon theatre that had been at the heart of the revolutionary street discourse, as well as in several factories where militant workers were refusing to end the occupations of their factories. While a number of equally far-left student groups were banned, so too were street demonstrations, at least temporarily. In a similar vein to the end of the Croatian case study, the possibility for new radical democratic and anti-Gaullist activity was only opened up in the 1970s once some of the main threats to the Gaullist order were banned from political participation or incarcerated as a result of charges related to their subversiveness.<sup>820</sup> Again, like Croatia, a more complete openness to radical democratic activity could only occur once potential threats to the order had been substantially reduced.

On the whole, given the observations made in this case study, we can confidently state that the radical democratic form that the movement embodied for much of May 68 was the result of an impasse whereby the movement was not yet ready to move in either a revolutionary or reformist direction. Yet, given their very reasons for taking to the streets in the first place, whether for material improvement or for control of the society, the movement was bound to coalesce around one of these options as a means to have these demands fulfilled. In the end, we have seen that it was the reformist option that was accepted by most. Of course,

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<sup>820</sup> Ross, 278.

given a few changes to the positions of certain important actors, this could have been different. The movement of May 68 certainly had the capacity – both numerically and in terms of control over important sites of the socio-political order – to become revolutionary. Yet, it had to be one or other - either reformist or revolutionary.

Clearly, given their philosophical starting points, the radical democratic theorists would not accept this dichotomy. None of their projects can be said to be revolutionary in the classical sense as they are all explicitly against coercively upending one's political opponents, as this would betray the equality of political actors. The concept of reformism would most probably not be accepted either as this would miss what is essential to the radical democratic project, namely actors "stepping out" of the pre-existing socio-political alignments and arrangements to fundamentally challenge the bases of the dominant order.

One question that needs to be asked of the radical democratic theorists concerns what ought to happen after this challenge. Most of the thinkers speak of some kind of institutional change, although a radical democratic detailing of such a process remains elusive. The reason for this brings us back to one of our earlier critiques of radical democratic thought that stemmed from the Croatian case, specifically, that although the theorists are able to put forth an innovative formulation of opposition, the fact that the project is of a fundamentally anti-institutional nature does not leave much room for the discussion of policy formation or the implementation of certain ideas of the best socio-political arrangement. One reason for this is the fact that this fundamental aspect of political life cannot be undertaken in an "in-between" position akin to what the radical democratic theorists see with regards to the space of equality or agonism in terms of contestation.

In fact, it is quite the opposite. As we have argued before, the implementation of one's political project requires either holding political power or influencing it. Yet, simply having an influence over those in power comes at a cost. While there is no doubt that

oppositional pressure like that witnessed in May 68 can result in the established order bending itself and its vision, oppositional forces find themselves in a subordinate position with regard to the levers of power and, thus, in a position of socio-political inequality. Thus, while French workers and students had “stepped out” of their subordinate positions and demonstrated their equality vis-à-vis the Gaullist elite, the concessions and reforms they won were done under the auspices of submitting themselves to a subordinate position under that of the government, the bureaucracy, the opposition political parties, and the trade union leadership. Once again, we have seen this logic at work in the Croatian case, although in a slightly different manner. It was argued in the Croatian case that when actors take to the streets, occupy buildings or factories, and enter into spaces and places controlled by their opponents, they certainly did demonstrate their equality, though not for its own sake. Rather, in conjunction with demonstrating their equality, by necessity, the actors also put forth particular demands based on some perceived issue. This, in itself, is not a groundbreaking insight. Rancière, for example, has himself suggested that each instance of politics properly defined begins with the exposition of a “wrong”. What is not adequately developed however is the fact that this wrong, more than the demonstration of equality, ends up determining the direction that the actors take.

In the Croatian case, such a perceived wrong pushed both sides to fight for the political control of certain territories at the expense of the other, as this was the only way most participants in each camp could envisage the righting of the wrong. We have already seen how this scenario tests the limits of radical democratic theory as the groups’ desire to be politically dominant necessarily undercuts the equality that the radical democratic theorists suggest exists when actors engage in “stepping out”. This is also for the reason that, in the end, some set of actors will dominate while others will be subordinated. In this way, the French case is no different as, by June, there was a clear re-emergence of dominant and

subordinate forces. After all, like the Croatian case, the millions who “stepped out” and took to the streets were also not demonstrating their equality for its own sake. Again, though at times they were incoherent or disorganized, a series of perceived wrongs were driving them to demand a certain politically initiated rapprochement. What is different from the Croatian case is that by the end of May 68 in France, participants among the progressive forces had opted not to attempt to attain immediate political power through the seizure of the state. As we have seen, the majority of participants were willing to have their demands met through a concessionary avenue – one that necessarily passed through the mechanism of co-optation and ensured a subordinate position of the actors. What the French case thus shows us is the fact that demands of a radical democratic movement can be made and met while accepting a subordinate position. With this stated, we need to ask once again if we ought to call such an end position radical even if demonstrations and other performances of a contentious repertoire seemingly point to it. It would seem at the point that this acceptance of subordination occurs, the movement loses its radical characteristics and credentials since it no longer identifies itself as an equal to those who it is in contention with.

As the French case seems to cement thus, the existence of a demand itself pushes a set of actors towards one of two avenues for the righting of a wrong. However, both of these avenues – having the demand met through concession and the maintenance of subordination or, by contrast, having the demand met through the taking of political power and the imposition of a particular project – take participating actors away from the equality and agonistic respect that is at the heart of the radical democratic project. May 68 thus appears as a radical democratic event with a litany of qualifications and limitations that pulled it away from some key principles of radical democratic thought. From March until 3 May, it remained relatively open to its flourishing but only as a result of its weakness and overall subordination and not without instances of repression by the police. Between 3 and 10 May,

it was repressed and restricted by the dominant Gaullists. From the end of May until mid-June, the majority of participants could continue with their activity (albeit in an increasingly dwindling nature) although only as a result of its choosing subordination and the return to its “proper places”. Radical democratic activity had the possibility of flourishing after the events, though only as a result of this continued subordination as well as the removal of more serious threats via the repression and detention of intransigent militants and the temporary closing down of spaces. Only the period between 10 May and the last week of the month appears to be a more pure instance of radical democratic activity although we have seen that this contest in the “in between” space of domination and revolt occurred only because the movement faced an impasse in terms of its direction while the government was unable to act for fear of revolutionary backlash due to the balance of capacity between the contending forces. Once the demands of the movement found voice through a concrete direction of reformism, this contingent radical democratic form gave way to one marked by the re-emergence of subordination.

While this work set out to establish the circumstances necessary for radical democratic activity to flourish, it has become evident through the analyses of our case studies that radical democracy is less of a political possibility or in its own right than that which we looked to explore – a circumstance. To say this is also to say that, despite its positivity and its imaginative attempt to rejuvenate political participation and “the political” itself, radical democracy as a normative theory and political project is riddled with some serious limitations. Indeed, the circumstances necessary for radical democratic activity to flourish in each of the individual case studies have been so limited and so qualified that it calls into question some fundamental aspects of the theoretical project put forth by the thinkers central to this study. With that said, it is now time to compare, compile, critique, and most importantly, create. Having our historical analyses complete, we are able to put everything on the table and

answer the questions most central to this study. What are the circumstances necessary for radical democratic activity to flourish? What specific impacts do these findings have for on the theoretical propositions of radical democratic thought? How can our findings and subsequent critique assist with the building of a more complete democratic theory and democratic project?

## **Chapter 7**

### **Cross Case Comparison: Open and Closed Doors for Radical Democracy**

It is often said that the great Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle was also the first political scientist. One reason for this among others is the fact that Aristotle believed that the coming to being of the ideal political community – one ruled by the most virtuous was in fact limited by the very real demands of other segments of the polity. As a result of this, Aristotle, in a commitment to a scientific method, was forced to concede that the best regime in principle was not the best regime in practice. Indeed, Aristotle argued that a “mixed constitution”- one which would take into account the demands of the polity’s different “parts”, was the least likely to descend into a tyranny and thus overall a better bet than the rule of the best.<sup>821</sup>

In many ways, our own investigation has been fairly Aristotelian in terms of method and, as will soon become clear, so too will the theoretical assertions that stem from it. In other words, like Aristotle, our own findings from the radical democratic case studies force us to state that there are some very real limitations in terms of when the ideal of radical democratic political activity can be sustained in a political community. While the previous four chapters have demonstrated these various limitations (what is a circumstance or a condition after all, if not a limitation?) as developments in organic, chronological case studies, this chapter will aim to synthesize them into more concrete categories through a comparison of similar sets of circumstances across cases. The goal of this, of course, is to construct a list, or a typology, of the various instances when radical democratic forms of politics can, indeed, flourish.

As we have also seen however, these Aristotelian limitations are not the only similarity that this project has with that of the great Greek thinker. For certain, what is more

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<sup>821</sup> This argument is most clearly found within Aristotle’s *The Politics*.

is the fact that, like in the *Politics*, these limitations fundamentally challenge many of the ideals – in our case, democratic ideals – that our four designated theorists have put forth in their writing over the last several decades. Just as Aristotle had to ask if virtuous rule could exist in its purest form, so too, given the nature of the limitations that we have encountered, are we forced to ask if the radical democratic theorists’ version of political equality and agonism can exist in any form, let alone as they are put forth by the radical democratic thinkers. As we will see, the answer seems (in another allusion to Aristotle) somewhere in the middle, and though perhaps not rendering radical democracy an impossibility, raises questions as to the appropriateness of either its “radical” or, by contrast, “democratic” moniker.

This discussion – building upon some of the tensions and contradictions we have already identified in the case chapters – will be the final step of our analysis and, as previously stated, will also attempt to appraise this limited version of radical democracy against its own normative goals. Is this more limited version of radical democracy strong enough as a project to serve a way forward for a progressive political future? This question will be answered in due time. For now, it is necessary to take one step at a time. Once again, before we can discern what these limitations mean, we need to carefully map out what these limitations are.

It goes without saying that the attentive reader, perhaps above and beyond what was laid out in the introductory hypothesis, will have been able to identify some patterns of tolerance and intolerance for radical democratic activity across the case studies. Undoubtedly, while some of these could have been predicted, some of them have come as a pleasant surprise. Of course, it must also be stated that research of a historical nature is bound to throw up a certain number of large surprises, not anticipated in the original hypothesis. Though this may very well be the case for all types of research, when the complexity and often near chaos

of historical instances of political contention serve as one's laboratory, the possibility of disparate nuance and, more troubling, loose-ends grows exponentially. Indeed, though our investigation has produced several of these nuances as well as a few loose-ends that we will try to tie up, one fairly neat development within the inquiry has been the fact that we have been able to pinpoint particular *sets* of circumstances, or scenarios, in which radical democratic activity was able to be prolonged and, likewise, scenarios in which activity taking such a form could no longer persist.

Through our comparison of instances of radical democratic openness and radical democratic closure throughout the time periods under investigation in Croatia, Thailand, Singapore, and France, it can be argued that there were four scenarios in which radical democratic activity remained opened and four scenarios in which such forms of political action were closed down. Given the breadth of our inquiry involving numerous and diverse moments of agonism and antagonism across four divergent case studies we can also state that we would expect to find these same eight scenarios appear when applying our analytical method to other episodes of radical democratic contention. For the purposes of classification and to facilitate the remainder of the discussion, we have opted to give these scenarios appropriate names that reflect their nature and effectively describe their level of intensity. The four scenarios whereby radical democratic activity was able to continue (despite, as we will see, some serious reservations) shall be described as (1) protest, (2) occupation, (3) containment, and (4) stalemate. By contrast, the four scenarios in which what we can describe as a radical democratic politics came to an end shall be entitled (5) crackdown, (6) civil war, (7) insurrection, and (8) take-over.

After coming to recognize through the case studies that there were a number of clearly identifiable repeated scenarios that more accurately and succinctly account for the possibility of radical democratic activity than our original hypothesis laid out in the introductory chapter,

we can confidently put forth these sets as the best representation of the circumstances when radical democratic activity can and cannot continue. As will become clearer with some further elaboration, the establishment of these scenarios has not forced us to abandon the proposed explanation put forward with our three original points concerning interests, capacities, and mechanisms. Rather, we have come to see that many of the “ifs and buts” laid out when presenting these three points are better captured in more numerous, specific scenarios that were found to have appeared repeatedly in the historical cases. How this is so will be demonstrated as we address each of the eight categories.

### *Protest*

Throughout our inquiry, we have encountered several instances in which radical democratic activity was able to carry on as a result of it not having threatened the interests of the dominant force, this itself in large part due to subordinate actors not substantially challenging any central boundary or not “stepping into” any space deemed off-limits by this dominant force. By boundary, though this can of course entail this aforementioned physical limitation demarcating control over a particular socio-political space and whose crossing is deemed to constitute a threat to the dominant force’s interests, it also needs to be understood in a more fluid or deterritorialized manner as a general threshold of resistance or pressure that the dominant force is willing to tolerate despite challenges to its interests. Given the relatively moderate nature of these non-transgressive actions on the part of participating actors, we have opted to entitle these types of instances *protest*. Across our four case studies, we have encountered several instances in which radical democratic actors “stepping out” engaged in what we can classify as protest.

The first of these instances was the early Croatian Serb autonomy movement led by the moderate nationalist Jovan Rašković whose boisterous demonstrations for autonomy were

permitted by the Croatian government as, prior to the implementation of nationalist policies from Zagreb, autonomy and the local Serbs' attempt to secure it did not contravene the interests of the central government. With the contest becoming increasingly antagonistic as interests became less and less compatible and the capacity of each side strengthened, the occurrence of radical democratic activity in the form of protest disappeared until the very end of the conflict. Indeed, the second instance of protest that we have come across in our inquiry occurred when some members of the defeated and weakened Croatian Serb population, particularly after the routing of the Operation Storm, were able to organize against the HDZ-led government due to the fact that they no longer constituted a substantial threat to their nationalist project.

Within the Thai case, protest made appearances several times between 2005 and 2014, usually bookending more confrontational periods – either before radical democratic actors “stepping out” from below were to engage in more confrontational forms of contestation or, by contrast, after such acts of greater militancy were weakened by the disillusionment of repression or the co-optation of a large number of their members by the dominant force. Protests in the Thai case that took this former form thus included Sondhi's anti-Thaksin road show at Thammasat University and later Lumpini Park in 2006 and the mass anti-amnesty bill campaign conducted throughout the capital by the Bangkok middle classes in late 2013. In these scenarios, the anti-government movements had simply not yet threatened the interests of the government in question - namely their rule and their ability to implement their policies - generally as a result of not having crossed any essential spatial boundaries to provoke a coercive response. With that said, we have also witnessed several instances of this second scenario, including the protests initiated by the Red Shirts months after they had been cracked down upon by the Thai military in the springs of both 2009 and 2010, weakening

their ability to immediately pose a new challenge of substance to the rule and order of the Democrats, Military, and Bureaucratic Elite.

Likewise, the manifestations of what we have defined as protest in the Singaporean case have also followed this bookending model. Indeed, the movement of the Singaporean left, including the trade unions and student groups, were tolerated in the early 1950s for the fact that they had yet to make enough inroads to seriously threaten the key interests of the British - the control over their businesses and their port. However, this scenario was in stark contrast to the allowance of the left's fairly toothless movements in 1956-1957 - ones that were fundamentally tolerated for their lack of revolutionary potential after the Lim Yew Hock purges had placed most of their most radical leaders in prison and weakened what had grown to be a movement of much strength and influence in the middle years of the decade.

Finally, within the French case of May 68, we have only witnessed radical democratic activity taking its protest form at the very end of the struggle. Here, after the co-optive policies and other olive branches on the part of the Gaullists had brought the majority of previously participating actors to a circumstance of compromise and, thus, who were allowed to have their protests fizzle out, those who could not be brought back under the Gaullist order were cleared away. Protest thus, though not fully being permitted to take root until the early 1970s after the Gaullists were finally certain that the threat had been erased, was eventually tolerated for the lack of threat that the radical left could now muster.

We can thus say overall that, in these scenarios, agonistic activity occurred within boundaries fundamentally accepted by this dominant set of actors. In some cases, while this acceptance was due to the demands of the radical democratic actors not, or no longer, embodying any real threat, in other cases this boiled down to the movement being too small and without a substantial capacity to push for a change. Indeed, in most of the instances, the

capacity of the dominant force continued to be high while the capacity of the subordinate actors either remained or became low.

In direct relation to these changing interests and capacities, in terms of the mechanisms that had pushed actors along, this fundamentally depended on whether the protest was a one of a nascent movement on the way to expanding into something bigger or the result of the movement having become weakened. In the first scenario though mechanisms of activation had indeed initially mobilized the subordinate force, they had not surfaced to push them into more threatening positions. As one possibility, exemplified by Rašković and the Krajina Serbs' initial moderate demand for autonomy and the Bangkok Middle Class' opposition to the amnesty bill of 2013, their interests and demands had not yet been shifted to the point of being driven to directly pose a challenge to the dominant force. As another possibility, exemplified by Sondhi's small but intense demonstrations calling for the resignation of Thaksin, their capacity had not been increased to the point – for example, through the mechanisms of diffusion or brokerage – which might have constituted the subordinate actors as a greater threat to the dominant force.

In the second scenario, we encounter instances in which, by contrast, mechanisms of deactivation – including co-optation and disillusionment – had returned the demands and capacities of the subordinate force “stepping out” to an unthreatening status after a period in which the interests of the dominant force had been threatened to a much greater extent. Such a scenario of relative defeat has been encountered several times in our case studies including those involving the Croatian Serbs after Operation Storm, the Red Shirts' initial remobilization after the crackdowns of 2009 and 2010, the Singaporean left after Lim Yew Hock's purges in 1956-1957, and the French left of the 1970s – all situations in which the ability of actors to engage in more disruptive and confrontational forms of political activity were hampered by a lack of capacity as a result of previous crackdowns. By way of contrast,

in the case of the immediate post-May 68 period, particularly in June when co-operative and non-threatening actors were allowed to see their protests fizzle out, we witness a scenario in which protest politics could continue as a result of the demands of actors having become less threatening due to their general acceptance of the dominant force's, and in this case the Gaullists', co-optive concessions.

### *Occupation*

Across several of our case studies, we have also encountered a series of instances in which a radical democratic "stepping out" had been able to continue despite the fact that the participating actors had most certainly "stepped into" some socio-political space normally deemed off-limits. As a result of this "stepping in", conducted to advance their interests and demands and potentially right some wrong, we can rightly classify this type of scenario as *occupation*. Despite this more militant effort to put pressure on the dominant force through the seizing of some space or locale and, along with it, its socio-political function, the agonistic form of occupation was still able to persist for the fact that it had not, or at least not yet, jeopardized the interests of the dominant force since it had not pushed past a key boundary held by the dominant force.

Within the Croatian case, occupation was witnessed when Zagreb's intransigence with regard to the Croatian Serbs' earlier demand for autonomy drove the Croatian Serbs, who had not altered the nature of their demand, towards more militant measures. Indeed, Rašković was replaced and the more militant leaders Milan Babić and Milan Martić began to lead their community in acts of disobedience up to the point of holding aggressive "rallies of truth" that forced ethnic Croatian leaders out of their positions and established a series of allied municipalities as a bulwark against the central government and as leverage in their demand for autonomy. It is in having crossed this boundary and appropriating this space of

the usual socio-political order that we can say that this instance falls into the category of occupation. Though this movement, of course included acts of coercion and domination against locals in these communities, it had not yet turned to antagonism against the central HDZ government. Though the direction of the contest was clearly moving away from agonism, particularly as a result of the Croatian Serbs' procurement of weapons, at this point, the relationship between the two main sets of actors in the contest – the active Croatian Serbs and the HDZ Croatian nationalist government – remained agonistic. This was for the fact that interests remained compatible, albeit thinly, with the Serb community still willing to accept some form of Croatian rule and the HDZ willing to tolerate the civil disobedience of the Serbs for the fact that their territorial integrity had not yet been jeopardized. Indeed, up until July 1990, believing that the Serb communities could still be brought under their rule, the HDZ had shown itself willing to negotiate, at least on their terms.

The other case in which the scenario of occupation came into play was that of Thailand – both instances in which the Red Shirts, demanding the resignation of Abhisit and the end to elite interference in the electoral system, had amassed hundreds of thousands of supporters in the streets of Bangkok and in other select locales of the country, interrupting the usual flow of socio-economic life on the part of those residents not taking part in the movement. Indeed, in both the spring of 2009 and 2010, this involved a mass mobilization in and occupation of the Ratchadamnoen district, home to several key arteries of the capital, while specifically in the 2010 instance this witnessed an expansion into the capital's primary commercial district. While the closure of such spaces for non-participants in the contest due to the encampments of the Red Shirts saw the subordinate set of actors in the contest move into a position of dominance, and, at times, coercive dominance, vis-à-vis non-participants in the contests, an agonistic relationship remained between the Red Shirts and the Democrat-Military-Bureaucratic Elite for several months in both instances.

In 2009, from January until March, the Red Shirts had been able to continually grow their movement through brokerage and diffusion – building ties with sympathizers and bringing them into their mass marches and demonstrations – for the reason that the Democrat government had remained sufficiently secure in their position, in part because the Red Shirts had not yet interfered with the daily workings of the state, and in part because the Red Shirts’ lack of coercive capacity as well as social capacity ensured that they did not face the possibility of an overthrow. Likewise, in 2010, following the February court decision that confiscated 46 million baht from Thaksin, what had again started as smaller scale protests against the Democrat-Military-Bureaucratic Elite alliance grew in size over the course of the month to the point where 200,000 had effectively shut down part of the capital in and around Ratchadamnoen and the Democracy Monument. In this instance, though the sheer size of the occupation and the fear that it could clog the daily functioning of government and the socio-political order had forced the hand of the Abhisit to negotiate, the situation in February and March remained agonistic for the fact that, in a similar vein to 2009, the Red Shirts had yet to directly threaten their rule.

Taking these instances of occupation as a whole thus, we can say that despite the fact that the subordinate set of actors has crossed and “stepped into” socio-political boundaries – actions that constitute antagonism with non-participants in the contest - agonistic relations are maintained between the main participants in the contest, namely those of the dominant and subordinate sets. Agonistic activity thus occurs in spaces *tolerated* by the dominant force. Furthermore, we can see that the capacity of the dominant force remains high while the capacity of the subordinate force remains relatively low, though higher than in the protest. In terms of relevant mechanisms, whereas mechanisms of activation may have pushed the interests of the subordinate force further away from those of the dominant force, they have not done so to the point of incompatibility. Likewise, though mechanisms of activation such

as diffusion and brokerage may have increased the capacity of the subordinate force to the point of being able to occupy certain crucial socio-political spaces, it has not been to the point of threatening the dominant force's interests.

### *Containment*

In a few select instances we have encountered, radical democratic forms of politics – in a similar vein to either protest or occupation – were able to persist but only in a highly limited form marked by a continual or near continual presence of coercive agents – generally the police, military, or paramilitary – physically demarcating the boundary as to how far the radical democratic actors could “step out”. As a result of this physical ringing of radical democratic actors, it is appropriate that we entitle this scenario *containment*. Though such delimited forms of dissent could be tolerated for the time being as they could not “step into” and thus could not further threaten the interests of the dominant force, such coercive restrictions imposed by them demonstrated that their interests had indeed begun to be threatened.

In terms of how they have appeared chronologically in our case studies, the first instance of containment that we have witnessed is once again in the Thai case and, indeed, directly followed from the occupation that the Red Shirts had been conducting in the Ratchadamnoen and central business districts of Bangkok in the spring of 2010. Indeed, after the first initial crackdown in the Ratchadamnoen district as a result of the Red Shirts' newfound direct antagonism with the Democrat-Military-Bureaucratic Elite alliance through the storming of a government controlled television station, the invasion of the parliament building, and the storming of an army base, the Democrats and Military decided to take no chances when the Red Shirts moved their entire protest site to the central commercial district. The interests of the dominant force had clearly been challenged, though instead of

immediately cracking down once again, the government instead opted to limit the movement of the Red Shirts while engaging in negotiation on their own terms. As a result of this, though the Red Shirts' radical democratic activity was able to continue in this area over the next few weeks, it was conducted in a heavily conditioned nature, surrounded by military and other special forces who ensured that they could push no further in terms of the taking of socio-political space. Indeed, when the Red Shirts attempted to expand their protest site into Silom - Bangkok's primary financial district - a heavily armed army division prevented them from doing so.

The scenario of containment has also been encountered in select moments within our Singaporean case that has spanned over twenty-five years of intense political contestation. In the immediate post-war period of 1945-1948, with the return of British rule after the defeat of the Japanese, a small degree of union activity was permitted under the condition that labour did not attempt to mobilize in a manner that went beyond simple sectoral demands. Indeed, when they did attempt to translate these specific workplace demands into a more direct political challenge to British rule, they were immediately met with arrests and, at times, the prohibition of their organizations. As such, though during this period the actors "stepping out" from below were not permanently contained in a single locale of contestation, their demands were contained in such a way that whenever they happened to cross this boundary, they were immediately met with the physical presence of the coercive apparatus.

In a historical instance with slightly different parameters, we have also witnessed the failed attempt at containment on the part of the dominant force during the "May 13<sup>th</sup> incident" of 1953 in which, fearing that the militant Chinese middle school students marching to the colonial offices to confront the administration regarding military conscription might cause too much inconvenience to the British who were strategically planning to back their way out of Singapore as quietly as possible, the police attempted to halt the students in their

movement. This of course, was before it became clear that, due to the students' level of support and vigour, doing so was fundamentally impossible, leading to insurrectionary activity on the part of the students and, later, repression on the part of the police.

As a final appearance in the Singapore case, an entire fifteen years and, more importantly, a whole series of remarkable political transformations later, we have witnessed the scenario of containment present in the standoff between what remained of the militant university students on the campuses of Nanyang as well as some of the polytechnics who were deeply concerned about the capitalist and corporatist direction of the governing People's Action Party who were attempting to co-opt the student movement which had proved to be such an enduring thorn in the side of the previous colonial administration. In a series of contests in the late 1960s, while some demonstrations against the government's new restrictions on political activity on the campuses including the implementation of "suitability certificates" were briefly permitted to continue on the campuses, those who looked to bring these outside of the campuses were blocked, arrested and banned from the schools.

As opposed to these more brief instances of containment in our Singaporean case study, the events of May 68 provide us with our best example of this scenario, lasting from the build-up to the events in March and April until the first night of the barricades on 10 May. Indeed, in the very early days of the struggle when the episode was limited to a handful of radical left-wing students within the gates of Nanterre, the actors "stepping out" from below in their campus demonstrations and office occupations were faced with the constant limitation of available political space. Indeed, during this time period, while demonstrations against the Gaullist educational order and its perceived role in the capitalist and imperialist socio-political order were tolerated when they transpired away from the university's administrative offices and lecture halls, the instant that they were deemed to have crossed a boundary in terms of the proper functioning of the university, they were met with the

coercive restriction of the police or other security forces. As such, while again these coercive agents were not a constant presence at the school, the constant physical demarcation of this boundary as soon as it was crossed demonstrated that the movement from below was fundamentally contained.

Later, after the students had moved their radical campus politics to the Sorbonne, the constant presence of the police and other security agents marking the boundary around the Latin Quarter became a marked feature of the first ten days of May. During this period of the episode, the growth of the student movement had threatened to disrupt the Gaullist educational order, of course notwithstanding the effects that such a disruption could have on the maintenance of the standing socio-political order as a whole. As a result of this, the authorities physically ringed the Latin Quarter with police, ensuring that, though radical democratic activity could continue within the “student commune”, any physical movement that looked to push the resistance beyond these physical bounds would be coercively forced back in. This of course was an occurrence that took place a number of times between 4 and 9 May when the students attempted to march outside the immediate area of the Sorbonne.

Overall, thus, we can say that in cases of containment, by stepping into a space deemed off-limits by the dominant force and by posing an initial threat to a key interest, the subordinate set of actors has forced the hand of the dominant force to restrict it from expanding its opposition and transgressing further boundaries. In some of these instances we have also seen that the subordinate force was able to force the dominant force into negotiation, albeit in terms set by the latter. Agonistic activity thus occurs but only within spaces and bounds highly and coercively delimited by the dominant force. The capacity of the dominant force remains high and though, while the capacity of the subordinate force remains low in relation to it, it is high enough to warrant the dominant force attempting to limit its movements. Mechanisms of activation have pushed either the interests or the

capacity of the subordinate set to the point of forcing the hand of the dominant set into restriction.

### *Stalemate*

Constituting what is probably the most unique scenario for the continuance of radical democratic forms of politics, we have witnessed several situations in which such forms of “stepping out” – often on a mass scale and with a great deal of militancy – have been reluctantly tolerated by dominant sets of actors. This, however, is despite the fact that their interests had, in fact, been threatened due to subordinate actors having challenging a central boundary or having “stepped into” a key space deemed off-limits by the dominant force. Though there are two variants of this type of scenario, what allows us to classify both of them as what we can call *stalemate* is the fact that though one or both sets of actors in the contest wished to bring the contest to a close through antagonistic means, such opportunity was not present and, in turn, the contest was prolonged with no winner being able to emerge. With regard to the two variants of stalemate, the differences are as follows.

In the first type of stalemate we have identified, interests of the dominant and subordinate sets of actors are deemed incompatible by the dominant force as a result of the subordinate set pushing beyond an essential boundary held by the dominant force and thus threatening one of its interests. However, the capacity of the dominant force, particularly in terms of coercive capacity, is too low to crackdown on the subordinate set. What has fundamentally led to this scenario is the fact that the mechanism of decertification (or, perhaps the absence of certification) has seen the dominant force lose control of coercive backing, generally through the loss of military or police support. Agonistic activity thus is able to occur in spaces that are necessarily though reluctantly tolerated. Within our inquiry, it

is within the Croatian and Thai case that we can find the best examples of this type of scenario.

In Croatia, the scenario of stalemate came into being as soon as the Croatian government failed with an attempt at crackdown on the Croatian Serbs' Association of Serbian Municipalities, in turn what came to be known as the "log revolution". With the central government under the HDZ refusing to accept the Serbs' control over their local police forces, Zagreb had attempted to bring a number of communities under their control by force in the summer of 1990. However, with some support provided to the Croatian Serbs by the federal Yugoslav National Army (JNA) through the procurement of weapons and also the JNA threatening Zagreb if it attempted such a manoeuvre again, the Croatian Serbs' agonistic rejection of HDZ rule, now behind a series of logs and armed gunmen blocking the roads, was able to continue. Indeed, with the Croatian republican government not having full control over the coercive apparatus due to its existence with the Yugoslav federation, they did not have the relative capacity to close down the revolt in the Krajina as they had initially desired.

Once again, though this period of the Croatian case demonstrates this scenario quite well, the Thai case is able to illustrate this even better. This is for the reason that the lack of coercive capacity on the part of the dominant force was able to prolong the radical democratic activity on the part of the subordinate set of actors on three separate occasions – all of course involving the Thaksinite or "red friendly" governments which were fundamentally decertified by the Thai military. In the first instance of this scenario in 2006, the anti-Thaksin Yellow Shirts had not only been given the necessary protection for demonstrations of up to 300,000 people blocking the streets of the capital, but had also been given a pass when it came to the month's long demonstration on the grounds of Government House, a key locale for the functioning of the country's administration. As such, though interests were incompatible in the eyes of the Thaksin government, they did not have the

capacity to end the Yellow Shirts' opposition, allowing the radical democratic form to carry on until the military fulfilled their opponents' wishes with a coup d'état.

In a very similar manner, in late 2008 when the Yellow Shirts were once again challenging the legitimacy of the Somchai government due to his direct family ties with Thaksin, the military did not provide any assistance to the government when the Yellow Shirts engaged in the debilitating blockade of Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport. In this case as well, though the interests of the two sets of actors had been deemed incompatible by the government – a position shown by their attempt to clear out the Yellow Shirt airport occupiers through government-loyal police divisions – their incapacity due to their decertification by the military allowed for the radical democratic form to continue.

Finally, in completing the trilogy of scenarios involving the incapacity of “red friendly” governments, in 2014 with the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) upping the ante on the Bangkok middle class's anti-amnesty bill demonstration and demanding for the immediate resignation of Thailand's then Prime Minister – Thaksin's sister, Yingluck Shinawatra – and again laying siege to various government ministries and bureaus, the military once again stayed on the sidelines, allowing for the radical democratic activity to unfold despite the threat being laid at the feet of the elected government. In an interesting twist to this scenario, knowing that sending loyal police security forces on the demonstrators may have caused unnecessary backlash against the government and triggered another coup, the government also engaged in a game of wait-and-see, hoping for the challenge to its government to die out. Though, in the end, this was not the hopeful outcome that came to fruition. The inaction of the Yingluck government shows us that the continuance of radical democratic forms of politics in the scenario of stalemate is not only the result of a lack of capacity but also as a result of a calculation in terms of long-term interests. This fact is one that brings us directly to our second version of the scenario of stalemate.

Indeed, in this second version, the immediate interests of the dominant and subordinate sets of actors are deemed incompatible by the dominant force as a result of the subordinate set pushing beyond an essential boundary held by the dominant force and thus threatening one of its interests. However, the capacity of the subordinate force, particularly in terms of the magnitude of the movement and their seizure of key socio-political spaces in the polity (production, education, transportation) due to the pervasive mechanisms of diffusion and brokerage – what we have termed social capacity - is too high for the dominant force to risk a crackdown for fear of the potential revolutionary repercussions that could ensue in a backlash. As such, agonistic activity thus occurs in spaces that are necessarily though reluctantly tolerated, for such direction is compatible with the dominant force's longer-term interests. With this scenario, it is the episodes of contention in Singapore and France that provide us with the most useful illustrations.

Within our exploration and analysis of post-war Singapore, there were two instances in which the radical democratic activity of actors from below was tolerated for the fact that cracking down could have threatened the long-term interests of the dominant force. The first of these occurred within the period of 1953-1956 in which the anti-colonial movement, particularly through the labour and student organizations, was at its peak. In this scenario, though the British colonial administrators were wary of a left-wing government appropriating many of its business interests and its access to the port after its planned exit from colonial rule, the size and strength of the anti-colonial movement, particularly with regard to its control over important socio-political spaces such as production, education, and transportation meant that any hasty attempt to completely repress these forces, despite the fact that they were posing an immediate threat to their interests through their militant strikes and occupations, could have possibly resulted in the revolutionary overthrow of its administration and the loss of all of its interests. As such, the British allowed much of the

anti-colonial movement's radical democratic forms of opposition as a way to increase their chances of holding on to their long-term interests, only certifying acts of repression when subordinate actors from below engaged in forms of opposition that were deemed too threatening to both their short-term and long-term interests. Since, for the most part, the Singaporean left-wing anti-colonial movement was committed to a parliamentary road to independence and socialism, repression of a fairly surgical nature only came to occur a handful of times during this period.

The other instance within our study of the Singaporean case whereby the scenario of stalemate resulted in the continuation of the radical democratic form as a result of a calculation of long-term interests was that during the so-called "battle for merger" in 1962 and 1963. During this period of time, while the PAP was now in the position of political power, there existed a substantial challenge to their vision of Singapore's post-independence future by several left-wing forces including the Barisan Socialis party and several major trade unions which had split with them over the issue of merger with Malaysia. Here we can see that while the coercive capacity of the subordinate set of actors was low, what we can call their social capacity was high as, in the building of a strong alliance through the brokerage and diffusion of their opposition, they controlled a series of locales that could potentially weaken the PAP's hold on the socio-political field and hence the polity. While the continuous strikes and demonstrations carried out by these forces were thought to be jeopardizing the PAP's rule, as a result of the fact that the PAP was competing with these forces in a referendum on merger – the PAP for and the left-wing forces against – Lee Kuan Yew and his fellow party members knew that in order to win the favour of the masses, they could not appear to be cast in the same repressive mould as the colonizers, lest they hand the future of the island to their left-wing opponents. Here once again, radical democratic politics in the

forms of militant strikes and demonstrations were tolerated as a result of the long-term interests of the dominant force.

Of course, the final and perhaps most explicit example of this scenario of stalemate stemming from the long-term interests of the dominant force and, indeed, the social capacity of the subordinate one, is that of mid to late May 68. In this period, with the *piétons de mai* having brokered and diffused their anti-capitalist and anti-Gaullist movement to the point that millions had taken to the street or occupied spaces in opposition to the government, de Gaulle and Pompidou were unable to crackdown on their opponents as they had done in early May for the fact that doing so might have further delegitimized the regime and pushed the movement from below into a clear revolutionary position, now with a much greater capacity for controlling the socio-political field. Alongside a strategy of negotiation and concession thus, the radical democratic form of politics was able to continue en masse for the purpose of protecting the long-term interests of the Gaullists, including their rule and some of the most essential elements of their socio-political project, including of course the maintenance of the parliamentary system and the capitalist socio-economic order.

### *Crackdown*

As the most common of scenarios identified throughout our four case studies whereby radical democratic activity was unable to persist was that of actors “stepping out” from below facing repression and a coercive clearing out of their space of participation and opposition. For the reason that these acts of repression were typically carried out by coercive forces and involved the use of violence – again, the police, military, or paramilitary forces - under the control or influence of the dominant set of actors in the contest, it is appropriate that we label such scenarios as instances of *crackdown*. In terms of the common logic of these antagonistic endings to instances of a radical democratic “stepping out”, in each of these identified

scenarios, interests of the dominant and subordinate sets of actors were deemed to be incompatible by the dominant force as a result of the subordinate set having pushed past what was understood to be an essential boundary, and thus threatening a key interest, held by the dominant force.

Within the Thai case, we have seen that crackdowns had almost been entirely conducted by the hands of the Thai military on sets of actors – “Red Shirts” – who had either directly expressed their support for Thaksin Shinawatra or who directly expressed their opposition to the rule of the Military and Bureaucratic Elite through the political proxy of the Democrat Party. Generally, such crackdowns had been conducted for one of two reasons. In some instances we have witnessed the crackdown having occurred for the purposes of “cleaning up” – done to ensure that the military could engage in its reordering of the socio-political arrangement without interruption after a coup d’état. As such, we have encountered such forms of crackdowns occurring after the removal of Thaksin in 2006 and Yingluck in 2014.

In other instances within the case study, we have witnessed crackdowns having happened once it was deemed that the Red Shirts had stepped too far across a boundary set by the government or the military and, in doing so, had threatened both the socio-political order as well as their very rule. On the Thai New Year weekend of 2009 thus, the Thai military, in the shadow of the Democracy Monument, cracked down on the Red Shirts who were deemed to have posed too much of a direct threat to the government’s ability to govern and even their very rule when, after months of occupation of city streets, a number of the Red Shirts’ members had violently stormed the ASEAN summit at Pattaya a few days before. Likewise, in April 2010 after another month of occupying central areas in Bangkok, the military cracked down on the Red Shirts, again around the historical Ratchadamnoen district, for the reason that their invasions of a television station, parliament, and an army base were once

again deemed to have threatened the governance and rule of Abhisit and the Democrats. One month later in May, after several weeks of radical democratic activity under the limited scenario of containment, the Thai military cracked down in an effort to push the Red Shirts out of Bangkok for good. With the Red Shirts failing to accept the election and reform offer made by Abhisit leading to the belief that only an immediate take-over would satisfy them coupled with the additional belief that too much disorder had already been caused by the Red Shirts' intransigence, the military forced the Red Shirts out of central Bangkok in a wave of repression that killed nearly one hundred people.

In terms of crackdowns in the Singapore case, we have also encountered them occurring in instances when either the British colonialists prior to 1963 or the autonomous or fully independent PAP government post-1963 had perceived radical democratic actors "stepping out" from below as having stepped across one of their key boundaries and thus as having threatened one of their key interests. Though we have seen that the British, given their long-term interests, were reluctant to crack down on their left-wing opponents for fear of a potential communist take-over, they did crackdown through their Singaporean proxies – particularly through the Chief Minister's Office – when such a threat, and thus a direct threat to their business and geo-political interests, was deemed to be imminent. As such, in 1948, all left-wing political parties were cracked down upon once the Malayan Communist Party had begun its armed struggle in the adjacent Malayan Peninsula. Five years later in 1953, the Chinese Middle School students were cracked down upon when their militant march to the colonial offices could not be contained and insurrectionary attacks on the authorities had broken out. Again in 1955, though as a result of a much larger form of "stepping out", Chief Minister David Marshall, given what turned out to be the false carrot of independence from the British, cracked down upon the Hock Lee strikers whose small sectoral dispute had been understood to have transformed into something bordering on full-scale rebellion. Finally, in

1956, with the British believing that the far left had infiltrated many of the major unions and educational institutions, they cracked down through a series of arrests and bans via what we can call the devilish pragmatism of Chief Minister Lim Yew Hock, who believed that Singapore would never be granted independence with the far left having infiltrated such locales.

In terms of Singapore post-1963 under the rule of Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP, first under the Malaysian umbrella and then, after 1965, independent from it, we have encountered that crackdowns became part and parcel of PAP rule. This however was a gradual development. Indeed, in the period immediately following the “battle for merger” in 1963, crackdowns occurred when the PAP believed that popular left-wing political figures constituted a threat to their popular support and their rule, and with it, their so-called democratic socialist non-communist vision of Singapore – one which was imbued with a self-described pragmatism about the need for foreign capital and good terms with the former colonialists. Operation Cold Store of 1963, occurring in the time period when PAP support was high following the successful merger referendum but before the general election of 1963, is one key example of this. However, we have seen that by the late 1960s, once the PAP had established its hegemony through a variety of successful co-optations, crackdowns occurred not because of imminent threat to their interests, but rather because “stepping out” at all was deemed to constitute a threat to a vision of the socio-political order in which the “chaos” of strikes and demonstrations was antithetical to a polity “requiring” socio-political order for the sake of the long-term interests of good governance and economic growth. The various crackdowns upon opposition groups in the autonomous unions and universities from 1965 to the early 1970s including those occurring on the grounds of Changi Prison and Ngee Ann Polytechnic are the embodiment of these scenarios in which the new interests of the PAP were deemed to have been jeopardized by any type of “stepping out”.

Finally, within the case of France in May 68 we have encountered three instances when the radical democratic form came to an end – temporarily or not – through the scenario of crackdown. In the first two instances, in a clear miscalculation of what such a repressive measure would lead to in terms of engendering sympathy and widespread support for the victims of such repression, the Gaullists cracked down on the far left students and their supporters within the grounds of the Sorbonne on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of May. Though up until the 3<sup>rd</sup>, the authorities had limited the radical democratic activity of the students through containment at Nanterre, when the students had moved their opposition to the Gaullist educational and, more generally, socio-political order to the heart of Paris at the Sorbonne and in and around the Latin Quarter, the students were understood to have pushed too far in interrupting the usual function of the university and, as such, were met with a wave of repression. Though, at this point, this threat, much like that of the students in the above Singapore scenario, was miles away from challenging Gaullist rule, let alone the socio-political order as a whole, the authorities still deemed it enough of a threat to or interruption of their interests to crack down on the students.

However, as stated, it was ironically the support that such repression engendered that pushed the movement onward to the point of it actually threatening the socio-political order as a whole. Indeed, after the containment of, and negotiation with, what had transformed into a growing movement had failed to force these subordinate actors back into their usual place and function within the socio-political order, the Gaullist authorities once more cracked down on the *piétons de mai* on 10 May for the fact that they were believed to have disrupted the university long enough and also for the fact that the continuation of such activity could spill over into other sectors. Once again, with the advent of this second crackdown what the Gaullists had not adequately calculated was the fact that it was, again, such repression that would allow for the movement to grow to a level they could not have possibly imagined.

Nonetheless, despite this error in judgement, the crackdown of 10 May was conducted on the basis of the dominant force perceiving that their interests had been fundamentally threatened.

Aside from these two dramatic and massively influential instances of crackdown, this scenario of radical democratic closure has appeared in only one other instance within our exploration of May 68. Indeed, in a much less dramatic scenario and in a similar vein to the crackdowns of the Thai military after their respective military coups, crackdowns occurred once more in June 68 in an effort on the part of the Gaullists to “clean up” and re-order the socio-political field after their hegemony seemed to have been re-established as a result of most participants in the movement having accepted the electoral and concessionary solutions offered to them at the end of May. Indeed, with the capacity of the lingering radical actors having been severely depleted as a result of their former allies’ co-optation, the Gaullists were able to crack down on those subordinate sets still occupying a handful of factories, campuses, and theatres across France and who were deemed to be interfering with their newest interest of putting the polity “back together”.

Overall, with these instances of the scenario of crackdown having been compared, there are three key points that need to be stated. First of all, despite the potential ambiguity this creates, we have to clearly state that it is nearly impossible to determine a universal threshold of interest compatibility from these scenarios since what was understood to be threatening in each scenario was contingently determined by the given dominant set of actors in each instance. This, of course, also has an impact on our understanding of the role of mechanisms since it limits us to the somewhat broad suggestion that mechanisms of activation have pushed either the interests or the capacity of the subordinate set to the point of forcing the hand of the dominant set into repression.

Despite this, however, we are able to put forth a third general claim about the role of capacity. For certain, in terms of capacity, the relative weakness of the subordinate set in each

scenario contributed to their facing a crackdown at the hands of the dominant force. Indeed in most of our identified instances, the capacity of the dominant force, particularly in terms of coercive capacity, remained high while the capacity of the subordinate force, both in terms of coercive capacity and also social capacity, remained relatively low. Unlike in the aforementioned scenario of stalemate, this capacity imbalance allowed for the antagonistic action to be a fairly one-sided affair, at least at the time of the crackdown. Yet, undoubtedly, as we have witnessed with both the crackdown upon the Chinese Middle School students in the “May 13<sup>th</sup> incident” of 1953 in Singapore as well as the two crackdowns upon the far-left students in the first decade of May 68 is the fact that such use of violence can often trigger mechanisms of activation including identity shift, diffusion, and brokerage which, in turn, have the potential to expand, as opposed to contract, radical democratic forms of opposition.

### *Civil War*

Within our exploration of the four case studies, we have only encountered one instance in which the eventual mutual antagonism of participants in the contest, fuelled by high coercive capacities on the part of both, could be classified as *civil war*. This of course is the case of Croatia’s civil war – one which we have witnessed the development of from its beginnings as an agonistic contest of protest.

Indeed, though we have witnessed that the situation of agonism – particularly that of a stalemate – occurred as a result of the Croatian government’s inability to crack down upon the Croatian Serbs’ autonomy referendum and subsequent rebellion through the “log revolution”, it was only a matter of time before they would have to attempt to secure their interests through acts of coercion despite having no guarantee of success. With the Croatian Serbs, particularly in the Krajina, having lost all trust in Zagreb to negotiate in good faith and provide them with autonomy after the incident of attempted repression leading to the “log

revolution”, further attempts to consolidate the control over communities with a Serb majority were enacted through coercive means. On the flipside, with the HDZ government believing that there was no way to secure their territorial integrity and the construction of their nation-building project within a Yugoslavia that was undermining it through material support to what was deemed a restless and troublesome minority group, Croatia moved towards independence as a way to legitimately secure their interests through violence. In a spiralling of interest incompatibility in which neither side could accept the demands of the other, the Croatian Serbs, who could in no way accept being pulled apart from Yugoslavia, particular under a Croatian nationalist government who had showed itself to be uncompromising, also declared independence and increased their campaign for the securing of Serb majority communities against the Croatian government who wished to hold onto them as part and parcel of their national territory. With the coercive capacity of the Croatian Serbs having increased due to certification by the JNA and the Croatians having increased its own coercive capacity through a greater weapons supply via Hungary, the agonism of stalemate quickly gave way to the antagonism of war.

Overall thus, in terms of what the Croatian case tells us about the scenario of civil war we can state the following. First of all, in such a scenario, interests of the dominant and subordinate sets of actors are deemed incompatible by both the dominant force and subordinate force as a result of both sets pushing past an essential boundary and thus threatening a key interest held by the opponent. In terms of the role of capacity, coercive capacity is particularly high for both sets, leading to a balanced use of coercive means as opposed to the one-sidedness of repression. Furthermore, in terms of responsible mechanisms, this crucial change in capacity is generally a result of either the defection of part of the coercive apparatus to the subordinate set or the certification of it by external actors with

coercive capacity. Agonistic activity is thus mutually ended by both sets of actors who turn to available coercive means to secure the essential interest.

### *Insurrection*

As what we can classify as one type of impure moment of radical democratic activity, we have witnessed several instances in which actors “stepping out” from below, though starting from positions of agonism, resorted to antagonistic means in an attempt to further their goals and meet their demands. This was also often in spite of the fact that the overall scenario was one that allowed for radical democratic activity to be conducted by other sets of actors in the contest. In these instances, interests of the dominant and subordinate sets of actors were deemed incompatible by a subordinate set as a result of the dominant force pushing past an essential boundary and thus threatening an interest held by the subordinate force. As a result of this newfound incompatibility that stemmed from a threat from above, former agonistic forces turned to antagonism and abandoned the radical democratic form. Taking into consideration these antagonistic means, including direct attacks upon the coercive agents being employed by the dominant force, it is appropriate to give instances such as these the title of *insurrection*.

Within our exploration of the four cases, there has been an instance, or sometimes several instances, of such a scenario in each case, some of which we have already indirectly encountered in our explanation of some of the other scenarios. First of all, within the Croatian case, we have witnessed insurrectionary activity taking place on the part of the Krajina Serb leadership after its standing vis-à-vis its opponent was made clear by the failed attempt by Zagreb to shut down their referendum on 17 August 1990. Indeed, here we see a situation whereby the dominant force in the contest crossed a boundary that was understood to be threatening to Croatian Serbs’ interest of autonomy. Though the “log revolution”, despite the

arming of guards for the protection of territory, stayed within the bounds of agonism vis-à-vis the central government in what became a long stalemate, by the beginning of the following year Krajina Serb forces had begun to attempt to secure a larger number of Serb majority towns in eastern Croatia. Though this had been previously done through acts of occupation and aggressive “rallies of truth”, it was now being conducted through violent means in what we can classify as insurrection. Of course, once Zagreb engaged its own armed forces to combat these insurrections, the scenario shifted to that of civil war.

Within the Thai case, the scenario of insurrection has come to appear a total of three times – two instances in which the antagonism originating from below came at the hands of the Yellow Shirts and one instance in which it came from the hands of the Red Shirts. In the Yellow Shirt scenarios of late 2008 and early 2014, all of the insurrections took place under the overarching scenario of stalemate brought on by the incapacity of their respective Thaksinite governments. Since the governments had, as we have seen, lost control over the coercive apparatus through decertification by the military, when these two governments were deemed to have crossed certain boundaries and threatened the interests of the subordinate forces, they were unable to put a stop to the violent responses of the anti-government forces “stepping out” from below.

In late 2008, with Thaksin’s brother-in-law Somchai holding power through the position of Prime Minister, the PAD had, just before the coup of 2006, believed that the “corruption and money politics” of Thaksin and his loyalists had threatened the interests of ordinary hard-working Thais who respected the rule of law and were in no position to abuse their positions of power like Thaksin had apparently done. As such, while protests against the Thaksinite government grew by the thousands, more militant members of the anti-Thaksin Yellow Shirt movement believed that in order to have their interests protected, Somchai – simply viewed as the former Prime Minister’s puppet – would have to be dismissed through

force. The fact that the “corrupt” electoral system was continually producing “red friendly” governments coupled with the fact that Somchai had not been entertaining their demands of resignation helped to further the incompatibility of their interests in the eyes of Yellow Shirts and push them towards antagonistic means. As a result of this, more militant members besieged the offices of the Prime Minister and Cabinet at Government House as well as their temporary offices at Don Mueang Airport in the fall of 2008.

In early 2014 a similar occurrence took place with Thaksin’s sister Yingluck as Prime Minister. In late 2013, in what was described by the government as a way to have Thailand undergo a process of “truth and reconciliation”, an amnesty bill was put forth that would drop criminal charges from those involved in politically motivated crimes on both sides of the political divide. However, with many anti-Thaksin Thais believing that such amnesty would pave the way for Thaksin to be exonerated of his corruption charge, again endangering the interests of Thais who upheld the rule of law, many took to the streets of Bangkok to protest against the amnesty bill. Once again however, more militant members of what was called the People’s Democratic Reform Committee believed that such amnesty also fundamentally threatened their own interests of a Thaksin-free Thailand and pushed them once more towards an antagonistic confrontation with the Yingluck government. Once again, in late 2013 and early 2014 not only were the Government House and various other ministries attempted to be sieged once more but the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Finance as well the Public Relations Department and the Budget Bureau were successfully overtaken by anti-government forces.

In terms of differentiating these instances of insurrection from those of the simultaneous agonistic protests or occupations, it must be stated that firstly, the dominant force was directly targeted by the actors from below and, secondly, that actions against them were conducted antagonistically through force or coercion. Indeed, what marked both of

these cases in which the Yellow Shirts or post-Yellow Shirt PDRC stormed or attempted to storm important sites belonging to the government or, in a similar vein, attempted to intercept some important member of the government – at Government House, at various state ministries, at government controlled public broadcasters – such actions were conducted through the use of force and, at times, through the use of arms.

The same can be said for the earlier incidence of insurrection at the hands of the Red Shirts in 2009 during the ASEAN summit in Pattaya in 2009. In this instance, it was the judicial removal of Somchai's government which had been viewed by many Red Shirts and Thaksin supporters as having directly threatened their interests of both respect for the democratic election of leaders as well as having their preferred leaders in positions of power. As such, and in a similar manner to the Yellow Shirt militants previously discussed, while many Red Shirts – indeed, in the hundreds of thousands - had participated in types of opposition that were agonistic in nature, more militant actors, wishing for the quick removal of the Abhisit government which was not responding to its demands for dissolution, smashed their way into the ASEAN summit in Pattaya, forcing Abhisit to retreat and for the summit to be cancelled.

Within the Singaporean case, though it was the forces of the unions who were more strategic and gradualist in their thought and action, the militant Chinese high school and middle school students were found to have engaged in forms of insurrection when their original agonistic means had not resulted in the meeting of their demands. The one scenario of insurrection that we have already witnessed within our discussion was that of the “May 13<sup>th</sup> incident” of 1954 in which the police failed to contain students marching towards the offices of the colonial administrators to confront the British over the issue of military conscription. Having begun the march peacefully and, indeed, agonistically, the students were simply unwilling to be contained by the police. These young militants, who had

believed that the colonizers had threatened their fundamental interests as free people, violently confronted the police both on that day and in their defiant occupation of their schools in the following weeks.

The final instance of insurrection that we have witnessed is found within the French case in late May 68 during the so-called “second night of the barricades”. While the strikes and occupations in the factories and streets of France had led to the Gaullists’ opponents reaching an incredible ten million, none of the major players in the events – including the major trade unions and the French Communist Party – had moved in the direction of readying for a take-over. While these conditions had helped to produce a stalemate, it had not prevented some far-left militants from believing that in order to secure their interests of ridding France of de Gaulle and his hierarchical and capitalist socio-political order, an attempt on power had to be taken immediately. As such, when de Gaulle announced his program of “participation” - one that was viewed as fundamentally threatening the interests central to the militants’ revolutionary demands - several far-left actors abandoned the agonistic form and instigated violent attacks on the forces of order with the offensive use of pavement, sticks, Molotov cocktails, and the setting of fires.

Overall thus, building on what we have seen in this comparison, we can state that in instances of insurrection what are deemed to be the threatening demands or activities of the dominant set of actors push a subordinate set to reconsider its approach in securing its own interests and demands. Indeed, despite the fact that the capacity of the dominant force remains relatively high and that the capacity of the subordinate set in question remains low, this subordinate set attempts to secure the essential interest or boundary through coercive means.

Depending on the breadth of the insurrection and the degree of threat that it can cause to the dominant force, agonistic forms of politics may be able to continue on the part of other

subordinate actors, as we have seen within the scenario of the stalemate. Notwithstanding this however, the fact that the interests and demands of subordinate actors, when threatened from above, have the ability to drive them into antagonistic positions demonstrates the possibility that the radical democratic form, even when initially committed to, can also be ended from below.

### *Take-over*

Our final scenario for the closure of the radical democratic form is one of a hypothetical nature as it has not been one that has appeared in any of our case studies. This, following the logic of the previously discussed scenario of insurrection, is a scenario in which a set of subordinate actors, engaging in a contest with the dominant force through antagonistic means, pushes past the limited scenario of insurrection and is able to take over the highest sites of political power, displacing the dominant force and becoming one itself. With this stated we can perhaps make a case that such an outcome presented itself as an unfulfilled historical possibility in both the Singaporean case prior to the various electoral victories and associated instances of repression by the PAP from 1959 to 1963 which took the wind from the sails of any revolutionary hope and, in a very similar vein, in May 68 prior to the electoral victory and associated instances of repression by the Gaullists which also deflated any chance for a revolutionary overthrow. Though, of course, such historical “what ifs” can only ever go as far as educated speculation, we are still able to confidently state that, in the case of such outcomes, the radical democratic form would have come to an end for two reasons. For certain, not only would such a direct taking of political and, indeed, state power require a high degree of antagonism, the institutionalization of the movement from below into a manager of the socio-political order – one which would necessarily re-order and re-place -

would strip it of many of its radical democratic credentials in a very similar manner to what Rancière has described as occurring with police functions that are ostensibly democratic.<sup>822</sup>

Overall thus, in scenarios of take-over we can state that the interests of the dominant and subordinate sets of actors are deemed incompatible by a subordinate force as a result of the dominant force having pushed past an essential boundary or having threatened a key interest held by the subordinate force. As a key factor in the take-over, the capacity of the subordinate force becomes higher than that of the dominant force prior to the take-over. In terms of the responsible mechanisms, a social capacity shift could come as a result of the seizure of key socio-political spaces in the polity (production, education, transportation) due to the pervasive mechanisms of diffusion and brokerage. Likewise, the appearance of the mechanisms of defection and certification could see the subordinate force substantially increase its coercive capacity.

### **Interests, Capacities, and Mechanisms**

Taking the eight categories as a whole and comparing their commonalities, we are able to argue that the most important factor for the continuation of a radical democratic form of politics – one in which sets of actors from below can “step out” and engage in an agonistic contest with a dominant political force – is that the interests of sets of actors in the contest are perceived to be unthreatened by the other’s own interests and subsequent political pursuits. It is in such situations whereby the interests of the contending parties can be said to be compatible. By contrast, in situations in which these political pursuits for the purposes of affirming a set of actors’ interests are deemed to have crossed some established boundary and thus threatened the other’s interests we can say that interests enter the realm of incompatibility and are thus ripe for antagonism.

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<sup>822</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999): 31.

Keeping in mind the contestatory nature of radical democracy, this means that while mechanisms of activation which directly impact the interests of actors such as boundary activation and identity shift are necessary for the contest transpiring in the first place, the more that the interests of competing actors are pushed away from this position of unthreatening compatibility through these mechanisms, the more likely there is to be antagonism in the contest. One interesting point that needs to be made here is that while this effect is true for mechanisms that have an impact on interests, the prevalence of mechanisms that have an impact on capacity have more mixed effects. Indeed, when the interests of the dominant and subordinate forces in the contest have been deemed to be fundamentally incompatible by one or both of the sets of actors in the contest, the prevalence of mechanisms which have ensured that the set or sets' coercive capacity has been competitive relative to its opponent has led directly to agonism giving way to antagonism as we have seen with the scenarios of crackdown, civil war, and take-over. On the flip side, when mechanisms such as decertification have taken this coercive capacity away from such actors, radical democratic forms of politics have been able to continue in an involuntary manner as we have seen with the stalemate. We can see thus the important role that mechanisms affecting coercive capacity have on determining the direction of political contests as agonistic or antagonistic.

Yet while the prevalence of mechanisms re-enforcing and redistributing coercive capacity have resulted in making political contests more susceptible to antagonism, the prevalence of mechanisms increasing what we can call social capacity on the part of actors "stepping out" from below – such as mass diffusion and brokerage – has sometimes had the effect of prolonging radical democratic forms of politics as we have seen in some of the above scenarios falling under the category of the stalemate. Indeed, while we will argue in more detail in later chapters that there is nothing to guarantee that dominant actors will be so calculative and keep their longer-term interests in mind, the fact that such appropriation of

the socio-political field by actors from below has, several times in our inquiry, pushed the dominant force into a stalemate is enough for us to suggest that the prevalence of the mechanisms of brokerage and diffusion on a mass scale can push a contest towards agonism. As a direct consequence of this, when speaking of the general effect of mechanisms on radical democratic politics we cannot simply apply the same explanatory logic to each and every mechanism and state that all mechanisms which push contestants further away from compromise in turn push the contest towards the likely direction of antagonism. For certain, while we can make such an argument for the mechanisms affecting interests and coercive capacity, we cannot say so in terms of mechanisms that increase social capacity.

As a result of this, in putting forth an answer to the question of what general circumstances – building upon our eight scenarios – are conducive to a radical democratic politics we can state the following:

1. A radical democratic form of politics – one of an agonistic “stepping out” with the expressed goal of demonstrating equality and righting a particular wrong – can first occur if one set of actors in the contest does not perceive to have their core interests threatened, including their long-term interests, by another set of actors who has challenged some particular interest or crossed some established boundary.
2. If interests are indeed perceived to be threatened, there still remains a chance for the radical democratic form to continue. This depends on whether this set of actors in question has the capacity to shut down the challenge and uphold the interest or boundary through antagonistic means. If this set of actors does not have such capacity, it is possible for the radical democratic form to continue.

3. Mechanisms of activation are required for any type of contest to begin, particularly those which push the interests of competing sets of actors away from compromise. However, when these mechanisms affecting interests push actors too far away from the possibility of compromise, they threaten their compatibility and potentially engender antagonism. In a situation of interest incompatibility, mechanisms that re-enforce or redistribute coercive capacity lead to antagonism. By contrast, mechanisms that increase a subordinate force's social capacity through widespread brokerage and diffusion of opposition throughout the socio-political field often create stalemates and thus prolong the radical democratic form.

Just as we have argued with regards to the eight scenarios of agonism and antagonism, we believe that as a result of the breadth and diversity of moments analyzed in our inquiry, that these three circumstances for the possibility of radical democratic agonism apply to any episode of radical democratic contestation.

Having stated this, it is now imperative that we proceed to the next step of our analysis. With these eight categories and, with them, an understanding of the general role of interests, capacities, and mechanisms for the direction of radical democratic politics having been established from the episodes in our case studies, we need to now ask the fundamental question of what challenges these sets of circumstances cause for radical democracy as a normative political project. Specifically, what do our case studies and the circumstances we have drawn from them say about radical democracy as a project of agonism, equality, and socio-political transformation? For certain, though we have seen that actors "stepping out" from below have often been able to achieve one of the above goals, they have often done so at the direct expense of another. As such, in addition to establishing the four scenarios in which radical democratic activity was able to take place along with the four in which it was not, we also need to discuss a series of five problems that the radical democratic project faces

in trying to meet its goals of agonism, political equality, socio-political transformation and even its fundamental starting point of “stepping out” in light of these circumstances. Only after laying out these problems can we appraise the overall standing of the project and propose some recommendations for future engagements with its theory and practice.

## Chapter 8

### Radical Democratic Challenges and Challenges for Radical Democracy

The original goal of this work was to empirically establish the necessary circumstances for radical democratic episodes of politics to be maintained in an agonistic form and, subsequently, to evaluate the possibilities for the project in light of these circumstances. Despite this original intention and design however, we have also found that in addition to what these circumstances tell us, our eight identified scenarios of agonism and antagonism also shed much light on some key challenges that the radical democratic project faces in terms of meeting its political goals of “stepping out”, agonistic relations between contenders, the enactment of political equality, and socio-political transformation. In this chapter, we detail five of these key challenges or “problems” with which the radical democratic project must contend. In the order that they appear in this chapter, these problems include the problem of the drive, the problem of political space, the problem of inequality, the problem of contingency, and the problem of expedience. It is to these series of problems and their repercussions for the radical democratic project that we now cast our attention.

#### *The Problem of the Drive and the Problem of Political Space*

Of all of the scenarios we have identified, including both those conducive and not conducive to the radical democratic form, there are two that can be said to stand out from the others as a result of their impurity. These two impure moments, either showing a tinge of antagonism in their agonism or vice versa, are the ones to which we have given the name occupation and insurrection.

Occupation, as we have defined it, though classified as a scenario in which radical democratic activity flourishes is, as we have seen, not without its serious tensions. As has

been oft-repeated in this work, in order for political actors to “step out” of their usual functions, roles, or place within the given socio-political order, for the reason that political contests cannot and should not be abstracted from the places and spaces in which they occur, it is necessary that they “step into” some place else. Though we have seen that such an action of “stepping out” is a performance signifying the actors’ equality to those in a position of power, “stepping in” often results in the establishment of another form of domination, frequently upon those not directly active in the contest. This of course is all the while the actor “stepping in” – the “occupier” – remains in a subordinate position to its opponent who remains in a position of domination as a result of their control over important levers of power, often including the lion’s share of the state apparatus. Yet despite this fairly serious qualification of the scenario’s credentials as a moment of equality, one which we believe raises some profound issues for radical democratic theory’s insistence on its egalitarian nature, we have still classified this scenario as radical democratic for the reason that the “stepping out” on the part of one set of actors does reflect the essence of a radical democratic action and, further, that the engagement between the two sets of actors remains agonistic.

However, when it comes to several other moments we have encountered in which belligerents resorted to more antagonist means to achieve their intended goals vis-à-vis their opponents, despite the fact that the overall situation was one of openness, we have needed to firmly draw the line and state that such instances – those which we have entitled insurrection - can in no way be classified as radical democratic. It is therefore necessary that we distinguish the overarching scenario, for example one of stalemate, from those very specific anti-democratic moments, such as the insurrection, which can happen internal to them. Yet, as we will see, rather than muddying our picture of the necessary circumstances for radical democratic activity, such impure moments of such activity tell us much about radical democracy’s limitations.

One myth that occurrences such as these put into serious question is the idea that the large-scale and often highly celebrated periods of contestation (May 68 and Singapore of the 1950s as the clearest examples in our cases) continued to take the form they did because of the participating actors' volition to have it take that form, first and foremost. Indeed, what we have come to see through the analysis of our case studies is that they are instead the result of several contingent factors. In the case of May 68 for example, we know that the prolongation that ensued resulted from a combination of an incapacity of militant actors to impose their will, the unwillingness of more moderate actors to take the movement to the next step thus leaving the movement in the street in an impasse, and their Gaullist opponents' inability to crack down for fear of their long-term interests being potentially jeopardized. In other words, though May 68 is often lauded for the duration and scope of its struggle, actors did not enter the struggle for the sake of the struggle itself. Rather, as we have seen in our exploration of the events of May, most actors entered the struggle with concrete demands reflecting their interests and, with that, the prolongation that ensued was not a willingness to struggle for the sake of a pluralist agonistic situation but to await a satisfactory resolution to what can be properly called a stalemate. Though this could have been actualized through the emergence of some agent who could resolve it by force and potentially through revolutionary take-over, we know that the agents who did eventually emerge took a fairly moderate set of actors down the parliamentary and reformist path to the end of episode.

With this stated, what needs to be made clear is the fact that the radical democratic activity that is possible during a stalemate such as May 68 is not only highly contingent on a large number of factors, most notably the standing of the dominant force (a problem for prescription which we will discuss in more detail later) but is also the direct consequence of certain sets of actors attempting to have a certain type of demand met. In other words, the nature of the demand determines the type of political activity that will follow. In the case of

May 68, the more moderate, opportunist, and for a time, uncertain demands of the majority of actors involved drove them to the stalemate with the Gaullists, but not past it.

As such, the fact that such instances of antagonism like that of an insurrection being instigated from below happen during a period of stalemate should not be taken as some type of aberration or simply be brandished “extreme”. Of course, it must be said that the tactics utilized, including some of those witnessed in our case studies, can prove to be fairly extreme. Yet, this is beside the point. What must be said is that such actions demonstrate that what drives actors into the various paths of doing politics is the demand to which they are committed. This, fundamentally, is what we can call the *problem of the drive* – the first problem that the circumstances for radical democracy, and in this case the scenario of the stalemate, cause for radical democratic theory.

For certain, one related element of the stalemate that needs to be re-addressed is the fact that although radical democratic activity was able to continue during these time periods, this is not to say that all forms of political activity necessarily took this form. Indeed, in many of the periods of stalemate that we have identified, though the majority of actors may have been engaged in a wait-and-see type of politics – often, like May 68, even bordering on an impasse – the inability of the dominant force in the contest to utilize coercion against opponents who may have “stepped in” too far, allowed space for more antagonistic opponents, driven on by their demands, to use coercive force of their own against its dominance. In short, these actors were able to engage in what we have described as an insurrection, without engendering a reaction that would shut down radical democratic activity for all sets of actors involved in the episode of contestation. Indeed, though one could certainly think of other historical examples of political episodes that involved forms of political activity akin to what we have described as insurrection, within our case studies five out of six of the instances of insurrection occurred within an overarching scenario of stalemate. Only the Thai Red Shirts

in their storming of the ASEAN summit in Pattaya in 2009 can be said to have engaged in insurrectional activity without the relative safety of the stalemate. For this, of course, they were to pay quite dearly.

With the fairly frequent occurrence of insurrection within an overarching scenario of stalemate having been identified, it could be asked if these minoritarian actions truly matter for our understanding of the necessary circumstances for radical democratic politics. Indeed, it could be argued that it does not fundamentally matter as these antagonistic actions undertaken by this small number of actors did not alter the possibility that other agonistic actors (albeit, as a result of a contingent impasse) could partake in their “stepping out”. While this might be partially true, the fact that sets of actors who began their contestation in an agonistic fashion then moved to relatively more coercive means, particularly when the agonistic channel was open to them, forces us to ask questions about the possibility of “taming” radical politics, or as Mouffe has often stated, turning antagonism into agonism.

As we can also see, the disappearance of the agonistic form in these situations, with the exception of the Krajina Serbs, did not come as a result of a substantial shift in tactics on the part of the dominant and, often, coercively capable set of actors within the contest, but rather through some of the dominant forces’ challengers from below who had taken the initiative and “stepped out” of their usual functions and roles and had since abandoned the more conciliatory stance. As such, the primary questions that need to be asked is what prompted these actors to abandon the agonistic form and what does this tell us about the requirements for a hypothetical continuation of such form?

To the first question we have undoubtedly already had a preview of the answer. Indeed, in all of our identified moments of insurrection whereby instances of coercion-from-below burst through an overarching situation of agonism, it was the demand of the actors – ones which would not accept their own subordination or, at least, the subordination of their

interests and demands to those of the dominant force – which pushed them into a Schmittian friend-enemy relationship. In these situations, it is certainly justifiable to speak in the language of enemies as opposed to the Mouffian language of adversaries as these actors treated their opponents as needing to be subordinated or even cancelled out as opposed to being engaged with as political equals.

In 1990, within the yet-to-be independent Republic of Croatia, the actions of Milan Babić and his supporters while attempting to forge the Association of Serbian Municipalities clearly pushed the bounds of agonism, as their “rallies of truth” aggressively forced out local leaders and those they represented. The escalation of this type of action within the register of “friend/enemy” occurred as soon as the Croatian government felt as though the Krajina Serbs, who were unwilling to back down on their claims of autonomy and who attempted to hold a referendum, were threatening their territorial integrity and nation-building policies. As such, a failed attempt at a crackdown on the part of the Croatian government unfolded on 17 August, initiating the “log revolution” which looked to protect the Serbian communities, and particularly Knin from further Croatian incursion. Yet, though this agonistic relationship continued on for several months as a result of the stalemate stemming from the Croatian government’s incapacity, at this point, given the Krajina Serbs’ fundamental interests of protecting their autonomy, there was no alternative to taking up arms against a Croatia that was now showing itself as being entirely closed to the Krajina Serbs’ demands. Here, we can say that given the nature of the demand – autonomy – and the contingent alignment of forces that the Krajina Serbs were up against – a Croatian government who believed firmly in the “one and indivisible” and thus unwilling to cede autonomy – drove them into antagonism, first in insurrection and second in war.

As a further illustration of this point, in many of the other instances of radical democratic activity that we have encountered, what began as a demonstration of equality in a

more or less agonistic form graduated to an increasingly antagonistic one with efforts to cancel out the power held by the opponent. Again, in these instances, the goal of the “stepping out” was often not something akin to the carving out of a socio-political benefit or piece of the pie, for example for the provision of some specific policy like education reform or the institutionalization and enforcement of labour rights on the factory floor – fundamentally reformist changes which *could* be instituted without a change in the socio-political arrangement tout court. Rather, here we can employ the language of “zero-sum”, and state that many of these instances escalated from agonism to antagonism as the initial demand put forward ensured that a concessionary resolution of the contest would not be possible.

Within our case studies, there have been several instances such as this that we have been privy to. In the Thai case we have witnessed the various Yellow Shirt and post-Yellow Shirt rallies begin agonistically and become increasing antagonistic within an overall stalemate in 2006, 2008, and 2014 for the reason that their goal – the replacement of Thaksin and, later, perceived Thaksin proxies – could not be achieved without the Red friendly governments stepping down. This development, of course, was next to impossible as it would have nullified one of the core interests of these governments – staying in power for the implementation of their various projects – an interest that they would also have felt justified in protecting given their, if contested, electoral mandate. For the Yellow Shirts thus, it was a zero-sum scenario of either having the levers of power in friendly hands or nothing that drove them into an antagonistic stance.

It is at this juncture that we need to argue that problem of the drive intersects with what we can call the *problem of political space* and the *problem of inequality*. As we have seen in hints throughout this work, radical democratic theory has generally been blind to the question of political space. Once more, one of the most oft-repeated issues of radical democratic practice witnessed in this work has been the fact that any “stepping out” requires

“stepping into” somewhere else, frequently a space or place deemed off-limits by the dominant set of actors in the contest. Quite simply, though radical democracy is fundamentally a project of theoretical equality, real political activity in the flesh and blood is almost never conducted within an actual space of equality. This is for the reason that there is a particular geography to socio-political control or dominance – one that, like any political map shows, revolves around the establishment and maintenance of certain black and white boundaries. Of course, when it comes to the operation of socio-political control within the modern state system – the unit in which political activity is most frequently conducted in our current era – the most important boundaries are those between two clearly identifiable sets of actors. Generally, there are first those who have access (legitimate or not) to the various state apparatuses (coercive, administrative, ideological) through which the socio-political field is constructed and which determine who gets what in the political community. On the other side of this boundary are those who do not have such access. Though it is not a unique insight as it has been long established by radical thinkers such as Gramsci, Althusser and their various disciples as well as within mainstream social sciences through the new institutionalisms, in constructing the socio-political arrangement and establishing who gets what in the political community, this also entails that certain boundaries are established outside of the realms normally conceived to be part of the state.<sup>823</sup> This location beyond what we usually think of as the capital-p Political does not, however, change the fact that these boundaries either originate from or are defended by this dominant force.

In our own exploration of the four case cases, we have witnessed dozens of these boundaries being revealed by radical democratic challenges. In the Croatian case, these boundaries are far more obvious to acknowledge as they involved a nationalist government using the apparatuses at their disposal via the republican government to impose its will in

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<sup>823</sup> For a detailed account of these see: Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971); Louis Althusser, *‘Lenin and Philosophy’ and Other Essays*. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001).

setting the very boundaries of inclusion in the national community. Among these boundaries designed to produce a “Croatian Croatia” were symbolic ones including the re-adoption of the *šahovnica* flag, the renaming of streets after Croatian “heroes”, and more materially-rooted forms of exclusion including the relegation of the Serbs to the status of national minority, the consequent stripping of the legal right to their own language, education system, cultural institutions, and writing script, as well as the exclusion of Serbs from prominent public positions including government, police and the media.

In the Thai case, boundaries under contestation varied according to the belligerents and included who in the polity was subject to the rule of law (one of the key demands of many anti-Thaksin demonstrators), who was entitled to the benefits of general economic development (one of the key demands of the Red Shirts), and most fundamentally, who had control over the apparatus of the state and the various institutions and places that fell under their socio-political designs, including the ministries, the parliament buildings, the airports, and the streets themselves.

In the Singaporean case, before independence via merger with Malaysia, we have also witnessed many boundaries put into contest including those determining control over the schools, the factory floor, the operation of political parties and civil society groups, and the ultimate boundary of the levers of political power via government, then in the hands of the colonial power. Post-1965, we have witnessed a clear attempt by the PAP government not just to reset but sharply delineate and enforce boundaries that ranged from those determining who could participate in union activity and who could participate in the management of ethnic and student affairs to those that set the conditions for political engagement of any kind, indeed drawing a boundary in a manner that even blocked the street.

Finally, in the French case, we have seen the calling into question of an array of established boundaries that stemmed from the organization of high-modern capitalism in a Gaullist political form. These contested boundaries included those that determined who governed the university, who controlled the direction of education, who managed the workplace, who had the right to the means of production, who belonged in the streets, and again ultimately, who had the legitimate authority to control the state apparatus.

It must be stated that, though radical democratic theory fundamentally rests on the encouragement of such challenges, the fact that none of the theorists adequately accounts for the actual geographies of these boundaries leaves them blind to the fact that in order for the boundary under contest to be altered, this space may need to be physically taken – a “stepping into” that displaces the current holders of that space in a clear showing of antagonism and a direct subordination of the opponent. In a zero-sum situation, not doing so amounts to leaving the demand unfulfilled.

The example of the Yellow Shirts/PDRC is a strong case in point once again. In 2006, 2008, and 2014 their demand left no room for compromise. In 2006, there was a black and white ultimatum put forth: either Thaksin resigned or the protests would continue to disrupt and possibly escalate. Likewise, in 2008, the ultimatum was either that Somchai resigned or more of the same and, lastly, in 2014, it was either that Yingluck resigned or even more of the same. In instances such as these, there is simply no possible pluralistic or agonistic resolution to the episode of contention as the boundary under contest is that of the levers of state power themselves – a location, which though not always singular due to the various apparatuses and institutions which constitute them - is desired in its totality, or at least as total as they possibly can be, for the effectiveness that such control can ensure, particularly in terms of being able to reconfigure the boundaries of the socio-political field so as to meet the actors’ interests and demands. In short, if the demand is political power and political power

unconditionally, one either achieves it or does not. There is no space here between domination and revolt and, hence, no true agonism. Even in the case of the stalemate which this episode fits, it only appears as agonistic as a result of an impasse that is eventually resolved in one direction or the other. For this episode, as we know, as a result of the eventual certification by the Thai military on all three occasions, the Yellow Shirts and post-Yellow Shirts of 2006, 2008, and 2014 indirectly succeeded in revolt.

There are several other instances we have examined that resemble the case of the Thai Yellow Shirts. One of course, was the aforementioned insurrectionary activity of their Red Shirt counterparts during April 2009 when they too, demanding the immediate resignation of the Abhisit government, pushed on with their mass protest in the Ratchadamnoen district and soon went beyond it, attempting to confront the Prime Minister directly during the ASEAN summit with a violent surge. Once again, one year later in 2010, with Abhisit still in power and the Red Shirts now seeking justice for their fallen brothers and sisters of 2009 and wishing for the downfall of the Democrat-Military-Ammarthaya alliance, the mass street demonstrations continued once again with a firm call for Abhisit's immediate resignation. As in 2009, when this call was not acceded to, some members of the Red Shirts again tried to up the ante and meet the coercive apparatus head on, invading an army base in the vicinity of the protest site. Like their Yellow Shirted rivals, the boundary of political rule, being contested in such an immediate manner drove them immediate to the antagonistic path.

Beyond the intransigence of the Thai case, such direct and immediate contestation of the boundary of political rule also showed its face during May 68 when a revolutionary feeling, if not actual revolutionary potential, was in the air. Without a doubt, many of the participants in the events of May carried with them radical ideologies – the most explicit of them being the far-left political parties and organizations – which were at least theoretically committed to the overthrow of the capitalist state in its Gaullist incarnation. As we have also

seen, as the event moved forward from early to late May, it was clear that these most revolutionary agents did not have the capacity to achieve this. Nonetheless, in the last week of May, when de Gaulle announced his proposal of “participation” as opposed to his resignation, these radical actors, who had been at the receiving end of many waves of repression at the hands of the police, turned the tables and became the instigator with the demand of revolutionary overthrow driving them to an insurrectional antagonism. Once more, when the boundary under contest is that which determines who ought to have ultimate control of the state apparatus, there is no concessionary approach, no pluralistic avenue to divide the various institutions of political power. It is simply all or nothing, a zero-sum game. This is all the more true when considering the programmes of the far-left forces involved in May 68 who were not content with “participation”, improvement in the material livelihoods of the workers, or life under the “revisionist” French Communist Party which had appeared to make its peace with “bourgeois” politics and even the capitalist system. For these actors, it was simply socialism or bust - again, in a very immediate manner, all or nothing.

Certainly, it can be argued that this is not strategically sound politics. Throughout the last several hundred years, there have been a vast array of derogatory names levelled at such forms of political action including “purism”, “adventurism”, “infantilism” and countless others. Indeed, we have come to encounter a few of these within the historical context of May 68, particularly through the strong criticisms from the PCF directed at the militant students in early May. Of course, it goes without saying that this critique is quite different from that which can be laid against the Thai Yellow Shirts and subsequent groups. Undoubtedly, a movement with the strong support of, and even affinities with, the Thai military – the institution that has been *the* mover and shaker of the kingdom’s politics since 1932 can hardly be brandished infantile, though other labels such as reactionary and dictatorial may well apply.

As such, for these types of instances – those generally falling within our category of insurrection in which the interests of actors led to a demand whereby the only acceptable option was to have those in power replaced immediately – all can be classified as undemocratic while some can be classified as both undemocratic and ineffective. Of course, it is quite apparent that none of the radical democratic theorists around whom we have framed our inquiry would suggest that a military coup or military engineered judicial decision constitutes a radical democratic action or a form of agonistic pluralism. Most definitely, even in the most conventional understandings of democracy or pluralism, a military coup is about as far away from being democratic or pluralistic as any political activity can get. The problem however is that radical democratic theory’s fundamental prescription of opening up political space for subordinated groups or for those normally “placed” within a certain function of the socio-political framework does very little for the promotion of agonism when the demands of these recently active subordinate forces and the interests of their more powerful opponents are mutually exclusive within a socio-political space, including the ultimate leadership of the polity itself, that both are driven to but which only one of them can ultimately control and shape. We can thus say that the eventual direction of this political contest is at the mercy of the drive and the divisibility of the socio-political space to which they are driven.

It must be stated thus that in some political contests, namely those in which the demands of the actors call for the indivisibility of a targeted socio-political space, the stakes are simply winner-take-all. Within one polity, there simply cannot be the both colonialism and independence, capitalism and communism, the rule of the oligarchy and the rule of the populist, the rule of the Croats and the rule of the Serbs, Lord Selkirk and Lee Kuan Yew, Thaksin and Chan-ocha, Tudjman and Martić, de Gaulle and Cohn-Bendit. Once again, these all-or-nothing scenarios boil down to the indivisibility of the targeted space.

Undoubtedly, there will be some who question the notion that a socio-political space can never be indivisible and might suggest that we have simply swapped a purist pluralist understanding for one of pure domination. The claim might be that, surely, political power is not simply the sovereign power of the Leviathan. To do so would be to turn a blind eye to the last fifty to sixty years of state theory and political sociology – much of which that has suggested that power of a politically relevant nature is far more dispersed than our notion of indivisible socio-political spaces seems to suggest.

There are two very different ways to respond to this claim - one which is more constructivist in nature while the other is more classically structural. Since, these two paradigms have been at the heart of our study – one of actors constructing demands and running up against structures that they themselves did not create – this is entirely fitting. From a constructivist perspective, we need to keep in mind that what matters most for understanding the direction of political actors is putting one's finger on the realities they perceive as opposed to a bird's eye view of overarching processes. After all, in the vast majority of cases whereby political actors are engaged in forms of radical opposition, these political actors are not social scientists (barring some cases, of course!) As such, as long as participants in such forms of opposition politics believe that certain socio-political spaces are indivisible and that, also, perceived benefits – such as legislation which corresponds to their core interests – will only come to fruition from control over this apparent indivisible space, it does not fundamentally matter if this is not actually how power is distributed. Actors will continue to be driven by their demand towards establishing control over the particular socio-political space – whether it is a legislative space like the president's office or those of the cabinet or a coercive or legal space that serves to protect the legislation. As such, since radical democratic theory is not in the business of discouraging action on the basis of a lack of structural understanding or awareness on the part of actors “stepping out” from below,

there is nothing proposed to prevent actors from aiming for an apparent indivisible socio-political space that will either meet, or at least establish a necessary prerequisite for meeting, the demand.

Of course, one problem with this position, despite the accuracy of its logic, is the fact that it paints political actors from below as being fundamentally naïve and susceptible to acting blindly. Though there are thousands of case studies that we could employ to show that actors are well aware of the stakes at hand, we do not have to look any further than our case studies. In all of our cases, given the various cleavages that existed not only between fairly militant and relative influential forces in the polity as a whole but also within the state apparatus, actors could not realistically expect that achieving state power and control over the state's various apparatuses for the implementation of some new design for the socio-political arrangement would be able to overdetermine the composition of the underlying socio-political field.

Once again, though such overdetermination, such moulding of the socio-political field is certainly the ambition of many political movements, both nascent in the position of opposition and initiated once at the helm of the state apparatus (in our exploration, the consolidation of the PAP's dominance over Singapore's political activity is a good case in point), this by no means takes place the very instant a set of actors takes hold of the state apparatus. Indeed, contemporary state theory and political sociology is correct when asserting that power is distributed across a variety of locales and nodes along with their various boundaries, thus making this dominance a long-term and difficult task that is also in no way guaranteed. Yet despite this however, a problem lies in that not every set of actors, driven on by their demand, will be willing to embrace these multiple alternative nodes as channels for the resolution of their claims. Undoubtedly, whatever the challenges that stem from having to deal with opponents and, indeed, enemies, there are many political projects carried along by

their agents that *necessitate* control over the more influential nodes of political power in order to defeat those who stand in their way – those whose own project necessitates a boundary in some locale of the socio-political field and who also wish to shape this same political field in their image.

Of course, despite it not being the only locale or political boundary of importance, control over the state apparatus, or at least some key indivisible parts or functions of it, is a prerequisite for the implementation of a large number of political projects. In a number of our case studies, we have seen just this. In the Thai case, though no-one would be able to imagine one aligned, united set of actors controlling all of the various tentacles of the state, let alone the numerous forces of influence in civil society, this did not prevent the Yellow Shirts and Red Shirts from attempting to control the indivisible space of the Prime Minister's office and, subsequently, the relatively indivisible policy functions – whether populist or elite-managed – for the fact that doing so would allow the radial democratic actors to have their demand met. In the Thai case, these populist and elite-driven visions of the country's needed socio-political arrangement put forth by the Red-friendly and Yellow-friendly governments were so diametrically opposed on issues of economic redistribution, public corruption, and the set of elites who should rule the country that the boundaries of these areas were set in a near impenetrable manner and left little room for the flexibility of concessions. Having control over other nodes or locales of power was thus irrelevant for the goal of setting the necessary boundaries which would determine who had access to what and who got what according to the interests of the group at hand. As a result of this, what was witnessed at times in the Thai case was a shift toward antagonism on the part of previously agonistic actors in a bid for the all-important and indivisible space of the cabinet.

Likewise, we have witnessed the same dynamics unfold within our exploration of May 68, particularly on the part of the far-left actors who began to pursue a more direct

assault on the Gaullist regime and the socio-political arrangement underlying it in their instigated confrontations with the police and other security forces in an insurrectional rejection of the standing order. Once again, though the vast majority of those highly militant participants would have been well-aware of the numerous conservative forces that co-existed and operated on the same terrain and that would consequently make it difficult for any one set of actors to control the entire state apparatus and holistically mould civil society and the socio-political field, this knowledge could have never led these far-left actors to try their hand at the pluralist game and attempt to influence the direction of the polity from a position of opposition. Indeed, a political position and, when active, project of revolutionary socialism has by definition, no chance of accepting a pluralist outcome whereby actors push against the dominant set of actors and the state apparatus only to achieve concessions while staying within a position of subordination. Rather, the very demand of revolutionary socialism pushes them directly to the heights of the state apparatus for the purposes of immediately, and not gradually, abolishing private property and appropriating the means of production for their collectivization – a process involving the wholesale dismantling and decertification of the parliamentary system as well as capitalist legal system for the establishment of the ruling party's own rule and law.

In this scenario, the locales of interest are, once again, fundamentally indivisible. One has either a “bourgeois” or socialist force in control of the executive and legal branches of the state and, likewise, one has either the allowance or disallowance of private property and as a result of this, there is simply no pluralist solution to the contest. As such, we see once more that the problem of the demand meets the problem of political space, the contest becomes zero-sum, and agonism gives way to antagonism, albeit in this case a mere insurrectional antagonism that could barely dent the Gaullist armour.

Overall thus, in these scenarios, the problem of the drive – the fact that the interests and demands of these actors necessitated them controlling some key socio-political space or boundary – brought them squarely to the problem of political space. Indeed, with the particular challenged spaces and boundaries having been those of an indivisible nature and thus taking the possibility of a compromise off the table entirely, the contest became that of a zero-sum game – an all or nothing battle for the particular targeted space or boundary. As a result of these two problems, their initial form of radical democratic protest gave way to an antagonistic insurrection instigated by forces from below.

From here, it must be said that despite there having been only a few clear-cut instances within our case studies in which such scenario became a reality, in the modern period taken as a whole there have been countless instances whereby political militancy and the indivisibility of the targeted space resulted in such antagonism. Undoubtedly, a very large number of the revolutionary moments, both successful and unsuccessful, of the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup> century have quite naturally gone down this antagonistic path for the reason that the demand at hand drove them beyond the point of accepting concessions. One could hardly expect, for example, a set of actors intent on the national liberation of their country to permanently accept concessions that would keep the country under perpetual colonial rule. Rather, the demand of independence would likely drive the actors to an indivisible political space – the ultimate determining hand on the state apparatus – leading the colonizers to either abdicate the space or have it taken by its opponents pressing from below. As we have already encountered via the actions of the militants of May 68, historical far-left parties of various stripes have also demanded all or nothing in the form of having control of the polity's guiding hands for the distribution of property, goods, services and other economic rewards ultimately for the purpose of their very redistribution.

We can thus state that (1) a drive stemming from actors demands coalescing with (2) the limits imposed by an indivisible political space to create a situation of antagonism initiated from below has made many appearances throughout the history of what we can describe as a particular brand of contentious politics – a politics with a revolutionary pulse. Of course, for every instance of revolutionary politics that was successful – successful in terms of their take-over if not in the implementation of their political project and also successful in cancelling out agonism and the radical democratic form – there have also been those that did not accomplish what they had intended to, usually as a result of their incapacity. Indeed, just as we have a case of a successful, though indirect, takeover of the targeted political space by the Thai Yellow Shirts, midwived through their army certifiers, so too do we have an unsuccessful effort on the part of far-left students in late May 68. Once again, in this latter case, due to the apprehension that the Gaullists felt about cracking down on the *piétons de mai* as a whole in one clear sweep at the point when the uprising had reached its peak, a general opportunity for radical democratic forms of politics carried on for the majority of participants, leaving the far-left militants without capable revolutionary allies.

With this stated, one of the major points of analysis that we have made throughout our inquiry into the four case studies is the fact that the direction and eventual fate of such militants depends as much on the very contextually contingent factor of capacity as it does on interests and demands. This of course, should not serve to downplay what the problem of the drive means for other moments of radical democratic politics and, consequently, the standing of radical democratic theory. For certain, the fact that not all sets of actors who turn antagonistic have the capacity to affect the overall possibility for contestation by other actors as in the case of late May 68 does not help radical democracy become a stronger normative democratic theory.

Undoubtedly, and as will become more important later on, we cannot and should not rely on entirely contingent factors when putting forth such a prescriptive theory. In fact, under no circumstances can we suggest that agonism is a viable political position to be emulated based on a case whereby actors from below would have forcefully subordinated by their opponents in power, given the capacity to do so. For certain, if there is a set of actors whose demand drives them to some indivisible socio-political space or boundary, a zero-sum game can be created and agonism can be cancelled out as a result of an enablement of capacity. We can thus say that in moments such as these with actors such as these, what appear to be agonistically engaged actors are simply waiting or hoping for their moment to become antagonistic, challenge those in control of the political space or boundary, and ideally take it for their own shaping. As a result of this, despite the fact that such a scenario depends on (1) the nature of the demand and (2) the set of actors' capacity, antagonism always remains a distinct possibility in politics broadly defined.

Herein lies a serious challenge for the radical democratic project. For though radical democratic thought has founded much of its normative stance on the notion that actors can *choose* to act in an agonistic manner, the fact that it is the nature of actors' demands combined with the nature of the targeted socio-political space or boundary that determines their direction in the first place raises serious questions as to whether sets of actors can be "tamed" to fit an agonistic mode of contestation. Indeed, given this logic, it would seem that in order for antagonism to be prevented, it is fundamentally the types of *demands* that need to be tamed as opposed to the tactics and manoeuvres of actors. It can be said that, in this way, radical democratic thought has missed a significant step in its analysis of militantly oriented politics, understanding the antagonistic direction of some sets of actors as a mere *cause* of domination and inequality as opposed to an *effect* of the demand and targeted space. It is this very damning combination of problems that we will now turn to.

### *Taming Demands and De-radicalizing Radical Democracy*

The first key point that needs to be made clear is the fact that radical democratic thought has not been in the business of prescribing the taming of political demands. In fact, the great contradiction to be found within all of this is that the prescription offered by the theorists has been just the opposite – the radicalization of political demands outside the bounds of politics usually defined – hence the name radical democracy. The central problem with this, as we have seen, is that radical attempts on the relevant socio-political space, including important locales within the state apparatus, stem directly from radical demands. Among these have been the historical demands we have witnessed in our case studies including more universally identifiable ones such as anti-colonialism and revolutionary socialism and more case-specific ones such as anti-Thaksinism. In short, though the radical democratic theorists wish for more vibrant democratic contests via more radical demands within an agonistic framework, some of these demands, when left unchecked or unqualified, lead directly down the path of antagonism.

This of course would be far less serious of a problem if the radical democratic theorists proposed a more thorough series of limitations on the types of demands that actors are permitted to put forth in “stepping out” from the usual division of roles and functions in the standing socio-political arrangement. As we have discussed in previous chapters, the four theorists that we have built our inquiry upon have tended to impose limitations on the types of actors who can participate in radical democratic forms of contestation according to their programmatic content as opposed to the targeted political space driven to by their demands. For Mouffe, to protect her project from inadvertently opening the door to reactionary and exclusionary political movements, the standard of liberty and equality are put forth – a standard that all participants must subscribe to, though their interpretations of these concepts, in conjunction with Mouffe’s post-structuralist framework, are left open to the actors. For

Honig, since her commitment to pluralism stems from an Arendtian understanding of the perpetual possibility of new and creative ways of being unsettling the old, actors' projects need to maintain an openness to subsequent new forces with their associated new ways of being. For Rancière, who also makes certain moves to protect his theory from appropriation by exclusionary forms of particularism, this limit is framed in terms of issues or "wrongs" that concern the community as a whole. Lastly, for Connolly, who perhaps deals with the justifiable limits for participation in the contest in the most thorough manner, postulates that democratic engagement requires a particular ethos – that of agonistic respect – whereby opponents participating in the contest enter it with a "certain forbearance and hesitancy" when it comes to putting their own project forth as one of universal merit. According to Connolly, this is done as a recognition and commitment to the deep diversity that pervades our mutual existence, politically, religiously, culturally, and otherwise.

With regard to the question of limits for participation thus, as a result of the first three theorists' predominant focus on the limits of programmatic content and Connolly's much thicker description of the limits of engagement established through agonistic respect, it is imperative that we grapple with Mouffe, Honig, and Rancière first and Connolly second. This is for the reason that, due to their divergent positions on limits, the issue of militant actors pushing beyond the agonistic form also causes divergent problems for their respective theoretical projects.

When it comes to the first three thinkers it can be said that their discussed limitations were elaborated on in an effort to demonstrate that their frameworks do not tread down the path of relativism – a direction that would undercut their standing as progressive political projects and thus the thinkers' own normative commitments. Much has already been said about these thinkers' leftist orientations and the fact that all of their works, including that of Connolly, fit within a general camp of intellectuals who have attempted to resuscitate

progressive politics after the so-called “death of Marxism”. As stated thus, to open up progressive political projects to the fact of pluralism which older frameworks and ideological positions previously ignored while remaining committed to inclusionary and non-hierarchical socio-political arrangements, Mouffe, Rancière and Honig have included commitments to “liberty and equality”, “the community as a whole”, and “the new” to ensure this.

It has to be stated however that, as moments within our case studies have demonstrated quite clearly, having actors committed to the above concepts is no guarantee that politics will remain agonistic. Indeed, sets of actors espousing socio-political transformations such as anti-colonialism, revolutionary socialism, and even more case specific projects such as anti-Thaksinism can be understood to fall, if not directly then at least arguably, within the bounds of “liberty and equality”, “the community as a whole”, and “the new”. However, as has been articulated in this chapter, as a result of the problem of the drive and the subsequent problem of political space, sets of actors carrying with them these types of projects had moved into the realm of antagonism for the control of the targeted socio-political space or boundary and the meeting of the demand. Indeed, such concepts can still be respected while embarking on a path of socio-political domination. Here we can see that the above-mentioned limits that Mouffe, Rancière, and Honig have set are not a sufficient check to ensure that the political contest steers clear of antagonism. With these projects – anti-colonialism, revolutionary socialism, and the anti-Thaksinism – changing the direction of actors would require changing the demands themselves – a prescription that does not appear within the theoretical projects of Mouffe, Rancière, or Honig.

This however, is where William Connolly differs. Unlike the other three thinkers, the centrality that Connolly gives to a pluralist ethos – one in which a commitment to agonistic respect entails actors hypothetically recognizing their own particularism and taking a step back from their political self-righteousness is a much more demanding limitation on

participating actors as it does in fact suggest that, for the sake of pluralism, actors have an obligation to reframe their demands with an eye to the interests, relative position, and resulting demands of the political opponent. Compared to the other three thinkers thus, we can say that Connolly's design for agonistic democracy is deeper as it is more cognizant of the fundamental inter-relational nature of political contests and is also more prescriptive in setting guidelines for engaging with each other.

It must be said that though these more carefully thought and constructed conditions protect Connolly from some of the problems faced by the others, it simultaneously opens the door to problems of a different nature. For certain, these thicker normative conditions do not entirely save Connolly from the problems stemming from his insistence that the recognition of difference will be the primary step in fostering agonistic respect, including the problem of the drive. Indeed, rather than being able to suggest that such a problem could be rooted out, Connolly's more stringent ethical stance simply allows him to delegitimize those movements who cannot modify their demands vis-à-vis others. As we will see, though the intention is to establish an inclusive ethos, this becomes a real difficulty, and also theoretical weakness, in conditions of limited political space and inequality. In short, though we can say that his theorization is somewhat insulated from the problem of the drive, the problem of political space - one which we have previously witnessed leading to antagonism - in Connolly's case, leads squarely to what we can properly call the *problem of inequality*.

### *The Problem of Inequality*

First of all, when it comes to the problem of the drive, while we have argued that the other thinkers' designs somewhat counter-intuitively open the door to antagonism by not calling for the restriction of demands that take aim at an indivisible political space, Connolly is able to argue that, according to his framework, such demands can be deemed illegitimate

from the outset for failing to take a step back from the perceived universality of the demand. Revolutionary politics of an insurrectionary nature are thus not to be found within Connolly's playbook. As we will encounter again in due time, neither does its mirror image of violent crackdowns via the state's coercive apparatus. Clearly, both fail the test of agonistic respect. To use the more classical political language of the ancients, moderation, and moderation of a mutual nature (or of the "whole") for that matter, constitutes a fundamental ingredient of Connolly's agonistic proposal.

However, once more, without pushing the semantic point too far, we need to ask ourselves how radical a radical democratic politics can be when it rests on the practice of moderation. Surely, in the realm of theory, we can imagine two sets of actors facing off like a pair of boxers in a ring – an even playing field fitted with an ethos of agonistic respect in which competitors wish to defeat, though not destroy, each other. Yet, if our case studies have served to demonstrate anything at all, it is the fact that politics – at least within the modern state (the implied battlefield of our designated theorists) and arguably any polity – never operates in such a context.

Given the starting normative position of radical democratic theory, perhaps best encapsulated by Rancière's statement that politics in its purest sense can be conducted by "anyone, anyone at all", it should come as no surprise that our case studies, which have been chosen for the reason that they closely fit this normative starting point, fall under this fairly David vs. Goliath scenario. Of course, for the radical democratic theorists, particularly Rancière, Mouffe, and Honig, the entire *raison d'être* of their project is to subvert this unequal power relation through an assertion of an equality that is *presupposed*. Yet, as we have seen through our inquiry, this matter brings us back to Marx's critique of abstract freedom under liberal democratic capitalism. For Marx, the liberal freedoms of thought, expression, and the press among others simply masked the material reality of domination and

subservience experienced within the realm of production. For us, in a similar vein, we can say that the radical theorists promote, though certainly not intentionally, an abstract equality. In Chapter 4, in our exploration of the Krajina Serb rebellion, we stated that the radical democratic theorists “ignore the room” – that being the actual spaces and places of influence and boundary setting just discussed. At this point of the work we can nuance this stance and insist that while the thinkers may be well aware of this socio-political alignment prior to any “stepping out” as it is the inegalitarian starting point for the launching of their critique, they tend to ignore this alignment or “room” the moment that actors “step out”.

As we have seen in our cases, the fact that actors assert or demonstrate their equality does not mean that the inegalitarian distribution of power through the control of influential socio-political locales and the setting of boundaries suddenly disappears. Rather, as we have witnessed, there are numerous instances where actors “stepping out” involved them “stepping into” spaces that do not seriously challenge the distribution of power at all. Examples of such instances of what we have labelled protest once again include Rašković’s early rallying of the Krajina Serbs, Sondhi’s Yellow Roadshow of 2005, the Red Shirts’ various start-ups while gathering momentum, the Bangkok Middle Class’ anti-amnesty bill movement of 2013, the activity of Singapore’s leftist forces after the Lim Yew Hock purge, and the continued action on the part of moderate actors in France, June ’68. As has been argued previously, this supposed expression of equality thus happens squarely within the very tangible parameters and, indeed, bounds of inequality.

Likewise, we have also come to see a series of more controversial examples of a similar nature that we have labelled occupation. As we have previously discussed, in these examples – those of Martić’s more aggressive Association of Serbian Municipalities, the Red Shirt’s assertiveness at Pattaya in 2009 and again in and around Ratchadamnoen in 2010, and the far-left students and workers in late May 68 – while radical actors in their “stepping out”

ended up antagonistically imposing their will on other members of the political community not directly participating in the contest between the main opponents, their overall position with the polity's socio-political order remained one of subordination in relation to the set of actors in control of the state apparatus. In these situations too, though perhaps making a greater case for their equality vis-à-vis the dominant force in the contest, these demonstrations still fell within the bounds of inequality defined in terms of the tangible exercise of power via control of socio-political locales of influence.

Finally, and most clearly demonstrating the continued subordination of actors “stepping out” from below within instances of radical democracy, are those which we have classified as falling under the category of containment. In these scenarios such as the Red Shirt's fortified encampment in central Bangkok in May 2010, the Singaporean left's fairly delimited activism in the periods following both the Second World War and in the late 1960s, and the French “student commune” from the middle of April to 10 May 1968, while sets of actors did manage to “step out”, the spaces that they were permitted to “step into” were sharply demarcated by the physical presence of the coercive apparatus, employed by the dominant force to ensure that actors from below could push no further. In this situation, with the abstract boundaries of inequality made very real through the presence of men with guns, the agonism, let alone expression of equality, that they engendered was highly tainted.

It must be stated that for Rancière, Honig, and Mouffe, such a problem of inequality – one that poses a serious limitation on their notion that a radical democratic politics is an egalitarian politics – stems once again from their failure to take into consideration the problem of the drive. More specifically, this is the fact that not only can the demands of actors drive them to a revolutionary position – one of clear antagonism – but also to one of concessionary subordination. Of course, the case of May 68 and the direction of its more moderate actors in the latter part of that month is our clearest example of this scenario. What

this scenario amply demonstrates is the fact that, even in situations whereby a stalemate sees the eventual outcome be temporarily postponed and thus prolonging the possibility of radical democratic activity, the set of actors “stepping out” from below, as a consequence of their demands, are eventually either driven to take political power or to accept subordination for the sake of concessions. As a direct consequence of this, when demands are left unregulated in terms of the socio-political locales and boundaries they are aiming for, as is the case with Rancière, Mouffe, and Honig, demands can drive actors immediately or eventually towards the logic of domination or the logic of revolt. Individual case studies have hinted at it but here, after having conducted our complete analysis, we can decisively say that there is truly no space to be found between these logics, except in the case of a permanent stalemate. In other words, there is either antagonism or inequality – both scenarios that are fundamentally antithetical to the radical democracy’s theoretical proposal.

It is here that it becomes increasingly clear that Connolly’s thick and thorough ethos for the promotion of agonism, leads squarely to the problem of inequality. For within the bounds of what Connolly postulates, we can say that the possibilities for a set of actors “stepping out” from below are even further restricted as it would seem that in his case, the options are not domination *or* revolt, but merely domination. Indeed, within any polity in which there is a clear hierarchical division of power based on the control over socio-political spaces and places of advantage (again, a definitive feature of the modern state and arguably any historical polity) the ethos of agonistic respect does not provide sufficient radical democratic bases for the displanting of those holding the levers of power in favour of a previously subordinated set of actors and their associated interests and demands. As a consequence of this, agonistic respect – if actualized – though perhaps leading to contending groups making compromises with each other on some occasions, cannot avoid the issue of

domination and subordination – the synthesis of our two problems of political space and inequality.

It has to be stated that, as far as the bounds of his theorization go, this type of domination/subordination scenario might not be as detrimental to Connolly's normative project as it is to the more post-Marxist and post-republican thinkers who tend to give much more weight to the concept of equality as a valuable end in-itself. For certain, though the question of equality does feature in his major works, it does so in a more implicit manner and, perhaps given Connolly's post-structuralist inclinations, falls on a lower scale of importance than the assurance of a more inclusionary pluralism and agonistic forms of contestation. With this, despite the existence of a power imbalance between contending actors, the key factors upon which Connolly relies when judging whether a contest can be given his seal of normative approval is whether contenders can step back from their perceived universality, challenge each other in ways that respect, at least, the *potential* applicability of their opponents position, and yield to some of this opponent's demands through compromise.

### *The Question of Political Power and Legitimate Rule*

It is at this point in the argument that we need to ask a very pointed question. If all political actors are considered equal, why should a set of actors in a position of subordination compromise with those in a dominant position when this very equality does nothing but expose the arbitrary nature of their rule? Indeed, we need to ask, beyond the question of mere compromise, why should a set of subordinate actors accept the dominant force's rule at all? Here we face the postmodern democratic dilemma articulated by Claude Lefort. If the king is indeed "dead" – if there is no transcendental value to which we can appeal in order to legitimate someone or some other's political rule, we end up in a state of serious uncertainty

whereby the levers of power require someone to hold them while, the fact is, no-one is actually justified in doing so.

At this point, we must say that if the model or form of democracy under discussion were that of a more classical Enlightenment form such as liberal democracy, we could of course appeal to the obvious legitimating mechanism of the election. Yet, as we have witnessed in our earlier theoretical chapter, elections – as a majoritarian and representative democratic mechanism – do not feature as part and parcel of the radical democratic framework. Indeed, for some of the authors, including most specifically Jacques Rancière, elections serve the function of re-placing or re-policing actors who had previously demonstrated their equality vis-à-vis the dominant force back into the usual functions of the hierarchical socio-political arrangement.

Though the critique of electorally-based democratic designs is certainly not without merit, the fact that the radical democratic theorists, albeit for the most part, do not propose some other theoretical mechanism of legitimation, leaves many of the thinkers' projects without a comprehensive answer to the question of "who should rule?" – undoubtedly, one of the, if not *the*, central question of political philosophy. As a result of this and as was discussed alongside the Singapore case study, one of radical democratic theory's central weaknesses is the fact that as a result of its theoretical starting points – Rancière's demonstration of "the part that has no part", Honig's emancipation of "the new", and Connolly's identity/difference matrix – all concepts which highlight what is missed out and in need of reaffirmation when politics becomes "settled" and "consolidated" through political rule and, according to their reasoning, domination, does not lead them to theorizing the normative requirements of political rule.

With a focus on the specificities of each thinker, we can say the following. For Rancière, radical democracy is a politics of interruption and opposition, both for the

demonstration of equality in-itself and the potential righting of some wrong, though not one which concerns itself with how legitimate power ought to be taken. Once again, one of the reasons that this does not feature in his project is because taking political power and making use of it is a clear form of placing and ordering and thus a function of police as opposed to an embodiment of politics. For Honig, radical democracy is also a politics of interruption with actors and their associated projects of new ways of being and doing unsettling the current order and pushing for a new arrangement which will open up to these forms of newness. However, once again, this is more concerned with re-founding the bases of the political community from below than with legitimately taking political power. In a similar vein to Rancière, taking and using this dominant position is akin to attempting to cement the socio-political arrangement, thus closing off spaces for the continuous re-founding of this arrangement. For Connolly, as we have been discussing, radical democracy is a politics of interruption meeting compromise, with contenders finding ways to seriously engage with each other as adversaries through challenging each other's positions all the while opening up spaces for each other based on the previously discussed ethos of agonistic respect. As a result of this wholehearted committed to pluralism and accommodation, Connolly does not provide himself with the theoretical tools to adequately discuss legitimate political rule. In contrast, Connolly is more interested in the question of the legitimating factors when it comes to the more pervasive engagements of the various old, new, and coming, sets of actors and their associated projects that take place in any polity. With this post-structuralist and, more specifically, Foucauldian assumptions that the power struggle extends beyond that of sovereign power – of having hold of the “King’s throne” – and into the socio-political field as a whole, Connolly’s thought operates at a level quite removed from ancient and modern prescriptions of “who ought to rule”.

When it comes to the thought of Chantal Mouffe however, it must be stated that her position on the question of “taking the state” is quite divergent from the positions of the three other theorists. Once again, as we have seen alongside the Singaporean case study, Mouffe, in clarifying her stance on the issue of seizing the heights of the state apparatus, has recently suggested that disrupting the dominant order is simply not enough.<sup>824</sup> Rather, radical democratic actors must try to build alliances and compete for hegemony. Indeed, within her most recent work, *Agonistics*, Mouffe has taken one of our earlier criticisms on board, namely that radical democracy as Honig and Connolly articulate it cannot be a progressive political alternative – particularly as a replacement for the socialist project – from a position of opposition or through strategies of interruption, as they do not allow for progressive forces to truly shape the polity in their image since they do not entail having control over the more meaningful levers of power that can effect such change.<sup>825</sup> With this, Mouffe seems to subscribe to the idea previously put forth in this chapter that sets of actors do indeed reach for certain nodes or locales of socio-political influence and boundary setting due to the unmistakable degree of control such a direction awards.

However, it needs to be stated clearly that despite the fact that Mouffe recognizes the need for actors to pursue such a course, this does not exonerate her thought from the various criticisms we have laid against radical democratic theory in general. The problem of the drive and of political space may very well lead to unregulated actors pursuing an antagonistic course, and the problem of inequality is certainly raised when considering Mouffe’s approval of seizing the state apparatus as such course of action cannot be done without legitimizing domination. What, after all, is hegemony – Mouffe’s favourite Gramscian concept – if not a form of domination?

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<sup>824</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (New York: Verso, 2013): 14  
<sup>825</sup> Ibid

Likewise, there is also the issue of Mouffe not adequately addressing the question of “who ought to rule?” Though it may appear obvious that Mouffe is intent on distancing herself from the charges of postmodern relativism and abandoning the class-struggle previously launched at her and her partner Ernesto Laclau from bedfellows of the left by suggesting that progressive and, indeed, anti-capitalist forces, should embark on a radical democratic route to eventually win hegemony and the state, there is nothing within her philosophical framework to suggest that it ought to be actors with leftist transformative projects to do so as opposed to other sets of actors with radically different programmatic aims. The contradiction here seems quite clear. If, as Mouffe suggests, there is no essentialist reason for any specific set of actors to rule, why then should the left more than other groups be the recommended sets of actors to travel down the radical democratic path? And likewise, if there is some essentialist reason that makes the left more favourable candidates to rule via control over the state apparatus and the control over important socio-political (and in the left’s case, economic) boundaries that come with it, then why open the space of contention to anyone else at all? Though these questions may come across as rhetorical, they should certainly not be taken in such a way. For certain, these are very real and, keeping in mind the future of progressive transformative projects in mind, very important questions that should be carefully considered and answered. Yet, as opposed to dealing with this difficult tension, it appears that she has instead attempted to shore up her commitment to an anti-capitalist transformation of the polity separately from her commitment to pluralism and agonistic forms of contestation. We can say quite certainly that her explanation of the latter, despite its various problems we have identified, has been thorough. As for the former however, and more importantly, how the former fits with the latter however, there is much clarification required.

This, of course, is also not to say that such a task – merging a commitment to progressive and transformative socio-political change with a commitment to political openness and the tolerance of opposition and/or plurality cannot be done. In fact, building upon our observations of the four case studies as well the prescriptions of the four theorists in light of these observations, this is a task that we will begin to tackle in our ninth and final chapter. This will undoubtedly and, indeed, quite rightly include some of the very pertinent foundations laid by Chantal Mouffe, in spite of the fact that we have also come to find fault with several of her essential assumptions and consequent directives. With that said, what Mouffe is excused from is the charge that her theory implies that opponents from below should submit to domination and thus render themselves subordinate. For certain projects at least, sets of actors should aspire to hegemony. For Mouffe, it is the nature of politics that *someone* needs to rule.

On this point, we can say that Honig and Rancière find themselves in the halfway house between innocence and guilt, depending of course on one's stance as to whether ignorance is no excuse in the eyes of the law. We can be quite confident in suggesting that given their respective commitments to equality in-itself and the continuous re-founding of the polity based on the ascension of "the new", that it is by no means the intention of Rancière and Honig to have their radical democratic actors submit to the dominant or hegemonic force in the polity. Once again, we can say that the thinkers indirectly allow for this possibility as a result of ignorance to the aforementioned problem of the drive and, likewise, the problem of political space that, as we have witnessed, includes the undeniable reality that power in the socio-political field in modern polities is distributed unequally. As we have previously discussed via our case inquiries, even when the usual socio-political arrangement is interrupted, someone or some set still remains in this space of domination. Their suggestion

that no-one has the right to rule or “found the polity” thus runs up against the fact that someone always does.

Though perhaps some with anarchistic tendencies in their thought (perhaps Rancière and Honig included) would see this assertion that no-one ought to rule as an embodiment of democracy, what would follow from the practice of this logic would be, at best, impasse, and at worst, state failure. We have to state firmly here that a romanticisation of this type of pure politics pushes the very *raison d'être* of political activity too far away from one of politics' essential characteristics: the governance and, hence, the shaping of the polity. Undoubtedly, and as we have argued in our earlier theoretical chapter, it is exactly this Platonic impulse – one which has had its fairly uncompromising modern forms in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century – from which the radical democratic thinkers have tried to push away. It is no surprise thus, that all four of our chosen theorists have, in one way or another, built their philosophies and models around one of two of Plato's greatest historical interlocutors and opponents, Aristotle or Nietzsche. Yet, not even these two great historical thinkers can be said to have abandoned this governmental and transformative aspect of the political as Rancière and Honig appear to. To summarize the crux of the problem, we can state the following. We, as political participants, can take to the streets, demonstrate our equality, and express forms of newness to our heart's content. Yet someone will still be governing us. To ignore this fact is to ignore this second fundamental Platonic characteristic of the concept of the political. In relation to real political struggles, it is to inadvertently submit to domination. It is this blind spot that, without a more comprehensive theory of political power, Honig and Rancière are guilty of. Yet the fact remains that, though these problems are quite serious when it comes to the soundness of their thought, particularly when evaluated as a project to be emulated by real world actors, no one can accuse them of being intentionally inegalitarian. Moreover, though from what we have observed such a position seems to be untenable, it can be said that when it

comes to the question of “who should rule?” their answer is “no one in particular” as opposed to no answer at all.

Once again, however, the issues that the problem of political space and, more specifically, the problem of political rule create for William Connolly’s thinking seem to run even deeper. Indeed, unlike the other thinkers, Connolly cannot be excused as he does not have a well-articulated answer to this question. As we have already argued, his very Foucauldian conception of power and, likewise, constituent power struggles leads him away from asking these types of classically oriented political questions. However, just as we have argued with regard to this deficiency in Rancière and Honig’s prescription, not thoroughly addressing the problems brought on by political space and inequality, particularly the advantages secured by the dominant force over subordinate ones, does not mean that these problems do not exist. Indeed, unlike Rancière and Honig’s suggestion of no-one being entitled to rule leading, if taken to its logical end, to the legitimization of permanent or perpetual disruption, Connolly’s proposal in which the question of who rules is less important than the commitment to agonistic respect, when taken to its logical conclusion, leads to the legitimization of perpetual compromise. The problem of course is that this compromise always occurs within the unequal distribution of socio-political power and is thus fundamentally inegalitarian.

Yet, since we have already established that Connolly’s thinking is relatively less concerned with equality than with agonism and pluralism it might be asked why this matters at all. Here, we must insist once more that, contrary to what some forms of postmodern thinking might suggest, having control over certain nodes or levers of influence, including those of the state apparatus which play an ultimate role in setting the defining boundaries of the socio-political, matters for a multitude of political projects. For certain, we only have to return to our earlier discussion of radical democratic actors “stepping out” from below to

recall that certain demands that call for the control over these spaces and boundaries for the purposes of instituting the desired project drive the actors towards antagonistically taking them. We can also recall that while the other theorists provide inadequate checks against this problem of the drive and thus end up opening the door to antagonism, Connolly's insistence on the ethos of agonistic respect would deem such uncompromising positions as illegitimate.

We can see however that a troubling contradiction arises when applying this requirement of "stepping back" from universality, engaging, and making space for each other's demands to those in a position of dominance. Indeed, because of the indivisibility of some political spaces and boundaries, there are certain positions that no set of actors can step back from. As was mentioned previously, some of these positions include who has ultimate control over the polity, a foreign or domestic power, or whether the law is established to respect or abolish private property. Even if reforms are possible within these overarching scenarios – a development which Connolly views as positive in that it opens up spaces and boundaries for previously excluded groups – it has to be stressed that a government in which the last word is left in the hands of a foreign power is still, in essence, a colonial regime, just as a politico-legal regime which guarantees the private control of the means of production is still, in essence, a capitalist political economy. Once again, there is simply no way to split these hairs, to divide these boundaries in a way that leaves both sets of contenders a recipient of what they demanded – of what drove them into the contest in the first place.

The resulting problem for Connolly's theorization is two-fold. First of all, though the commitment to agonistic respect suggests that contending groups "step back" and cede space to their opponents position and demands, the fact that there are some spaces of influence and boundaries that contenders cannot compromise on due to their indivisibility means that the set of actors in control of the crucial locales of socio-political influence and boundary setting are able to have their fundamental demands met while their opponents "stepping out" from

below cannot. As such, not only is the inegalitarian nature of the socio-political arrangement maintained but also the radical democratic actors “stepping out” from below are also subordinated in terms of not having their demands accommodated. Consequently, even if the more powerful set of actors have adopted Connolly’s ethoi of pluralism, they can only compromise to the point at which their interests and consequent demands meet some indivisible locale or boundary. It is at this point that the political contest becomes zero-sum and the problem of the drive ensures that these demands, aimed as they are at these indivisible locales and boundaries, witnesses actors from above attempting to hold onto them at the expense of those “stepping out” from below. It must be stated that, just as we encountered in our discussion of the radical democratic actors from below, the problem of the drive also means that the possibility of antagonism cannot be ruled out if these particular indivisible locales come to be threatened by demands from below which ask for too much or which push too far.

Indeed, it would seem that all sets of actors, irrespective of their programmatic content, have a stance on certain locales and boundaries that are fundamentally indivisible. As we have previously stated, this could be in relation to the question of who controls certain offices, who benefits from certain policies, or the law concerning public or private control over property. In a word, we can say that is fundamentally impossible to either remain neutral or split these spaces in two. As a result of this, even given a commitment to compromise, those in a position of power – those in control over these essential locales and boundaries – will necessarily set the boundaries in ways which will be acceptable to them and, given Connolly’s identity/difference logic, fundamentally unacceptable to others.

As we have already witnessed several times in this chapter, the problem of the drive meets with the problem of political space, and indeed, also the problem of inequality to cast serious doubt as to whether the type of pluralism that Connolly wishes to see come to fruition

could ever be a reality. Seemingly, these three fundamental problems suggest that there is no way to alleviate political subordination, defined both in terms of politics as action and politics as craft – of both the Aristotelian and Platonic conceptions of the political.

If we return once again to the Aristotle’s conceptualization of the ideal political community, we can come to see the second major area of concern for Connolly’s theoretical project stemming from some of the issues we have just identified. Aristotle in the *Politics*, well aware of the subordination that results from some groups ruling and not others – whether it be the rich or the poor, the many or the few, argues that the most appropriate design for each of the polity’s “parts” to be represented in the “whole” was for “each to rule and be ruled in turn”.<sup>826</sup> With Connolly however, as we have already discussed with regard to the radical democratic theorists in general, there is no promoted mechanism of legitimation, let alone any mechanism to ensure this type of rotational representation. As a result of this, Connolly’s prescription that contenders engage through an ethos of agonistic respect not only means that an inegalitarian arrangement will persist and that those in a position of power will necessarily have the upper-hand in moulding the polity, but also that subordinate sets of actors, without recourse to a promoted mechanism for legitimately taking power themselves, are left with the option of submitting to a dominant force whose rule, and thus boundary setting, is arbitrary.

As a consequence of this, rather than constituting a project of fundamental socio-political change, Connolly’s inability to take into proper consideration the problems of the drive, political space, and inequality leads him down a fundamentally reformist path whereby previously subordinated as well as newly emerged sets of actors may be provided additional spaces via this commitment to generosity, all the while the overarching socio-political arrangement including the most important socio-political, economic, and legal boundaries are

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<sup>826</sup> For the full argument regarding democratic liberty involving ruling and being ruled in turn, see: Book VI Part II of Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

left in the hands of the dominant force, whose rule is not substantially challenged. In essence, as opposed to hegemony, we have hegemony light - a scenario in which the maintenance of the status quo, whatever form it may take, is traded for a greater degree of inclusion. Though most certainly not intended, as opposed to radical politics we have instead a form of progressive liberal democracy or, perhaps, a multi-cultural social democracy.

Of course, leaving aside important considerations such as the economic and administrative viability of such a project, we can still argue that for some pluralists this type of inclusion might be just enough to meet their normative goals. As such, despite the perpetual subordination that this entails in both of our identified senses of “the political” – as actors and as crafters – there are, once again, certain benefits that can come along with this agonistic, though not truly radical form of engagement. Indeed, for many of more moderate political persuasions, such a trade-off constitutes a victory for sets of actors who once found themselves in a position of even further subordination, with little to no chance of being able to engage with the dominant force at the level of the state and within other areas of influence, receiving beneficial concessions that could satisfy some of their demands. As we will discuss more thoroughly in our final chapter, the fact that such engagements and meeting of demands often resulted from the radical democratic politics of our case studies, is one potentially positive development we can associate with the project of radical democracy.

### *The Promise and Peril of Contingency*

Before we can move on to our final analysis and appraisal of radical democratic thought via our findings from instances of radical democratic action, it is imperative that we identify and explain several remaining problems faced by radical democratic theory that our case studies have made abundantly clear. The fourth in this series of problems is that which we can call the *problem of contingency*. If the problem of contingency can be summarized

idiomatically, we could simply state that it takes two to tango. As one of the most common patterns that has appeared in our selected historical cases, radical democratic actors “stepping out” from below have been *allowed* to push as far as the more dominant force granted them space to do so. We have seen with our categorization of radical democratic sets of circumstances into scenarios, there have been two reasons for this allowance.

With the scenarios of protest, occupation, and containment, radical democratic actors were, to varying degrees, granted space and time to conduct their opposition to the dominant force for the reason that they were not deemed to have substantially threatened their interests. As such, though certain socio-political spaces may have been “stepped into” and certain boundaries may have been crossed, the apparent lack of threat experienced by the dominant set of actors left them in the position of an active opposition, though one of subordination and thus subject to the aforementioned problem of inequality.

By way of contrast, in scenarios of stalemate, radical democratic actors had crossed into spaces, places, and boundaries that did, in fact, jeopardize the interests of the dominant force, and yet were able to continue with their opposition as a result of the inability of these dominant sets of actors to thwart the movements from below through a crackdown. Within this category of stalemate, we have also witnessed two separate, although often intertwined, drivers of this scenario – one determined by interests and the other by capacity.

In terms of scenarios driven by interest, we have seen that when there had been a long-term calculation that long-term interests could have been put in jeopardy through the shoring up of short-term interests via a crackdown, radical democratic actors – often in large numbers and possessing a strong capacity or potential capacity for bringing about political change – were reluctantly left to carry on their radical democratic forms of opposition. Once more, the case of Singapore’s colonial government during the 1950s and the Gaullists at the height of the events of May 68 are our most illustrative examples of this. In the scenarios

determined by capacity, though the dominant set of actors has a willingness to forcefully end the movements from below, they lack the coercive resources to do so, often as a result of having lost key segments of the state apparatus. Once again, the cases of Thailand's "red friendly" governments and the lack of support or certification they received from the Thai military demonstrate this scenario quite clearly.

Though we have already explored how such scenarios – particularly those of protest and containment – lead radical democratic theory to the problem of inequality for the fact that these supposed egalitarian expressions exist fundamentally and, indeed, *necessarily* in an inegalitarian socio-political arrangement. However, what also must be said about this is the fact that these scenarios are also essentially *contingent* arrangements. For certain, in all of our case studies, we have witnessed that despite the strong subjective drive and sometimes, as in the case of May 68, even ideological content of the sets of actors "stepping out", participants in radical democratic forms of opposition always found themselves up against a relatively more established set of forces, usually in control of some or all of the important apparatuses of the state who would set the limits on how far opposing groups could push. As a result of this, and as our case studies have illustrated well, the ability of these actors from below to push as far as they wished was not always possible.

As we have discussed in relation to the problem of the drive, when it comes to actors "stepping out" from below, the demands of actors can drive them towards taking control over some indivisible socio-political space or boundary for the meeting of the demand or the implementation of the project. As was previously mentioned in terms of the *problem of inequality*, it is certain that the problem of the drive also applies to sets of actors who find themselves in a dominant position - in control of the spaces and boundaries needed for having their interests and subsequent demands met. For certain, when a set of actors from below begins to fundamentally challenge this dominant force's control or even direction over these

spaces as well as the setting for these boundaries, if these spaces or boundaries – whether it be some office of influence, some particular law, some pattern of distribution, or some policy – are deemed to be unnegotiable or, indeed, indivisible, tolerance for opponents will fade and, given the capacity, turn antagonistic.

The essential point that needs to be stressed here is that this dominant set of actors, only has to *deem* the space or boundary unnegotiable or indivisible for antagonism to take the place of more tolerant forms of the political contest. Once again, Rancière, Mouffe, and Honig – in not proposing any sort of limitation on actors’ demands in terms of the spaces and boundaries they target – leave themselves open to the problem of the drive. Quite simply, as a result of this problem of the drive and the overwhelming capacity advantage that dominant sets of actors usually possess, radical democratic actors “stepping out” from below are fundamentally at the mercy of this dominant set’s interests and capacity. On this point, all four of our selected case studies have provided ample evidence that once this contingently defined line is crossed; once the interests of a dominant and capable force have been threatened to a level that they themselves believe to be substantial, agonism gives way to some form of repression.

In the Thai case we have encountered the crackdown carried out by the country’s military in the post-coup period of 2006, against the Red Shirt mobilizations once in 2009, twice in 2010, and most recently in the post-coup period of 2014, each time being scenarios in which the interests of the military’s partners in the bureaucratic elite and Democrat Party – namely control over the country’s administration and political economy - had been understood to have been threatened by actors from below. Though in the wake of the 2014 coup, the military had framed their various arrest of activists and intellectuals and the strict prohibition of demonstrations on the idea that Thailand could not afford to have any more chaos – one of the justifications for the coup itself – the various manoeuvres of the military

government under Prayuth have shown that the de-Thaksinization of Thailand and, thus, the reconsolidation of the bureaucratic elite's interests is still a primary driving force.

When it comes to the Singapore case, though the British colonial authorities, in the scenario of a stalemate, had strategically allowed for some democratic mobilizations in the 1950s and 1960s for fear of the Communists taking power if their own rule was understood to be too draconian, the colonial administration did employ repressive measures when the anti-colonial forces swung farther left than their interests – holding on to their businesses and their naval base – would dictate. As such, crackdowns were carried out in 1948 as a result of the MCP's revolutionary path on the peninsula, in 1955 with the Hock Lee strikes, in 1956 via Lim Yew Hock's purging of an ever-ascending radical left, and in 1963 via Operation Coldstore, designed to rid the island of any elements that could threaten British interests after Singapore's independence. Of course, we also know that, after 1965 with control of the island having shifted entirely into the hands of Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP, the crackdown in the manner of Coldstore as well as in other forms became systemized. Indeed, in our exploration of the end of the 1960s, we have seen that any set of actors "stepping out" of the socio-political spaces and places designated by the PAP for the expressed purpose of ordering and developing the country were usually met with an unapologetic crackdown on the part of this dominant force.

Finally, in the case of France in May 68, we have witnessed crackdowns carried out by the Gaullist regime on two occasions. In the first instance, within the first decade of May, the Parisian police cracked down upon the student demonstrators in and around the Sorbonne when they were understood by the authorities to have disrupted the Gaullist socio-political order, particularly in terms of the functioning of the education system, to an unacceptable degree. Once more, at the end of the episode of contention during the month of June, the Gaullist controlled coercive apparatus showed its teeth and cleared out the lingering

demonstrations and factory occupations of the remaining militants whose continuation of such belligerent activities were deemed to have been impeding the attempts of the regime to “return the country to normalcy”.

It has to be said that the historically and circumstantially contingent nature of these instances of repression can be classified as a problem for two complementary reasons. First and foremost is the fact that, given the multitude of possible political projects which exist and, with them, the countless number of interests and varying boundaries that can be held up as the core of these projects, from a prescriptive point of view, it becomes nearly impossible to present a universal account of when radical democratic activity can carry on without eventually facing closure via a crackdown. Indeed, before we can evaluate whether such a scenario could be possible, we need to have a clear idea of the interests and consequent targeted spaces and boundaries that both sets of actors in the contest claim as central to their project and whether these interests are compatible. One very clear problem with these very arbitrary social scientific specificities of course is the fact that a normative theory such as radical democracy which aims to provide political participants from below with a way forward in challenging the standing socio-political arrangement suffers from these limitations which mostly, though not entirely, lie out of their hands and thus without a set of structural certainties from which they can confidently assert themselves and make their demands.

As a result of this, though we have argued that, if not complete socio-political transformation, radical democratic political engagement has the potential to win important concessions for previously subordinated groups, there is nothing that guarantees this. As such, for a different set of reasons, when compared to the strategy of attempting to take political power through control over the state apparatus, radical democratic activity, particularly in its more militant form of occupation, is a definite gamble. Whereas we have encountered instances in our study in which the dominant set of actors in a contest were willing to

negotiate and concede when it came to certain demands – for example, in the stalemate scenario of the British concessions to David Marshall and the Singaporean left and the Gaullists’ concessions to May 68’s more moderate militants – we have also witnessed the aforementioned scenarios of crackdowns whereby concessions were not in the cards.

Although we may be able to point to such factors as the size and social capacity of the radical democratic forces in being able to prolong radical democratic activity via the stalemate and draw concessions from the dominant force, we can only put this forth as one contributing factor among many others which are beyond the control of the radical democratic actors. This includes not only the interests and capacity of the dominant set of actors but the external mechanisms that can alter them. For these reasons, even in the case of the stalemate whereby radical democratic actors clearly contribute to the overarching scenario as a result of their overall capacity, we cannot hold it up as a model to be consistently replicated.

The second main issue that stems directly from the problem of contingency is the simple fact that it more deeply reveals the aforementioned problem of inequality. Earlier in this chapter, we suggested that those radical democratic activities classified as protest, containment and, albeit to a lesser degree, occupation were fundamentally inegalitarian moments of political subordination despite the appearance of demonstrating equality. With the problem of contingency – the fact that a set of actors and their “stepping out” from below depends so highly on the benevolence of the dominant force and is cracked down upon the moment its demands are believed to have pushed too far – the myth of equality is shattered, and the true arrangement of the socio-political order shows itself for what it really is.

As such, we can state that the radical democratic project suffers a second blow of sorts to its aspiration of an egalitarian politics. It has already been demonstrated that radical democratic politics may very well take an agonistic form while fundamentally leaving the unequal distribution of power within the overall socio-political arrangement in place and

themselves within a position of subordination. In short, no antagonism comes with no equality. This, as we have described, constitutes a serious failure for the radical democratic project for the sole reason that it is unable to meet its own standard of equality. Yet the problem of contingency worsens this even still. For, as we have seen, not only is the agonism of protest, containment, or occupation not equal but also it is not guaranteed. As a result of this additional lack of certainty, we seem to be left with a theoretical project that not only lacks in progressive potential – a benchmark that the theorists clearly not just reach for but hold as one of their *raison d'être* of their interventions – but also leaves much to be desired in the way of potential applicability.

Previously we have stated that the radical democratic project, if lacking in radical credentials, is still of importance for the reason that it can serve as a tool of reforming and making space – indeed, opening up the very spaces, places, and boundaries of the socio-political order – for sets of actors previously shut out from them. Though we can still state that this appraisal stands, we need to qualify it once more as a result of this lack of guarantee brought on by the problem of contingency and state that, as opposed to a project that can serve as a new way forward for progressive forces in an age in which older ideas have, to some degree, fallen into disrepute, radical democratic activity can be held up and utilized as one potential strategy for socio-political transformation. In other words, radical democracy may perhaps be more useful as one tool in a larger toolkit of advancing political change as opposed to *the* tool.

It would be tempting to add the all too frequently employed expression “nothing more, nothing less” to this somewhat harsh indictment of radical democratic thought and action. We need to state here once again however that such a statement would ignore the expressive and, indeed, Aristotelian element of politics – a politics that understands political action as a virtue in-itself – which a number of our identified theorists support. Having stated in this chapter

that both the Platonic *and* Aristotelian conceptions of politics – with their various modern and postmodern derivatives – should be relevant for a progressive democratic politics, this is certainly something that is to be supported. Yet, here once more we can affirm this while adding another essential qualification of our own borne out of this work. Simply, this the fact that we cannot properly, and thus should not, commit to a politics of expression without an inquiry into the limitations presented by the politics of taking and maintaining power. It is this last point that brings us to our final critique of the radical democratic project, one that stems from what we can call the *problem of expedience*.

### *Lessons in Political Realism*

In our exploration of the events of May 68, we have come across one of the oldest debates of political praxis, not just for self-described progressive forces, but also for political actors of various ideological stripes. This of course, is the debate between those who subscribe to the notion that certain principles and ideological positions (these, of course, being interests in their own right) should not, under any circumstances, be compromised for the sake of future gains and those who take a much more pragmatic approach and argue that compromising on certain principles in the short-term is often a necessary step for securing them, as well as other associated interests, in the long-term. For the sake of discussion, we can classify those of the first position as purists and those of the second as realists.

Indeed, as we have seen within the context of May 68, while this first purist position was embodied and even articulated by the militant far-left groups, the latter realist position was embodied and articulated by the relatively more mainstream leftist parties and trade unions, most notably the PCF and CGT. Furthermore, we have also encountered several criticisms of each position vocalized by their opposing counterpart. To summarize in brief, while the purists and their direct action were criticized for provoking their adversaries and

potentially jeopardizing popular support and the movement's very gradual efforts at extending its control over influential spaces and places of the socio-political field, the realists were accused of selling out their principled positions and, as a result of their gradual boundary pushing, being co-opted by the dominant force via the state apparatus and potentially stymying more transformative or revolutionary possibilities.

Though both arguments carry an obvious degree of merit on the basis of very divergent assumptions of what is of primary political importance, it is difficult to suggest that either one of the two approaches could simply be theorized out of existence by either well-wishing (or ill-wishing) ideological opponents or the prescriptions of political theorists through their writings. On the contrary, we can say that, as long as the aforementioned notions of Platonic and Aristotelian politics are somewhere to be found in the hearts and minds of those for whom political engagement is a necessity, whether as a means to an end or an end in-itself, we are bound to find actors participating in actions of both a purist and a prudent nature.

It is at this point that we are required to ask a few directed questions. First, why do some actors subscribe to the prudent or expedient path despite the fact that it involves abandoning some of their principles and, second, what is its relation to radical democracy?

The answer to the first question is that, whether a set of actors is committed to either taking power for itself or simply wishing to influence those in power from a position of opposition (both of which require some form of maintenance once they have been achieved) these ambitious endeavours are often more likely to succeed if they are conducted with some degree of strategic calculation. Though perhaps an all too obvious point, building support, winning allies, and gaining access to or control over key nodes of influence in the socio-political field such as civil society organizations, the media, sites of production, and even parts of the state apparatus can trigger key mechanisms of mobilization such as boundary

activation, brokerage, identity shift, diffusion, and certification. These in turn can consolidate interests among large numbers of participants and supporters, increase their capacity, and consequently increase their leverage over their adversaries in a position of dominance. These, of course, are goals that are often conducted after some strategizing on the part of certain actors “stepping out” from below. Among a number of considered factors, this includes the careful judgment of what direction or specific strategy is appropriate to assist them in their quest of eventually having their demand met, taking into consideration the set of actors’ current standing and circumstances as well as those of its opponent.

Despite all of this however, it still needs to be said that such strategizing is not a necessary requirement for attempting to influence or outright take political power. Certainly, we have seen that capacity in the form of the power of the gun often is enough in-itself for a set of actors to force its way into power, albeit in a way that is entirely undemocratic. However, with that said, building the type of support and digging the types of trenches that we have just described most certainly assist actors “stepping out” from below in the political contest. Indeed, just like any contest in which one is directly confronted with their opponents and thus subject to their various manoeuvres, whether it be in chess, football, or politics, one can either be aware of themselves, aware of their opponents, and plan accordingly or one cannot. Of course, just as it is with these contests, not being aware does not necessarily translate into definitive failure. However, it does make it far more likely.

Yet, once again, we need to ask how this relates to radical democracy. In fact, the issues that this creates for radical democratic thought are several and generally stem from the fact that our chosen theorists, with the notable exception of Mouffe, have very little to say about political expedience or strategy. Given what we have witnessed in terms of the theorists’ general aversion to a discussion of taking political power, perhaps this does not come as a surprise. With that said however, if radical democracy is, as we have described, a politics of

righting “wrongs” and of reconfiguring the hierarchical and exclusive socio-political order from a position of agonistic opposition, then it would most certainly be of great benefit for those committed to the radical democratic project, despite the challenges posed by the problem of contingency, to provide some outline or direction in terms of the most appropriate strategies, manoeuvres and perhaps, as we have utilized for our purposes, mechanisms for a radical democratic form of politics that can assist in achieving these goals. As such, perhaps less of a criticism aimed directly at the heart of the radical democratic project, it ought to be taken as a constructive critique as to what those who subscribe to the project can do to deepen its foundations and increase its validity and potential for applicability.

Indeed, just as this work, fundamentally concerned with the possibility of political opposition worthy of its name, has been engaged with the question of when radical democratic activity can occur and be maintained, so too could a future work concerning itself with the effectiveness of such activity establish the circumstances for when such attempts at reconfiguration or drawing concessions actually succeed. Yet, of course, given the previously mentioned problem of contingency, this hypothetical work may very well be much longer and with many more qualifications than the one we find ourselves presently working through.

Yet, despite the potential positive repercussions that identifying the problem of expedience could later have on the development of radical democratic thought and action, there is a further issue that arises from the problem of political expedience that causes the general standing of the theory and project to be more severely challenged. To draw a parallel with some of the previously mentioned problems, just as we have stated that the problem of contingency further reveals the problem of inequality, so too can we say that the problem of expedience further reveals the problem of the drive. For certain, with an eye to our case studies and, more specifically, the episodes in which sets of actors clearly operated through more strategic and calculated designs for engaging in forms of radical democratic politics, we

can see, once more, that the persistence of the form depended on how useful it continued to be in terms of having demands met. With their demands embodying certain interests that, again, necessarily transcended a bare commitment to the radical democratic form itself, the form was dropped time and time again when acting expediently made it more likely for the demand to be met.

As we have seen in the French and Singaporean cases, one of the reasons why the possibility for the continuance of the radical democratic form lasted as long as it did was because, in the eyes of some of the major players “stepping out” from below (the CGT and the major Singaporean trade unions included) this was the most expedient direction to take, knowing that pushing too far could result in a crackdown that would potentially jeopardize their longer-term interests. Here we can see that, slightly different from the “all or nothing” cases of insurrection analyzed earlier in this chapter, the direction of these radical democratic actors was determined by a more expedient calculated drive, but a drive nonetheless. Eventually, in both of these case studies, the militant opposition that had begun its action via protest and occupation became funnelled into an electoral politics for the potential, and in the Singaporean case, eventual translation of their demands into tangible outcomes for the reason that, given their own position relative to their opponents, this was the most effective open path for achieving the outcomes and long-term interests they ultimately desired: independence sans socialism in the Singaporean case and reform sans a revolutionary break in the French case.

The Croatian episode, specifically at the time when the Krajina Serbs abandoned their agonistic strategies of protest and occupation for a direct confrontation with the HDZ para-state, is another example that the problem of expedience brings to the radical democratic project. As we know about the early direction of the SDS under Raskovic, the moderate demands of the autonomy-minded Krajina Serbs drove them to an agonistic form of struggle

that did not yet even push into the bounds of occupation. However, this position remained tenable only to the point that Tudjman's nationalist HDZ was willing to tolerate such autonomy claims. As it became clear over time, the HDZ's attitude and subsequent policies towards the local Serbs would do anything but. Coming as a consequence of this, though the interests of the Krajina Serbs had not changed – indeed, achieving cultural and linguistic autonomy remained the primary goal – the way to achieve them had required shifting as a result of the HDZ's intransigence. Since autonomy was off the table for the HDZ, and the fundamental demand of the SDS had not changed, it was deemed politically expedient, even at the cost of war, to abandon the moderate path and embark on a path more confrontational and antagonistic in order to have their demands met.

What these two cases demonstrate is the fact that even if the radical democratic project can be channelled into righting certain “wrongs” and reconfiguring the socio-political order for the benefit of subordinate groups, the continuance of the radical democratic form fundamentally rests upon whether the set of actors can move towards and eventually achieve their demands. Here once more, the problem of contingency – the fact that actors from below must react to the circumstances of the dominant force – and the problem of the drive – the fact that interests and demands drive actors towards a space not opened by this dominant force – leads to strategically minded actors acting expediently and, thus, potentially abandoning the radical democratic form. Similar thus to the problem of the drive, the problem of expedience sees the question of political form become subordinated to that of political content.

### *Expedience from Above*

Up to this point, we have solely focussed on the issues brought about by the problem of political expedience as it relates to actors “stepping out” from below. Yet not only have

Connolly and Mouffe, albeit with their varying theoretical problems, more clearly identified that radical democratic activity is a two-way street dependent on the actions of both the powerful and the powerless (or at least the less powerful), our own inquiry and the findings that have arisen from it has made the fact of this contingency all the more recognizable. From this, we have been able to confidently state that, given this contingent relationship, the continuance of agonistic forms of opposition often depends on space being opened up by the dominant set of actors as a result of particular interests not being put into jeopardy by the actors from below.

Though we have also seen that even Connolly's parameters of agonistic respect are not infallible to this problem, we can still argue that this scenario, though often, is not *always* the case. Indeed, first and foremost, we have found that the capacity to repress is also a factor that makes a large difference, as for the most part, in situations that have descended into stalemate, radical democratic actors from below have operated beyond the bounds set by the dominant force. As we have argued however, this is also a highly contingent factor, generally lying outside of the subordinate actors' control. Furthermore, the one scenario we have encountered of a less arbitrary nature are instances whereby actors from below were able to alter these initial bounds directly through their struggles. For certain, the most intense and participatory periods within the Singaporean and French cases have demonstrated that the organized and mass movement of radical democratic actors can frighten those in positions of political power and eventually force them into a stalemate.

However, even here, and returning the notion of the two-way street, we have to say that though not cracking down may have been the best course of action that both the British colonialists and the Gaullists could have taken in light of the possibility for revolutionary overthrow, there was nothing to guarantee that these sets of actors were to take these decisions. Rather they did so only because they had engaged in an expedient form of political

calculation – something that does not necessarily come naturally to actors in the midst of a political crisis like those of Singapore and France. Though entirely hypothetical, it could have very well been the case that those in positions of power could have miscalculated or simply made what, in hindsight, may have been a rash decision. Certainly such rash decisions are made all the time and there are countless historical cases to demonstrate just this. Through this example thus, we can see that the question of expedience for dominant forces can certainly matter.

Yet here, it must be stated, that we are met with a situation in which expedience played to the favour of radical democratic forms of politics. We cannot forget that, by the same rationale, there are situations where dominant actors acting expediently can play against its favour. For it is certainly not only actors “stepping out” from below who are able to play a political game and prepare their manoeuvres to secure the necessary socio-political spaces and gain control over particular boundaries, not only to fend off potential challenges if they arise, but also to prevent them from arising in the first place. Most definitely, this nipping of opponents in the proverbial bud is a prudent and fairly commonplace, though once again not necessary, direction of actors in positions of political dominance. Within our own selected case studies, we have come to witness this scenario on a few occasions, most notably in the extended struggles of Thailand and Singapore.

With the Thai case, we have an example of a failed attempt at controlling influential socio-political spaces for the purpose of closing down rallying points and other possible points of attack from use by opposition groups. This, of course, occurred during the build-up to the years of continual confrontation in Thai political life via Thaksin Shinawatra’s efforts at consolidating his rule into what we could classify as a more durable and hegemonic regime. In Chapter 4, with our inquiry into the Thai case, we have already detailed how Thaksin took early aim at his opponents by attempting to take control of the courts, some segments of the

military, the police, and the media, all the while discouraging civil society groups whose progressive function he and his party wished to co-opt and avoiding the bureaucracy when it was more favourable to utilize his own TRT party machine for similar purposes. For certain, it can be argued that that the radical democratic movement with its yellow tinge which began with Sondhi's anti-Thaksin roadshow at Thammasat University did not only transpire because the embryonic Yellow Shirts had not yet pushed too far to constitute a threat to the ruling party, but because Thaksin and his TRT failed where his Singaporean counterpart Lee Kuan Yew succeeded.

As we have seen, Lee and the PAP, with its three pronged approach of providing concessions, setting the boundaries of appropriate socio-political involvement strictly within areas it had influence over, and reprimanding those who either stepped outside them or questioned them, were able to render autonomous civil society in Singapore more or less obsolete. Thaksin on the other hand, operating in a very different field with very divergent circumstances, particularly in a highly divided populace, could not rein in civil society to the same extent. Certainly, the siege mentality, which pervaded the Singaporean polity after the island's exit from Malaysia in 1965 and the relative, and also relatively universally shared, economic and developmental success the PAP managed during its first decade and the mechanisms of demobilization that resulted from them were factors that Thaksin did not have the benefit of enjoying. As a result of these factors, Lee was able to establish control over both the unions and the universities – the same locales of opposition which he had ridden into power – and tame them with a mixture co-optive concessions and strict regulations, including regulations to weed out future challengers via legislation such as the Societies Act which so strictly demarcated acceptable “political” from acceptable “social” activity, that political challengers emanating from outside of political officialdom were made next to impossible. Coupled with the continuous economic growth and relatively universal distribution of its

benefits over the next four decades *and* the use of undemocratic tactics such as an abuse of the fusion of executive and judicial powers via libel suits against critics as well as gerrymandering before elections, the PAP was able to maintain its hegemonic position until at least the general election of 2011. This, of course, given the party's extreme anti-civil society stances has meant that sustained radical democratic challenges had been all but non-existent up until 2011 and have since come to operate within the highly conditioned or asterisked tolerance of a still dominant PAP.

Despite these differences however, the regime consolidation activities of Thaksin and Lee have one crucial similarity for our purposes. This is the fact that once Thaksin's TRT took power and once Lee's PAP was no longer restricted by Kuala Lumpur, both men and their associates attempted to close down an array of spaces for opposition to operate – actions clearly ill-suited for the allowance, let alone promotion, of radical democratic activity. The problem that this creates for radical democratic theory stems from the fact that our selected theorists do not adequately account for this type of political expedience. On the one hand, for the likes of Honig and Rancière, this once again boils down to their failure to provide a more comprehensive analysis of political power and its effects on the possibilities opened for subordinate sets of actors “stepping out” from below. On the other hand, for Connolly and Mouffe, who do, to some degree, take into consideration the question of power, the problem comes as a result of not adequately accounting for what spaces dominant forces frequently “step into” in order to ensure their dominance and, by contrast, what spaces potential radical democratic actors “stepping out” from below require in order to launch their opposition. As a direct and damaging consequence of this, they do not impose strict limits on how far sets of actors in positions of political dominance can go in consolidating their rule.

For certain, the Singapore case post-independence can provide a very good illustration of what could be tolerated, even unintentionally, without the establishment of such theoretical

normative limits. Indeed, while the PAP kept the political contest somewhat open in the realm of official politics with sets of actors such as approved political parties being able to compete for rule in order to set the agenda, in terms of other socio-political spaces and places that are necessary for the establishment of autonomous or oppositional political forces, the field was quite tightly closed. As was previously demonstrated, this closure was conducted through a serious number of restrictions on who could enter the “appropriate” realm of politics and state control over crucial bodies in a civil society which once provided the most serious forms of opposition to the British – dynamics which lead to the promotion and establishment of pro-PAP norms and, eventually, the potential for radical democratic actors to “step out” becoming highly limited.

With these, and here we can stress once again, *socio-political* spaces being essential for the possibility of opposition forces developing into something that could actually get itself off the ground and “step out”, there are serious ramifications for radical democratic theory. Quite simply, as a result of this finding, it is simply not enough for Connolly to suggest that those in positions of political power should step back from their own insistence on the universality of their position or project and be challenged by subordinate forces. Likewise, it is not enough for Mouffe to suggest that the struggle for hegemony should remain as open as possible once a new set of actors takes power or becomes hegemonic. Rather, since expedient sets of actors will look to consolidate their rule as a result of the demands which drive them and thus may look to control spaces beyond this first dimension of agenda setting for future benefits, what is needed is a serious discussion regarding the limits of political dominance. In short, which spaces outside of the capital-p Political cannot be legitimately closed? Or in other words, how far into what we know as civil society can a dominant force reach?

Though liberal democratic theory has held these types of questions as central concerns, radical democratic theory, with some recent notable exceptions, has been fairly quiet on the

issue. Given the anti-institutional nature of so much of radical democratic theory's starting assumptions and subsequent prescriptions, particularly in the works of Honig and Rancière, perhaps this is not surprising. One does not need an institution to take to the street, nor throw a rock at a Starbucks. Yet here we have to say once again, that for those who subscribe to the idea that political action in-itself is something to be promoted and who are likewise committed to radical socio-political change through the taking of political power, these are the difficult questions that not only need to be asked but answered.

As we have seen in this chapter, this problem of expedience is only one of many exemplified by the circumstances uncovered in our case studies that have come to challenge both the feasibility and the value of the radical democratic project. It is with these challenges in mind that we can proceed to evaluate radical democracy as a project worthy of adoption by those who believe in politics as a both a mean and an end in itself.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Proposals for a Better Democratic Theory**

This work began with the task of establishing the circumstances in which radical democratic forms of politics could both take root and be maintained. The reason for wishing to engage in this type of inquiry was largely due to radical democratic theory's recent popularity in progressive political theory as a potential alternative to older models and designs for the achievement of certain progressive political goals. The most central of these goals, generalized across the various strands of radical democratic thought, are the commitments to agonistic as opposed to antagonistic forms of political contestation, the promotion of political equality and participation for anyone at all, and the establishment of a path towards socio-political transformations that are inclusive and representative of those in subordinate positions within the usual socio-political order.

Though the normative value of such goals is certainly very high given their commitment to the radical expansion of democratic norms, an inquiry into the circumstances for the achievement of such goals became necessary for two reasons. The first of these was the fact that, as political philosophers, the most influential radical democratic theorists including Mouffe, Rancière, Connolly, and Honig had not spilled a sufficient amount of ink on the socio-political contexts that would allow for such forms of radical democratic politics, first, to commence and, second, to last. As such, there was a substantial gap in the literature of radical democratic theory – one that needed to be filled by a more social scientific account of its plausibility. For certain, just as countless social scientific studies of liberal democracy have been conducted to provide buttresses to some of the great liberal democratic theories of the past and present, one of the goals of this work was to provide similar types of buttresses to a radical democratic theory which, as previously stated, embodied some highly progressive political goals, at least as far as those who believe in democracy are concerned.

A further development however was also responsible for increasingly the need for such an inquiry. This was the fact that, in the last decade or so, though not identifying themselves as “radical democratic” actors, an array of political mobilizations embodying some of the radical democratic project’s most fundamental starting points – political equality, a “stepping out” on the part of subordinate actors, and a commitment to agonism – took the world by storm. Among the most globally recognized were the Arab Spring and the Occupy Movement that shifted the discourse about democracy in a way that again reflected many of the theoretical assumptions of radical democratic theory. Yet, as we now know, despite the hope that these various movements engendered, Occupy ended with police repression while several of the multiple episodes of the Arab Spring descended into various undemocratic outcomes including repressive crackdowns, undemocratic take-overs in the form of coup d’états, and even civil war. With a hopeful agonistic and seemingly egalitarian beginning having been thrown down the path of coercion, exclusion, and inequality in many of these contemporary cases, the need for a social scientific inquiry into the circumstances conducive to radical democratic politics became all the greater.

Though this work could have utilized these most recent episodes as cases upon which we could have conducted our inquiry, episodes or series of episodes of a more historical nature – those which also reflected the radical democratic project’s most fundamental starting points – were chosen so that we could focus on the dynamics of and circumstances for contestation and avoid getting caught up in the interpretation of events of which the dust has yet to settle. The Thai case, with its period of inquiry spanning 2005-2014, is the obvious outlier here though one in which the accounts and analyses were more than comprehensive enough to give our attention to the dynamics and circumstances at work. Likewise, with the nature of its constituent mobilizations challenging the usual explanations employed by

political science and sociology, its inclusion was one that both fit well with our method of giving a voice to the actual demands of actors.

As such, within our selected periods of Croatia 1990 – 1995, Thailand 2005 – 2014, Singapore 1945 – 1970, and France January to June 1968, we have attempted to compare across case studies and identify the circumstances that are both conducive and not conducive to the presence and continuation of radical democratic forms of politics. With our aforementioned method of focussing on the subjective and constructed demands that drive actors as opposed to structuralist and culturalist explanations which overgeneralize and assume a type of false consciousness (sets of actors think they know why they are acting, but in fact are oblivious to what actually drives them) our inquiry has utilized the categories of interests, capacities, and mechanisms to explain the direction of political actors and hence political contests.

One major finding of our work has been coming to the understanding that different combinations of interests, capacities, and mechanisms among competing sets of actors in a contest determine whether radical democratic forms of politics are possible. Combinations thus have been found to correspond directly to specific scenarios of agonism and antagonism. In Chapter 7 we have outlined and explained the list of eight scenarios, four in which radical democratic activity could continue and four in which it could not. As was previously detailed, the four scenarios whereby the radical democratic form was maintained we have entitled (1) protest, (2) occupation, (3) containment, and (4) stalemate while the four scenarios in which the radical democratic form was not maintained we have entitled (5) crackdown, (6) civil war, (7) insurrection, and (8) take-over. To summarize what these eight scenarios generally entail, we can restate what was presented in Chapter 7 in a more concise format. The constitution of these eight scenarios is as follows:

(1) Protest – Interests of the dominant and subordinate sets of actors remain compatible as a result of the subordinate set not pushing past an essential boundary and thus not threatening a key interest held by the dominant force. Agonistic activity occurs in spaces accepted by the dominant force. The capacity of the dominant force remains high while the capacity of the subordinate force remains low. Though mechanisms of activation have taken effect to mobilize the subordinate force, either their interests have not been shifted to (or have shifted back from) the point of being driven to challenge the interests or boundaries of the dominant force further or their capacity has not been substantially increased through diffusion or brokerage which could also further threaten the dominant force.

(2) Occupation – Interests of the dominant and subordinate sets of actors remain compatible as a result of the subordinate set not pushing past an essential boundary and thus not threatening a key interest held by the dominant force. This is despite the fact that the subordinate set has crossed and “stepped into” socio-political boundaries – actions that constitute antagonism with non-participants in the contest. Overall, agonistic relations are maintained between the main participants – the dominant and subordinate force – in the contest. Agonistic activity thus occurs in spaces tolerated by the dominant force. The capacity of the dominant force remains high while the capacity of the subordinate force remains relatively low, though higher than in the protest. Mechanisms of activation have pushed the interests of the subordinate force further away from those of the dominant force though not to the point of incompatibility. Likewise, though mechanisms of activation such as diffusion and brokerage may have increased the capacity of the subordinate force to the point of being able to occupy certain socio-political spaces, it has not been to the point of threatening the dominant force’s interests.

(3) Containment – Interests of the dominant and subordinate sets of actors remain compatible but are bordering on incompatibility in the eyes of the dominant force. By stepping into a space deemed off-limits by the dominant force or by posing an initial threat to a key interest, the subordinate set of actors has forced the hand of the dominant force to restrict it from expanding its opposition and pushing further boundaries, whether physical or in terms of the socio-political arrangement. Agonistic activity thus occurs but only within spaces and bounds highly and coercively delimited by the dominant force. The capacity of the dominant force remains high while the capacity of the subordinate force remains relatively low. Mechanisms of activation have pushed either the interests or the capacity of the subordinate set to the point of forcing the hand of the dominant set into restriction.

(4) Stalemate – There are two distinct possibilities with this scenario:

(a) Interests of the dominant and subordinate sets of actors are deemed incompatible by the dominant force as a result of the subordinate set pushing past an essential boundary and thus threatening a key interest held by the dominant force. However, the capacity of the dominant force, particularly in terms of coercive capacity, is too low to crack down on the subordinate set. The mechanism of decertification has seen the dominant force lose control of coercive backing, generally through the loss of military or police support. Agonistic activity thus occurs in spaces that are necessarily though reluctantly tolerated.

(b) Interests of the dominant and subordinate sets of actors are deemed incompatible by the dominant force as a result of the subordinate set pushing past an essential boundary and thus threatening a key interest held by the dominant force. However, the capacity of the subordinate force, particularly in terms of the magnitude of the movement and their seizure of

key socio-political spaces in the polity (production, education, transportation) due to the pervasive mechanisms of diffusion and brokerage, is too high for the dominant force to risk a crackdown for fear of the potential revolutionary repercussions that could ensue in a backlash. As such, agonistic activity thus occurs in spaces that are necessarily though reluctantly tolerated, for such direction is compatible with the dominant force's longer-term interests.

(5) Crackdown – Interests of the dominant and subordinate sets of actors are deemed incompatible by the dominant force as a result of the subordinate set pushing past an essential boundary and thus threatening a key interest held by the dominant set. Agonistic activity is thus ended by the employment of coercive force, generally through use of the police or the military. The capacity of the dominant force remains high while the capacity of the subordinate force remains low, allowing for the antagonistic action to be a fairly one-sided affair. Mechanisms of activation have pushed either the interests or the capacity of the subordinate set to the point of forcing the hand of the dominant set into repression.

(6) Civil War - Interests of the dominant and subordinate sets of actors are deemed incompatible by both the dominant force and subordinate force as a result of both sets pushing past an essential boundary and thus threatening a key interest held by the opponent. Capacity, and particularly, coercive capacity is high for both sets. In terms of responsible mechanisms, this change in capacity is generally a result of either the defection of part of the coercive apparatus to the subordinate set or the certification of it by external actors with coercive capacity. Agonistic activity is thus mutually ended by both sets of actors who turn to coercive means to secure the essential interest or boundary.

(7) Insurrection - Interests of the dominant and subordinate sets of actors are deemed incompatible by a subordinate set as a result of the dominant force pushing past an essential boundary and thus threatening an interest held by the subordinate force. Though the capacity of the dominant force remains high and the capacity of the subordinate set in question remains low, this subordinate set attempts to secure the essential interest or boundary through coercive means. As a result of the capacity imbalance, this coercive attempt does not threaten the rule of the dominant force. Furthermore, depending on the breadth of the insurrection and the degree of threat it can cause to the dominant force, agonistic forms of politics may be able to continue on the part of other subordinate actors, as we have seen within the scenario of the stalemate. Mechanisms of activation such as identity shift have pushed the interests of this subordinate set to the point of incompatibility.

(8) Take-over – Interests of the dominant and subordinate sets of actors are deemed incompatible by a subordinate force as a result of the dominant force pushing past an essential boundary and thus threatening an interest held by the subordinate force. Capacity of the subordinate force becomes higher than that of the dominant force prior to the take-over. In terms of the responsible mechanisms, this capacity shift could come as a result of the seizure of key socio-political spaces in the polity (production, education, transportation) due to the pervasive mechanisms of diffusion and brokerage as well the mechanisms of defection and certification that could see the subordinate force substantially increase its coercive capacity.

In an effort to generalize the conditions necessary for the appearance and continuation of radical democratic forms of politics, we have also attempted to compare across the eight scenarios, identify commonalities, and present a list of three circumstances regarding

interests, capacities, and mechanisms that we believe best encapsulates when radical democratic politics can occur and be maintained. To repeat from the previous chapter, the three circumstances are as follows:

1. A radical democratic form of politics – one of an agonistic “stepping out” with the expressed goal of demonstrating equality and righting a particular wrong – can first occur if one set of actors in the contest does not perceive to have their core interests threatened, including their long-term interests, by another set of actors who has challenged some particular interest or crossed some established boundary.
2. If interests are indeed perceived to be threatened, there still remains a chance for the radical democratic form to continue. This depends on whether this set of actors in question has the capacity to shut down the challenge and uphold the interest or boundary through antagonistic means. If this set of actors does not have such capacity, it is possible for the radical democratic form to continue.
3. Mechanisms of activation are required for any type of contest to begin, particularly those which push the interests of competing sets of actors away from compromise. However, when these mechanisms affecting interests push actors too far away from the possibility of compromise, they threaten their compatibility and potentially engender antagonism. In a situation of interest incompatibility, mechanisms that re-inforce or redistribute coercive capacity lead to antagonism. By contrast, mechanisms that increase a subordinate force’s social capacity through widespread brokerage and diffusion of opposition throughout the socio-political field often create stalemates and thus prolong the radical democratic form.

As was stated previously in Chapter 7, given that our inquiry has analyzed, compared, and synthesized a wide breadth of varying moments of both agonism and antagonism across divergent cases, it is our contention that these eight scenarios and three general circumstances could apply to any episode of radical democratic contestation.

Finally, after having identified these eight specific outcomes and three general circumstances, it was necessary to engage in a discussion of how the normative project of radical democracy, with its goals of agonism, political equality, and socio-political transformation, stood up against some of the challenges that these identified circumstances brought forth. As we have argued in the last chapter, there are five substantial problems that radical democracy faces in light of the eight specific scenarios and three general circumstances. These problems are as follows:

*The Problem of the Drive* – The direction that sets of actors take is fundamentally determined by their interests and demands. Agonistic relations with political opponents thus only occur if these interests and demands do not drive actors towards some socio-political space or boundary that another set of actors also requires for its own project. Taming sets of actors heading down an antagonistic path thus requires the taming or regulation of demands as opposed to the suggestion that actors should simply opt for agonistic methods. Encouraging the openness of political contests without taking into consideration the spaces and boundaries to which actors are driven is thus to indirectly promote antagonism.

*The Problem of Political Space* – Contests of a political nature do not unfold abstracted from real physical spaces under the control or influence of certain sets of actors. Actors “stepping out” from below thus cannot avoid “stepping into” a space under the control or influence of some other set. There are two repercussions resulting from this, the first exacerbating the

problem of the drive. Since some political spaces or the boundaries set within them are indivisible, there is no possibility of satisfying the demands of actors driven to these spaces by pluralizing these spaces or boundaries. This all-or-nothing scenario directly results in antagonism. The other repercussion leads directly into the problem of inequality.

*The Problem of Inequality* – The political spaces under the control of certain actors are not equal in terms of the power they entail. Control over the state apparatus is the clearest example of this. As such, though the principle of equality may encourage actors to “step out”, when they do so they either “step into” spaces under the overarching influence of more powerful forces or displace those in these positions. Consequently, contests always unfold within relations of domination/subordination and thus inequality.

*The Problem of Contingency* – Given these power differentials, the ability of sets of actors from below to “step out” often depends on toleration by a dominant force and can be cancelled out if threatening this dominant force’s interests. This further reveals the problem of inequality both in terms of control over significant spaces and boundaries and the ability to have demands met. In other select situations in which “stepping out” occurs and persists, it can come as a result of the dominant force’s incapacity due to a contingent loss of the coercive apparatus. Such cases thus should not be used as evidence that the possibility of “stepping out” is always possible for actors who wish to do so.

*The Problem of Expedience* – Actors in political contests, including those in dominant positions, often utilize strategic calculations to determine the best approach to broker and diffuse, win support, shape certain socio-political spaces and boundaries, and challenge for or maintain political power. Actors “stepping out” from below, in competition with counterparts

such as these, thus should also think expediently about the best approach to have their demands met and not commit to a single approach – radical democratic forms of politics – as a type of purism. However, since dominant forces often use expedient tactics to close down spaces for opponents, actors from below may not have the opportunity to “step out” in the first place.

With these identified problems, the ultimate question that we need to address is whether radical democracy can stand as a feasible normative political theory. Despite the multitude of problems that the project faces, our answer to this question is a highly qualified yes. As we will explain in this chapter, there are many salvageable worthwhile aspects of the radical democratic project, although it is clear that its designs cannot be maintained as our four selected theorists currently have them and, perhaps more problematically, want them. The task of this final chapter thus is to provide recommendations as to how some elements of the radical democratic project could be shielded from the various problems that have been identified and could thus continue to serve an important purpose for meeting some of the theorists’ normative, and often progressive, goals. This insistence that only some of these goals can be met is a qualification that needs to be taken very seriously by those intrigued by the apparent radical nature of the project since, as we have seen and will continue to see, there is a definite trade-off between maintaining radicalism and maintaining a state of affairs akin to agonism.

In order to ensure the specificity and clarity of these recommendations, it is imperative that we individually direct them towards the sets of actors occupying the two primary positions within the political contest that have been central to our cases and, more generally, to our overall study – those of subordination and domination. While there is no doubt that radical democratic theory has predominantly concerned itself with the activities of

sets of actors “stepping out” from below, the formulations of Mouffe and Connolly, with their more prevalent focus on political power, have suggested that there is a role for dominant forces in the promotion of radical democratic activity. If our case studies have shown anything at all, it is the fact that the persistence of radical democratic politics hinges *predominantly* on the interests and capacity of the dominant force. If no normative commitment to opposition and oppositional socio-political space is embodied by this dominant force, any instance of “stepping out” at all can be deemed to have crossed the line and threatened current or, more expediently, future interests. As such, not only does it take two to tango but also the dance floor is steeply sloped.

It has to be said here that this problem – what we have called the problem of contingency – is the most damning of all the problems we have identified. For one, unlike some of the other problems which only jeopardize the radical or egalitarian nature of the project, the problem of contingency means that agonism too can be disposed of without it being willed by both sets of actors in the contest. This however leads us to an even bigger issue. As a result of this situation, and as we have previously argued, we cannot universally prescribe such a dependent and arbitrary arrangement as a model for political engagement and struggle to be pursued by subordinate sets of actors whose fate rests fundamentally out of their hands.

Furthermore, unlike some of the other problems that radical democratic theory faces, there is no additional element to the framework that we can propose to *completely* rid the theory of the problem of contingency. Indeed, it would seem that the only way for subordinate sets of actors to completely overcome this contingency problem is for these sets of actors to take political power and become the dominant force themselves, in turn, placing the question of tolerating opposition directly in their own hands. This however, is not a path that the radical democratic theorists, with the exception of Mouffe, have explicitly promoted,

instead having at times relied upon the benevolence of the dominant force while at other times, as we have discussed, having outright ignored the elephant in the room that is this dominant force. In any case, while we will return to the role of the dominant set of actors in facilitating the continued possibility of radical political opposition, for now we can say that this avenue of achieving political power for the sake of a later pluralism is not a pragmatic plan for subordinate sets of actors who are attempting to push for their interests and demands within a contingent framework of tolerance determined for the most part by their opponents.

As such, as a result of this general inability to overcome the problem of contingency, we are left with the same previously described situation of high reliance – an arbitrary and dependent scenario which we cannot prescribe as a universal model or formula to be pursued by subordinate actors in their quest to prolong their statement of disagreement or discontent, extract concessions from the dominant force, or build a movement towards some greater future socio-political goal. Once more, we can say that only if a flash in the pan moment of radical opposition or, one might say, resistance (though, as we have seen, not true equality) that is quickly engulfed by repression suffices for actors “stepping out” from below, does the problem of contingency not factor into the equation. As we have discussed, there are and always have been political purists for whom this is true. However, for those sets of actors who engage in political contest and struggle for more long-term and programmatic goals, a more nuanced and strategic approach than the “stepping out” that radical democratic theory prescribes is required.

As we have stated previously, radical democratic forms of political activity – such as the ones we have categorized as protest, occupation, and even the more thorough and militant forms of occupation that have historically led to stalemates – ought to be one weapon in the arsenal of forces from below who wish to prolong their opposition, extract concessions, or attempt to build their movement for a future bid for power. Likewise, such forms of activity

ought to be utilized in specific situations in which there is a reasoned chance that such direction could result in advancing some of their goals or interests. A serious approach to opening up spaces for subordinate groups or transforming the status quo of the socio-political arrangement should not rely on Hail Mary's. Instead, the position and strength of the dominant force should be analyzed, the socio-political spaces and locales of strategic advantage for the purposes of diffusion and brokerage should be pinpointed, and the boundaries that potentially limit opposition activity such as those concerning the restricted spaces for protest and occupation should be assessed for possible strategic targeting.

Though this first point may be fairly straightforward, the latter two points are in need of some elucidation. In terms of the pinpointing of certain socio-political spaces and locales, and indeed the potential allies that come with them, in reaching out to these and attempting to bring them under their wing, a subordinate set of actors "stepping out" from below looks to broaden its support and widen the number of pressure points for the purposes of the movement's prolongation, the extraction of concessions, or the continual building of their opposition. In other words, in doing so, the set of actors, becomes what can be properly called a force. Though we have previously stated that a further, more comprehensive study utilizing the tools of contentious politics is required when it comes to understanding what manoeuvres and mechanisms have been historically responsible for the success of such movements, this study has been able to preliminarily identify widespread diffusion and brokerage as key mechanisms for pushing the dominant force into a stalemate and opening up the possibility of further gains for the subordinate force. In short, size seems to matter. Yet once again, however, we need to state that there is nothing guaranteed about this and that while such political strategizing may be able to solve one part of the problem of expedience (after all, one should certainly think and act strategically if the opponent is doing so) it can only weaken the effects of the problem of contingency. For certain, relatively successful diffusion

and brokerage does not necessarily mean that the dominant force no longer has the relative strength through the control over important socio-political spaces, boundaries, and the allies to maintain them in order to stop the emerging subordinate force in its tracks. Rather, all that such strategic thought and action can do is make this above situation less likely. Given the fact that this would appear as the only option that the problem of contingency leaves subordinate actors with, this type of expedience from below is something that radical democratic theory, as well as other theories of political opposition, should explicitly encourage.

This of course brings us to the third point made above regarding assessing and targeting boundaries that can limit a subordinate set of actors' growth and movement including, it must be said, the legal limits on where and when sets can engage in protest and what sets can or cannot occupy. This latter question may indeed seem oxymoronic, as occupation by nature, in pushing past established boundaries designating appropriate spaces, is hardly ever legal. As such, while the promotion of such assessment, targeting, and eventual pushing past falls into the same category of expedience from below as the strategies listed above, it is also far more controversial as it raises serious questions about what makes political activity, and also political rule, legitimate. Just as we have gathered with the mechanisms of diffusion and brokerage above, we have seen that stepping up the intensity of opposition from protest to occupation and thus crossing certain boundaries and interrupting the usual functioning of the socio-political order, though not solving the problem of inequality, is a more effective direction for having the dominant force respond.

Though it is true that at times this response can be a repressive one, at other moments, including some that we have witnessed within our case studies, the militant occupation of socio-political spaces of importance for the dominant force, even if removed from the tentacles of the state, has had the effect of pushing the dominant force into a less fortified and

more liquid position, particularly if conducted on a mass scale with a high degree of brokerage and diffusion. However, without a theory of legitimacy – one which concerns both how a set of actors can claim legitimate control of the political apparatus and also how far sets of opposition actors can legitimately push against this rule – the direct promotion of such activity leads the radical democratic project down the same road that we have previously encountered with the interconnected problems of the drive and of political space. This is the fact that without a discussion of legitimate rule and legitimate forms of opposition, sets of actors are not only theoretically permitted to become agents of domination in spaces that they did not previously control but also that sets of actors are given the theoretical green light to simply force their way into a position of political power – a classic case of might makes right.

This of course is not to deny that such an eventuality could take place. Indeed, here, we need to sharply distinguish what is descriptive from what is prescriptive. Just as we have asserted in the previous chapter, radical democratic theory faces the problem, and here we can add irresolvable problem, of political space. As long as there are power differentials in the socio-political field in terms of the nodes, sites, or spaces of power and influence, the domination/ subordination dichotomy is maintained and, hence, the problem of inequality persists. As such, whenever a set of actors “steps out” of their usual function, role, or place in socio-political order, they inevitably “step into” somewhere else and potentially take the place of the previous dominant set of actors with, it must be said, the same degree of dominance. As we have seen, on one hand, this could be conducted through a type of activity that we have described as occupation, occurring within some space that remains under the overall dominance of the leading set of actors. On the other hand, it could be conducted through what we have theoretically classified as a take-over whereby the once subordinate actors become the dominant force in the polity tout court. The fact that the interests and demands of some socio-political projects will necessitate driving towards these spaces – some

of which that cannot be divided equally and others that cannot be divided at all – means that might sometimes will make right, at least in the sense that “make” in this sense means determining the laws, norms, and boundaries that the rest of the polity is obligated to obey.

However, just as Socrates argued with Thrasymachus in *The Republic*, this idea that “justice is simply the interest of the stronger” can hardly be sufficient for a radical democratic notion of justice. One does not have to look too deeply into this fundamentally coercive and particularist situation to see that there is very little that can be described as democratic. Indeed, this latter issue – the fact that any set of actors could theoretically take power with any political project for the benefit of any select group – rules out any possibility of arguing that such a coercive take over could be democratic in the sense that it is “for the people”.<sup>827</sup> Undoubtedly, the radical democratic theorists, with their own starting assumptions about the value of pluralism and/or subjective participation in politics, would hardly be swayed by such types of arguments in the first place. Yet the problem that still remains however is the fact that without theoretically establishing the legitimate means of achieving political rule or, in turn, the boundaries that opposition forces need to respect as part and parcel of respecting this legitimacy of rule, radical democratic theory leaves itself open to criticisms of *undemocratic* relativism.

With this stated however, it also must be argued that, given some of the other starting assumptions of radical democratic theory, establishing a theoretical basis for legitimate political rule and legitimate opposition activities becomes an extremely difficult task. In previous chapters we have already discussed the theory’s indifference and, sometimes, outright hostility to some of the historical liberal democratic mechanisms of legitimation such as elections for the reason that they promote the reordering of the political space into dominant and subordinate sets through its majoritarian logic and the inegalitarian division of

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<sup>827</sup> CB MacPherson, *The Real World of Democracy* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1992).

the polity into those who are capable of governing and those who are not. Yet, if the election will not suffice, what other process of legitimation is possible?

Though the other theorists are fairly mute on this issue, Mouffe, once again with her more comprehensive account of the “hegemonic contest” for political power, puts forth, though somewhat implicitly, the construction of a counter-hegemonic project from the ground up as being a process of democratic legitimation in-itself. Once more, this renewed focus on the hegemonic contest has appeared within her most recent work *Agonistics*. In this formulation of her theory, borrowing from her partner Ernesto Laclau’s framework found within his *On Populist Reason*, Mouffe states that subordinate actors should not simply be focussed on disrupting the dominant order but should be intent on engaging in the act of building a chain of equivalence across various sets of demands in order to challenge the dominant set of actors and compete for hegemony.

Admittedly, when compared to the particularism that is, if indirectly, promoted through the pluralism of Connolly and the focus on emerging forms of being in Honig, or the radical subjectivity that is promoted through Rancière’s assertion that politics can be done by “anyone, anyone at all”, the formulation put forth by Mouffe does seem to have stronger democratic credentials in that it takes into consideration the construction of a *demos* – an allied force of divergent sets of actors who span a range of the citizens in the polity emerging from below with compatible interests against the dominant order. For the reasons that this alliance is representative of diverse yet compatible interests and that it receives consent of a broad segment of the populace, Mouffe’s proposal of constructing this type of counter-hegemonic bloc also fits with the general radical democratic concern for allowing multiple voices to speak and act and consent rather than antagonistic coercion as the manner in which to forge political relationships and engage in political contests.

Despite this however, problems arise when we begin to consider the achievement of a broad-based consensual hegemonic bloc as the basis of legitimate political rule. Indeed, even if such a bloc could achieve this type of result without facing any debilitating crackdown on the part of the old dominant order or engaging in forms of coercion itself, or without having to compromise its socio-political vision to ensure this – a very tall order given what we have witnessed in our case studies when interests have been incompatible – problems would still emerge if hegemony was the only measure of legitimacy. First of all, unlike the legitimation of rule through the liberal democratic election, hegemony is not periodically tested. As a result of this, unlike in a liberal democratic environment in which an expression of popular sovereignty provides a mandate every several years, the struggle for hegemony, taking place across the socio-political field as a whole, is always open. What this means for the hegemonic force is that their legitimacy is constantly put into doubt. While this might sound theoretically progressive and perhaps entirely democratic when abstracted from the actual socio-political spaces over which such contests take place – over streets, over schools, over factories, over parks, over council chambers, over airports – when we take into consideration the disruption at the level of the social that this entails, it is necessary that we take a step back and reconsider.

At first sight, such a criticism pointing to the disruption of the social may reek of the types of conservatism normally advocated by those subscribing to law and order as the highest political virtue in-itself or by those who tend to see the smooth functioning of the social “body” – in administration, in production, in transportation, in education, and in other areas usually described as “society” – as goal of higher importance than that of the political, particular in its sense put forth by radical democratic theory. Given that this work has been committed to political action as a valuable and desirable goal in-itself, this is not the direction that we wish to take the argument down. However, this does not change the fact that this is a

debate that certainly needs to be taken extremely seriously by progressive thinkers, particularly in our current age, sometimes labelled “post-political”, in which order, efficiency, development and other goals that explicitly call for the quieting of the political to ensure the sanctity of the social have been gradually gaining steam. Indeed, while such type of thinking used to only belong to the most conservative of conservatives in the West and historical peculiarities like Singapore under Lee Kuan Yew and his PAP, the post-Cold War era has seen many countries, particularly but not limited to those with emerging economies, slowly squeeze out the political for the sake of the social. Some commentators hailing from Singapore, quite ironically enjoying the liberalization of information and political discussion within the so-called “new normal” post-2011, have gone as far to say that while Singapore has gradually been becoming more like the rest of the world, the world has also been gradually becoming more like Singapore.<sup>828</sup> As such, we have to stress that the combatting of this closing down of political space in the contemporary period is one pressing challenge that radical democratic thought and action is well-placed to tackle. With that said however, though many radical thinkers have been attempting to combat this post-political trend with their writing, it is clear that much more work needs to be done in order to contest what amounts to a very troubling development for those who believe that politics is not only more than a means to an end, but also that it should not simply be reduced to administration. Though this question needs much more thorough deliberation, we do need to ask if radical democracy’s implicit assertion that *no* space should ever be closed down for political contestation is the best way to argue against the increasingly prevalent idea that most or all spaces ought to be closed down.

For our purposes however, we need to strongly state that the reason why the implicit assertion that no space should be off-limits ought to be reconsidered is the fact that such

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<sup>828</sup> Donald Low and Sudhir Thomas Vadaketh, *Hard Choices: Challenging the Singapore Consensus* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2014).

potential for the constant disruption of the social prevents those in positions of legitimate political power from ever being able to implement their project or socio-political vision. Following the logic that stems from hegemony standing as the only measure of legitimacy, as soon as a set of actors is able to establish itself in a position of hegemony, opponents are justified in attempting to directly thwart it and build their own counter-hegemonic project through the control of any socio-political space that they can physically “step into”, including some very essential locales of the social mentioned above. As a result of this, a counter-hegemonic project, having built itself up to the point where it was able to receive a substantial amount of support for its vision and, in turn, take political power, would be blocked from actualizing its project and fulfilling its vision, with opposition forces occupying the spaces needed for the desired transformation, potentially including the halls of administration, the schools, the factories, the streets, and countless other private and public spaces. Of course, as we have seen with our case studies, such a development could very well provoke a wave of repression through crackdowns that would leave these forces temporarily weakened. On the other hand, it could also result in something akin to a revolutionary take-over in a very similar manner to how the dominant force at hand was able to accede to political power, only for the process to be repeated once more.

Once again, the question is not whether this could happen, as our case studies have certainly shown that it can, but rather whether we should give such possibilities our normative approval. Here, we have to say that answer must be a firm no. Rather than checking the problem of the drive and the problem of political space that we have detailed in the last chapter, such an approval would actually be promoting their undemocratic ends. Indeed, without a clear process of legitimation other than hegemony, rather than the construction of any socio-political project with tangible benefits for those who support it – as we have seen, one of the fundamental reasons for engaging in politics in the first place,

including those of a progressive and transformative bent – we have the legitimization of organic crisis and perpetual political struggle. Though this may indeed be quite radical, it cannot be said to be democratic. In order for a polity to have something we can call democracy – the rule of the people – we need to have some form of rule. As such, though it is clear that the liberal democratic election will not suffice, establishing who can legitimately rule must go beyond the achievement of hegemony as Mouffe has theorized.

However, along with a theoretically set standard of legitimacy and, along with it, a process of legitimation, there is one other element required for radical democratic theory to avoid some of the pitfalls it faces if left as it currently stands. Given the dynamics that we have seen in our case studies, the essential element that radical democratic theory needs to detail regards which socio-political spaces ought to be left open for political contestation and which spaces can be legitimately placed off-limits.

Admittedly, it would seem that the suggestion of imposing limits on, who are in fact, equal political beings to those in positions of power directly contravenes the spirit of radical democratic theory which places the contestation of such limits and boundaries at its core. Yet given the above scenarios of permanent politics and, with it, permanent political impasse that follows fundamentally from an unchecked problem of the drive and problem of political space, they are limits upon which we must insist.

As we have stated earlier, for the purposes of salvaging some elements of the radical democratic project – particularly the maintenance of non-antagonistic opposition in political contests – certain normative commitments, as contingent as they are on sets of actors' core interests and demands, need to be made by sets of actors in positions of both subordination and domination. For certain, while we have seen the hypothetical situations above (and to some extent, reflected in our Thai case) in which sets of actors from below do not accept the legitimate rule of those in power or the boundaries that stem from it, the case of Singapore,

particularly post-1965, has shown us what can transpire when those in positions of power do not see a limit as to how far they can push into spaces often reserved for what we call civil society – two scenarios amounting to different sides of the same coin.

Undoubtedly, what the Singapore case shows us is that if a set of actors in a position of political dominance is committed to respecting opposition forces, there must be a commitment to respecting the spaces they require for operation - a commitment to a somewhat autonomous civil society. Without this, not only will subordinate actors have nowhere to “step into” without facing a re-placing or re-ordering by the dominant force, but also they will most certainly find it difficult to “step out” in the first place. Though some of the more subjective elements of radical democratic thought, especially prevalent within the writing of Rancière and Honig, state that there is always the possibility of a spontaneous disruption of the given order, the emphasis placed on the action of “stepping out” obscures the processes of building the collective of actors who possess, first, a series of opposing demands and, second, the desire to later challenge the dominant force. As we have witnessed in our case studies, these types of processes in which certain mechanisms work to alter identities, broker alliances, and diffuse common strategies, require spaces autonomous from and uninterrupted by the dominant force, generally with its control over the state apparatus. Though this has not been the explicit focus of this work, we have seen that high school classrooms, university corridors, union halls, factory floors, community centres, and even the streets themselves have served as the locales for the formation, solidification, and continuation of radical democratic projects of opposition.

Most definitely, one key reason why Lee Kuan Yew’s PAP, for many years had not faced either sizeable or sustained instances of opposition is that these spaces have been so tightly controlled through the measures of co-optation that have and continue to give them a degree of legitimacy. Furthermore, when it comes to the post-2011 period of the “new

normal”, it is difficult to discuss Singapore’s move towards liberalization, however slight and gradual, without taking into consideration the role of alternative media on the internet influencing public discourse – a space that the ruling party has had a challenging time keeping under its control.<sup>829</sup> In this case we can see that, surely, space matters. With this stated, we can definitively argue that there is a role for both subordinate and dominant sets of actors, bearing in mind that they are committed to agonistic opposition, in ensuring that such development has a fighting chance.

For those sets of actors in a position of subordination who are forced to operate in an environment in which such spaces have been closed down illegitimately, one goal of these actors should be attempting to open them up, not only for the sake of opposition and political action as a good in-itself, but as an expedient move to improve the chances of building a larger, stronger, and more dynamic opposing force which could assist them later in furthering their interests and demands. This of course, given the potential consequences of such actions that can come at the hands of the dominant set of actors, is a direction that requires a great deal of courage. Yet in the case of an unbenevolent dominant force, putting pressure on it through acts of opposition from below may be one of the few ways that certain socio-political spaces can be conceded. With regard to this point, we need to state that, for the time being, the assertion that sets of actors from below can be successful in forcing open socio-political spaces can only be a hypothesis. For certain, the factors contributing to the opening of spaces in civil society within political systems whereby such spaces had been previously closed off has been discussed quite thoroughly in the democratization literature and, as such, any stronger assertion would need to compare our method and our evidence with that of what has already been established in this aforementioned body of knowledge.<sup>830</sup> Furthermore, since the

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<sup>829</sup> Ibid

<sup>830</sup> Frequently referenced works regarding the opening of political spaces in the democratization literature include: Adam Przeworski, *Democracy in the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Guillermo O’Donnell and Phillippe C.

primary thrust of this work has involved engaging with scenarios in which radical democratic activity was initially able to take place, and thus with certain if limited spaces already open, we may not be in the best position to comment on what factors lead to newfound political openness in situations in which the initial open space is next to nil.

Despite this however, just as our case studies have shown that sizeable mass movements from below that have had the ability to threaten and jeopardize the long-term interests of the dominant force – movements such as those featuring in the cases of Singapore and France – have had some effect in extracting concessions from it, so too have we witnessed that what has additionally come as a result of their pressure was the granting of additional socio-political spaces in which they could operate openly. Indeed, in the Singaporean case, specifically during the anti-colonial fervour of the 1950s, greater spaces for the unions and students were gradually awarded as the anti-colonial movement grew in size and momentum in an attempt by the British to accede to some of the movement's demands and thus prevent a revolutionary situation developing from the perception that the colonialists were intransigent and unresponsive. Likewise, within the mass movement of May 68, though France's workers and student unions were unable to launch the country into a revolutionary overhaul, their threatening of de Gaulle's regime brought them not only material concessions in the form of better wages and better university infrastructure, but also saw them receive greater control over their workplaces and their schools – key access to socio-political spaces that they did not enjoy prior to the events. As such, though we must hold to our qualifications above regarding our select case studies vis-à-vis a vast democratization literature and though we also must state that these developments too were heavily contingent on the position and standing of the dominant sets of actors and the demands of the actors “stepping out” themselves, these case studies do point to the fact that

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Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013).

subordinate actors do indeed have a role to play in ensuring that certain socio-political spaces remain open for use by autonomous opposition actors.

Of course, as we have identified above, the protection of open socio-political spaces cannot solely depend on sets of actors “stepping out” from below. Indeed, there are two additional essential factors for the upkeep of open socio-political locales or what we can call democratic spaces. First and foremost, though actors from below can certainly fight for the opening of these spaces when the dominant force crosses certain limits, we need to have a clear understanding of what these limits definitively are. Once again, this proves to be a very tough question to answer for radical democratic theory. Though we have come to see that both extremes of no spaces off-limits and all spaces off-limits do not yield democratic outcomes, the idea of appealing to a happy medium also poses a problem for the radical theorists. For, once again, it is with this type of proposal that we can identify the clear trade-off between radicalism and agonism mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

Certainly, one of the foremost problems for radical democratic thought identified in this work has been the problem of inequality. What we have come to understand with this is the fact that though radical democratic theory proclaims to be one of egalitarianism, the possibility of an agonistic relationship between sets of actors in contention is only maintained, barring an altogether contingent capacity setback, if the subordinate set of actors in the contest stays within the crucial boundaries established by the dominant force and thus does not threaten their interests. With this, that which is framed as an expression of equality actually transpires within a framework of definite inequality. However, it must be said that this issue of inegalitarian dynamics is worsened when we, in fact, directly promote it. For certain, in stating that there ought to be some spaces that are open for contestation and others which must remain off limits for the sake of effective rule by the dominant force, this inegalitarianism is precisely what we are suggesting. Indeed, though the relationship between

contending forces may very well be agonistic, it appears closer to its liberal democratic cousin than all of our theorists, Mouffe included, would want it to. Yet here we have to firmly assert that, if we wish to maintain the same normative standards for all of the various political projects that our four theorists see as worthy of promotion, this is the best solution that can be offered in order to both ensure that those in power, backed by some process of legitimacy, have the opportunity to construct their socio-political vision which pushed them towards taking political power in the first place and that those opposing from below have the necessary political space to express their disagreement and build their own challenge to the dominant order. As moderate and reformist as this may strike those of radical stripes, this middle option – spanning a fairly wide range of possibilities – is that which exists between a would be promotion of totalitarianism (if this can be defined as the complete absence of civil society) and a would be promotion of permanent revolution.

Having stated this, the question that is now imperative to answer is where to set the limits within this broad range of socio-political boundaries between all of them and none of them. In short, how far can a legitimate dominant force push into civil society to enable itself to fulfil its program? Once again, for those progressives who believe in both taking political power to achieve one's programmatic ends and also in respecting political action in-itself and, with it, the spaces this requires as another end, this is a question that demands careful consideration. Given the importance that these spaces have played in instances of radical democratic politics, what this process of determining the right balance between the arenas of influence and control that the dominant force can legitimately control and influence and those that should be left untouched for opposition to claim as their own really boils down to is fundamentally one question. Which combination of spaces left open to potential opposition forces would ensure that the contest between dominant and subordinate forces would in fact be just that – a real contest?

Given the normative position of the radical democratic theorists, the ideal answer to this is relatively straightforward. Most certainly, for the promotion of circumstances whereby subordinate groups “stepping out” from below could organize and engage in a politics of radical opposition, more space, or at least spaces of greater influence, should be left open for democratic contestation and thus should not be directly under the direct or indirect control of the dominant force. This undoubtedly brings with it a whole slew of pragmatic challenges, many of which we have already encountered with the previously discussed issues of hegemony and legitimacy. Here however we have to state that even if we leave the issue of executive power to some other process of legitimation, such a proposal would still mean the democratization of a wide range of socio-political spaces, whether they are in the realms directly controlled by the state such as education, health, or transportation or within what we tend to think of as private realms such as in the workplace or in commercial spaces but which fundamentally exist as private spaces only as a result of the imposition of the dominant force’s socio-political and, indeed, legal order. For certain, once more, one can argue that in a truly democratic polity, no limit should be left untouched as if it existed as some type of a priori or natural boundary. In a truly democratic polity, its contours are decided by the people and the people alone. Of course, this very ambitious proposal would entail a democratization of spaces that historically have seldom if ever been open to continual contestation. In an age in which the current seems to be flowing in the opposite direction – where the sanctity of the social appears increasingly important relative to that of the political and even the street, the most public of spaces, is increasingly absorbed by its logic and order – this is a truly revolutionary proposal. Indeed, as impossible to realize as it may currently appear, this idea that challenging the very rules of the game is the real game of worth, of a higher order than the game itself – that no space is off limits - may very well be the “transvaluation of all

values” needed in a time when all spaces are slowly but surely placed off limits, when politics is dying a slow death at the hands of administration.

Yet, despite this very worthy intention, we have already seen that such a far-reaching proposal, even in the unlikely hypothetical scenario of getting past the problem of contingency with opposing actors not being repressed by the dominant force, could justify a legitimate dominant set of actors being blocked from implementing anywhere from some to the vast majority of its proposals. For certain, if education, health, transportation, and commerce can all be interrupted without end even if capital-P political spaces cannot be, scales are nonetheless tilted heavily in favour of the subordinate actors, rendering these actors more than effective and pushing the episode, or potentially recurrent episodes, past the point of being able to describe it as a contest. Here, it must be stated that for those of the perspective that the way in which political opponents are engaged with fundamentally does not matter as long as political power is achieved and maintained, this type of bombarding every possible socio-political space might be viewed as exactly what needs to be done. Yet, once again, for those who are committed to both the programmatic politics of taking power and changing the socio-political arrangement and the promotion, or at least allowance, of political action through anyone, anyone at all, in the polity, this can simply not suffice. For certain, if a progressive set of actors – the favoured agents of all our theorists - were to take legitimate political power (through means which, once again, the radical democratic theorists need to identify), they would not wish for the allowance of opposition political action to handcuff the implementation of their socio-political project, even if they were genuinely committed to these former goals. As such, if the preservation of the political is a genuine goal that remains after the taking of power rather than, as we have framed it above, simply a means to achieve it in an age where such change is becoming increasingly difficult the more the political loses currency, we cannot propose such open limits for contestation.

With this stated, we are back to the question of which spaces, between all of them and none of them, should be legitimately controlled by a legitimate dominant force, and which spaces should be left as open for contestation by members of the polity. What we have seen above, is that the answer can also surely not be a balance that sees most socio-political spaces left open for contestation, lest, once again, a dominant set of actors never get their intended project off the ground. However, here we have to ask that if most spaces cannot be feasibly opened, which particular socio-political spaces should be instead targeted that would differentiate a dominant set of actors' allowance or promotion of radical democratic politics from its liberal democratic variant? For certain, if the promotion of radical democracy is not simply in the hands of sets of actors who, in their "stepping out", step beyond the boundaries of politics as usual of liberal democracy or other regime types and instead, as we have argued and with which Mouffe and Connolly have agreed, that there is a role to play for dominant actors in ensuring that certain spaces remain open for contestation and that actors "stepping out" are not repressed, the dominant force must also ensure that the socio-political spaces open for contestation are more thorough than what is provided via liberal democratic designs.

Given that making opposition and political contestation in general more dynamic and widespread than what exists under liberal democracy is one of the starting points of the radical democratic critique, and also given what we have come to see regarding the importance of available socio-political spaces for democratic contestation, it follows that the politicization of certain spaces beyond what is ideally provided within liberal democracies needs to be explicitly sanctioned by dominant actors. Yet once more, with this more surgical approach to which spaces should be under whose control, it is necessary that we also put forth a more careful assessment of which spaces can assist in meeting the aforementioned goals of ensuring that a legitimate dominant force can implement its project and ensuring that subordinate actors have enough space to "step out" and challenge it. This, undoubtedly, is a

much more difficult task than the ill-advised suggestion that most spaces ought to be left open to subordinate groups as was laid out above. For what this more surgical approach requires is identifying a series of socio-political spaces that, first, are currently restricted under liberal democracy and, second, whose opening would not pose the threat of blocking the actualization of a legitimate dominant force's intended project.

Taking into consideration the number of possible spaces that require analysis and appraisal, this is an ambitious though arduous task, one that could potentially be taken up in a separate volume building on the findings of this work. At this point however, we can start by putting forth one proposal that would push beyond the status quo of liberal democratic tolerance of opposition politics while not pushing far enough as to directly block the implementation of legitimate dominant force's socio-political designs.

What this proposal amounts to is setting a limit around the sanctity of public space. Though theorists of neoliberalism have argued that the sheer amount of public space has decreased over the last forty to fifty years given a substantial shift towards the privatization of goods and services, and hence, the places and spaces within which they operate, we can still affirm that there still remains one space which remains public (or sometimes more problematically defined as "state space") in which the dominant force should never be allowed to enter as an agent of political contestation. This space is none other than that of the streets, defined widely to include spaces and places such as public parks, public squares, and others in which large numbers of citizens can gather to debate, discuss, build alliances, and oppose. It is at this point that critics might say that such a minimum space is, in fact, too minimal – that such spaces are already granted in polities with liberal democratic systems and are guaranteed under constitutional rights such as freedom of expression and freedom of assembly.

Though, ideally, this is correct, liberal democratic polities have not always fully respected the autonomy of such spaces when their occupation has been of a very mass scale or of a very long duration. Indeed, in recent time, the anti-capitalist and anti-elitist Occupy movement of 2011 that had based itself in public parks within various cities around the world was cleared out primarily for the reason that the protesters had been interrupting the social function of the parks and had been “causing a nuisance” for nearby residents. Likewise, in 2014, the Occupy Central movement of Hong Kong, which had been protesting against the Chinese government’s apparent renegeing of their promise to allow for free and democratic election in the Special Administrative Region, had witnessed the forceful clearing of their protest sites for the reason that the streets needed to return to “normal” – of course, meaning their normal social function - in order for the “city to get back to business”. Though it is true that city streets, city parks, and city squares such as those of New York and Hong Kong clearly do have their social function, as spaces of a more important and, indeed, higher order political function, they should never have this latter role subordinated to the former. For certain, having these spaces permanently open to political debate and contestation is required for the aforementioned balance between dominant and subordinate forces in a polity. Indeed, if the space of the street or the park can be closed down anytime the dominant force sees its open status it as “causing a nuisance”, subordinate sets of actors are limited in their ability to either broker and diffuse across sympathetic actors and build an alliance to challenge the direction of, or their very subordination under, the dominant force or simply to engage in a form of political activity – one of debate, disagreement, and contestation - that many, including many of our discussed radical democratic theorists, see as a valuable human goal. With so much of the socio-political field either directly controlled by the state apparatus or private entities, public spaces such as streets, parks, and squares are some of the few free spaces where members of the polity can engage in such activity, and as such, should be

protected and respected by a dominant force with some commitment to these types of goals. Furthermore, the fact that this minimum space of non-interference would not directly impede the implementation of a legitimate dominant force's project for the socio-political field – whether in the offices, the factories, the schools, or the administration buildings of the polity – should mean that a dominant set of actors do not have a strong reason or incentive to shut down these public spaces or repress those subordinate actors engaging in them.

This, of course, is not to say that such an outcome could always transpire. The problem of contingency – the fact that so much of what can come to fruition from the hands of subordinate forces depends on the interests and capacity of the dominant one – strongly suggests that this could not always be so. As a result of this, with this one initial minimal limit having been theoretically proposed as a way to push the promotion of radical democratic forms of politics past those of liberal democracy, we need to put forth our final argument regarding the fundamental role that dominant sets of actors have in upholding these radically open socio-political spaces. For certain, the comparison of radical democracy to liberal democracy sheds further light on the dilemma that radical democratic theory faces in attempting to strike a balance between allowing legitimate dominant force the opportunity to implement their program and allowing sufficient space for those who disagree to “step out” against it.

It is undoubtedly not surprising that radical theories of various sorts, particularly those originating from the West, take aim at what is viewed as the insufficiency of liberal democracy, given the system's hegemonic position in both theory and practice in the western world. What is interesting about radical democratic theory however, as a result of its post-structuralist and/or neo-Aristotelian/Arendtian leanings, is the fact that while its theorists view liberal democracy as being insufficiently open, more modernist radical theoretical projects, often taking their cue from Marx, have tended to view liberal democracy as

insufficiently closed. Indeed, theoretical defences of former, and some current, regimes with a philosophical indebtedness to Marx have often suggested that the provision of open socio-political spaces in civil society not only amounts to an illusory bourgeois freedom, but that the allowance of such spaces impedes a revolutionary party or force from revolutionizing the socio-political order in its entirety, in part because old ways of being and doing could remain in place and in part because reactionary forces could interrupt the party or set in its historical mission. Indeed, this understanding of the danger of open socio-political spaces has always featured as a key component of Marxist thought encapsulated by the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat, perhaps most comprehensively defended by French philosopher Etienne Balibar in 1976 when the French Communist Party was being internally pressed to adopt a more open approach and ideological direction as a result of the anti-authoritarian intellectual political currents before and since the events of May 68.

Keeping in mind the desired political projects of what is the post-Marxism of Mouffe and Rancière, we can see how some schools of radical thought have been substantially altered in the last 50 years. For certain, the advocacy of radical democracy seems a world away from the promotion of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Yet, the comparison still forces us to engage with a difficult question. If previous historical dominant forces who had been intent on radically transforming the socio-political order, whether in Marxist forms, in those resembling the authoritarian co-optation of Singapore's PAP, or even Tudjman's modernist, though far from progressive HDZ party-state, were reluctant to allow liberal democratic spaces for the reason that such allowance was deemed as threatening to their fundamental interests and demands which had driven them towards taking power, how can we expect for similar types of transformative forces in the future to accept even further open space as radical democratic theory demands?

As our case studies have demonstrated, it is difficult for us to expect anything of the sort from such types of transformative forces. The circumstances that we have established for the continuation of radical democratic forms of opposition have included the compatibility of interests between dominant and subordinate forces, with compatibility generally determined by the former at the expense of the latter. This, once again, forms the basis of the highly damning problem of contingency, only being somewhat rectified when the capacity of this dominant force is insufficient, either as a result of a lack of coercive capability or a stalemate forced by a mass movement from below. Yet, when these qualifying factors are absent, it has to be stated that the ability of subordinate actors to “step out” lies precariously and unequally in the hands of its dominant counterparts. As a result of this, radical democracy can, in this scenario, be cancelled out at nearly anytime, even if the subordinate actors respect the limits of opposition under legitimate rule such as those we have just put forth.

At this stage, there would seem to be only one proposal that could possibly dissuade dominant forces from cancelling out radical democratic politics in sweeps of repressive crackdowns. For those dominant sets of actors who have little interest in protecting political action as an end in-itself or in allowing for socio-political outside of their control, there is nothing to be dissuaded from. Changing the direction of actors like these, whether founded on some notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the authoritarian and expedient management of the socio-political order à la PAP, or an exclusionary nationalist framework that wishes to paint each space with its own colours, fundamentally rests on altering their interests and even the ideological or philosophical positions that inform them. This, of course, is not something that can be done so easily. Though those who believe in the promotion of autonomous action as an end in-itself can condemn these types of actors, they cannot ensure that such types of forces never achieve political power and attempt to close down all autonomous socio-political space. In this case, as we have already caught a glimpse of, the

small possibility of spaces for political opposition and autonomous participation depend entirely on the pressure that emanates from below and that pushes the dominant set of actors to keep spaces open, despite their unwillingness to do so.

However, for those sets of actors who do have some commitment to maintaining open spaces for a politics of “stepping out”, there is one recommendation that we can make, despite the fact that the problem of contingency can make them redundant at any time. Quite simply, dominant forces should be encouraged not to pull the trigger of repression or cast the net of authoritarian co-optation so quickly when subordinate actors “step into” space that does not directly impede the implementation of their project. A standard understanding of what those unimposing spaces constitute could follow a more detailed and comprehensive account of what we have laid out above with regards to the usual public spaces that ought to be strictly respected as such as well as further socio-political spaces beyond liberal democratic norms that, again, require closer analysis to determine their feasibility in striking the necessary balance between the divergent goals of contending forces.

This recommendation, though in a similar vein to those put forth by Mouffe and Connolly, is one that does not go nearly as far in suggesting that dominant sets of actors can step back from the apparent universality of their projects and allow for the open contestation of their position. Indeed, given what we have come to see in our case studies, it is impossible for us to propose anything near their recommendation. Due to the problem of the drive, sets of actors cannot simply rescind their core interests and instead will do what they can to defend them, even if this means abrogating on their commitment to autonomous political activity as a worthy end in-itself. As such, what we are suggesting here is that legitimate dominant forces, seeing as they are bound to crack down when these core interests are threatened, only act in such a manner when established lines, signifying a direct threat to the actualization of their project, are physically crossed. As stated before, this means that

subordinate actors having parked themselves en masse in properly public spaces such the city streets or in the city parks – spaces in which their public political function should never be subordinated to their social function – and also thus not directly interfering with the dominant force’s project, should be indefinitely left alone. Though, given what we have witnessed in our case studies, we are not naïve enough to believe that such an outcome could happen each and every time, we can still assert that this is a more informed and more feasible proposal for the maintenance of radical democratic forms of politics.

Yet, what can we say to those who still insist that such an allowance of open socio-political space, beyond that which is normally permitted in liberal democratic arrangements, still poses too much of a problem for those dominant actors who wish to radically transform the socio-political order – that, as we have witnessed, though instances of opposition often start out small, they can escalate to become much more worrying for the dominant force? At this point, building on our findings from our case studies, we can state that the periods in which radical democratic activity was at its least threatening - within what we have classified as protest - occurred when the dominant force had a high degree of hegemony. Indeed, except for the case of Singapore’s PAP in which there was no interest shown in allowing autonomous socio-political spaces and every form of autonomous opposition was viewed as a threat, the presumed need to close down certain socio-political spaces only occurred when the dominant force had lost a degree of its hegemony. Looking back on our discussion of the instances of protest, we have seen that Rašković’s early movement in the Krajina, Sondhi’s initial protests at Thammasat University, and even the militant students in the outskirts of Paris were left alone by the dominant force for the fact that they were not deemed to have substantially threatened or jeopardized any of their core interests. Undoubtedly, one of the primary reasons why all three of these movements grew to become increasingly threatening

was as a result of the manoeuvres of the dominant force which resulted in lessening their degree of hegemonic control.

For instance, while Rašković's protests against the anti-Serb direction of the Croatian para-state had initially begun fairly small, after Tudjman and the HDZ began implementing nationalist policies, the position of the Croatian Serbs was fundamentally altered, with several mechanisms of activation coming to the fore including identity shift away from the Croatian state, brokerage between sympathetic anti-HDZ entities in civil society, and a diffusion of widespread protests and boycotts against the Croatian nationalist government. While we have employed Tilly's terminology of contentious politics to explain these developments, we could also state that the same developments also reflected the Croatian government losing its hegemonic control over the Croatian Serbs. Indeed, in the language of Ernesto Laclau, the mechanisms which involved the Croatian Serbs turning away from the central HDZ controlled government, witnessed them turning away from a logic of difference in which their usual demands would be sectorally channelled into the central government and toward a logic of equivalence in which divergent sets of actors across the Croatian Serb population came together with a common goal of challenging the HDZ's hegemonic position and attempting to win autonomy from the nationalist government. Here we can clearly see that radical democratic activity became more threatening once the HDZ alienated a substantial portion of their population and thus lost their hegemonic position.

This same logic can be used to explain the developments in the Thai and French cases mentioned above. Both Sondhi's nascent Yellow Shirt movement which started at Thammasat and later moved to Lumpini Park and the French militant students' protests which started at Nanterre and later moved to Paris' Latin Quarter had begun with opposition numbers in the thousands, unthreatening to the dominant sets of actors they were opposing. However, when Thaksin bent the rules of the game to sell his Shincorp without paying tax

and when the French police opted to crack down violently on the protesters in and around the Sorbonne, similar mechanisms of activation – identity shift, diffusion, and brokerage – were put into play and, the governments of both de Gaulle and Thaksin lost some of their support, and hence, degree of control. Indeed, once again in Laclau’s terms, sets of actors who, in both cases, had once engaged with the respective governments through an individuated logic of difference, rallied together against the government through the logic of equivalence, weakening the dominant force’s hegemonic position. With many members of the Bangkok middle classes joining the unions, student groups and NGOs against Thaksin and bringing their ranks to nearly a million, Thaksin’s regime became substantially threatened in a way that it had not been before. Likewise, after the first brutal crackdown on the militant students by the French police, public opinion radically shifted against the Gaullists and, as we know, the unions as well other organizations with their own grievances with the Gaullist socio-political order joined the students in the millions, jeopardizing the regime almost to the point of a revolutionary break.

By way of contrast, we can also see that at the end of many of our studied episodes, radical democratic activity became less threatening once again for the fact that mechanisms of deactivation such as co-optation brought previously disruptive actors back under the overall control of the dominant force. Once more, in Laclau’s terms, the dominant force was able to repackage hegemony by sectorally addressing individual sets of actors’ grievances and thus breaking the chain of the equivalence that had thrown their hegemonic status into crisis. In May 68 this, of course, happened with the majority of previously militant forces, students and workers alike, accepting the parliamentary and concessionary solution provided by de Gaulle and his party. In turn, the radical democratic activity of these now moderate forces that was allowed to fizzle out became far less of a threat to the Gaullist order. The same can be said to have happened more controversially in both the Croatian and

Singaporean case studies. In the Croatian case, following the end of the war in 1995 and more specifically Operation Storm whereby up to 200,000 members of the Croatian Serb community fled into neighbouring countries during an attempt by the central government to regain control over the Krajina, the opposition activities of the Croatian Serbs became far less threatening to the direction of the nationalist HDZ in Zagreb. Likewise, in the case of Singapore, after a victory for the PAP in the 1963 “battle for merger” which saw the majority of Singaporeans voting to follow their proposal for integration with Malaysia, the success of their early socio-economic policies, and the selective, albeit effective, use of coercive measures through Operation Coldstore whereby key members of the leftist opposition were incarcerated, the PAP’s hegemony was consolidated and the radical democratic activity of its opponents were left in a serious state of weakness. Of course, as we know, unlike in the former two cases in which radical democratic activity was able to continue, albeit in a severe subordinate form of protest, due to the fact that the interests of the dominant force had no longer been threatened, the PAP’s vision of a totally managed socio-political order for the sake of what they defined as socio-economic development, prevented any radical democratic activity from occurring for several decades. Here, we can emphatically argue that this direction was taken despite the fact that there was no real need to do so, given the hegemonic position that the PAP had already clearly established in the immediate post-merger and post-independence period.

Though, of course, we cannot normatively tolerate the establishment of hegemony through coercive means given the undemocratic, inegalitarian, and antagonistic nature of such measures such as Croatia’s Operation Storm and Singapore’s Operation Coldstore, we can argue through the above scenarios that the maintenance of a dominant force’s hegemonic position substantially reduces the chances that radical democratic activity will go beyond the relatively unthreatening level of protest and, as such, reduces the need to coercively close

down socio-political spaces of contestation. Though we have previously argued that hegemony, as Mouffe would have it, cannot be the method in which dominant forces are legitimated and thus given the authority to rule as this could potentially leave the polity facing perpetual contestation and little in the way of programmatic politics, we can argue that the attainment of hegemony does engender a dominant force with some degree of popular support and durability. As Honig indicates in *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, albeit with a fairly different purpose, Nietzsche pointed to such a possibility in the *Genealogy of Morals* in stating that,

“A society might attain such a *consciousness of power* that it could allow itself the noblest luxury possible to it – letting those who harm it go *unpunished*. ‘What are my parasites to me?’ it might say. ‘May they live and prosper: I am strong enough for that!’”<sup>831</sup>

For certain, if a dominant set of actors, through the use of the state apparatus is able to meet the demands of a large number of subordinate sets of actors through the provision of wide-ranging policies and programs through consensual as opposed to coercive channels, then not only does the dominant force exhibit some strong democratic credentials in the sense that it can meet the demands of a large segment of the polity but that, also, it will be much more difficult for mechanisms of activation to come into play and for subordinate groups to form a chain of equivalence against it. In short, we can say that having a more democratic, or at least responsive, dominant force is one effective way of ensuring that the radical democratic activity of opposing sets of actors does not eventually push farther than desired. This in turn provides a dominant set of actors, if committed to political action as an end in-itself, a very strong incentive not to close down socio-political spaces for opposition and autonomous political activity such as the ones we have outlined above. Democracy at one level thus begets democracy at another.

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<sup>831</sup> Honig, *Political Theory*, 137.

As a result of this, those who are firmly committed to protecting autonomous socio-political spaces for contestation and for political activity as something to be intrinsically valued should not accept the arguments of a dominant force who, in claiming its democratic character, suggests that in order to effectively implement their socio-political program certain public spaces and places need to be designated off-limits. Not only does the allowance of such spaces show a commitment to the value of the political and not substantially interfere with the implementation of the desired program, but also any dominant force claiming to represent or embody the demos should be able to withstand the pressure that could emanate from it. Any dominant force suggesting otherwise may very well be able to justify it according to another logic or rationale, but should not be permitted to do so in the name of democracy.

Having made these recommendations for radical democratic theory in light of a series of substantial problems emanating from our comparative inquiry, we now need to ask where the radical democratic project stands as a whole. One way to address this question is to ask what radical democratic theory can and cannot be. We need to state that, even in following these recommendations, radical democracy cannot be a theory of political equality. The problem of political space will simply not permit it. Though radical democratic thought can promote political action based on the principle of equality, it can do nothing to alter the fundamental division of power in any polity between those in dominance who control certain spaces of influence and those in positions of subservience who do not. Likewise, nor can radical democracy be a theory of achieving legitimate political power. The unlimited promotion of sets of actors “stepping out” from below only to have them “step into” a position of political power or the socio-political spaces needed for a legitimate ruling power’s project, is not the type of political action we should be encouraging if we believe that one of

politics' ultimate goals and, indeed, essential characteristics is the construction, and not simply disruption, of the political community.

Yet what radical democratic theory can be, at least some of the time, is a basis for an inspiring project whereby “anyone, anyone at all” can “step out” of their usual place or function within the socio-political power, and participate in a type of politics in which such participation, such realization of our thought and action and of our ability to debate, disagree, and contest – in a word, to be political – is a virtue in-itself. As an important second benefit, radical democratic forms of politics can also be one useful tool of expedient actors looking to expand their movement in the most public of spaces, raise awareness, build alliances, and even extract concessions from the dominant force and enlarge their opposition to the point of taking power through whatever means are deemed legitimate.

With this said, the necessary qualification that these outcomes can occur only some of time results from the fact that the possibility of such occurrences is not entirely in their hands. As a result of the problem of contingency – the problem emanating from the frequent dependence of actors from below on the standing of actors from above – radical democracy cannot be a theory of certainties. However, though little can be done about those political forces, either from above or from below, who have no interest in the divisibility of political space and who are driven to antagonism by their very interests, radical democratic theory can, in taking on board some of the above recommendations regarding the establishment of a theory of legitimacy and the spatial limits of political rule and opposition, put forth a more thorough proposal as to what needs to be done for the greater assurance of the benefits listed above and seen throughout this work.

In practice, this of course entails a commitment by those in positions of political power – in positions with the ability to conveniently disrespect and cancel out such forms of participation and democratic action – to respect these limits of space and place for the sake of

these other political goods that are not entirely programmatic. Of course, we cannot expect that current dominant forces in various polities would suddenly commit to this. With that said however, it is at least hoped that a progressive set of actors with an expressed desire to protect autonomous political action as a virtuous end in-itself who, in taking power and beginning to transform the socio-political order in ways they saw fit, would do just this. Though here, we find ourselves inescapably within the police order, as Rancière might say, it is one definitively better than others.

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