

The new social contract and the conservative remoulding of the West

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In an article penned for «The New Yorker», Nicholas Lemann expresses bewilderment as to why people economically dispossessed by the Great Recession do not look to politics «to get back some of what they lost» and why inequality (which negatively affects the vast majority of American citizens) is not a «big issue» in the political debate¹. This paper goes some way towards answering those questions. In order to do so, I chart the historical evolution of the social contract, with particular attention to the implications of the link between the entrenchment of economic ‘enclosures’ and the concept of political representation. I outline the ways in which the social contract underwent a meliorist reordering in the aftermath of World War Two and how, since the 1970s, tables are being turned in favour of the return to a version of the minimal State. I then proceed to explain why the severance of the link between political action and economic improvement is consolidating conservative democracy as the political consciousness of the ‘Market-state’. Finally, I demarcate the way in which this philosophy is remoulding the societal make-up of Western societies.

The historical evolution of the social contract

The idea of the social contract has an economic connotation attached to it. Hobbes dedicates a chapter in the *Leviathan* to matters pertaining to the ‘nourishment’ of the Commonwealth, maintaining that it was incumbent upon the sovereign:

«[...] to appoint in what manner all kinds of contract between subjects (as buying, selling, exchanging, borrowing, lending, letting, and taking to hire) are to be made, and by what words and sign they shall be understood for valid»².

The Lockean innovation revolved around the idea of economic ‘enclosures’. Locke argues that when a person removes something from nature through his hard work, it is no longer the common property of all mankind but belongs to

¹ Nicholas Lemman, ‘Evening the odds-The politics of inequality’, «The New Yorker», 23 April 2012.

² Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1651, Chapter XXIV, - <http://socserv.mcmaster.ca/econ/ugcm/3113/hobbes/Leviathan.pdf>.

himself exclusively³. The idea of economic enclosures creates by default the notion that these need to be protected from external interference, be it the sovereign or other individuals. The emerging social contract therefore endorsed from that moment a minimal notion of the State. Its inception corresponded to the need to have a strong centralising force which would be able to guarantee the right to own property and to enforce its proper use and exchange. An intermediate class between the State and the individual is created by placing the acquisition of property under public scrutiny, ensuring that it would be «impossible for any man, this way, to intrench upon the right of another, or acquire to himself a property, to the prejudice of his neighbour, who would still have room for as good, and as large a possession (after the other had taken out his) as before it was appropriated»⁴. The need to secure and legitimise those property rights brought about the idea of political representation. Indeed, it was economic ‘enclosures’ that prompted property owners not only to demand the right to be politically represented, but most fundamentally to become part of the apparatus of government.

The implications of this ‘property-nexus’ for the idea of a social contract are also underlined by Rousseau, who explains in his *Second discourse* that «the first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, bethought himself of saying: “This is mine”, and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society»⁵. It is precisely these economic enclosures which create ‘political enclosures’ in the form of the configuration of political systems which restrict access to property for the majority. Marx focuses on the effects that this societal arrangement has on the individual. His critique of private property is based on a principle of freedom and on the effects of private property on individuality and personality⁶. According to Marx, under the economic system of private ownership, society divides itself into two classes: the property owners and the property-less workers. In this arrangement, the workers not only suffer impoverishment but also experience alienation from the world, understood as the estrangement of the worker from the product of his work, from the activity of production, from ‘species-being’ (or human identity) and estrangement of man to man⁷.

The Lockean social contract lacks the idea of access to property as an instrument to enable the universalisation of political representation. The idea of democracy (the marriage between political and economic enfranchisement) began to be broached when the concept of property encompassed access to ‘social goods’ such as healthcare, education and public infrastructure as a right of citizenship. The idea of political representation becomes consolidated when

³ John Locke, *The second treatise of civil government*, 1690, Chapter V - <http://www.constitution.org/jl/2ndtr05.htm>.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the origin and basis of inequality among men*, translated by G. D. H. Cole, 1755 - www.munseys.com/diskone/ineq.pdf.

⁶ George Brenkert, *Freedom and private property in Marx*, in «Philosophy & Public Affairs», Winter 1979, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 123.

⁷ Karl Marx, *Economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844*, translated by Martin Mulligan, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1959.

access to 'social goods' is guaranteed by the legal process. Interestingly, the countries which enjoyed the benefits of stable constitutional systems before the onset of the democratic age were compelled to introduce that type of social contract when they began to be challenged by illiberal ideologies like communism and fascism; more adamant on the idea of property as 'social goods' and as a prerequisite for the legitimacy of the political system.

The electoral franchise in countries which adopted a liberal constitutional system of the Lockean mould, like Britain, had a property qualification attached to it. In the case of Britain, the enlargement of the electoral franchise, ultimately encompassing all adult men and women by the 1920s, coincided with the wider access to 'social goods'. This phenomenon gave rise to a new type of social contract: by giving up a portion of their property by way of taxation, the propertied class ensured the survival of capitalism. It was universal suffrage and access to 'social goods' for the majority that converted these liberal constitutional systems into fully-fledged democracies; not the idea of piecemeal political representation as a matter of principle, only to be granted to the moneyed class. Without this innovation in the social contract, it is quite feasible that the liberal constitutional system of countries like Britain would have collapsed, especially in the aftermath of World War One, when the country began to experience a steep economic decline *vis-à-vis* its industrial competitors.

Geoeconomic limitations were also a powerful incentive for the introduction of a meliorist innovation to the idea of the social contract. As the rivalry between the great European powers became more acute towards the end of the Nineteenth century and massive industrialisation created a huge pool of economically disenfranchised proletarians, the idea of nationhood became inextricably linked to better economic outcomes for the majority, particularly with the partial gentrification of the working class which took place during World War One. The ideological impetus for a new 'property-nexus' was primarily given by social democracy, which catapulted to the forefront of politics the idea of access to social goods as a means of widening and legitimising the scope of political representation. The new 'property-nexus' incorporated the idea of collective stakeholding as a means to enable individual economic enfranchising. Social democracy has a lot of self-interest about it. Access to 'social goods', through take-up of taxes levied by the State, is collectively enforced but individually acquired. Conservative thinking permanently underlines the 'inviolate' nature of collective stakeholding for the pursuit of economic advancement for the majority. As we will see, this denial of individual enfranchising through collective stakeholding is exclusively geared towards depriving the individual from increasing its living standards, regardless of whether this is economically viable or not.

The economic disruption caused by World War Two and the successes of top down modelling, coupled with the immediate ideological threat posed by the Soviet Union after the end of the conflagration, installed the social democratic

postwar consensus as the social contract of the age. Property that served to elevate the social standing of individuals would be subject to nationalisation or strong communal scrutiny. As a general rule of thumb, the State undertook to expand the scope of intervention in the economic process and enable people to have wider access to 'social goods' as well as opportunities for advancement in a highly monitored private sector. The postwar consensus which took root in the West created a particular type of social contract, in which the elevation of the material well-being of the citizens of the Western world was activated by the ideological threat posed by a relatively successful alternative to capitalism. In the aftermath of World War Two E. H. Carr opined that

«[...] the fate of the Western world will turn on its ability to meet the Soviet challenge by a successful search for new forms of social and economic action in which what is valid in individualist and democratic tradition can be applied to the problems of mass civilization»⁸.

The key issue was to ensure that capitalism would succeed by being the guarantor of welfare for the mass of people who were politically and economically gentrified in order to stop them from seeking a political alternative conducive to more intense forms of social elevation.

Whilst the aspect of State intervention in the economic process remained and increased over time, this form of dirigisme ceased to be meliorist with the onset of the conservative revolution of the 1970s and 1980s. Rawls' *Theory of justice* provides the theoretical template for the beginning of the reversal of the meliorist project of the postwar consensus. Rawls states that a workable theory of justice lies upon two basic principles. The first, that «each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others». Secondly, argues Rawls, «social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all»⁹. The 'lexical ordering' outlined by Rawls (in which liberty takes precedence over equality) creates a situation in which under conditions of depressed economic performance the gap between the 'well-off' and the 'least well off' narrows down as the size of the cake diminishes over time. The purported lack of freedom to produce ultimately makes equality prevail by default. In the Rawlsian template this problem is practically and morally solved by allowing inequalities to rise, provided the 'least well off' in society are not worse off as a result. This entails that the level of wealth of the 'well-off' increases exponentially whilst the level of wealth of the 'worse off' remains at the very least, at constant levels.

Under the Rawlsian template, the notion of 'equal opportunities' would facilitate the partial narrowing of the gap. To be sure, the introduction of an agenda for social inclusion has enabled previously disenfranchised groups to

⁸ E. H. Carr, *The Soviet impact on the Western World*, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1948, p. 106-113.

⁹ John Rawls, *A theory of justice*, Cambridge, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Revised Edition, 1999, p. 52.

enter the marketplace as their grievances are gradually and successfully dealt with. Inevitably, this still leads to some form of redistribution of 'social goods', which necessitate appropriation of taxes from the 'well off', even in the context of a less heavy taxation regime. Nozick, whose ideas are construed in academic and intellectual circles as the antithesis of Rawls' theory, argues that justice is about respecting people's (natural) rights; in particular, their rights to property and self-ownership. People are 'ends-in-themselves', and we cannot use them in ways they do not agree to, even if that would lead to some supposed 'greater good'. To take property away from people in order to redistribute it according to some pattern (especially by means of taxation) violates their rights¹⁰.

It is possible to argue that Nozick's ideas are a more extreme re-enactment of Rawls' theory of justice. Rawls argues for liberty over equality, opening the gates for a wider disparity of economic outcomes but most importantly, introducing a theoretical template which (because it came from the Left) legitimised the overhaul of the meliorist social contract. On the one hand, the Right would regard the Rawlsian principles of justice as an implementable form of natural-rights libertarianism. At the same time, the Left, devoid of its revolutionary potential, began to see in the Rawlsian blueprint a long-term roadmap for its survival as an ideology of government. It is however Nozick and those who argue from the standpoint of deontological libertarianism, insisting on the moral case for the unpatterned distribution of property, who help to sustain the ideological purity of the non-meliorist project in the long run.

The meliorist revamp of the social contract which had taken place in the aftermath of World War Two disrupted a system based on the custodianship of cultural values as well as the political/economic system by a reduced number of people. The criticism levelled by the forces of conservative is that the meliorist social contract created a 'great disruption'. In essence, the notion of access to social goods is perforce an expansive one. The concept of socio-economic rights is compoundable: the more one gets, the more one wants. The 'great disruption' described by scholars like Fukuyama can be understood, from the conservative position, as the threat of forever replacing a system of accumulation of capital by a small number of people. Restoring inequality as the touchstone of the political became paramount to the restoration of the Lockean social contract. With its emphasis on the 'maximisation of opportunity' for individuals¹¹, the 'Market-state' is eager to liken government to business. This has seemingly become more peremptory in the age of austerity. Predictably citing Burke on the intergenerational nature of the social contract, and advocating austerity as a way to restore its viability, Niall Ferguson, a conservative historian, states that:

«Public sector balance sheets [...] should be [...] drawn up so that the liabilities of governments can be compared with their assets. That would help clarify the difference between deficits to finance investment and deficits to finance current consumption.

¹⁰ Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, New York, Basic Books, 1974, Chapter 7.

¹¹ Philip Bobbitt, *The shield of Achilles: war, peace, and the course of history*, London, Penguin Books, 2002.

Governments should also follow the lead of business and adopt the generally accepted accounting principles¹².

The social contract in the making has a distinct Hobbesian connotation. Instead of the citizens consenting to give absolute power to a monarch in order to tone down the level of violence, they consent amongst themselves to accept diminished living standards in return for fiscal solidity and the maintenance of the 'Market-state'. One example of this state of affairs is seen in the willingness of the Greek electorate to accept the conditions imposed by Brussels. Mario Vargas Llosa is eloquent in this matter:

«The surprising thing is not that many Greeks have voted in the last election for extremist parties of the left and the right but the fact that there are so many people in Greece who still believe in democracy and that the latest polls for the upcoming election indicate that centrist parties, which maintain a pro-European position and accept the conditions imposed by the European Union could obtain a working governing majority (in Parliament)»¹³.

The process of depoliticisation which unfolded since the end of the Cold War has paid handsome dividends for the forces of conservatism. Pettit argues that the absence of an effective rebellion against the social contract is its only source of legitimacy¹⁴. On the left, the Occupy Movement and the anti/alter-globalisation undercurrents are incapable of placing their discourse at the forefront of mainstream politics. On the right side of the political spectrum, the contrarian thinking of libertarian movements like the Tea Party in the United States and other advocates of the 'minimal State' are really nothing more than a call to reinforce the tenets of the social contract which has arisen out of the ashes of the meliorist project.

According to van Creveld, the State is, historically speaking, merely one of the forms «the organisation of government has assumed, and which, accordingly, need not be considered eternal and self-evident anymore than the previous ones»¹⁵. As reasons for the decline of the State since 1975, Creveld cites the waning of major war, the retreat of welfare, technology going international and the withdrawal of faith¹⁶. Here is an important distinction: 'government' is not the same as the 'State'. The development of the social contract (the instrument by which the bond between the ruler and the governed is legitimised) departed from the notion of a ruler concentrating a large amount of power with the purposes of toning down the level of violence. The reasons adduced by Thomas Hobbes for the existence of a centralised political force involved a critique of the 'equality'

¹² Niall Ferguson, *Viewpoint: why the young should welcome austerity*, June 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-1845613116>.

¹³ Mario Vargas Llosa, *¿Por qué Grecia?*, «El País», 3 June 2012.

¹⁴ Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: a theory of freedom and government*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1999.

¹⁵ Martin Van Creveld, *The rise and decline of the State*, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 415.

¹⁶ *Idem*, Chapter 6.

of the state of nature. In order to create the conditions for 'commodious life' (or a 'neighbourly society', to use modern political parlance) this concentration of power, voluntarily agreed upon, was needed in order to protect the political community from the appetitive nature of man, driven by passion and emotion more than rationality. As the meliorist position adopted a more optimistic view of human nature, the State became the embodiment of the social contract in action, accepting the existence of intermediate structures but ultimately undertaking the role of nurturing the best qualities of man by widening the access to 'social goods'. The economic debacle of the 1970s would create a reversal of the meliorist project and a return to a social contract based on the recreation of a conservative consciousness amongst the citizens of the major Western societies.

Conservative democracy as the political consciousness of the Market-state

The idea of a social contract in which the State sustains ever increasing levels of affluence has been gradually eroded since the economic crisis of the early 1970s, severely curtailed since the end of the Cold War and increasingly reversed since the onset of the Great Recession of 2008. In order to consolidate this reversal, the new social contract utilises some of the most fundamental principles of conservatism. The historical evolution of conservatism produced three orientations which presently guide the societal arrangements of the West and beyond.

1 - The principle of 'order'. This orientation can be understood in practical terms as the pigeonholing of individuals into restrictive categories in order to allow a reduced number of people to have custodianship of the political and economic process. According to Kirk, there is a conservative conviction that civilised society requires orders and classes; that the only true equality is moral equality. All other attempts at levelling lead to despair, if enforced by positive legislation. Man must put a control upon his will and his appetite, for conservatives know man to be governed more by emotion than by reason¹⁷. Furthermore, conservatives espouse the notion that «freedom is [...] not the precondition but the consequence of an accepted social arrangement»¹⁸. It is possible to surmise that conservatism upholds the notion that people crave authority and hierarchy and therefore accept being less than they can be and having less than they can have. As Scruton argues:

«[...] the value of social order is higher than that of the market economy. Therefore, the value of any economic policy is to be measured not in its own terms, but in terms of the social arrangement which it serves»¹⁹.

2 - Derived from this obsession with strict social taxonomies, conservatives work to entrench the notion of restrictive political and economic enclosures.

¹⁷ Russell Kirk, *The conservative mind: from Burke to Eliot*, Washington, Regnery Pub, 1995, p. 17-8.

¹⁸ Roger Scruton, *The meaning of conservatism*, London and Basingstoke, The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1980, p. 18.

¹⁹ Roger Scruton, *The ideology of the market in the politics of culture*, Manchester, Carcanet Press, 1981, p. 200.

These enclosures are depicted as quintessential for freedom to flourish. However, the appropriation of economic enclosures, from which political enclosures originate, could create a situation in which more and more individuals increase their economic and political freedom. Cowling is very blunt about how the conservative project ought to proceed in this matter:

«[...] it is not freedom that conservatives want; what they want is the sort of freedom that will maintain existing inequalities or restore lost ones»²⁰.

Wide inequality of economic outcomes is now an accepted fact of life. Market mechanisms as well as the relative economic decline of the West have ensured that the appropriation of economic enclosures – the acquisition of goods and services – has become more restricted to the average citizen, whose real wage has remained stagnant since the mid-1970s. This order of things facilitates the closing of the political space, increasingly restricted to the partnership between corporate interests and professional politicians who carry out the diktat of the ‘Market-state’.

3 - The reluctance to broadcast the ulterior motives of the conservative project. It is a requirement of the consolidation of a conservative order that these societal templates should be tacitly adopted. Scruton maintains that:

«[...] conservatism - as a motivating force in the political life of the citizen - is characteristically inarticulate, unwilling (and indeed usually unable) to translate itself into formulae or maxims, loathe to state its purpose or declare its view»²¹.

Whilst it is accepted that conservatism has become more intellectually-minded in response to the challenge of social democracy, it is fundamentally more interested in instinctual politics. Articulation comes with the meliorist drive. Where there is a perceived need to repair, there is a need to articulate. Lack of rhetorical articulation leads to lack of positive action, which is a prerequisite of the reversal of the meliorist project.

Conservative democracy erects itself as the reigning social paradigm when all the tacitly enacted tenets of traditional conservatism are assimilated by the members of society, who do not see an alternative to this state of affairs. Conservative democracy is the unwitting rejection of the remnants of the social democratic consensus by large segments of the population which, paradoxically, are bound to benefit from this paradigm. The subjects consent amongst themselves to accept the fact that the relationship between ruler and governed implies the subordination to a political system which is not directly conducive to the betterment of their material conditions. It is precisely this subordination that creates a prevalence of duties over rights, revolving around the acceptance of

²⁰ Maurice Cowling, “The present position”, in Maurice Cowling (ed.), *Conservative Essays*, London, Cassell, 1978, p. 1 and p. 9.

²¹ Scruton, *The meaning of conservatism*, cit., p. 20.

lower living standards and more political control, including a wider spectrum of surveillance.

Conservative democracy attempts to make society 'stronger' by cutting off the link between political action and economic improvement, creating a situation in which economic grievances are increasingly taken out from the public domain and devolved to the market for their resolution (or not). Emphasising the notion of responsibility and civic duty, it entails the idea that not all economic grievances have to be resolved by entities other than the individual. The conservative approach to the reversal of the meliorist project is, to paraphrase the concept devised by Oliver Letwin (who combines the job of being chairman of the Conservative Research Department and chairman of the Conservative Party's Policy Review with his role as minister of State for Policy) 'socio-centric' rather than 'econo-centric':

«Before Marx, politics was multi-dimensional – constitutional, social, environmental as well as economic. But Marx changed all that. The real triumph of marxism consisted in the way that it defined the preoccupations not only of its supporters but also of its opponents. After Marx, socialists defended socialism and free marketeers defended capitalism. For both sides, the centrepiece of the debate was the system of economic management. Politics became econo-centric. But, as we begin the Twenty-first century, things have changed. Since Thatcher, and despite recent recurrences of something like full-blooded socialism in some parts of Latin America, the capitalist/socialist debate has in general ceased to dominate modern politics. From Beijing to Brussels, the free market has won the battle of economic ideas»²².

Every actor in society, from the lowest to the highest echelon, has, in Western locales, become accustomed to benefitting from the link between the political and the economic for the preservation of their way of life. Reversing this process entails silencing people's explicit (and publicly projected) concern with self-interest, by ending guaranteed access to a modicum of affluence. The tenets of conservative democracy have been absorbed by the electorate in such a way that it bypasses party divisions. The governments elected in the wake of the Great Recession are attempting to replicate the termination of the culture of entitlements set in motion by president Bill Clinton in 1996. The process of severance set in motion by Clinton, carried out in conjunction with a Republican-dominated Congress, was repackaged around the idea of communitarianism, emphasising responsibility and affirming «the moral commitments of parents, young persons, neighbours, and citizens». According to this view, «the ultimate foundation of morality may be commitments of individual conscience, [as] it is communities that help introduce and sustain these commitments»²³. At the time, Clinton suggested that the Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, which curtailed citizen's access to State benefits, should remove

²² Oliver Letwin, *Cameron raises his standards in the battle of ideas*, «The Daily Telegraph», 8 May 2007.

²³ Amitai Etzioni (Ed.), *Rights and the common good - The communitarian perspective*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1995, p. 22.

welfare from the political arena, adding rather ominously that it would not be «the end of welfare reform, [but] the beginning»²⁴.

The removal of the link between the political and the economic has to be accompanied by a ‘socio-centric’ rhetoric in order to prevent an ‘econo-centric’ political backlash. The main idea behind the entrenchment of conservative democracy entails the riddance of the notion of a public sphere agglutinated by the State. If the public sphere can be recreated outside the scope of the State, there will be one. If not, there will be no public sphere.

The conservative remoulding of Western societies

The main reason put forward by the captains of conservative democracy for ending guaranteed access to a degree of affluence for the majority is that the culture of rehabilitative legislation endorsed by the meliorist social contract produced a ‘broken society’. Conversely, they argue, ‘social capital’ can become an important regenerative force in the establishment of a ‘neighbourly society’, where everyone accepts their standing in society irrespective of economic outcome and regardless of whether their self-elevation is impeded by the system. The exponents of the ‘social capital’ theory, defined by Fukuyama as a ‘set of informal values and norms shared among members of a group that permits cooperation among them’²⁵, expect adjustments to occur in society in response to the change in the system of allocation of resources, eventually legitimising the inevitable minimisation of choice.

Political conservatism is quite different from conservatism-in-the-individual. While political conservatism is centred around the preservation of inequality, the conservative voter (and those who make of a virtue of their centrist approach) think of that ideology as an element for expanding economic opportunity. Traditional conservatism has been described by Kirk as the conviction that civilised society requires orders and classes. In this context, conservatism is also a gatekeeping exercise geared towards preventing self-elevation for the majority, for economic discrimination inevitably entails the notion of ‘enclosures’. Mobility, in its purest conservative form, is always relegated to obtaining «modest but solid progress», as Winston Churchill (intellectually besieged by the welfarist furore which swept the West in the 1940s) vaguely promised the British electorate in the aftermath of World War Two. What is fought for, along with the preservation of inequality, is to curtail the idea of self-elevation, which is detrimental to gatekeepers and costly to the dynamism of the socio-economic system based on ‘enclosures’. In order to bypass intellectual checkpoints, the captains of conservatism dress up their true motivations by invoking a ‘socio-centric’ approach - which is, at least in appearance, taxonomically close to the collectivist dogma of the left, and as such more familiar and palatable to the

²⁴ *Clinton signs welfare bill amid division*, «The Washington Post», 23 August 1996

²⁵ Francis Fukuyama, *The great disruption - Human nature and the reconstitution of social order*, London, Profile Books, 1999, p. 16.

masses - in order to end the mutually beneficial symbiosis between man and State.

From the top down, 'reconstruction' by way of destruction is being sold as inevitable. But keeping its presentational aspects to the bare minimum allows the political class to impose the 'inevitability' of a non-meliorist project as a choice made in the interest of the electorate. On the one hand, conservative democracy operates by denouncing the State-regulated private sphere as an unfair master of the masses, enslaved by the yoke of jobsworths and self-serving bureaucrats. On the other hand, the same masses (historically enfranchised by the State-induced public sphere) have developed an appetite for this kind of economic opportunities. Since the differentiation of ideological hues has become blurry, the masses assume that the existence of a public sphere (and its possible recreation) is really a given; the product of the historical evolution of the national project, irrespective of who is in power or the ideological discontinuities encountered along the way.

In order to implement the simultaneous process of destruction and putative reconstruction, the re-engineering of the role of the State has to be marketed to the electorate as a plethora of life-enhancing potentialities rather than a retreat from its meliorist mission. Motivational language, employed by conservative democracy and assimilated by the populace, becomes a useful nexus which links the process of destruction and the implementation of fake reconstruction. The rise of the New Conservatives under David Cameron is an example of how conservative democracy brands itself as a 'progressive' force, targeting the masses with a message of change and renewal in the same way that Reagan and Thatcher broadcast the Edenic promise of free market economics in the 1980s, while at the same time exercising the same kind of sanctimonious honesty about future cuts in social spending. As Edward Bernays, the Austrian-born father of 'public relations' stated, propaganda is the 'the conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organised habits and opinions of the masses' which he deemed quintessential for the smooth functioning of democratic society²⁶. In this context, motivational rhetoric becomes part and parcel of the process of consent, and the reorganisation of the collective psyche towards the internalisation of the severance between political action and economic improvement for the majority. By focusing on positive values and concepts, destruction and reconstruction can be streamlined in a non-frictional way and the scope of action for this simultaneous process can be smoothly and permanently enlarged: 'protecting people from poverty' then becomes 'liberating people from poverty'; 'ensuring access to public goods and services' becomes 'empowering people by freeing them from the shackles of the State'.

Since 1945, generations of Western Europeans have seen their levels of affluence increase through the redistribution of public goods and services and rehabilitative government policy. In order for this new order to arise (geared

²⁶ Edward Bernays, *Propaganda*, New York, IG Publishing, 1928, p. 9.

towards the 'spontaneous' realignment of the society once the citizenry is liberated from 'the shackles of the State'), motivational rhetoric constitutes itself as one of the main bridging elements. This is where the 'socio-centric approach' comes into play. A purely economic rationale would not resonate with the electorate as much as an emphasis on the social connotations of the new order. Motivational language, once consumed and assimilated, creates the notion of self-sufficiency and obliviousness towards the benefits to be accrued from rehabilitative legislation, therefore inducing neglect of self-interest amongst the average voter.

Conclusion

The idea of a social contract originally emerged as a means to tone down the level of political violence. It evolved as a means to tone down the level of economic violence. By widening access to 'social goods', the social contract re-legitimised the spectrum of political and social 'enclosures'. The Lockean idea of 'property' as the transformation of nature through 'labour' has a deep flaw attached to it, as signaled by Marx. Labourers, most of the time, do not own their labour. They sell it at a fraction of its real value, trying to stay afloat and living permanently in the 'realm of necessity', as the Sage of Soho and Hampstead pointed out. It was the idea of social democracy that saved the social contract as an instrument to legitimise the acquisition of property. By ensuring the wider access to property for the majority in the form of 'social goods', there was wider acceptance of the idea of a tiny elite being able to accumulate capital faster and in greater number than the vast majority of the population. We are experiencing an overhaul of the meliorist social contract. There is a reversal of the idea of property-as-access-to-social-goods and a return to the idea of a social contract based on the strict protection of enclosures for-the-few. Interestingly, unlike the period of political and economic turmoil which ushered in the social democratic consensus in the West (1945-90), the majority is remarkably comfortable with the idea of protecting the enclosures for-the-few as a means to protect the viability of the 'Market-state', from which they benefit less and less.