DEMOCRACY IN BRITAIN
Essays in honour of James Cornford

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WHAT KIND OF DEMOCRACY SHOULD WE WANT?
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Introduction: what kind of democracy?

'Democracy' is one of those ideas that virtually everyone says they agree with. Disagreement is more likely to come when we start to unpack the term and ask: What *kind* of democracy ought we to want?

One answer to this question, popular among contemporary political theorists, is that we should want a deliberative democracy: a democracy in which laws and policies reflect the outcome of public reasoning about what is best for the citizenry's common good. I will explore this answer first of all, sympathetically.

The ideal of deliberative democracy has been strongly criticised, however, as putting an unfeasible or undesirable emphasis on achieving or seeking consensus amongst citizens. So I will then consider the alternative ideal of 'agonistic democracy' put forward by theorists such as Chantal Mouffe. In the agonistic model, democracy is about bringing underlying conflicts of value fully into view and working through them rather than seeking to bury them in an oppressive consensus.

After this, I will go on to consider conceptions of what I term republican democracy. These include theories drawing on the idea of freedom as non-domination developed by Philip Pettit and Quentin Skinner, as well as John McCormick's recent account of 'Machiavellian democracy'. Republican conceptions of democracy perhaps offer one way to try to combine or balance the deliberative and agonistic conceptions.

Finally, I will conclude by drawing out some of the demands of democracy, and incorporate insights from these various schools of thought: participatory, deliberative and contestatory, and I will discuss robust institutional mechanisms to counter the risk of oligarchy which is always present in capitalist societies.

Deliberative democracy?

A democratic political system must obviously satisfy certain basic conditions: laws and policies must be made by direct vote of the citizenry or by assemblies elected by the citizenry on the basis of free, fair and regular elections, against a background of expansive freedoms of expression and association (Dahl 1998: 83–86). According to what has been called the aggregative conception of democracy,

such institutions provide a fair way through which the people's varied preferences for law and policy are aggregated into a collective choice. Regarding this aggregative conception, we need not ask where the preferences themselves come from, how they are formed, or on what considerations they are based. In contrast, conceptions of deliberative democracy require that these preferences not only be aggregated fairly, but that they be shaped by 'deliberation': roughly speaking, by discussion and debate in which citizens assess proposals in a way that acknowledges their shared status as free and equal and by reference to an associated conception of their common good (Cohen 2009a, Freeman 2000).[1]

To elaborate, the deliberative democrat highlights the idea of *publicity and reciprocity in justification*. As citizens we ought to give our fellow citizens reasons for the laws or policies we prefer, reasons that we can reasonably expect them to find acceptable. Our fellow citizens ought to do the same towards us. This ethic of publicity and reciprocity in justification – expressive of what Rainer Forst calls the 'right to justification' – can be seen as a fundamental expression of mutual respect between citizens (Forst 2012). When citizens accept this principle of reciprocity, they do not seek merely to impose their will through the state, treating their fellow citizens as subjects who can just be bossed around if the bare majority for a policy is there. The legitimacy of the democratic state is thought to rest on this practice of mutual respect. When we seek publicity and reciprocity in justification, moreover, we must take the free and equal status of our fellow citizens as fundamental to the reasons we offer and accept. We are also led to think in terms of what serves the shared interests, or common good, for ourselves and our fellow citizens, conceived of as free and equal.

As Samuel Freeman notes, the ideal of deliberative democracy can be seen in some respects as a development of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's model of democracy (Freeman 2000). In *The Social Contract*, Rousseau famously sets out to explore how it is possible for us as citizens to be subject to the laws of the state and yet 'remain as free as before', that is, obedient only to our own will (Rousseau 1994, Cohen 2010: 24–32). The legitimacy of the political order depends, in Rousseau's conception, on this alignment of the citizen's own, self-determined will with the state's commands.

For Rousseau, in *The Social Contract*, this requires regular citizen assemblies that vote directly on all proposals. Second, if citizens in general are going to be able to assent to a given law, the law must be based on considerations that are also appropriately general and

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1   The contrast between aggregative and deliberative conceptions of democracy originates with Cohen. See, for example, Cohen 2009a. Other important statements of deliberative conceptions of democracy include: Benhabib 1996; Cohen 2009b; Dryzek 2000; Fishkin 1995; Gutmann and Thompson 1996, 2004; Habermas 1997; and Mansbridge 1980. See Freeman 2000 for a helpful overview.

acceptable to all; that is, on considerations of the citizenry's common good. This, I think, is centrally what Rousseau means when he speaks of the sovereignty of the 'general will': laws must come *from* all citizens and be oriented *to the good* of all citizens (see Cohen ibid: 32–59).[2] Freedom and authority are then reconciled because citizens are able to will the laws they are required to obey.

Let's say a little more about the notion of the common good. For Rousseau, the idea seems to be that citizens share certain basic interests, interests that it is the job of a political association to protect. These interests include life and health, liberty, and 'property' or what we might term economic opportunity. Citizens also have an interest in dignity and civic standing: in having their worth affirmed by fellow citizens and by the institutions and rules under which they live and cooperate (Cohen ibid: 40–54).[3] To promote our common good, therefore, the laws we make must track these shared basic interests in life, liberty, economic opportunity and civic standing. In other words, the job of the citizenry, in its capacity as sovereign maker of the laws, is to define a schedule of rights that secure these shared basic interests (Cohen ibid: 82-83).

Contemporary deliberative democrats do not typically follow Rousseau in requiring that all laws be made directly by the citizenry. They accept that representative democratic institutions are consistent with respecting the citizenry's underlying status as sovereign.[4] However, their conceptions of democracy do overlap with that of Rousseau in some significant ways.

First, they typically share with Rousseau the idea that citizens bear fundamental responsibility for the nature of the laws and major policies of their state. We, as citizens, properly have the right to shape these things, through the political process and, as such, we must understand ourselves as responsible for them.

Second, deliberative democrats tend to share with Rousseau the idea that democracy is properly understood as a joint search for the citizenry's common good, understood centrally in terms of interests in things such as life, liberty, economic opportunity and civic standing. Deliberation is about the nature of this common good and how best to secure it.

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2   I draw on Cohen's discussion here, but only touch on some of the key ideas.

3   Cohen points out how the liberty interest is not that well developed in Rousseau's theory. I would argue that it is understood by Rousseau centrally in terms of the 'neo-Roman' conception of freedom which I shall discuss below.

4   Cohen 2010: 146–152, argues that Rousseau's case for direct democracy does not necessarily follow from Rousseau's underlying principles.

Third, some contemporary deliberative democrats share with Rousseau an ideal of consensus. This is easily seen as a goal or corollary of seeking to justify laws and policies on terms that are acceptable to all.[5]

One very influential political philosophy which has these Rousseauian elements is that of John Rawls (Cohen 2003, Freeman 2000). Rawls offers his theory of justice to us in our capacity as democratic citizens, for us to reflect on as we consider how to act on our responsibility for legislating the basic institutions of our society (Cohen ibid). The principles articulate a conception of our common good, one which acknowledges our status as free and equal. In much of Rawls's work there is also an assumption that citizens can achieve an 'overlapping consensus' on these principles. The underlying vision of a 'well-ordered' society is of one in which citizens view basic laws and institutions as mandated by a conception of the common good which they share and affirm, and, therefore, as an expression of their own will.

Agonistic democracy?

So should we accept the deliberative model of democracy? Critics have raised a number of objections to the ideal related to its emphasis on deliberation, the common good and, not least, on agreement and consensus.

In approaching this criticism it is important first to stress that deliberative democracy describes a political *ideal*. It describes how state power should be authorised under conditions where citizens are able, as in Rousseau's society of *The Social Contract*, to cooperate as genuine equals. But our own society is shaped by many inequalities of power that take us far from this ideal. It is naive to expect the powerful to agree to just policies because they are presented with compelling arguments of a moral kind. As Joshua Cohen puts it: 'A sucker may be born every minute, but deliberative democracy is not a recommendation that we all join the club' (Cohen 2009c: 341). For this reason, deliberative democratic politics here and now cannot consist merely of an exhortation to deliberate and reach consensus. It must consider what kinds of non-deliberative tactics, such as strikes and consumer boycotts, are legitimate in the face of powerful interests (Fung 2005, Cohen 2009c: 340–341). It must also consider how underlying power inequalities can be rebalanced. Thus, for example, some deliberative democrats have explored proposals for 'associative democracy' that seek to bring civil society groups and the state into partnership to counter the powerful, for example, to foster an encompassing trade unionism able to counter the power of business (Cohen and Rogers 1994).

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5   Some deliberative democrats explicitly accept the inevitability of disagreement and view deliberation, in their preferred sense, as a fair way of coping with it. See especially Gutmann and Thompson 1996, 2004.

Nevertheless, the emphasis on consensus in the thought of many (though not all) deliberative democrats seems vulnerable to criticism even in the context of a society with greater equality in power. Going back to Rousseau for a moment, we might wonder whether citizens are all going to agree on the nature of their common good and what it requires. Rousseau claims that if there is disagreement in this situation, then the minority in a vote is mistaken (Rousseau 1994, book 4, chapter 2; Cohen 2010: 77–79). The implication is that they have reason to accept the majority's judgment as the objectively correct one. But this breaks down if there is, as Chantal Mouffe suggests, an 'ineradicable pluralism of value' (Mouffe 2005: 102; see also Mouffe 1993). For example, imagine that the community is deliberating a law that affects two different components of the common good, such as liberty and economic opportunity. Contrasting proposals will give weight to the two values differently. Perhaps some weightings are simply wrong. But is there necessarily a single right way to balance them and, therefore, a uniquely correct policy? It seems likely that in many cases there will be no such thing. There will be a range of reasonable weightings and corresponding policies. Citizens will then likely support different proposals and we will not be able to say, necessarily, that a minority is simply mistaken when it is outvoted by a majority.

In Mouffe's view, the ideal of deliberative democracy should be rejected in favour of *agonistic democracy*.[6] Democracy is precisely about how we live politically together with serious and ongoing disagreement. Indeed, if there is consensus, we should be suspicious. It means that an underlying conflict of values is being suppressed. Somewhere in the background, there is an operation of power by one group over another. It would be better, more democratic, to end the consensus, to let the underlying conflict emerge and explicitly play itself out. There will be winners and losers. But at least people will know where they stand. As Mouffe puts it: 'far from jeopardizing democracy, agonistic confrontation is in fact its very condition of existence' (Mouffe 2005: 103).

The key to the idea of agonistic democracy is, as Mouffe puts it, to convert mere antagonism into 'agonism'. This is centrally to do with how one perceives the political opponent. The opponent – the 'them' – 'is no longer perceived as an enemy to be destroyed, but as an 'adversary', that is, somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question' (Mouffe 2005: 102). In Mouffe's view, a pluralist democracy does require a degree of consensus around core values, but 'since those ethico-political principles can only exist through many different and conflicting interpretations, such a consensus is bound to be a "conflictual consensus"' (Mouffe 2005: 103). Mouffe continues:

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6   For an alternative agonistic approach, see Honig 1993. Young 1990 also has an important affinity with the agonistic perspective.

> 'Ideally such a confrontation should be staged around the diverse conceptions of citizenship which correspond to the different interpretations of the ethico-political principles: liberal-conservative, social-democratic, neo-liberal, radical-democratic, and so on. Each of them proposes its own interpretation of the 'common good', and tries to implement a different form of hegemony … They provide the terrain in which passions can be mobilized around democratic objectives and antagonism transformed into agonism.'
> Mouffe 2005: 103–104

Interestingly, as Joshua Cohen notes, Rawls himself seems to have accepted the unfeasibility of consensus (Cohen 2003: 129–131). In one of his later discussions, Rawls accepts that democratic society will not exhibit consensus on a specific conception of justice. Public debate will be structured around 'a family of reasonable liberal conceptions of justice' (Rawls 1993: xlix). As Cohen comments: 'organized debate between competing parties on competing ideas of justice both expresses disagreements among citizens and enables them to fulfil their deliberative responsibilities by presenting reasonable alternatives. Such debate seems to be part of a well-functioning democracy and not a sign of democratic failing' (Cohen 2003: 130). This is not to say that Rawls's view converges with that of Mouffe.[7] But each of them does ultimately seem to be trying to acknowledge a place for both shared values and conflict as integral to democratic politics. They are struggling with the question of how we give both their due.

At any rate, I think this is the question that *we* should be struggling with. As democratic citizens we should search for the laws and policies that advance our common good. We should give reasoned justifications for our proposals to others, which we reasonably think they can accept, and be willing to listen receptively to their arguments in turn. But even under conditions far more ideal than our own, less distorted by social inequalities, disagreement is inevitable. We need to embrace this fact of disagreement too. We need to retain the deliberative ethic while detaching it from the hope or expectation of consensus.

Republican democracy?

With this point in mind, let's now turn to contemporary republican political theory. This has undergone a marked revival in recent years. The work of Philip Pettit and Quentin Skinner has been particularly influential (Pettit 1997, 2012; Skinner 1998). At the centre of their reconstruction of republicanism is a particular way of thinking about freedom. Skinner argues that in Roman law, the status of a free person is understood in contrast to that of a slave. What characterises the slave's position is that

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7   Mouffe's list of competing accounts of the common good stretches wider than Rawls's criteria of a 'reasonable' conception of justice.

he or she lives subject to another's power to interfere in their actions at will. The slave is the subject of another's power of arbitrary interference. In the neo-Roman view then, freedom consists in the status of not being subject to another's power of arbitrary interference. The free person does not live under the shadow of a powerful party, able to intervene at the power-holder's discretion. Pettit refers to this as *freedom as non-domination*.

In Pettit's account of republicanism, freedom as non-domination becomes the key objective. The state's role is to use its coercive power to create social conditions in which, in our relations to one another, we are secure against domination. For example, it is part of the state's responsibility to craft laws around property, taxation and social policy to help ensure that citizens do not suffer the economic deprivation that might otherwise render them dependent on, and dominated by, the better off. At the same time, however, the republican will want to structure the state so that it, too, is unable to make us the subjects of an arbitrary will. In a recent interview, Skinner argues that the recent revelations about the wide scope of the state's power of surveillance of our digital communications point precisely to a power of arbitrary interference: such surveillance is not only a threat to privacy, he argues, but to liberty itself by virtue of the apparently wide degree of discretion state officials have to monitor citizens' communications (Skinner and Marshall 2013).

How, in very broad terms, can we help ensure that the state's power of interference is appropriately constrained so that it is not a power of arbitrary interference?

Here we come back to the idea of the common good. A republic is a state 'that is forced to track the common interests of its citizens' (Pettit 1997: 290). In common with Rousseau, Pettit thinks that citizens share certain basic interests: common recognisable or avowable interests. A legitimate state is one that uses its coercive power to pursue these interests for citizens – and only to do this (Pettit 1997: 290–292).

What is crucial, however, is not just that the state does pursue the common good but that it 'is forced to track' this common good. It is when the state is *constrained* to track the citizenry's common interests that we can say its coercive power is non-arbitrary. The state cannot then do as it likes, act on its whim. It must act in accordance with its proper purpose. How is this constraint achieved?

Part of the answer is that the people must be able to use standard democratic devices such as elections to exert influence over lawmakers, thereby helping to ensure that their decisions track common interests (Pettit 1997: 292–293; Pettit 2012). However, in Pettit's view, electoral accountability is only part of the answer. There is always the danger of a 'tyranny of the majority' in which a section of the community uses

electoral power to lord it over a persecuted minority. To help prevent this, Pettit argues that democracy must be 'contestatory' (Pettit 1997: 293–297; Pettit 2012: 213–218, 225–229). It must provide institutional devices that help citizens to contest proposals and decisions, even those that might initially have strong majority support.

A good example of the sort of thing Pettit has in mind is provided by a recent case in the UK. In January 2012 the Coalition government's Welfare Reform Bill went for its second reading in the UK parliament's second chamber, the House of Lords. Although unelected, the Lords is understood to be parliament's 'revising chamber', examining bills passed in the Commons with care and making amendments. In this case, confronted with a controversial bill, and arguably responding in part to a very effective campaign by a group of welfare and disability rights activists (the Spartacus campaign)[8], the Lords voted through a number of significant amendments to the government's bill (Butler 2012, Marsh 2012). However, when the bill returned to the Commons, the government invoked the doctrine of 'financial privilege' to claim that it was entitled to ignore the Lords' amendments. There was some controversy as to whether this was an unusually broad use of the financial privilege doctrine (King 2012). But the key point is that, no matter how innovative this use of the doctrine was, the Commons *was able to ignore* the Lords. For campaigners, the Lords was perceived as a key point of contestation in the UK's democratic system: a point where they, as citizens, could bring arguments to bear, persuade lawmakers of their case, and so possibly limit a bill that they saw as insensitive to the interests of many disabled people. But it turned out that a victory at this point in the political process was hollow. The government, backed by a compliant majority in the House of Commons, forced through its bill without any pressure to respond to the arguments of the critics. The House of Lords turned out not to be a point of contestatory power within the UK polity.

A democracy is contestatory to the extent that citizens *do* have access to points in the political system that they can use to pressure policymakers into reconsidering their proposals or decisions. Bills of rights can be particularly important here in that they capture some of the citizenry's permanent common interests and so provide an important reference point for contesting government proposals and decisions in terms of the common good.

Republican democracy is, then, as for the deliberative democrat, at its core a collective search for the citizenry's common good. We enter the forum, ideally, with the goal of advancing common interests and

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8   The Spartacus report, *Responsible Reform*, was a report compiled by a network of sick and disabled people on the Coalition government's proposed changes to Disability Living Allowance. It became known as the Spartacus report because campaigners used the slogan 'I am Spartacus' on Twitter and elsewhere to publicise the report. See Hill 2013: 102–105. For the report itself, see http://wearespartacus.org.uk/spartacus-report/

persuading fellow citizens of what might constitute the common good – and of learning with an open mind from them about what this could involve. But republican democracy is also, as for the agonist democrat, a matter of ongoing conflict. We enter the forum ready to persuade fellow citizens of a policy *opposed by* other citizens, and whose opposition we do not (and should not) expect simply to go away. Pettit draws attention to this aspect of his theory when he contrasts it with what he sees as the 'communitarian' theory of Rousseau (Pettit 2012: 11-18). Whereas Rousseau allegedly expects the citizen in the minority to accept and comply with the majority's decision, the republican view imagines a 'contestatory citizenry' always willing to continue to oppose decisions with which they disagree.[9]

Pettit's conception has been challenged from within the republican framework, however, by John McCormick (McCormick 2011).[10] McCormick argues that Pettit is so concerned by the tyranny of the majority danger that he ends up advocating institutional checks and balances that render his imagined republic strongly 'aristocratic'. Against this, McCormick advances a democratic republicanism that he finds in the work of Machiavelli. Machiavelli's discussion of the Roman republic draws attention to various institutions that enabled the Roman people to check the authority of the Roman aristocracy. In McCormick's view, there is an important lesson here for us today. In the classical republican tradition, the republic is a 'mixed constitution', combining elements of democracy and aristocracy and/or oligarchy (and perhaps monarchy), and the mix reflects a particular balance of power between social classes. However, our contemporary conception of our political system as straightforwardly 'democratic', with authority resting on a sovereign people, conceived in a way that abstracts entirely from social differences, arguably obscures this question of the balance of class power. This becomes very worrying when officially democratic societies become subject to increasing political domination by corporate and economic elite interests. To counter the effective power of the economic elite, McCormick argues, there is a need to revive the Machiavellian idea, drawn from the example of the Roman republic, of political institutions that serve to articulate and press the claims specifically of those outside of the elite.

To this end, McCormick proposes that the US revive and update a key institution of the Roman republic: the Tribunate. In a fundamental reform of the US constitution, a relatively small group of citizens (McCormick suggests 51 people) is to be chosen at random each year to sit on the Tribunate. They will have power to call on outside expertise of

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9   I disagree with some of what Pettit says by way of contrast between the 'Italian-Atlantic' tradition of republicanism and Rousseau's political theory, but I think he is right on this point.

10   McCormick often speaks as a 'democrat' in contrast to a 'republican', but I think his work is readily understood as fitting into the republican tradition, albeit as a contribution that is critical of the 'aristocratic' elements in much republican thought.

their own choosing, to assist in their deliberations. This assembly will have complete control of its own agenda. It will not merely issue recommendations, but have some degree of independent political authority. Specifically, it will have the power to put at least one proposal per year to a popular referendum. It will also have the power to veto one law made by Congress, one executive order of the President, and one decision of the Supreme Court per year; and the power to initiate impeachment proceedings against officeholders in any branch of government. Finally, in order to make it an institution that represents the people in contrast to the 'nobles', eligibility for the Tribunate will be limited to those in the bottom 90per cent of the wealth distribution (and, within this 90 per cent, to those who have no significant record of holding political office). In McCormick's view, a Tribunate of this kind can help ensure that popular preferences are better represented in the political process. Its mere existence, on these terms, will also promote a certain kind of class consciousness, he argues: an awareness that society is divided into a people and an elite, whose interests are not necessarily coincident (McCormick 2011: 170–188).

McCormick's arguments resonate in light of recent work in political science which points to the growth in recent decades of corporate and elite power in countries such as the US and the UK. In relation to the US, Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson have argued that recent growth in economic inequality is best explained by a change in the representation of organised interests in the US polity, with the rise of corporate and economic elite influence as a key factor (Hacker and Pierson 2010). In a number of recent books, Colin Crouch has made a similar argument that also covers the UK (Crouch 2004, 2011, 2013). McCormick's proposal for a Tribunate is intended to address this problem and is made in a spirit of inviting further discussion. This should consider recent democratic innovations in Latin American nations and elsewhere in the global South, such as participatory budgeting in Brazil, which arguably connect with the concern to find new institutions of popular power to complement the standard institutions of liberal democracy (Santos 2005, Fung 2011).

Pettit is right, I think, to stress the need for contestatory institutions and devices to reduce the danger of a tyranny of the majority. McCormick underscores the accompanying danger of a tyranny of the minority – in Occupy's slogan, the 'one per cent' - raising the question of whether we need to complement the institutions of conventional, electoral democracy with additional contestatory institutions – new Tribunes perhaps – to contain it.

Conclusion: the demands of democracy

The kind of democracy I think we should want is one that draws on insights from the deliberative, agonist and republican models. What does this emerging conception of democracy look like? What does it demand of us?

First, this is a *participatory* account of democracy. We should take from Rousseau and the deliberative model the idea of citizen responsibility for the laws and institutions we live under. This is a call to action. Now this can be said in a way that is patronising and exhortatory: 'Come on citizens, pull your socks up, get out there and take some responsibility for your society.' But people are unlikely to respond to such calls, quite reasonably, if they do not have real power. The moral call to participate implies a right to the structures under which participation is meaningful. So we need to ask what these structures are, and how far we currently have them.

Second, democracy in the sense outlined here is *deliberative*. Participation is partly about a degree of engagement with argument and debate, a debate focused centrally on a collective search for the citizenry's common good. Very important here, of course, is the structure of the media through which citizens access and offer interpretations of their social world. Do our media structures allow for a range of interpretations or do they tend to reinforce particular ways of looking at the world (Hind 2010)? How can we make them better at facilitating deliberation?

The conception of democracy sketched here is, thirdly, *contestatory*, one in which citizens must have to hand a range of devices for contesting proposals and decisions, including those that are initially favoured by the majority. We must ask if the mechanisms of contestation in our polity are adequate. Campaigns like Spartacus have made effective use of social media, underscoring their importance to creating a more contestatory environment (Butler 2012, Marsh 2012). Ensuring an effective right to protest, including non-violent civil disobedient protest, is also crucial. One reason that the surveillance power of the US and UK states over electronic communications is alarming is that such power has the potential to be used to contain and chill dissent, fundamentally compromising the contestatory quality of political life.

Fourth, as McCormick reminds us, taking democracy seriously demands that we identify and *address the danger of oligarchy*. To a considerable extent, this links back to our general concerns with effective participation, deliberation and contestation. But it also raises the question of what other institutions and practices we need to ensure that corporate power is checked.[11]

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11 The conception of democracy sketched here has much in common with the ideal of 'empowered democracy' set out by Roberto Unger. Unger's work is very suggestive for those interested in thinking about how to deepen the participatory, deliberative, contestatory and anti-oligarchical dimensions of contemporary democracy. See Unger 1987: 444–476.

The demands of democracy, in the sense outlined here, run wide and deep. They touch on many of the usual aspects of the debate in the UK around constitutional reform. However, they also have much wider implications. For example, they have implications for thinking about the nature of the media, including the role of social media. They touch on the rights of free speech and the need to maintain an effective right of protest. They implicate the surveillance practices of the state, and the need for robust protection of online privacy as a condition of liberty itself. They require us to address the place of corporate power in our politics.

Does the 'centre-left' understand the depth and breadth of these demands? Is it able and willing to take them up and to make them its own?

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