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The State's New Clothes: NGOs and the Internationalization of States

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Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are a growth industry, not only in terms of numbers but also in terms of their significance for journalists and political scientists. The concept is enjoying popularity comparable with that of "new social movements" or "civil society" a couple of years ago. Some people have come down to earth again in the meantime, but many still place their hopes in NGOs to bring about liberating social change. NGOs are thought to guarantee the development of a more rational and democratic society. This applies especially at the international level, which is becoming increasingly important in the age of globalization, although there can be no talk of democracy even in theory.

That people have such high expectations of NGOs no doubt has something to do with the fact that they present an ideal surface for political projection and also serve as a subject which enables social scientists some sort of self-legitimation. Social scientists are often closely in touch with the NGO world and are at any rate quite closely allied to it socially, culturally and politically. But the popularity of the NGO concept reflects above all the fading of hopes for major change which were last placed in "new social movements." So many hopes for fundamental social change have been disappointed and now the "new social movements" are also seen as a failure. To this are added the difficulties, since 1989, of political orientation in the face of neoliberal globalization, the collapse of "actually existing socialism," and what seems to be the final victory of capitalism. As in the case of the (re)discovery of "civil society" at the end of the 1980s, the focus on NGOs appears in a sense to be an expression of resignation, of making do with what is feasible given the basic—apparently unchangeable—structures of society (Narr 1991).

There is some truth in Peter Wahl's remark that NGOs therefore became "the most overrated actor of the 90s" (1997, 293). This overrating results not only from a politically distorted viewpoint, but also from an associated lack of theory. A lot of research is done on NGOs using totally inadequate theoretical concepts of state and society. This serves to perpetuate the deficiencies which have already characterized the debates about "democratic civil society" since 1989. It is therefore difficult to analyze correctly the transformation processes to which states are subjected in the course of so-called globalization (Hirsch 1995, 1998; Görg and Hirsch 1998; Hirsch, Jessop, and Poulantzas 2001; Hirsch 2002). Fundamental changes are taking place in

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the relationship between "state" and "society" and in the modes of political regulation. Associated with this is a major change in the structures of liberal democracy. Non-governmental organizations are both an expression of and an actor in these processes.

In this paper I shall attempt to define NGOs more closely and to describe the conditions which have led to the growing prominence of this form of political organization. After clarifying some basic concepts in the theory of the state, I shall describe the most important processes of transformation to which states and the international system of states are subject in the process of so-called globalization. Having set the scene, I shall attempt to describe the role of NGOs in the international regulatory system which is in the course of development. This raises the question as to how far and under what conditions NGOs can be regarded as promoters of democratization, especially at the international level.

What Exactly Are "Non-Governmental Organizations"?

The growing significance of NGOs reflects the increasingly frequent intervention of formally private organizations in political processes at both national and international levels. There is nothing new in the existence of these organizations, but they are taking on new forms and functions. "Non-governmental organization" has, however, become something of a catch-all term, which carries a hotchpotch of connotations, some applied by outside observers, some by NGOs themselves and some with considerable ideological overtones. Descriptive and normative concepts are often mixed up together to such an extent that it is impossible to tell them apart. Nevertheless, "non" indicates a dialectic which should be taken seriously. In a way, NGOs indicate how formally private organizations take on the characteristics of a state or how organs of the state become "privatized." "Non" is therefore an ambiguous term rather than a clear description of the place of NGOs within the structures of state and society in general and in relation to the state and state organizations at the national and international levels in particular. In addition to this, the term "NGO" usually serves as an unspecific label which is attached generally to a wide variety of organizations. The dilemma associated with this is ironically brought out in acronyms such as GONGO (governmentally organized non-governmental organization) and QUANGO (quasi non-governmental organization). Indeed, "NGOs" are from time to time, if not set up by governments, at least financed by them and used for their purposes. In dependent countries on the periphery, for example, the founding of an NGO which is more or less independent of the state is often a precondition for obtaining international aid. Similar things apply to the capitalist centers and their burgeoning NGO business. NGOs serve often enough as "the long arm of the state." This is especially apparent in logistical and political support for so-called "humanitarian military intervention" (Gebauer 2001). Indeed it is extremely doubtful whether NGOs would exist in such numbers if they did not receive government funding or have funds channeled through them. This raises the question as to whether NGOs are really organizations of "civil society" rather than state organizations or whether they are in fact part of a governmental

and regulatory complex and should be identified as parts of the "extended state," in the words of Gramsci (Gramsci 1986; Anderson 1979; Kramer 1975).

According to Wahl (1997, 313), NGOs are voluntary associations which are: independent of the state or political parties; charitable; nonprofit oriented; and nonexclusive in terms of race, nationality, religion, and gender. This is admittedly, however, a normative and self-descriptive set of criteria, which in practice can rarely be met in full.

If one wants to examine the role of NGOs in the context of new forms of political regulation at national and international levels, it is necessary to choose a more narrowly defined and analytically accurate term, which does not simply relate to a nebulous negative characteristic ("non-governmental"). Using Wahl's definition as a starting point, I will describe as an NGO any formally private organization, which is active in politics at a national or international level and exhibits the following characteristics:

- Nonprofit orientation (charitable status)
- Engaged in advocacy and not representing own material interests
- Organizationally and financially independent of the state and commercial enterprises
- Professional competence and permanence as an organization

The last of these characteristics is particularly significant. The self-interest of the organization (e.g., in maintaining the jobs and the income of the employees) carries considerable weight, so that there is a basic tension between this and the aim of representing particular interests or serving public welfare. As a rule NGOs are not only idealistic agents of the interests of humanity, however these might be defined, but they are inevitably also "moral enterprises" which operate on the basis of economic and financial constraints.

This definition makes it possible to distinguish (though perhaps not very clearly) between NGOs and other organizations—in particular other "nonstate" organizations which are active in the political arena: private commercial enterprises (although there are hybrid organizations, such as consultancy firms with charitable status); associations and groups which only represent the particular interests of their members (i.e., large bureaucratic associations such as trade unions and grass-roots initiatives); and many other forms of temporary or loosely organized political initiatives and campaigns. It is more difficult to distinguish between NGOs and social movements, which are usually defined as a complex network of a variety of actors as opposed to a single organization. NGOs can be—but don't have to be—part of a social movement. Sometimes they form a more or less stable element of a movement network or may be seen as an organizational expression of movement infrastructure (Roth 1994). On the other hand, they are often regarded instead as a product of the disintegration of social movements (Brand 2000). And they may indeed be seen as being in opposition to a movement, if the movement is independent of or even in conflict with the established institutional system, including associated NGO structures (Görg and Hirsch 1998, 606 ff.).

The Conditions for the Development of NGOs

NGOs have already been in existence for a long time: One need only think of the Red Cross, which was founded in 1864. The fact that they have become so numerous and gained such significance in the public eye in recent years requires some explanation. This may well be a direct result of a specific failure of state institutions, an associated decline in the established forms of interest mediation and political representation on the one hand; and a growing differentiation and/or institutionalization of social movements, on the other hand (Messner and Nuscheler 1996; Brand and Görg 1998; Brand 2000). This should be seen in the context of fundamental economic, social, and political change—namely, the establishment of new forms of accumulation and regulation in the course of so-called globalization (the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism) and the associated transformation of nation-states into "national competitive states" (Hirsch 1995, 1998; Brand 2000; Hirsch, Jessop, and Poulantzas 2001). The following developments are especially significant:

- *The decline of the "new" social movements* which has taken place since the 1980s. There is a need to differentiate here, though. The decline is most obvious in the national liberation movements of the capitalist periphery, which have been largely robbed of their political and economic basis by the end of the East-West conflict and the neoliberal globalization offensive. In general, there is a process of differentiation and institutionalization in the field of social movements, whereby loosely organized movements have been transformed into more solid and, to some extent, professionalized organizations (Roth 1994). This has led to former movement activists seeking and developing new areas in which to work and new conditions for work outside the state and commercial enterprises. Seen in this way, it is not so much a question of decline in social movements, but rather, one of structural change. This is an expression of a widespread crisis in extraparliamentary politics, in which cooperative forms of political activity are superseding noninstitutionalized protest and resistance.
- *Globalization*—that is, the establishment of new forms of internationalized production based on the liberalization of markets for goods, services, finance, and capital and the development of international communication, transport, and data management. This means that individual states lose some of their interventionist capacities and, as a consequence of that, liberal-democratic institutions are being undermined and a crisis is developing in the system of representation. At the same time—at least so far as public awareness is concerned—there is an increase in the number of problems affecting more than one country, which cannot be dealt with adequately—or even at all—by individual states. One of the underlying causes of this is the fact that—due to the East-West conflict coming to an end—the world order has become much more complicated in terms of structure and fault lines of conflict.
- The emergence of *new issues and difficulties in managing global processes*. Scientific theory and knowledge are coming to play an increasingly important part in politics so that knowledge and expertise, rather than protest and resistance, are becoming increasingly important preconditions for the exercise of political

influence. This is especially obvious in the case of environmental issues (Görg and Brand 2001). Scientific analysis and problem-solving strategies are becoming an increasingly important factor in political conflicts. In many fields (e.g., development policy and emergency aid), it is evident that bureaucratic state organizations are inadequate to the task. A complex variety of political goals can only be realized by involving numerous state and nonstate actors, especially where social processes of modernization and adjustment are concerned. In addition to this, the contradictory processes of globalization and regionalization ("glocalization") make the development of channels of communication between the various levels of politics—from the local to the international—increasingly urgent.

The Transformation of States and State Systems

"State" and "Civil Society": Some Brief Definitions

In order to examine the role and function of NGOs, it is essential to clarify the underlying assumptions in the theory of state and society. What one understands by "state" and "civil society" and how one rates current economic, social, and political changes in this context are of key importance. I will proceed here on the basis of an analysis of capitalism according to regulation theory and the materialist theory of the state. The contributions of the West German state debate in the 1970s and those of Poulantzas and Gramsci are especially important in this respect. But we must restrict ourselves here to sketching out these approaches in a few basic premises (cf. Holloway and Piciotto 1978; Poulantzas 1978; Jessop 1982; Hirsch 1995).

According to the materialist theory of the state, the existence of the state as a separate entity and the separation of "politics" from "economics" and of "state" from "society"—although not functionally guaranteed and always a subject of conflict—are basic structural characteristics of bourgeois-capitalist societies. "State" and "society" are neither independent nor simply in opposition to each other, but rather, they are an expression of a social system which is full of contradictions (Gramsci 1986; Poulantzas 1978; Hirsch 1995). The state is the product of the centralization of physical force and its formal separation from the social classes. This is one of the foundations of capitalist society. As part of the capitalist system of production and a precondition for its reproduction, the state is a class state even though it is not simply the tool of one particular class. It cannot therefore be regarded as a person, as a subject, or as a purely rational organization pursuing its own goals. Instead it is to be seen as the crystallization of antagonistic relationships within society. At the same time it exhibits an institutional stability and dynamism of its own and possesses "relative autonomy." This means that the state is not to be regarded as a closed organization, but rather as a multitude of corporate entities which relate to different classes and groups within society in various—sometimes conflicting—ways and often act in opposition to each other.

So the state is a centralized ruling body with the means of exerting physical force at its disposal. "Civil society," on the other hand, denotes all the (relatively) free

and independent social and political organizations, such as associations representing particular interests, political groups, the media, churches, academic institutions, research institutes, groups of intellectuals, and "think tanks." Civil society provides a forum for the expression and confrontation of views and interests in public debate. It is nevertheless also largely determined by the structures of capitalist society: private ownership of the means of production, paid workers, the market, the nuclear family, and so on. "Civil society" is therefore by no means free from the exercise of power, but is indeed subject to many different forms of economic and political coercion. Public discussion and debate serve to legitimize state power and enable the state to assert its dominance ("consensus"). At the same time the state may intervene in public discussion and debate ("force"). "Civil society" can be seen as a political and ideological battlefield, in which alternative conceptions of social order and development can be emerge too. "State" and "society" therefore form a complex of power relationships which is full of contradictions, a "system of domination" based on both force and consensus: a "hegemonic bloc" in Gramsci´s terms. Taking into account its contradictory nature, one can and must see civil society as part of the "extended state."

It is no coincidence that there are a great many (nation) states. This is a fundamental aspect of the capitalist system of production. The division of classes (and groups within classes) along state borders and their joining together across borders is an important precondition for the regulation of the capitalist system. This serves above all to make it possible to play classes and segments of classes off against each other and to establish social contracts within nation-states. The nature of the state as a contradictory complex of heterogeneous institutions which is relatively autonomous in relation to socioeconomic structures is reproduced at the international level in the existence of a system of states (Hirsch 1995, 31 ff.).

Transformation Processes: Denationalization, Privatization, and Internationalization of Policy Regimes

The neoliberal restructuring of capitalism—referred to as "globalization"—has subjected the political structure which forms the basis of bourgeois-capitalist society to major modification. It is exactly in this connection that NGOs have gained their current significance. The following developments are important (see especially Jessop 1997a and also Sassen 1996, 1999; Görg and Hirsch 1998; Zürn 1998).

Firstly, a fundamental change takes place in the relationship between "state" and "society," which can be described as *"denationalzation."* One of the reasons for this is the internationalization of production. In this process capital seeks to free itself from the systems of accumulation and regulation which—in the "national" economies typical of Fordism—focus on the development of internal markets. A central component of the strategy of globalization and the accompanying deregulation is a restriction of the scope which individual states possess for intervention, particularly in the field of economic and social policies. This reduces the capacity of the states to regulate social developments in a coherent and coordinated manner. In this process national societies are becoming more heterogeneous. And there is an increase in

social disparities and divisions, on the one hand, and in the establishment of economic relations across state borders, on the other hand. At the same time international disparities are creating ever larger streams of migrants and refugees. This in turn contributes to the reorganization of class structures, the transformation of forms of work, and changes in power relationships within society (Sassen 1996, 59 ff.; Samers 1999; Pellerin 1999). As a result, societies are generally becoming more "multinational" and "multicultural." The increase in social disparities and divisions is leading to an apparent paradox: The process of "denationalzation" goes hand in hand with growing nationalist and racist tendencies. The phenomenon of the nation-state, as such, is not about to disappear. The nation-state continues to be of central importance as the key institution—on the basis of its monopoly of physical force—for the purpose of regulating class relationships and for the creation of a degree of social cohesion (Jessop 1997b).

Secondly, there is a tendency toward the "*de-statification*" or "*privatization*" *of politics*. A key to this is the development of regulatory networks, in which the state—as moderator and coordinator of a conglomerate of more or less independent social actors and groups—is little more than *primus inter pares*. In this way political decision-making processes are shifted into corporate structures (in the broadest sense) and into private negotiations in which the state is involved. This "negotiating" state is not a totally new phenomenon, because governments have always been forced to compromise with powerful social groups. But the state is taking on this role increasingly often in the course of neoliberal restructuring and privatization. While the deregulation of markets is reducing the scope for administrative intervention, powerful "private" actors—especially transnational companies which are increasingly able to escape the control of individual states—are playing an increasingly important role. In addition to this there is a need to mobilize diverse resources of knowledge and power in the face of a growing "competition of localities." This can be achieved only to a limited extent by legislative and bureaucratic measures. "Cooperative" strategies are required. This is the background, not always fully thought out, to the current boom in "governance" and "network" theories (Scharpf 1996; Messner-Nuscheler 1996; Messner 1995, 1997; Kommission 1995; Rosenau 1999; for a comprehensive critical assessment, see Brand et al. 2000).

Often associated with these concepts is the somewhat misleading idea that states, international organizations, commercial enterprises and non-governmental organizations all operate with and against each other on more or less equal terms. This not only fails to take into account major disparities in terms of economic and political resources, but there is also disregard for the fact that the physical power of states—along with the legitimacy which is peculiar to them—still forms the main source of their "bargaining power." Very often it is overlooked that the changes in the relationship between state and society which are associated with the development of structures of "governance" signifies a fundamental transformation of relationships between the classes at both national and international levels. This is characterized, on the one hand, by the emergence of transnational capital and, on the other hand, by increasing heterogeneity and divisions within society.

From a critical perspective, this development looks like a "re-feudalization" of politics. This expresses itself in a decline in the significance of institutional decision

making processes in favor of informal negotiating fora, which are almost completely beyond the control of traditional democratic institutions and processes (Maus 199; see also Sassen 1996, 40 ff.). The current "realistic" change to "competitive state" or "deliberative" concepts of democracy is also to be seen against this background. These concepts reduce democracy to processes of negotiation within civil society between extremely unequal actors or simply to participatory mobilization for the international competition of localities (Görg and Hirsch 1998, 326 ff.).

Thirdly, there is *a growing internationalization of political regulatory systems* and the creation of an increasingly dense network of organizations, institutions, and informal "regimes" on this level. The immediate reason for this is that the global process of accumulation and its consequences (the breakup of states, the ongoing crisis of the financial markets, global threats to the environment, etc.) are creating problems which extend beyond the borders and the capacities of individual states. At the same time governments are trying to compensate for the loss of scope for intervention by creating or strengthening international regulatory systems. This ties them down in new forms of cooperation and especially limits the options of weaker states (Hein 1998). Globalization is also accompanied by increasing regionalization and attempts to create supranational economic blocks. It therefore creates a greater need for coordination between regional, national, and macroregional levels. It is very difficult to meet these needs in the context of the traditional state-administrative political institutions. In the new international power structure, the stronger states of the capitalist triad—through a form of conflictual cooperation—more or less rule the world. This finds expression in an increase in the significance of international organizations (especially the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the World Trade Organization as a central institutional expression of neoliberal constitutionalism) which represent the common interests of these centers. But there are also less institutionalized forms of cooperation and networks in which multinational companies and non-governmental organizations play different roles. A "negotiating state" is therefore also developing at the international level. On the other hand, since the end of the old world order of the postwar era and with the unilateral military dominance of the United States, the United Nations, in which great hopes were placed for the creation of a peaceful "New World Order," is becoming increasingly irrelevant—at least in so far as the United Nations cannot be used to serve the interests of the centers of capitalism. Incidentally, under these circumstances it is wrong to talk of a simple "disembedding" of economic processes on the level of the world market. Instead it is the case, especially at the international level, that new forms of political and institutional "embedding" are being created in accordance with neoliberal constitutionalism, of course (Gill 1995; Scherrer 2000).

The growing importance of international and supranational organizations and of a wide variety of more or less institutionalized cooperative relationships and "regimes" (Mayer, Rittberger, and Zürn 1993) does not mean the development of an international political sphere which is truly independent of individual states. International organizations and regimes depend to a large extent on the interest of the stronger states in cooperation and the stronger states continue to determine and to

limit the effectiveness of the international organizations and regimes. The growing importance of informal networks, as opposed to formal international organizations with clear rules regarding membership and decision making processes, reflects the imbalance of power between strong states and multinational companies, on the one hand, and weak states, on the other hand. All but the most powerful states are forced by the dominance of the strong states to cooperate. Sometimes only the United States is able to resist the pressure to cooperate. The European Union is a special case insofar as it has taken on some of the characteristics of a supranational state, but even here decision making power still rests with the individual states, which have not given up their monopoly of physical force. The internationalization of policy making "regimes" has certainly not superseded the system of individual states. Nevertheless, it is bringing about lasting change in institutional structures and in the context in which states can act, because structures and regulations are created which cannot be disregarded without far-reaching negative consequences and at great cost—at least so far as weaker states are concerned. With the growing importance of international organizations and regimes, state bureaucracies which relate to a large number of national societies are gaining greater relevance.

The "Internationalization" of the State

Taken together, these developments constitute an internationalization of the state apparatus. This finds expression in the growing importance of international organizations, regimes, and other forms of international cooperation and in the development of increasingly complex links between regional, national, and supranational levels. A main characteristic of this process is the internationalization of the state apparatus itself. In the course of neoliberal globalization and the deregulation and privatization which go with it, individual states are becoming increasingly dependent on international financial markets, whose primary actors—above all, the "strong" states and multinational companies—determine the policies of individual states to an increasing extent by means of effective economic mechanisms. They are able to do this in a more or less nonpolitical manner independent of any mechanisms of democratic control or decision making. This finds institutional expression in significant shifts in the configuration of the governmental apparatus of individual states. A significant part of this process is the growing weight of ministries of finance and of central banks which are largely independent of democratic political decision making processes. Both are closely linked to the interests of international capital and act as mediators between international capital flows and the policies of individual states, or even simply as transmission belts. This is above all the institutional expression of an administrative internalization of global imperatives in the political processes of individual states.

The nation-state, as an integrated entity with centralized power and decision making competencies within a society with geographical borders, is not about to disappear. But it seems to be subject to strong forces of reconfiguration, disintegration, and fragmentation. The transformation of the nation-state into a "national competitive state" (Hirsch 1995, 1998) is connected with increased geographic and

social diversification of political functions and levels of government. The nation-state, with its monopoly of physical force, is still the main guarantor of the existing social order and social cohesion. It is still the main center for the regulation of the relationship between classes. And it still has the task of ensuring the provision of the basic conditions for production: infrastructure, research, technology, and so forth (Sassen 1996; Boyer and Hollingsworth 1997; Hirst and Thompson 1997). The regulation of conflictual relationships between classes and groups within society is still basically a matter for the individual state and guarantees that the world market remains a system of national "production sites" with very unequal conditions for production and processing, which is still a fundamental basis for global exploitation and accumulation.

The differentiation of levels of government and of the functions of the state—in comparison with the historical phenomenon of the Fordist nation-state—nevertheless has significant consequences where political processes are concerned. The transformation into a "negotiating state" and the increasing importance of international organizations and networks is seriously undermining the democratic systems which are still confined within the bounds of individual states (Hirsch 1995, 1998; Hirsch, Jessop, and Poulantzas 2001). This is leading to a crisis in the structures of representation and a growing lack of legitimacy of the political system. These developments are a significant reason for the growing importance of NGOs. With growing inequality across the globe and the resulting waves of migrants and refugees, the democratic systems of the strong metropolitan states are tending to degenerate into an association of relatively privileged citizens, whose primary aims are to maintain a fortress of the rich by shutting others out and to guarantee national security and economic prosperity by means of military intervention in the crisis regions of the periphery. Access to physical resources plays a central role in all of this. The "national competitive state" therefore also arms itself to become a "national security state" (Hirsch 1998). It is important to stress that individual states are not simply passive objects, but rather, strategic actors in this process. They are indeed the key actors in the international political system, because they have final control over military forces.

The internationalization of the state is both cause and effect of a fundamental restructuring of class relationships on a global scale. Within individual states the restructuring of the administrative apparatus of government entails a weakening of the institutions such as social service ministries, political parties, and corporate structures of social partnership—which play an integrating role and represent the interests of the broad mass of the population—in favor of financial institutions (Baker 1999; Lukaukas 1999). At the global level the system of individual states is becoming more and more a basis for dividing the exploited and subjected classes within and along national boundaries. Globalization has facilitated the international flexibility and mobility of capital. This makes the processes of fragmentation and division more obvious, while workers and workers' organizations still do not see beyond national borders. The relationship between "state" and "capital" is nevertheless also undergoing transformation as a result of globalization and internationalization. But it would be a mistake to assume that capital is becoming "stateless" or to a large extent independent of the state in the course of these developments. In the course

of neoliberal globalization and deregulation, international capital has indeed largely freed itself from state regulation of the accumulation of capital and state regulatory institutions have been seriously weakened. And transnational companies are in a better position than ever to behave flexibly within the global multistate system by promoting and exploiting the comparative advantages of individual states as "production sites." But they remain dependent on the power of the state and its organizational capacities, both for the protection of their interests and for their political legitimacy.

States still have an important role to play in the formulation of a "politics of capital" which transcends competing interests. They also provide a base for particular groups of capital within the world market. The fragmentation which this implies becomes less significant, however, when it is seen how international capital is increasingly referring to international organizations such as the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO. The policies of these institutions are still determined to a very large extent by the interests which are bundled within individual states, however. Transnational companies are less strongly tied to national markets, to the associated conditions for production, and to social contracts. This enables them to act more independently in relation to states and to play states off against one another. Thus, the internationalization of production and circulation calls into question the validity of the terms "national capital" and "national bourgeoisie" (see Poulantzas 1974, 77 ff.; Jessop 1997b). The relationship between states and (international) capital has taken on a new shape, without there having been any reduction in the degree to which capital and the machinery of state are intertwined. Transnational companies still depend on states to guarantee the provision of conditions for production which cannot be provided by the market, to maintain social order and, if necessary, to secure their interests by force. It is no accident that almost all transnational companies are based in or operate from the powerful states within the global system (Sassen 1996, 1 ff.). This enables them to benefit from the military strength of these states and from social structures established by them (e.g. a suitable environment, especially within the military-industrial complex, for advanced technological development). They may even go almost as far as using the state as an instrument to serve their own interests. The relationship between transnational companies and states nevertheless remains contradictory, for it is characterized by both cooperation and conflict.

The conflicts inherent within capitalism are therefore reproduced not only within individual state apparatuses but also—because of the complex interconnections between international capital, states and international organizations—at the level of international relations between states. This is made clear, for example, by the attempts of companies from the capitalist triad to become established in the United States as the dominant superpower. When examined more critically, the "OECD world" (Zürn 1998) is also, as political scientists tend to forget, very much the world of the multinationals. One example of the conflictual relationship between states and multinational companies stands out: the failure (until now) to agree on the Multinational Agreement on Investment (MAI). MAI should be seen above all as an attempt by the industrialized (metropolitan) countries to force through the interests of transnational capital against the states of the periphery. The failure to reach

agreement on MAI was due not only to the worldwide mobilization of public opinion and the resistance of peripheral countries (which is slowly becoming more organized), but also to the divergent interests of the metropolitan states and—one may assume—the companies which they represent. There were similar reasons for the failure of the World Trade Organization conference in Seattle in the autumn of 1999. Besides the conflict of interests between the metropolitan and peripheral states, the conflict between the United States government and the interests of the companies represented by the European Union (e.g., in the field of genetic engineering) played a most significant role (McMichael 2000; Chakravarthi 2000). The transnational companies do not form a united block, but are in competition with each other. This competition also takes place within the international system of states and within international organizations. On the whole, the contradictory relationship between capital and state leads to a decreasing coherence of the capitalist class system.

NGOs and "International Civil Society"

NGOs are widely regarded as "organizations within a weakly developed but globally oriented civil society with a vision of global citizenship" (Messner and Nuscheler 1996; see also Habermas 1998; Sakamuto 1997). The lack of state theory in research on NGOs is demonstrated especially clearly by the way in which the terms "international" and "global civil society" are used. The processes of transformation of the state and of the global system of states which have been described undoubtedly have a significant impact on the relationship between "state" and "society" on both the national and the international level. The internationalization of production, the development of economic relationships within the world market, the growing number of global problems and dangers, the flows of migrants and refugees, growing dependency at the international level and improvements in transport and communication are all serving to strengthen a great variety of links and connections across the globe. But this development is also characterized by the fact that "global society" is extremely heterogeneous and fragmented and is full of unequal relationships in terms of power and dependency (Bonder, Röttger, and Ziebura 1993; Görg and Hirsch 1998, 593; Slater 1998).

If "society" is taken to mean more than just a collection of people, organizations, and institutions—that is, a social structure with a basic value system, an integrated economic development, and a relatively coherent system of political institutions—it is hardly possible to apply this term at the international level. Following Gramsci's terminology of "civil society" in a stricter sense, it can only be used to refer to a coherent political and institutional system—namely, the "extended state," with all its inherent contradictions.

At the international level there is no "state" with a "monopoly of legitimate physical force" (M. Weber) and such a "state" would indeed be incompatible with the capitalist relations of production. This fact is of crucial importance. The continuing fragmentation of economic, social, and political institutions, levels, and structures is an important feature of what I call globalization. Economic globalization is not accompanied by the development of a comprehensive and coherent system of

political institutions, but continues to be determined by the existence of individual states. This means that one should not, as is often done, use the term "global civil society" as if it were analogous to "civil society" within the nation-state.

According not only to Gramsci but also to classical liberal theory of "civil society" (Keane 1988), the function of "civil society" within the limits of an individual state is—on the basis of freedom of expression and freedom to organize—to create the conditions for institutionalized opinion-forming and decision making processes and, in this way, to build consensus and hegemony. This, however, requires the existence of a centralized system of state institutions, in which decisions are made and implemented according to formal rules and in which hegemonic projects can be realized and maintained. The transformation of the state in the course of economic globalization has brought about major changes in this system of building consensus and creating hegemony and political legitimacy. This is especially apparent at the international level, so that various authors refer with good reason to "neofeudalism" or simply "structured anarchy" rather than "global civil society" (Görg and Hirsch 1998, 600 ff.).

The term "global civil society" is sometimes associated with the evolution of particular actors: an international managerial class which includes managers of commercial companies, scientists, the staff of international organizations, and parts of state bureaucracies and a wide variety of "private" organizations including NGOs (Cox 1993; Sklair 1997; Demirovic 1997, 246 ff.; Görg and Hirsch 1998, 591). It is assumed that we are witnessing the evolution of a relatively coherent social group, which is developing "a particular form of self-direction," so that it can implement its own "particular project of establishing global consensus and a global state project," thus contributing significantly to the transformation of the system of nation-states (Demirovic 1997, 247). This international managerial class is indeed building its own institutions—in the form of the Davos "World Economic Forum," for example. This makes it possible to begin to develop socio-political visions and strategies of domination at the global level (Demirovic 1997; Slater 1997; Van der Pijl 1997). In any case, these structures have played a significant role in establishing the dominance of the neoliberal socio-economic model (Plehwe and Walken 1999). But at the same time, it is necessary to note that the international managerial elite remains dependent on the existing and still extremely viable, system of state regulation, and its internal structure will remain subject to the economic and social fragmentation of global capitalism. In summary: the use of the terms "state" and "civil society" in relation to global politics is extremely problematic.

NGOs in the Context of International Regulation

The role and function of NGOs cannot be understood simply on the basis of the structure and aims of individual organizations. They can only be understood in the context of post-Fordist transformation processes. There is a crucial lack of regulation and legitimacy within the international system of nation-states at both national and international levels. This is the main reason for the growing importance of NGOs.

NGOs harness (scientific) knowledge and understanding, which state bureaucracies

do not possess. They play a significant part in the identification and definition of social problems and threats. They thus find themselves involved in setting the agenda for political negotiations and decision making. They represent interests which do not have a voice or are not listened to in established political institutions (Brand and Görg 1998, 102; Princen and Finger 1994, 34). And they monitor international negotiations (Brand and Görg 1998, 101). In this way NGOs represent a reaction to the crisis of representation which accompanies the post-Fordist transformation of the system of nation-states. They play a major part as channels of communication between the regional, national, and international levels of political institutions in relation to a wide variety of problems and interests. As a result, they come into contrast with a great many actors: international organizations, states, grassroots groups and other NGOs (Brand and Görg 1998, 101; Princen and Finger 1994, 38 ff.; Brunnengräber and Walk 1997, 71 ff.). And finally, NGOs are engaged in practical projects—especially in the fields of development and relief work—which state administrations are unable to or do not wish to undertake, or which they delegate for reasons of political legitimacy.

NGOs have few formal opportunities to participate in political decision making. Most of them are dependent on donations and grants, and therefore have an insufficient and insecure financial basis. It is therefore the knowledge which NGOs possess and their ability to influence public opinion which are the main ways in which they can exert power and influence. They possess knowledge as a result of scientific and technical expertise and also thanks to their familiarity with local and sectoral structures and problems. On this basis NGOs may either cooperate or engage in conflict with governments and international organizations: in defining problems, in decision making, and in policy implementation. The crucial resource of power which NGOs possess is their ability to mobilize public opinion. Indeed, it is only as a result of the pressure of public opinion that NGOs can enter the political arena. Obtaining and fighting for media attention is therefore a key objective of NGO policy (Wapner 1995; Brunnengräber and Walk 1997; Wahl 1997; Brand 2000). But they lack their own material resources and are therefore dependent on the cooperation of a powerful media industry and have to adjust to its ways of working. This can be seen in the field of development aid, for example, where it is difficult to gain public attention for long-term, "sustainable," and therefore unspectacular projects, while catastrophes which are dramatized by the media can gain a lot of attention and attract much more in the way of donations. This inevitably influences the priorities of NGOs, as is evident in the expansion of the international emergency aid business during the past couple of years. The example of Greenpeace shows that media-oriented "transnational NGOs" can carry considerable weight in opposition to governments and commercial companies, but they do so at the cost of having to set their priorities tactically according to media-oriented criteria.

The wide variety of NGOs makes them a major factor in the development of consensus and compromises, especially at the level of international regulation. As a result, a broader range of interests is taken into account and decisions are made more rationally. NGOs can be recognized as an important new actor in the political arena (Princen and Finger 1994, 41 ff.; Wapner 1995; Brand 2000). They are very different from traditional social organizations such as states, parties, and associations,

and contribute significantly to the transformation of the relationship between "state" and "society." But the question arises as to whether NGOs are truly independent of state institutions or whether they are to be seen as part of the "extended state."

The relationship between NGOs and the state is largely determined by the fact that, as professional organizations with a degree of permanency, they usually require financial resources beyond that which can be obtained through donations alone, especially where large-scale projects are concerned. As a result they become dependent on states, state federations (such as the European Union), international organizations, or even associations and private companies. This dependency makes it possible for donors to use NGOs to serve their own interests. Indeed, some NGOs are even founded and controlled by donor states or organizations. NGOs also play a significant role in conflicts within and between national administrations and international organizations. They may, for example, be used by metropolitan states to circumvent the activities of governments of peripheral countries and sometimes they are mobilized by national governments in opposition to international organizations or vice versa (Bruckmeier 1994; Walk 1997; Wahl 1997; Görg and Hirsch 1998, 602 ff.). NGOs tend to be "state-oriented," not only because they are financially dependent but also because they often depend on the legislative and executive power of the state and/or the goodwill of private companies for the realization of their objectives (Brand 2000). Their effectiveness depends to a large extent on the willingness of states to cooperate, and this always entails the risk of being used by states for their own purposes. This is demonstrated by the fact that the creation of NGOs is very much "demand led," i.e. NGOs most often come into being where states have an interest in cooperation to meet their needs for information, legitimacy or regulation (Görg and Hirsch 1998, 602 ff.). So it may not be altogether wrong to regard NGOs, in a certain sense, as advance organization of the state. But this is only one side of the coin: They can only perform their functions—organizing, representing particular interests, sharing knowledge and gaining legitimacy for groups and issues—adequately so long as they do not simply become organs of state, but maintain a certain level of financial, political, and organizational independence.

It follows from this that it is hardly possible to assess the role and function of NGOs according to the traditional model of state and society at the national level and within the bounds of the associated concepts of "civil society." On the other hand, Gramsci's concept of the "extended state" is also of limited usefulness, because there is no integrated state at the international level. NGOs are part of a complex system of "global governance" and their effectiveness results largely from the "internationalization" of the state. The evolving, international regulatory system is extremely heterogeneous and full of contradictions and conflict. This is the main "strategic gateway" for NGO politics (Brand 2000; see also Wapner 1995; Brand/ and Görg 1998).

The staff of international NGOs can to some extent be seen as part of a globally active managerial class. At the very least they share areas of work, forms of behavior, cultural orientation, and jargon. This is a precondition for NGOs to gain access to both formal and informal negotiations and decision making. The structure of the NGO system is also a reflection of hierarchical international economic and

political power structures. In particular, "northern" multinational NGOs are not only better equipped with technical and financial resources; they also possess "cultural capital," which can enable them to be more effective.

Up until now at least, specialization on a single issue has been one of the main requirements for success in the work of international NGOs, but this may cause broader problems and concerns to be ignored. It is possible that NGOs contribute to the division and diminution of the forces of protest and resistance in this way (Demirovic 1997; 256, Wahl 1997). The fact remains that at the international level, NGOs are bound up in political processes of representation and negotiation which lack formal democratic structures such as criteria for representation and rules of decision making. They may be able to obtain a hearing for concerns and views which have been suppressed or neglected. But this happens in a context of powerful negotiating fora which are not at all transparent, where—given the lack of understandable and transparent decision-making processes—a rather anarchic system of "sub-politics" has grown up (Görg and Hirsch 1998, 605). NGOs therefore play a significant part in the "re-feudalization" of international politics. In conclusion, NGOs can at best be regarded as a form of "catalyst for democratization of the international system" (Wahl 1997, 311). NGOs "have no formal democratic legitimacy," but, "in the face of the tendency of 'global society' towards fragmentation" they have to some extent become "a *substitute* for democracy" (Görg and Hirsch 1998, 605).

The stronger presence of NGOs both at the national level and on the international stage can therefore be interpreted as a result of the post-Fordist, neoliberal restructuring of states and the international system of states. This has led to a far-reaching privatization of political processes of decision making and implementation, thus to a fundamental change in the relationship between state and society. The growth in the number of NGOs and in the amount of attention given to them, both by political scientists and in society as a whole, can rightly be regarded as part of the neoliberal paradigm which has now become dominant (Brand and Görg 1998; Wahl 1997). Given the existing political and economic structures, growing economic and social fragmentation, and, last but not least, the position of overriding importance which nation-states still possess, the significance of NGOs should not be overrated, especially when their democratizing influence is concerned. Nevertheless, NGOs are an increasingly important part of the international regulatory system which is evolving in new directions, so they are more than just a "marginal phenomenon of globalization" (Wahl 1997, 295).

Democracy Beyond the Nation-State?

Liberal democracy is closely associated—though in a most contradictory way—with the capitalist nation-state, both from the point of view of its historical roots and in terms of its basic functional requirements. The evolution of the nation-state created societies with fairly clear geographical boundaries, a relatively closed economic system, a politically defined population subject to central control, and a government with executive powers which is therefore, in principle, responsible and subject to

control. It is therefore generally agreed that the internationalization of the state in the current process of globalization is undermining some of its important foundations (Hirsch 1995, 1998; Görg and Hirsch 1998; Zürn 1998; Narr and Schubert 1994; Archibugi and Held 1995; Held 1991, 1995; Sassen 1996). This in turn has an impact on the organization of social and class relationships, thus on the conditions for social reproduction in general. One of the most significant consequences of the process of globalization and internationalization is the growing dependence of individual state governments on the dynamics of capital accumulation and the strategies of international capital. Given the overriding importance of the competition between states as "production sites," democratic institutions continue in existence, but are in danger of becoming increasingly ineffective and running empty. This is leading—together with the restructuring of particular institutions—to a new form of decoupling of state and society and a tendency of government administrations to become autonomous and authoritarian. Particularly significant in this respect is the establishment almost everywhere of the independence of financial administrations and central banks from liberal-democratic political decision making processes. This largely removes the basis for social partnership between the classes and social contracts facilitated by the state. In contrast to the Fordist form of comprehensive institutionalization and pacification of the capitalist class conflict, the neoliberal organization of relations between the classes rests largely on fragmentation and division and the promotion of competition between individuals and groups, which is often characterized by racism, nationalism, and welfare chauvinism. At the same time there is a growing tendency for political debate and decision making processes to take place in international organizations and negotiating fora which are largely beyond democratic control. As the democratic institutions and processes within individual states lose their influence over political decisions, liberal democracy becomes reduced to a system of domination without the freedom and self-determination—however limited—which citizens might otherwise enjoy. When democratic processes become ineffective in this way, political systems lose their capacity for social integration and the resolution of conflicting interests. They become less able to respond to new problems, concerns, and force relations within society—that is, they lose their ability to learn, which has been the key function of democratic structures in the regulation of capitalist societies. At the global level, democratic institutions and processes are becoming less and less a force for integration and more and more a source of sociopolitical fragmentation. There is a growing divergence between the state as a ruling administration and democracy in the sense of social self-determination.

These developments are especially apparent in the relationship between the capitalist centers and dependent countries. On the periphery, where—in the course of restructuring and with the end of the East-West conflict—nominally democratic regimes have been put into power, it is actually a case of the "democratization of powerlessness" (Hippler 1994). The formal democratic structures, insofar as they have been properly established, remain largely ineffectual in relation to governments which are in practice authoritarian and are dependent on international capital, international organizations, and powerful states. In the metropolitan centers on the other hand, democracy is taking on the characteristics of a politically,

economically, and socially exclusive organization of privileged people, including parts of the working class, which serves the political purpose of establishing itself as an exclusive minority, shutting all others out at both the global and the national levels. One indication of this is the fact that in many states, due to the continuous influx of migrants and refugees, only part of the resident population has the right to vote. Combined with the abstention of those who have virtually nothing to gain from the democratic political process, this means that the Western democracies which rule the world are developing into a club for the "better off" and a political version of a strongly defended and barricaded social fortress. Democracy is becoming an organized form of social apartheid. This regressive development robs democracy of its universal, open and progressive character, which has at least been potentially present in the past.

This is in accordance with the OECD countries' plan to establish global dominance, which is steadily becoming more obvious. Its main foundations are welfare chauvinism, racism, and the supposed superiority of Western civilization in the "war of cultures" (Huntington). And it finds legitimacy in the continuous battle against "(foreign) organized crime," "terrorism," and "anti-Western" regimes. This battle is fought by means of "humanitarian" military and police intervention in crisis situations and the highly selective organization of disaster relief for parts of the world which are the victims of globalization or are suffering from interimperialist conflicts. "Human rights," in whose name the battle is being fought, are degenerating into an embodiment of the metropolitan/capitalist way of life and its political and economic foundations. The OECD plan is characterized by a regressive and particular "universalism" which sets up "Western values" and the American model of "freedom and democracy"—that is, the resolute defense of capitalist principles of private property and the free market and the predominance of the powerful states—as the general norm. Hopes that an international "human rights regime" will have a democratizing effect (Sassen 1996, 83 ff.) should be met with considerable skepticism.

The ever growing dominance of market relations carries within it the seeds of the destruction of their own natural and social foundations. In the past this development was countered by the evolution of oppositional forces (social movements, such as the labor movement and workers' parties) and more or less well-established democratic structures within the nation-states (Polanyi 1990). When these particular political structures are undermined in the process of the internationalization of the state, important preconditions for the development of a constellation of oppositional forces are lost. One may assume that this will cause a comprehensive and long-term social crisis of global proportions, which should be recognized as a complex of mutually related economic and political processes. There can be no doubt that global capitalism requires new forms of international political regulation. But, given the existing system of states (which is undergoing internationalization) as a basis, one can hardly expect such new forms of regulation to be anything more than a makeshift response to crisis which does not have any impact on the foundations of a world order which is going off the rails. Above all, the structural lack of a democratic basis will mean that nothing can be done to work against the destructive consequences of uncontrolled market forces.

As is known, there is not much sense in hoping that a capitalist crisis or the collapse of capitalism will be the starting point for processes of liberation, so the question remains as to how it might be possible to work against these destructive developments politically. Simply to restore the old system of nation-states with its inherent mechanisms of oppression, division and exclusion would not be a very promising solution—even if it were possible in spite of the dominance of international capital and the radical change in class structure which has taken place. The world-wide growth of movements for democracy and human rights and the revival of democracy as an issue in political debate are significant developments at this juncture. It is true that these developments are full of contradictions: on the one hand, it is an expression of the OECD's attempt to establish its dominance in a "new" world order; on the other hand it is a form of protest in reaction to the undermining of liberal democracy and the social fragmentation and degradation associated with globalization. The significance of "human rights" is both historically and socially ambiguous. Napoleon set off to conquer Egypt "with a sword in one hand and human rights in the other." In other words, an important question in current discussion and debate is: What is actually meant by "human rights" and "democracy" and how can they be established in actual practice? And here the difference between the capitalist centers and the periphery is most significant, as is clear from discussions about "civil society." In the capitalist centers the debate about civil society serves primarily to lend legitimacy to the political structures of the "competitive nation-state," which is becoming a barricaded fortress of the rich, and as a slogan of neoliberal "freedom and democracy." On the periphery, on the other hand, "civil society" is a reflection of the struggle to create a self-determining democratic society independent of authoritarian government—for example, the discussion following the Zapatist uprising in Mexico (Brand and Cecena 2000). This debate about the concept of democracy and the political organizations and movements involved will clearly be of key importance.

The development and realization of a democratic order beyond the bounds of the liberal capitalist nation-state—a democratic order which will necessarily differ considerably from conventional models of democracy—is therefore on the agenda. New forms of democratic politics must be developed, especially because of the internationalization of the state which is now taking place. These forms of democracy must be more independent—in terms of organization and activities—of state systems of administration at both national and international levels. This will only be possible if the political imperatives associated with liberal democracy—the separation between private and public spheres, the basic principles of representation and decision making processes—are fundamentally reformulated. This means that the international cooperation of organizations and movements which are independent of both states and private companies must be developed, strengthened, and institutionalized in new ways, so that the "global civil society" which is so often referred to can begin to live up to its name (Görg and Hirsch 1998). Such an undertaking cannot be limited to the international level. It must indeed be preceded by basic processes of democratization at local, regional, and national levels, which similarly extend beyond the horizons and limitations of bourgeois liberal democracy.

The question is, what can be expected of NGOs? Both in scientific literature and

in political discussion, NGOs are expected to make a major contribution to the civilization and democratization of international politics (see, for example, Habermas 1998). Analysis of the structures and processes which are actually developing does in fact show that, in some areas at least, NGOs have become—or are at least becoming—an important part of international regulatory systems. The extent to which they have a democratizing influence is nevertheless open to question. The question is whether NGOs can be regarded as democratic and autonomous actors, quite apart from their function as part of an international regulatory system. If one equates democracy with functionality and rationality in political processes and decision making, as is being done increasingly often in the more recent discussions of the theory of democracy (Görg and Hirsch 1998, 594 ff.), then NGOs are clearly "democratic" organizations in this restricted sense. After all, they do cause attention to be given to a broader range of interests, and they contribute to greater rationality in processes of problem definition and decision making. This also applies if one understands democracy as a pluralistic system of checks and balances with limited possibilities for participation.

But if one understands democracy as a system which allows every member of society the highest possible degree of freedom and autonomy, then things are more complicated. So long as NGOs remain dependent on bureaucratic state administrations at the national or international level and are fundamentally state-oriented, their ability to develop and pursue strategies for fundamental social change will remain limited (Wahl 1997; Brand 2000). Even if they are internally democratic and close to the "grass roots," one may question the extent to which they are representative and possess democratic legitimacy, because there is a total lack of appropriate institutional mechanisms. It is difficult for them to relate closely to the needs of the people whom they are supposed to represent, not least because of the considerable self-interest of the organization itself. And of course there is nothing to stop NGOs bringing interests into play which have no democratic legitimacy or are partisan. It should also be noted that until now the activities of NGOs have been largely confined to "soft" issues in environmental, social, development, and human rights policy, whereas they have played a relatively minor role in the "hard" issues of security, defense, technology, and economics—not least because states have little or no interest in their cooperation in these areas. This is beginning to change, however, as the most recent debates about the policies of the IMF, World Bank, and WTO have shown. To some extent this was already the case with the international land mines campaign (Gebauer 1998). Finally, one should remember that NGOs vary considerably as regards political capacity in terms of resources and scope for action. This is particularly obvious when one compares "Northern" and "Southern" NGOs and observes the frequent financial and organizational dependency of the "Southern" NGOs (Bruckmaier 1994; Demirovic 1997, 255). There is also a hierarchy of power among NGOs, which leaves powerful "transnational NGOs," which are usually based in metropolitan centers, at a considerable advantage over smaller and weaker organizations at local and regional levels (Wahl 1997; Walk 1997). The NGO system reflects to some extent the imbalance of power between nation-states.

It is clear that the democratic nature of the NGO system depends not only on the aims, internal structure, and operating conditions of individual organizations—even

if their internal structure is democratic—but just as much on their position and function within the broader international system of political regulation (Wahl 1997, 313; Görg and Hirsch 1998, 602). From the point of view of the theory of democracy, NGOs are only one of many actors. There is also a great variety of NGOs which are often in opposition to each other. As a general principle, the more NGOs are able to maintain their material and political independence in relation to states, international organizations, and private companies, the greater is the role they can play in democratic processes. This is by no means easy. It requires that NGOs remain independent of state grants and subsidies where their administration and core functions are concerned and that they avoid at the same time too great a dependence on the media for fund raising. This means above all that they need to be able to rely on the support of an active political base of social movements and initiatives. This cannot be provided simply by direct mailings and televised benefit concerts. What is necessary is that accurate and critical information be made available to those who are interested and that public discussion takes place about NGO activities, the conditions under which they are working, the difficulties which they face and, if necessary, the reasons for their failure to achieve certain objectives. Only on this basis will it be possible to build up sufficient countervailing power over and against state administrations and private companies—political power which is more than symbolic. This is a precondition for the development of political visions and ideas beyond the limits and regardless of the imperatives of the existing system of regulation and domination (Görg and Hirsch 1998). This would also be a precondition for meaningful activity within the "hard" policy areas which are of decisive importance in relation to the global sociopolitical order and where NGOs cannot be certain of help and offers of cooperation from state institutions. A strategy for liberating social change would require a fundamental extension of the concept of "politics" to address issues such as production processes, consumption, life style and gender relations and, combined with this, the promotion of social learning and activities aimed at consciousness raising. This requires political orientation and action which are not limited to lobbying within state-dominated negotiating fora (Princen and Finger 1994, 35; Wapner 1995).

The dependence of NGOs on states and international organizations can only be reduced sufficiently by the creation of international coalitions for cooperation and action (Princen and Finger 1994, 36; Wapner 1995; Wahl 1997, 313). Here again the international land mines campaign serves as an important example (Gebauer 1998). It is particularly important to work on making the complex and obscure negotiating channels in the international system more public and transparent (Princen and Finger 1994, 35). Finally, the degree to which NGOs are democratic correlates with the closeness of their relationship to those whose interests they claim to represent. It is possible to represent interests and provide material aid in such a way that the "beneficiaries" become even more dependent and lose whatever opportunities they may have had to organize themselves politically. It can be shown that this is often the case where development aid and relief projects are concerned. NGOs can on the other hand aim to promote self-organization, although this is less spectacular from the point of view of media interest and is likely to lead to conflict with state authorities. And even this approach remains full of contradictions: to start with, it

is not at all clear that outside intervention can indeed serve to promote political self-determination. And there is always the risk of being used in conflicts between governments or, to be more accurate, in the exploitation of weaker states by stronger ones. Nevertheless, this orientation is of crucial importance (Wapner 1995, 334): the democratizing influence of NGOs depends largely on the extent to which they are able to support local and regional political structures (Görg and Hirsch 1998, 609 ff.). But so long as NGOs remain part of the "extended state," as one might say, it is an illusion to imagine that they might engage in political opposition to the state (Wapner 1995). The best that can be expected of NGOs is that they become politically engaged "within and against the state" (Brand and Görg 1998; see also Walk 1997). This path is as difficult as it is full of risks and conflicts.

It has to be noted that it is misleading to suppose that NGOs can be an "increasingly important alternative to radical action" (Princen and Finger 1994, 65). They can at best be part of broader movements or networks. This implies a somewhat complex relationship as, for example, in the case of the ambiguous role of NGOs in connection with the relatively successful mobilization of protest at the WTO/IMF/World Bank/G7/8 conferences in Seattle in 1999, in Prague in 2000, and in Genova in 2001. This ambiguity was apparent in the need for NGOs, having played a key role in organizing the protest on the streets, to work hard to maintain their image as serious partners in negotiations with governments and international organizations. If it is a question of overcoming global dominance, exploitation and dependency, then there can be no substitute for radical action—that is, direct action outside institutional structures, which transcends the limits of dominant political agendas, destroys consensus and attacks the extensive and complex system of domination at national and international levels. Least of all can a substitute for such action be found in the corridors of diplomacy or at negotiating tables. The structure and function of NGOs prevents them from engaging in such action except in rare circumstances. At best one might expect NGOs to bring the results of radical action, including the more powerful position which they then enjoy, to bear—in so far as far as they are willing and able to do so, in accordance with their internal structure, political activities, and orientation—on international negotiations and in confrontations with governments and international organizations. Radical social movements, which refuse to allow their capacity for protest and resistance to be tied down in institutions, are still one of the basic foundations of democratic development. This leads to the paradox that the democratic nature of the NGO system tends only to have a significant influence when NGOs come into lasting conflict with more radical political initiatives and movements (Brand 2000). If one examines closely the observation that the growth of the NGO sector is a response to the decline of radical political movements, it can be seen that it implies considerable skepticism in relation to their potential for promoting democratization.

The term NGO can be applied to a wide variety of very different organizations, even when the term is defined fairly narrowly and precisely, as it is in this essay. There are limits to the comparability of Greenpeace and Oxfam, Médecins sans Frontières and Medico International, even though their structure and function are similar. And then there are also many organizations which are virtually business enterprises. The democratic nature of NGOs depends to some extent on these

differences becoming the subject of political debate both within and between NGOs. It remains for us to remind ourselves of what the materialist theory of state and society tells us about "civil society": it is extremely heterogeneous, and it is an arena for contests over the development and realization of models of society. NGOs are involved in such contests and are indeed often in conflict with one another. The democratizing influence of NGOs depends not so much on their "constructive" activities within international state negotiating systems as on their ability to criticize the dominant political system, of which they are a part—i.e. to engage in "criticism in the midst of a fistfight." If this were to come about, one could indeed talk more seriously of "democratic civil society" where NGOs are concerned. It is a question, to quote a relevant NGO slogan, not of talking about "civil society" but of changing it. To abandon the mythical image of NGOs—popular in both academic discourse and public debate—with all its undifferentiated and normative attributes, would be a major step toward democracy and liberation.

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