A protracted battle is taking shape in the political arena of all Western democracies. Moreover, a corresponding battle is proceeding on the intellectual plane. Its outcome will determine the future of our society and the patterns of life encouraged or suppressed by its prevailing institutional arrangements.

**BATTLE FOR THE FUTURE OF WESTERN SOCIETY**

This intellectual and socio-political conflict is concerned fundamentally with the role and form of 'government'. Those on one side of the batteline argue for social coordination based on market processes. They also express substantial reservations about political institutions and insist on constitutional restrictions to limit the range of their operation to the absolute minimum. Those on the other side reverse this pattern. They favour a social system which coordinates its affairs mainly within the context of political institutions operating in a political process with few, if any, constitutional constraints.¹

*Socio-political and Intellectual Scene*

A socialist trend has been gathering momentum since it emerged in the mid-1960s and has found strong support among the intelligentsia and the mass media. Advocates of this trend oppose the social coordination of human affairs based on markets within a system of private property rights and a minimal set of political institutions controlled by a constitutional census. The socialist standpoint argues for a wide-ranging and open-ended replacement of spontaneous market arrangements by an array of political agencies. Thus, it assigns a powerful and central role to 'government', which we understand here as the gradual incorporation of all relevant social decisions within the political process.
This conflict in the public arena and the intellectual marketplace is usually interpreted, at least by the media which address a broader intelligentsia, as reflecting some basic 'ideological commitments'. This characterisation conveys the pervasive impression that the ongoing disputes occur essentially on the plane of religious visions or political commitments, beyond any rational assessment. Advocates of a revealed truth tend, of course, to describe alternative conceptions of the world as ideologies, which express the false consciousness unavoidably suffered by the unenlightened. Such explanations of the conflict, however, hardly survive probing examination. The social and intellectual battle involves aspects beyond the grasp of such metaphysical interpretations. Ideological commitments nevertheless play an important role in this context. They occur as attitudes and dispositions which reject determinedly any rational assessment of socio-political views of positions on the grounds of inter-personally valid analysis and evidence. But the prevalent rejection of a rational assessment does not determine its non-existence or its impossibility. We do possess the intellectual means to penetrate beyond 'ideologies' and 'ideological commitments' to the substantive core of the issues shaping the conflict. This essay should be regarded as an attempt to penetrate the ideological fogs of the intelligentsia market. It attempts, in particular, to relate opposing views on the 'role of government' to two fundamental and rationally assessable strands of thought.

*First Strand: the Perception of Man and the Conception of 'Government'*

Two major alternatives pertaining to the perception of Man dominate our thinking. One alternative, the 'Scottish' model of Man, was introduced by the Scottish philosophers of the eighteenth century and developed into the choice-theoretic foundation of economic analysis. The other alternative derives from the French enlightenment of the same century and was ultimately shaped into a sociological view of Man. Both perceptions of Man permeate the social sciences, but with differing frequency of occurrence in the various fields and branches. The sociological version, however, clearly dominates the public arena with the intelligentsia. For our purposes, we may summarise the major differences between the two alternatives with the following passages from a previously published paper.²

'According to the Scottish intellectual tradition, man is