

# **DEMOCRACY ! WHAT A GREAT IDEA!**

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Democracy: What a great Idea! But everyone seems to have a *different* idea. Is Democracy a real thing or is it merely some chimerical ideal? Is Democracy really a great idea or is it merely a dream? We all know that the state of being a Democracy is frequently claimed, and usually loudly so. But everyone seems to define it differently. Look at it this way; if the United States of America is a democracy as it claims, what then was the "Democratic Republic of Germany (East)"?

Probably the best definition, of Democracy is the one given us by Abraham Lincoln, who, during the course of his Presidency, while I certainly believe he had it for an eventual goal, did not always practice what he preached, which was: "Government **OF** the people, **BY** the people, **FOR** the people". Unfortunately, using that definition, no current nation-state qualifies as a true Democracy. I do **NOT** exclude the United States of America, though Iceland comes very close to the ideal.. The "right to vote" in and of itself, does not a Democracy make.

To me, the most important question we **MUST** ask ourselves is this: Is true Democracy possible in our Post-Modern world?

When the Communist Systems realized that they had totally failed, and, as a result precipitously collapsed, we were loudly told that : "Democracy has triumphed over Totalitarianism"; but I really don't believe that is true. What actually happened is that a economic and social model based on a totally inhumane world-view which resulted in rigid central control and rigid discipline of the citizenry, fell of it's own intrinsic corruption and the utterly fallacious nature of it's philosophy.

The other economic-social model falsely called "Free Market" did not so much "triumph" as simply become the "last fighter left standing". But to tell the truth, neither system does much, if anything, to make the world a better place for human beings. The socialist-communist model is the more immediately oppressive-repressive, but in the long run the intrinsic motivations in a totally unfettered capitalistic model have the potential for being more destructive. Any society who's principle motivation is unfettered greed leaves disaster in it's wake.

We got a "New World Order" alright, democracy and communism are both being replaced by the rule of a globalized corporate structure who's only loyalty is to itself. "Board room Democracy" is **NOT** true democracy! In fact it is the antithesis of Democracy. "The Bottom Line" and "making a buck" are among the worst possible motivations for those governing the world.

But what is "true Democracy"? If we start with Lincoln's definition we notice that the most frequently mentioned word is **PEOPLE**, and that is the most urgently important ingredient in any Democratic model. If a form of social-economic model is to be at all valid, it must actually be the people themselves that rule themselves for the betterment of the entire group. And that means to say **ALL OF THE PEOPLE** not just some of them. But in that case all of the people must be given the necessary skills and knowledge to do so.

Democracies have been infrequently attempted in the course of Human History, and unfortunately, they have seldom lasted for any length of time. Winston Churchill is reputed to have said: "*Democracy is a terrible form of Government, but it's better than all the rest*".

If it is "better than all the rest", why is it that Democracies are usually short lived? In fact, the United States of America is the second oldest Democracy in the world, and it's right to make the claim that it is truly a Democracy is now doubtlessly questionable. The oldest Democracy in the world is the Icelandic Nation and it is a case of very "special circumstances".

Socrates is said to have said: "*All forms of Government fall from an excess of their best principals.*"

Will Durant, the Historian-philosopher, expanded on those words thusly:

**"ARISTOCRACY** ruins itself by limiting too narrowly the circles within which power is confined"

**"OLIGARCHY** ruins itself by the incautious scramble for immediate wealth (and power)"

*"In either case, the end is revolution. When revolution comes, it may seem to arise from little causes and petty whims; but though it may spring from slight occasions it is the precipitate result of grave and accumulated wrongs. When a body is weakened by neglected ills, the merest exposure may bring serious diseases."*

*"Then Democracy comes: the poor overcome their opponents, slaughtering some and banishing the rest; and give to the people an equal share of freedom and power. At least that's how it starts"*

*"But even Democracy ruins itself by excess.....of Democracy.....It's basic principle is the equal right of all to hold office and determine public policy. This at first, is a delightful arrangement; it becomes disastrous because the people are not properly equipped by education to select the best rulers and the wisest courses. Mob-rule is a rough sea for the ship of state to ride; every wind of oratory stirs the waters and deflects the course."*

The most dangerous aspect of Democracy is one which I believe to be a thing which is both unconscious and largely unpremeditated, and that is the constant

lowering of the "common denominator". There is a subliminal hatred of excellence built into the very concept of Democracy, while all people should, and indeed must be equal in respect to Law, that does not make them equal in fact as individuals. While Democracy in its early stages may uncover unsuspected excellences, over the long haul when viewed historically, and when experienced as we are presently, it is destructive of excellence. It denies this factor by continuously and consciously redefining "excellence" with lowered parameters. That has always proven to be true of the many democracies the human race has spawned.

The basic premise of a democratic society is that all of its citizens are entitled to equal treatment under the laws of that society, and that all educated and informed citizens are entitled to a "say" or vote in the management of that society. It is, and always has been very obvious that the uneducated and uninformed are not capable of making a rational choice in the voting process. Democracy most especially does not mean that each of the citizens is equal to each of the other citizens in the matter of intrinsic worth!

That is egalitarianism and egalitarianism has destroyed every democracy in which it has raised its mindless head! It is doing far more than "raise its head" in our planetary society today!

Voltaire, who had something intelligent to say about everything, had something to say about this:

*"Those who say all men are equal speak the greatest truth if they mean that all men have equal right to Liberty, to the possession of their goods, and to the protection of the Laws - but, equality is at once the most natural thing and the most chimerical thing in the world; natural when it is limited to rights, unnatural when it attempts to level goods and powers - not all citizens can be equally strong - nor can they be equally wise - but they can be equally free. **To be free is to be subject to nothing but the Laws!**"*

Aristotle, who while an unabashed admirer of Monarchical and aristocratic forms, was nonetheless one of the most knowledgeable men who ever lived, and like Voltaire, had something to say on almost everything, said this:

*"Democracy is, on the whole, inferior to Aristocracy. For it is based on a false assumption of equality; It arises out of the notion that those who are equal in one respect (e.g. in respect of the law) are equal in all respects; because men are equally free, they claim to be absolutely equal. The upshot is that ability is sacrificed to number, while numbers are manipulated by trickery. (sound familiar Americans?) Because the people are so easily misled, and are so fickle in their views, the ballot should be limited to the intelligent. What we really need is a combination of aristocracy and Democracy. Our state will be sufficiently Democratic if the road to every office is open to all; and sufficiently aristocratic if the offices are closed except to those who have traveled the road and arrived fully prepared."*

Plato, who was certainly equally intelligent and well informed, totally disapproved of Democratic forms. His "Ideal State" which he described in "The Republic" is totally totalitarian. Perhaps because he was a member of the Athenian Royal House, but I do think the most important factor behind his fervent disapproval of Democratic forms was based entirely on the Judicial Murder of his Teacher and Friend Socrates by the skillful manipulation of the Athenian Mob by the Demagogues.

A little later in time, the man I consider to be Rome's most significant contribution to Humanity's "Honor Roll"; Cicero, had this to say on the subject:

*For that equality of legal rights of which free people's are so fond cannot be maintained: Since the people themselves, though free and unrestrained, give very many special powers to many individuals, and create great distinctions among men and the honors granted to them. Besides, what is called equality is really more inequitable. For, when equal honor is given to the highest and the lowest, for men of both those types must exist in every nation, then this very "fairness" is most unfair; but this cannot happen in a state ruled by it's best citizens. (Author's note: I hope he wasn't actually referring to Rome's rulers in his times,)*

People are definitely not of equal worth! To insist that they are of equal worth is probably the most self-defeating form of oppression~repression known to humankind !

When Democracy mutates into egalitarianism it automatically self- destructs!

What I'm trying to say here is; in our effort to create a better social paradigm than we have, it's very clear that we cannot get ourselves caught up in old forms. More important still, we must not be enthralled by old "slogans" only half understood.

Democracy is an old form. It is, as Winston Churchill said, "better than all the rest", but, like all the others, it's no good in the end.

Monarchy, theocracy, autocracy, oligarchy, socialism, communism, democracy, tribalism, anarchy, they have all been tried, and every one of them has been found wanting. Socrates was obviously entirely correct, when viewed in the light of human history, each of those forms of government was destroyed by an excess of its own BEST principle.

Each of them has its own particular validity, one which is usually quite limited in time and scope. Every one of them has proven itself to be intrinsically flawed. Each of them has been given a more than adequate attempt to prove itself, and they have each of them failed miserably.

Of all claims the claim of actually being "first" with any social model or idea, is the most doubtful. Where the idea of Democratic Governance actually started we have no real idea.

But from the common historian's viewpoint the first actual appearance of Democratic Forms was in the City States of Greece and in particular Athens. And of course we know that it failed miserably there and was followed by the Empire of Alexander the Great.

So we must ask ourselves what, exactly, does "Government of the people, by the people, for the people" really require to succeed? One thing seems obvious Democracy is successful in direct proportion to the smallness of the body politic involved. The reason Iceland's "Thyning" (Democratic Parliament) has been in existence for over a thousand years is due entirely to the nature of Iceland's population. It is small and it is extremely homogeneous.

Now, the population of Athens was fairly large for one city-state, but the franchise was limited to Male Citizens which actually translated to a small percentage of the population many of whom were disenfranchised "Metics" or "foreign" and constituted the mercantile and trades classes, while an even larger percentage were slaves with no rights at all. That is not Democracy, but an extremely limited oligarchy. In probable fact, one of, if not the most harmful fiction into which modern humanity has bought is the idea that the Greeks had a Democratic form of Government. On the rare and separate occasions that Athens (and only Athens) pretended to attaining "Democratic forms what they usually had was "Mobocracy". Viewing Athenian History dispassionately Athens was eventually destroyed by its so-called "Democracy".

Now, in the earliest days of the history of the United States of America, there was almost perfect "Government of the people, by the people, and for the people" and that was in the New England Town Meetings for everyone in each little town had an equal say in how the town was run and equal responsibility for keeping it running. Of course as it typical of this period, half the people were excluded by virtue of their sex. Women, as in Greece, had no voice at all except what they had to say to their husbands and sons at dinner.

The History of the United States of America has been a desperate attempt to extend that quasi perfection into larger and larger populations and eventually to the Nation itself. The question we're facing is: will what worked perfectly in The Quincy Town Meeting which was composed of a small number of homogenous individuals limited to male property owners ever even begin to work for 300 million totally diverse individuals? In other words, is it at all possible for a wildly diverse and multi-cultural society which is what the United States has become, to manage the almost perfect Democracy of the New England Town meeting, or to be frank, to manage any Democracy at all? The political history of the United States of America in the years of its existence seems to clearly indicate that this is an impossible dream. At least anyone sufficiently observant to comprehend what is happening to our Government knows this is an impossible dream.

This year, the first year of the 21<sup>st</sup> century marks a Presidential Election, the glory of our Democratic System, but every really aware person knows it's really nothing but a terribly tragic farce and pretense. I have explained why in previous essays

and in my book. But to reiterate: When the population of a nation, and this is true of many nations, divide themselves into mutually antagonistic, mutually contradictory, mutually exclusive "pressure groups", all, or most of them, primarily oriented toward "one issue". When the members of these groups mostly proudly declare their status as "one issue voters".....**What value does the electoral process.....a process which is predicated entirely upon complete understanding, and balanced evaluation of ALL of the diverse issues which face any electorate, really have?** When our educational process is so impoverished intellectually, that a monstrous percentage of College Students are functionally illiterate, or at least sub-literate....when an advanced, and very bright, high school student of my acquaintance who is attending an expensive Preparatory School in, of all places, Lexington, Massachusetts, has never heard of Henry David Thoreau.....when students of my acquaintance at a major, and very prestigious California University.....have never even heard of Samuel Adams.....**What then, of the values and goals for which these men stood?**

Though there is a very good chance that this anecdote is apocryphal, the fact that the anecdote is widely believed says a very great deal about peoples feelings about their country. The anecdote tells that: a random group of United States citizens, upon being shown an otherwise unidentified copy of the "Bill of Rights" which is one of the true glories of that nation; identify the document as "obvious Communist propaganda".....**What chance have those rights for long-term continuity?**

All of this, remember, is not only true of the United States!

When the general public is utterly, and for the most part, correctly, convinced that their government lies to them; automatically, all of the time, in almost all circumstances, party in power notwithstanding.....even in circumstances when the lie is counter-productive and the truth would not be. **Where is the trust upon which Democratic government must stand?**

When the general public, in this case almost 100% of it, firmly believes that the taxing agency of their government, the Internal Revenue Service; is "Un-American", tyrannical, oppressive, arrogant, and the totally enthusiastic persecutor of honest people.....When that agency enthusiastically returns the compliment, in spades....and views each and every citizen as a potential cheat if not an outright criminal.....and acts accordingly. When that agency firmly regards that portion of a citizen's earnings and substance which they permit that citizen to retain as a "tax expenditure". **Where is the mutual trust, respect, confidence, and mutual support that should, indeed MUST be the hallmark of a democracy?**

Without this mutual trust, respect, confidence and support, a Democratic society is doomed!

When the citizens of a Democratic society cease to regard the government as "us"....and instead come to always regard it as "them"....and see it as an entity

which is distinctly and continually hostile and antithetic to "us".....**That political entity is a Democracy no longer!**

Does the shoe fit? I think it fits very well indeed.

Now, of course the question is: can we "fix" it? I am not at all sure we can. After all to fix it would mean swimming against the violently strong current which is taking our Democracy over the edge. There are definite steps that could be taken to make Democracy a living thing as it was in the earliest days of this country, but those steps are all extremely "politically incorrect" and diametrically opposed to all the current shibboleths.

Firstly, it is absolutely necessary, but I am afraid hardly likely, to clean up the present political system, it is as corrupt as it can possibly be, and it is the source and fountainhead of lies. Money has got to be removed entirely from the political equation and I am afraid that is an impossible goal. In addition, the people who become involved in politics must be deeply convinced that their goal and purpose is to serve the entire country and all of its diverse people and not to serve either party or narrow interests. Today, with most politicians, their career comes first, then their party's needs, and then the parochial interests whose financial supports put them in office. Can this be changed? Without a revolution? I wish it could be, but I am very pessimistic.

Now as the most vital ingredient in a Democracy is a educated and fully informed electorate, it is obvious that our educational system needs to serve something other than the career needs of its professionals, and the information media need to become something other than entertainment venues. Is this "fixable"? Do you think it is?

Lastly, and most important of all, something needs to be done to reverse the ever growing trend to total political apathy on the part of the electorate. Right now the United States has a minority government, why? Because most people don't bother to vote. Why don't they bother to vote? Because they are either disinterested or disenchanting with the process and its results. This is especially true among minorities, who are the people who need to vote the most! This aspect is the least difficult to fix, and if fixed, it can lead to the fixing of the other problems. But everyone must become involved. Are you?