

It is interesting to note that no matter how hard we try to convince ourselves that our country has the oldest and best democratic system in the world, the facts point to the contrary conclusion. The more one looks at our governmental system and processes, the more one realises that it is an outdated democracy that needs upgrading. Despite our democratic pretences, we are a country that likes the security of our wholly uninspiring system of government and we are loath to change it!

This opinion is probably one that you would not agree with, and perhaps this view is extreme. However, it is interesting to look at our modern democratic system and ask questions. The more one looks, the more one sees and the more one doesn't like.

Let us begin by looking at the current Labour government, New Labour with all its promises and policies of the manifesto. This was to be a new era of change, of radical reform and dramatic difference. Three years on, one must ask oneself, how much has actually changed? The health service is still riddled with problems almost too profound to solve, the education system, despite labour's new initiative and huge promises of funding amounting to billions of pounds still retains many of the problems that existed under the previous conservative government. Why have some of New Labour's key policies failed? Can this be blamed upon the democratic system of government?

New Labour bears a striking resemblance to the Conservative party of the late 70's under Edward Heath. It is a most interesting observation that as New Labour began to retake the middle ground that the conservatives had previously occupied they began to gain popularity. One also notices that when New Labour took power under the charismatic leadership of Tony Blair, it was the Conservatives that promptly elected a new more right wing leader in William Hague to fight against New Labour's more central policies. This brings to the forefront one of my key arguments, essentially, in Britain there are only two parties capable of being elected into government, the Labour and Conservative parties, perhaps including the Liberal Democrats as a potentially influential party with policies that bear a striking resemblance to those of New Labour at the present time. In our 'democratic' society, essentially if you do not vote for one of these three parties, your vote has been wasted. So what does this mean for your average man on the street, how much choice does he have over government policy? Essentially, he has very little choice, he has to balance those policies that he likes and dislikes from the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat manifestos. He may generally agree with what the Labour manifesto talks of, but they may, for example want to tax him heavily as a middle class citizen to create a better education system. If he has no children the education system may have no impact over his life and therefore, he doesn't wish to pay thousands of pounds in tax to improve it. However, what choice does he have, if he does not vote for Labour, Conservative or the Liberal Democrats, he has essentially wasted his vote. This raises more issues about our excellent democratic system. We in Britain allow universal suffrage meaning that everybody over the age of 18 can vote regardless of intelligence or social status. If we again take the example of our average man on the street who has read the manifestos of all three major parties and done extensive research into their policies and the potential improvements and detrimental effects of their being elected, and contrast his well researched vote with that of Tim, nice but dim, who either does eeny meeny miny mo with the voting slip or else votes Labour or Conservative because he likes the leader having no real idea of policy, we can see that the universal suffrage system is not actually all that great. Our average man's vote has been cancelled out effectively by someone with no clue regarding what they are doing. This

is one of the major problems of our democratic system of government and it is very difficult to rectify without abandoning a fully democratic system and converting to a democracy of the educated classes.

To further this argument, there are only about 250 seats in Britain that regularly change hands out of the 650 available. Therefore, for a Labour voter in Malvern or a Tory voter in Ebber Vale your vote has essentially been wasted, either you move to a different constituency or else you change sides, otherwise your vote will effectively not count. This begs the question whether a fairer proportional representation system would lead to a fairer government, but as past examples such as the Weimar Republic have shown, proportional representation is not without its problems, the result of smaller parties gaining seats is that in order to gain a majority the larger parties must form a coalition government with the smaller. This results in compromises and the phrase 'the tail wagging the dog' comes into being as the smaller parties gain a say in government as the larger party needs their support to get legislation through and as no government this century has been elected on more than 50% of the vote, even the recent 'landslide' victory of Blair's New Labour resulted in only around 40% of the voters voting him in. This illustrates the point that the smaller parties would most certainly be necessary for a successful government in Britain. Therefore, although proportional representation certainly has its benefits such as giving a truer reflection of the vote, it can also have undesirable side effects resulting in more inefficiency, instability and more difficulty for the government to get legislation passed as much compromise is necessary.

To what extent do those in power respect the democratic system? This is a question that I have found extremely interesting. Do the voters always know what's best? It is a commonly known fact that if the voters in Britain were given a say by means of a referendum over issues such as capital punishment, then capital punishment would be reintroduced, but this certainly would not be the best thing for Britain. Equally, we see our image obsessed Prime Minister listening to what the people have to say, but how much does he really take on board. Essentially, the opinion of the masses is not necessarily the best policy, people often make decisions based on less than all the facts, or on gut feeling. These essentially lead to the masses having the wrong ideas of what is right for the country. Election promises are designed to please the uninformed masses, and chancellors are forced to save money in order to give the appearance of increased spending and lower taxes in the year before a general election. Essentially, what is best for the country can come irrelevant, and politicians work to improve only the areas that are perceived to please the voters. The pre-election 'feel-good' factor is used to great effect.

Democracy, of course does have its strengths, it acts as a 'safety valve' and it keeps those in authority in touch with the people that they represent. Effectively, a leader that does not perform as required by his people will be removed in a democratic system, whereas in any other system of government a leader can become too powerful to the detriment of the people. As Lord Acton once said

"Power corrupts but absolute power corrupts absolutely."

However, democracy, whilst useful to ensure that no one person becomes too powerful or influential can become detrimental when applied too rigorously to every element of society as a whole. Democracy can make systems slow and inefficient and therefore, democracy can become detrimental to progress. The democratic system can be slowed down by series of elected committees who talk much about what could and should be done, but little actually ever happens as by the time an issue has been discussed, potential solutions discussed, a decision drafted and redrafted, and a

conclusion come to, the issue no longer has the same significance. It is frequently the case in all organisations of our ultra democratic system that much is discussed but not much is ever changed. In this way democracy can often be detrimental to efficiency and change.

We have examined democracy and British democracy in depth, looked at the pros and cons, and found that there are most certainly more pros than there are cons, so let us look for a moment at the alternatives. Perhaps the most obvious example is that of dictatorship. As I have already said, a leader can become too powerful. However, let us look at a system in which a benevolent dictator remained responsible for the people in order to act quickly and efficiently to turn the country around. This is a reference of course to the rule of De Gaulle in France. After the turmoil of the first and second world wars, France needed a strong and effective leader. De Gaulle became this leader and, whilst remaining accountable to the people through referendums on his leadership, he was able to act in a way that he saw fit in order to turn France from an economically backward power into the modern and efficient nation that we see today. However, once his task had been fulfilled, the people spoke up and removed him from office. The French as a nation have swung from dictatorship to democracy, but the frequent removal of the dictators shows that they have never been completely content under benevolent dictators. Essentially, even under a benevolent dictator, dictatorship results in too much power being concentrated in the hands of an individual, and when this goes wrong as in the case of the legitimately elected Adolf Hitler, we see persecution, repression, and the state controlling all aspects of the lives of an individual under a 'totalitarian' state.

To look at another example of a different system of government, we can look at the Communist Manifesto by Karl Marx. The philosophy of communism, Marx and Engels were convinced, would sweep the globe, as A.J.P Taylor said:

"Both of them, and particularly Marx, were convinced that they had solved the riddles of man's existence"

It was not just Marx that held this view, in the 20th Century, Marx's philosophies were taken on board by many countries worldwide after communist revolutions. However, Marx's ideal of 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' failed to take into account human nature. People simply could not function without leadership, and leadership led to lust for power, lust for power to dictatorship. The theoretical government of the people, by the people and for the people simply did not come about in practise and led instead to brutal dictatorship. Furthermore, Marx's communist philosophy was based almost entirely on the people working tirelessly for the common good. However, if you gain nothing for working harder or becoming better educated then it is human nature to think why bother? The people in practise were not the innately good beings that Marx and Engels theoretically perceived them to be, if there were no benefits to be gained, education standards fell and production decreased in a non-competitive environment. Therefore, as Churchill once said:

"Many forms of government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No-one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except for all the other forms that have been tried." (Winston Churchill to the House of Commons on 11th of November 1947)

Although Democracy has its problems, there is no better system, the only question that remains is how much democracy is required. In my opinion, the most beneficial system is something in between democracy and dictatorship. To prove this, I would like to look at the two extremes. The most democratic constitution is that of the

United States of America, the near perfect system of checks and balances where it is impossible for any one person to gain too much power. The American president, often referred to as the 'most powerful man in the world' can do little without the approval of the Senate. The result of this democratic constitution is that there is a certain amount of inefficiency. For example, after alcohol was banned in the United States in a post-war fervour, it took 14 years to get the resolution revoked, a demonstration of the checks and balances working to too greater effect. Furthermore, as I have already shown, despite the effective government that an autocratic, benevolent dictator can bring, the result is the concentration of power in the hands of the few.

Is there a solution to this whereby a fair, democratic system of administration could also be efficient. As I have already shown, the British party political system is fundamentally flawed, similarly, proportional representation causes as many problems as it solves. However, in my opinion, there is a resolution. The most effective system of government that I have seen operate is that of the Isle of Man. In my home land, there is no party political system, each candidate is voted in on their own individual manifesto, and each candidate is independent. This leads to a system where compromise between individuals is required, but this is far outweighed by the fact that each individual MHK (the Manx equivalent of an MP) represents the interests of their constituency and not that of the party. Furthermore, at the beginning of each year, the elected MHK's vote for a Chief Minister, rather than the leader of the elected party automatically becoming Prime Minister. This leads to a fairer election of a strong leader who essentially, along with his cabinet holds the responsibility for the passage of legislation. This seems to be an effective system of government, a democratic system with a powerful leader who can be effective and decisive. However, even the Manx system can be ineffective as with so many individuals, the passage of legislation can be slowed and compromises must be reached. Even this system has not solved all of the problems of the tendency of democracy to be ineffective, but until someone invents a better system, democracy does present the best system of government available.