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### Participatory Democracy: Beyond Classical Liberalism

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As a postsecondary educator with most of my experience in colleges, but with some also in undergraduate and postgraduate studies, I have been teaching politics and government for close to fifty years. That time has been spent not only working with the empirical analysis of political behaviour and the normative analysis of political theory, but also in the practical activity of promoting understanding of what is frequently called civic life. The authorities who develop broad educational goals seem to have it in mind that promoting ideas of good citizenship and suggesting ways in which this citizenship can be displayed should be among the several goals of faculty members involved in “general education.” As we live in a liberal democracy, it follows that a good part of that mission should involve the both cognitive knowledge (how governments work, issues of policy development, elements of the political process, etc.) and what are sometimes called “affective” and “behavioural” traits—habits of attitude and action that encourage good citizenship. Specifically, we are expected to teach something about democracy.

#### Democracy as a Subject of Controversy

Democracy has always been a controversial concept in theory and in practice (Doughty, 2014a). Ever since it entered the Western political lexicon in ancient Athens, it has worried the wealthy and the powerful who were rightly anxious that permitting political power to fall into the hands of ordinary citizens or, to be less generous, into the clutches of the “mob” would mean the end of their domination over their communities, the loss of their privileges and (for the more principled and high-minded among them) the danger that what passed for culture would be sacrificed to the impulses and base desires of the lower orders. So, although there may have been occasional attempts to widen the range of popular participation in public affairs, it was not until the European Enlightenment—very roughly having its political origins in the times of Hobbes, Locke and Kant and culminating in the French Revolution of 1789—that notions of individual rights, popular sovereignty and limitations on the authority of the state gained reluctant credibility among those who truly mattered insofar as the governance of principalities and of empires were concerned.

It was true, of course, that kings, princes and the necessary assortment of aristocrats were intermittently advised to keep the people under control not just through threat and coercion, but also with at least the appearance of justice and wisdom. When, however, the higher civic virtues failed, the authorities also had a monopoly on legitimate violence and the (almost) ever-present enabling hand of the church, which could usually be expected to offer its blessing in the name of the doctrine of “the divine right of kings”. By this logic, rebellion was not merely a secular crime, but it was also a

mortal sin. Few attempted it and those who did were harshly punished. Times have changed. The ruling classes today are possessed of other means.

There is no need to go through the tentative, tortuous, step-wise history of the emergence of democracy as ideology and institution. Suffice to say that to the names of such early “social contract” theorists as Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau were added those of Jefferson and Lincoln as well as Bentham, Disraeli, John Stuart Mill and Lord John Russell. All these and many others had a hand in the reconciliation of the right to vote with the expectation that a government, once in power, would assure not only that the needs of the people were met, but also that order, stability and the property of those who possessed it would be maintained and well protected.

The balance between political equality and economic inequality has always been difficult to manage. And so, when pushed by the largely unrecorded names of the advocates of robust democratic reforms—some Jacksonian Democrats, some British Chartists, inchoate trade unions, utopian socialists inspired by Saint-Simon, Fourier and Robert Owen, and radicals of all sizes, shapes and descriptions, matters could quickly get ever so slightly out-of-hand. Whatever else it was, the quest for democracy was not restricted to (or contained within) polite conversations among philosophers in coffee-houses and the eloquent speeches of political leaders strutting down corridors of influence and rising in legislatures. It may have been rationalized in edifying journals, intellectual discussions and parliamentary debates, but it was ultimately won in open confrontation and sometimes in armed struggle. Only the most naive “whiggish” brand of historical analysis would advance the idea that democratic reform was the triumph of “an idea whose time had come” or, worse, that it was an inevitable step forward in the long progressive march of human history. It was fiercely resisted by many who have been praised as among its earliest and greatest defenders and its apparent triumph is still far less settled and far more fragile than we are led to believe.

What sometimes surprises people today is how recently we have come to embrace democracy, at least as a slogan or as people say today, as a “brand” for our political affairs. It has been barely twice my lifetime since the United Kingdom agreed to the Great Reform Bill and universal manhood suffrage, the United States of America emancipated its slaves and the Czar of Russia freed the serfs. It’s been only about a century since women in the even the most “progressive” liberal democracies won the right to vote—first, incidentally, in New Zealand in 1893, but not until the 1920s in the USA, Canada and the UK. Thereafter, the franchise was extended slowly and not always steadily. Here in Canada, there are many people of Chinese, Japanese and Native heritage who may vividly recall when Canadian electoral laws were blatantly racist. Some women in Québec may also recall when they were first permitted to vote in provincial elections in 1940.

In liberal democracies today—mainly in Europe, North America, the former British “dominions” and an increasing number of countries on the Pacific Rim and in Latin America—there is little philosophical argument

*against* democracy. Home-grown medievalists, fascists, theocrats and other authoritarians do not (yet) occupy a great deal of the political landscape. Democracy has been “normalized.” It also works reasonably well on the limited level that it was designed to stand. With a few obvious and odious exceptions, intimidating the electorate, banning people from the ballot box and engaging in blatant voter fraud are rather rare activities—not that elections (and sometimes some important ones) haven’t been “stolen.” Likewise, nefarious voter-suppression and other reprehensible tactics may slither along quite close to and sometimes beyond the limits of the law. And, within the letter if not the spirit of the law, gerrymandering district borders to give political advantage is an all too well recognized practice in some places. Despite such tawdry “irregularities,” however, I wish to claim that there are deeper problems with modern democracy and that they lie elsewhere. There is certainly a “democratic deficit” in political life, but it demands deeper exploration than discussion of its most visible layers.

I shall name just four of these problems. All of them are serious and arguably more serious than my putative primary focus here; namely, the replacement of our current electoral system with some version of Proportional Representation (PR). Although I will allude to one or two of them later, full discussion must be left for another day. For now, I want to highlight the items in an admittedly pessimistic inventory of concerns about the current state of democracy.

### **Voter Apathy**

One contemporary democratic problem is *voter apathy*. It is commonly said that a healthy democracy depends on an engaged electorate. This is held to be a prime tenet of what’s called “classical democratic theory” (Pateman, 1970). Among critics of this view are those whose fear that democratic activism actually leads to the political turbulence and the possible disruption of public life. An early example is Alexander Hamilton, that most *bourgeois* of American revolutionaries, who is famous for having sneered at a colleague who had spoken approvingly of the great American people; Hamilton contemptuously replied: “Your people, sir, is a great beast!”

Hamilton’s attitude informed the Federalist movement in the United States and much of the Canadian and British traditions of “Toryism.” It even dominated American political science—especially during the lead-up to and the endurance of the tumultuous 1960s when “participatory democracy” was first used as a slogan in the quest for a more vigorous form of democratic politics. At that time, “democratic revisionists” had attacked the “classical model” of democracy, which was generally believed to urge and encourage an active and attentive public but which was deemed by democratic “realists” to be too idealistic, too demanding on the time and attention of citizens, and too unpredictable to ensure political tranquility (Bell, 1960; Berelson, 1956; Dahl, 1956; Lipset, 1960; Mayo, 1960; Milbrath, 1965; Morris-Jones, 1954; Plamenatz, 1958). The consensus among the “revisionists” was that popular participation was to be avoided since it brings instability into the system.

Moreover, in light of the ways in which mass participation was alleged to have resulted in the totalitarian regimes in Italy, Germany and Russia, the susceptibility of citizens to demagogues, the inclination to display mass hysteria and the willingness to surrender precious liberties to tyrants whose promises proved to be false but whose practices were all too real, constituted a dark and cautionary tale. If the twentieth century had proved anything, they believed, it was that high levels of public involvement foreshadowed dictatorship more than government representing the authentic will of the people and the common good. Fixating on what I regard as at least a partial misreading of Rousseau (Doughty, 2014b), critics such as Talmon (1952) read the case for mass involvement as a prelude to totalitarianism. Liberal democracies, they suggested, provided all the opportunity for involvement that was necessary by allowing competing groups of potential leaders to submit themselves for approval every few years and to get on with the business of governance without further interruption and annoyance as soon as the chosen leaders were sworn into office. So, low voter turn-outs were interpreted as evidence not that the people were alienated, but that they were satisfied. Sleeping dogs, they concluded, should be allowed to lie.

### **Voter Ignorance**

The other element in a healthy democracy, according to the "classical theory" was that such polities required an informed electorate. Exercising the right to vote without having a basic knowledge of political institutions, an awareness of the salient issues and a familiarity with the candidates and the pertinent political parties was considered a betrayal of the public responsibilities that attended public rights and freedoms. Even democracy's most fervent advocates did not contemplate an electorate that would remain almost wilfully ignorant and yet eager to cast a ballot on the basis of nothing more convincing than a set of slick television ads, a photogenic leader, and the apparently charming personality of the local candidate.

As we are only now beginning to acknowledge, however, both our main instruments of information dissemination in the print and broadcast media—never mind the Internet and the social media—have not only failed to do their civic duties, but they have actively distracted voters from the pressing issues of the day. What's more, either by incompetence or intention, our educational systems have not properly informed young people about their country's history or their governments. People easily graduate from secondary schools, colleges and universities with little, if any, knowledge of the institutions of their government and the politics of their fellow citizens. There is an absence of *political literacy* combined with a generally jaded view of politics and politicians. So, although idealistic youth may mouth platitudes about "helping the poor" or "cleaning up the environment," they have far too little basic understanding of economic and ecological problems to understand the breadth and depth of the issues and almost no idea about what practical (or even impractical) action might be taken to alleviate the multiple sources of distress that define their political existence.

Political incompetence among young people is not, of course, entirely their fault. We have been negligent in our educational policies and practices. We did not follow Graham Nash's advice. We have failed to "teach the children well." Accordingly, they tend to retreat into the "idiocy" of private life and to shun all parts of the political process. What's worse, we have little reason to believe that what seems true for this generation will not be even truer in the future. Lacking even a rudimentary sense of chronology or an elementary knowledge of political thought and action, the ease with which the unaware can be manipulated by aspirant tyrants with the power of surveillance, big data and mass advertising is more than marginally disturbing.

### **Neoliberalism**

A third factor is *the pervasive ideology of neoliberalism*, best captured in British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's unseemly but much quoted expression (1987): "There is no such thing [as society]. There are individual men and women and there are families." Dame Thatcher's defenders have claimed that these words, taken out of context, sound much harsher than they were meant to; nonetheless, her words as they stand are at the core of this pernicious ideology that has increasingly dominated North America, much of Europe and growing parts of the world for an entire generation. It endorses selfishness and denies social obligation. It doesn't mind charitable gifts, but it is outraged by taxation. Above all, it insists that everything from health care and education to parcel delivery and pollution controls should be governed only by a free market (which is, it should be obvious, by no sensible definition free). A distressing symbol of the entire movement is the renaming of members of the voting public: we are no longer *citizens*, but redefined as *clients*, *customers* and *taxpayers*. The result is *retail* politics and the exclusion of thoughtful consideration of policy from voter choice.

Privileging the private over the public sphere not only in the accumulation of wealth, but in all facets of social relations, neoliberal ideas provide justification for unravelling the social safety net, smashing trade unions, slashing public investment, deregulating resource, manufacturing, commercial and financial enterprises and—in the consciously chosen and deliberately deployed words of our current Prime Minister—declaring climate change to be a hoax and a "socialist plot." Also connected are issues of privatization of public services such as police forces and jails, while imposing draconian criminal codes and making a commitment to "permanent war," silencing scientists, suppressing alternative opinions in policy-making exercises and imposing a general climate of fear with regard to everything from immigration, pandemics and both foreign and domestic terrorism with the transparent intention of giving the authorities a blank cheque in terms of the withdrawal of civil rights.

### **Inverted Totalitarianism**

Finally (at least for my purposes), we are witnessing the imposition of what Sheldon Wolin (2008) famously called *inverted totalitarianism*, a concept that is simply described by Chris Hedges and Joe Sacco (2012) as

“a system where corporations have corrupted and subverted democracy and where economics trumps politics.” In our degraded democracy, they say, the ruling classes no longer need to impose their will as much by force (though they will do so if tempted), but generate compliance by largely ideological means—not least of which is the promulgation of a kind of cheap cynicism whereby ordinary people persuade one another that it is pointless to engage in political dissent because the authorities are so entrenched that opposition is futile. Or, put rather crudely, “you can’t fight City Hall” which, of course, implies the corollary, “therefore City Hall wins without a fight!”

Inverted totalitarianism is nothing less than the application of neoliberalism in the day-to-day events of our lives. It is fed by apathy and ignorance, of course, but it is further enabled by what the great American novelist and essayist Gore Vidal (1998) famously called the process of “shredding the [American] Bill of Rights.” Inverted totalitarianism involves the subversion of the kind of practical equality that has normally been associated with democratic politics and governance. In some cases, it means the ability of wealthy and influential group to dominate others by owning and controlling the means of ideological reproduction such as the newspapers and television networks and thus to control what counts as news and what the proper interpretation of events will be. It also means the ability to influence election outcomes through campaign contributions (Teachout, 2014), a matter taken to extreme limits by the current American Supreme Court in its extraordinary judgement in the 2010 Citizens United case which granted to corporations the same rights as individual citizens under the “free speech” protection of the First Amendment to *The Constitution of the United States* and, in effect, exempting them for controls on political spending enacted by the American Federal Election Commission. In the opinion of many critics, this effectively permits companies to “buy” elections. Or, as President Obama politely put it (CNN Political Ticker, 2010): the decision “gives the special interests and their lobbyists even more power in Washington”. And, as reported in *The Huffington Post* (Superville, 2010), “the ruling strikes at our democracy itself.”

While there are plenty of criticisms of institutional democracy, liberal democracy in practice and the limits of democratic possibilities in late capitalist society (to say nothing of the philosophical and psychological issues raised regarding the *purpose* of democracy and the *existential* relationship of democratic norms to individuals as we experience our lives as political actors), my intention here is to explore briefly one set of criticisms of contemporary democratic politics as they are practiced in the United States of America, Canada and the United Kingdom.

### **FPP versus PR**

With the foregoing catalogue of common criticisms in mind, I will, as others have done before me, call into question the fairness of the electoral system known casually as First-Past-the-Post (FPP). The consideration of what may seem like an arcane debate about rules and procedures certainly does not seem to raise the gripping issues that discussions of ignorance,

apathy, fraud and greed are capable of rearing. There are, however, some important questions of justice and fairness and just as many issues of immediate importance concerning who we elect, who our system excludes and how the expressed will of the people is hideously distorted as election results are engineered to thwart the will of the people.

Under the FPP system, in general elections involve countries being divided up into constituencies, ridings or districts in which any number of candidates may contest the election and in which most credible candidates representing one or another political party (there are some "Independents" but they are more often legislators who have been expelled from party caucuses rather than candidates who were elected despite having no party affiliation). Votes are cast and counted and the person winning a plurality, though not necessarily a majority, of the votes is declared the winner. In such a system, it is possible and often probable that more people will vote against rather than for a victorious candidate and that, if there are enough credible candidates, a person may be elected with only 40% or 30% or even less of the total vote.

In the alternative, I wish to present the case for Proportional Representation. This electoral method takes many slightly different forms. It is, however, used in the majority of extant liberal democracies and, in one way or another, allows the political parties to have a legislative presence roughly equal to the proportion of the votes that they attract. Among the different ways to do this, the most obvious is for the parties to draw up a list of their preferred candidates and if, for instance, there are 100 seats in a legislature and a party wins 25% of the votes, it will get 25% of the seats and the seats will be filled by the top 25 candidates. Variations exist that allow a significant number of constituency-based seats as well, but the main goal is the same: to ensure that the number of seats held closely reflect the actual popularity of each party.

Three cases will illustrate why some people regard FPP as an unfair and even an undemocratic way to elect presidents, prime ministers and legislators of various descriptions. I will select these from recent Canadian experience.

### **The Case of Small Parties**

The first case concerns *small parties* that may be presenting new and innovative programs that stand apart from the existing and well-established parties. An example is the Green Party of Canada. It is true that Canada is not a simple two-party system with voters normally choosing between the Conservatives and the Liberals; rather, Canadian history, at least since 1945, has increasingly made room for alternatives including the New Democratic Party on the mild-mannered left, at least one nationalist party in Québec and occasional dissenting groups such as the Reform Party which eventually transformed itself into the Canadian Alliance and subsequently conducted a hostile takeover of the former Progressive Conservatives. The NDP, which has been around since 1961, is an apparently permanent presence and is, at least for now, leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition

in Ottawa. So, we can sensibly call Canada a dominantly three-party system, although there are five parties with parliamentary representation at the moment.

The Green Party, however, has been a little different. Since its founding in 1983, it has slowly gained credibility and has arguably been instrumental in increasing Canadian awareness of environmental issues, especially climate change. In the elections since 2006, it has received a small percentage of the vote (between about 4% and 7%). With only 6%, however, a directly proportional allocation of seats would mean that at least 18 Green Party members would now be sitting in the House of Commons instead of the current 2 (one member directly elected and the other a deflection from another party after a brief time sitting as an Independent). A compelling argument can be made that people don't vote Green because they think their vote would be wasted and they choose instead to vote "strategically" so that a "less worse" candidate might prevail over the "worst." This process respects neither the integrity of voters who are forced to vote for someone they actually oppose, nor the principle of democracy which is intended to produce results that accurately reflect citizens' choices. Moreover, as a simple matter of practicality, with proportional representation, the mere existence of a presence in the House would undoubtedly boost the credibility of smaller parties, give them more visibility and the crucial benefit of being considered a possibility rather than an inevitable loser. With PR, a vote for a third, fourth or fifth party would actually count.

### **The Problem of Artificial Majorities**

The second case concerns the matter of *artificial majorities*. Since 1950, Canadians have elected nineteen federal governments, eleven of which have been "majority" governments with the party in power holding more than 50% of the seats in parliament. Yet, only twice has the winning party garnered 50% or more of the votes. The greatest "landslide" was in 1958, when John George Diefenbaker's Progressive Conservative Party won 53.7% of the vote, but took 208 out of 265 seats (78.5%). The next largest majority of the vote was won by Brian Mulroney's Progressive Conservatives in 1984, yet his mere 50% support gave him 211 out of 282 seats (74.8%). On the other hand, in the other majority governments an average of 42% of the people supported the winners and 58% did not; yet, in each case the triumphant leader managed to claim, with a straight face, that he had been given a mandate to govern.

Of course, people opposing PR insist that it would lead to a series of what the British call "hung parliaments" and nothing would get done. Minority governments, it is said, hinder "leadership." Now, I have no doubt that PR would produce many more minority governments and that it might be that no majority would be elected again. I am also prepared to stipulate that PR could produce (as it has in Italy and Israel) a constant series of failed governments, a reshuffling of alliances and a new government seemingly every year. At the same time, there is no fractiousness and parliamentary instability built into PR. Moreover, given our understanding of



the relatively pragmatic nature of Canadian political culture, I would be hard pressed to believe that fractious governments would be any greater danger than the proven undemocratic false majorities that have given governments the power to introduce and pass measures that over 60% of the people oppose. In my view, it would be an easy bet that PR would be a more satisfactory and satisfying system that would, incidentally, contribute to a higher level of engagement and better qualified voters who would not feel as left out or as ignored as they do today.

### **The Issue of Regional Concentration**

In one of the greatest turnabouts in Canadian history, the Progressive Conservative government of Brian Mulroney enjoyed two majority victories but, after Mulroney wisely decided to step down, his unfortunate successor ran a disastrous campaign in which her party's seats in the House of Commons dropped from a high of 211 (under Mulroney in 1984) to 177 (under Campbell in 1993).

Of interest here is not the Progressive Conservatives' ignominious defeat, but the fact that the party's share of the vote was 16%, a number that would have given it 47 seats. What's more, the role of Official Opposition was taken by the Bloc Québécois which received 13.5% of the vote, a smaller portion than the Progressive Conservatives, but won 54 seats because it only ran candidates in Québec. Moreover, the Reform Party, an Alberta-based party of disgruntled ex-Progressive Conservatives came third with 52 seats despite receiving the votes of 18.7% of Canadians, more than any other minor party.

Even from this superficial account, it is plain that the FPP system utterly misrepresents Canadian voters, deforms the expressed will of the people and results in an allocation of seats that is undemocratic, unfair, unconscionable and, I can only hope, unsustainable.

### **Five Propositions**

I now wish to set out five propositions that I hope will win approval and frame the subsequent argument.

- PR is a *formal* reform which, like the universal franchise, deals with method, not content;
- PR *will* result in a more accurate reflection of the popular will in legislature where it is used;
- PR will *probably* produce more minority and possibly coalition governments;
- PR *might* produce fractiousness and parliamentary instability leading to more frequent elections; but,
- whether the *possibility* of unstable government and frequent elections is a greater problem than the *reality* of regularly distorted government and the suppression of majority opinion is an open question; I am inclined to take the risk, preferring democracy over stability (and frankly not expecting much instability).

From here we can move to eight increasingly complex and therefore controversial statements.

1. Calls for electoral reform usually take one of two forms: they criticize the fact that the current system distorts the popular will and insist that the current system denies or limits individual rights. Both elements are present in the case as I have presented it.

2. The denial of individual rights mainly involves the subversion of the right to vote in free and fair elections in which all votes "count." This may take two forms: (a) a vote for any candidate who doesn't have a realistic chance of winning is considered a *wasted* vote; (b) a vote for the "lesser of two evils" with a realistic chance of victory is a *coerced* vote for a candidate (or party) that I do not genuinely endorse. Both votes are wasted in the sense that neither gives my true opinion a chance to be heard.

This is a *liberal* objection, not in the sense of party affiliation, but with regard to its connection to philosophical liberalism originating in Hobbes and Locke, passing through Jeffersonian democrats, given utilitarian support by Bentham, being refined by John Stuart Mill and being made more inclusive as women, Asian minorities and First Nations Peoples were added to the Canadian voters list in about 1920, 1950 and 1960 respectively. Now, the universal right to vote is generally accepted. But let us take note of the liberal theory that backed up the reforms leading to our current electoral arrangements:

- Liberal theory attacked on aristocratic power, intending to "liberate" capital and empower the rising *bourgeoisie* without addressing other questions of equity or extending the franchise to the lower orders (Macpherson, 1962).
- Liberalism gradually expanded its definition of "natural rights" to those enumerated in the first ten amendments to the *Constitution of the United States*, and then to take up certain social and economic equity measures – in brief, liberalism began to embrace democracy and, ultimately, a pragmatic "welfare state" and various "civil rights" issues;
- Whether in its evolved form as manifest in the US Democratic Party, the Canadian Liberal and recently moderated New Democratic Party, the "new labour" of Britain's Labour Party or in the harsh "neoliberalism" of contemporary the Republican, Canadian and British Conservative Parties, liberalism *remains* a formalistic, legalistic approach stressing private rights over public interests. It endorses *liberté*, is divided on *égalité*, but generally stops short of *fraternité* (or, better, *solidarité*).

3. The distortion of the popular will is revealed in the commonly understood outcome of *artificial majorities*, the illegitimate success of *regional parties* and the underrepresentation of *third or fourth parties* that may get between five and twenty percent of the vote, but obtain few if any seats and nowhere near the number that would be awarded under a PR system. This, too, is a liberal argument:

- It is based on the idea that the popular will is an *aggregation* of individual wills;
- It does not include *public* rights or goods, except as asserted by individuals;
- It retains the “marketplace” model in which *community* is excluded and reform is limited to revising the mechanism whereby aggregated possessive individualism is translated into a more accurate and fair version of FPP.

By these lights, political participation is all about maximizing our own personal values. As such, PR is mainly a method of compelling “liberal democracy” to improve or perfect its *methods*, but it does not revise the liberal norm and its obsession with private desires.

6. Some may be satisfied with a reformed system and, while objecting to the current *means*, wonder what’s wrong with the current *ends*. I’d like to “push” both “envelopes.”

7. I argue that there *is* something fundamentally wrong with the ends of liberalism. Apart from deeper “philosophical” issues concerning the nature of the self and its relation to others selves and ultimately to “society,” I contend that the urgency of contemporary ecological degradation and economic inequity present immanent threats to our society and to democracy itself. If we do not address these impending catastrophes in a spirit of solidarity, the resulting collapse and conflict may render any discussion of democratic procedures moot.

Let us revisit liberal principles in their French iteration. The American Revolution was premised on the call for individual rights to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” (the latter being “code” for *property*); the French Revolution, however, spoke of “liberté, égalité et fraternité.” Liberty is pretty easy to understand. Equality is a little more complicated in that it can mean:

- “equal rights under the law” (which is the basic “liberal” message);
- “equality of opportunity” (which is the application of liberty to the economy); or
- “equality of condition” (which doesn’t necessarily deny the first liberal commitment, but adds a “socialist” component.

The United States of America, Canada, the United Kingdom as well as Australia, New Zealand, the Scandinavian and continental European and other countries claim that their citizens enjoy liberty under the law and equality of opportunity (at least as aspirational values) and go some distance toward equality of condition (welfare, government pensions, unemployment insurance, etc.), though the amount of social assistance varies greatly from, for example, Sweden to Mississippi and there can be no doubt that the gap between rich and poor is not only large but growing in the (perhaps not coincidentally) FFP nations.

8. What has been generally lost, however, is *fraternité* or "solidarity" which moves out of the realm of merely "private" rights and the primacy of the "individual" and into a deeper concern for "public" or "communal" interests.

### **Beyond Liberalism**

I now want to invite consideration of the question of whether the "liberal" version is adequate or even very meaningful if all we are doing is advocating a "tinkering with" or "refinement of" a political mechanism that does no more than express personal, private, self-interested or even selfish desires. Part of an argument for expanding our view of democracy to include the "common weal" can come from traditional notions of care or charity and concern for our compatriots arising out of a sense of compassion or even an elevated and more rational notion of social justice (*we are* or ought to be our *brothers' keepers*), but it may also have tremendously important social consequences.

Over the past year, a large number of people were smitten with a new book by a French economist named Thomas Piketty (2014, Doughty 2014c, Doughty, 2014d). *Capital in the Twenty-first Century* explains how the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. What they tend to neglect is another new book by a French historian named Pierre Rosanvallon (*The Society of Equals*). The first has caused a large uproar because, wholly within the liberal framework and without the apparent taint of Marxist doctrine, it unmaskes most of the folklore/propaganda of contemporary capitalism and shows not only how it creates the rich/poor gap, but also intensifies it, thus showing its *inherent* unfairness within the logical-empirical calculations of mainstream economic theory. The second probably won't even be permitted the kind of popularity enjoyed by the first because it deals with the moral argument in favour of greater economic equality and mutual regard.

My point here is that the moral argument, while compelling, is inadequate because it will not engage people for whom self-interest is an essential *moral* and *political* principle (for whatever reasons). Instead, I want to stress two important *pragmatic* principles:

(a) the threat to social stability which comes when economic inequality becomes intolerable;

(b) the threat to ecological sustainability which comes when unfettered economic self-interest is allowed to toxify the natural environment (short term gain with long-term pain).

In short, PR is essential for *fairness* under the current electoral rules; but, it is not enough. Democracy, if it is to flourish, cannot be satisfied with revising rules that do not *also* embrace a more inclusive ethic of "solidarity" that goes beyond the individualistic preoccupations of liberalism and encourages growing relations among all members of society, between societies and between human and non-human nature. From this perspective, PR is both an end and a means to a further end.

It is an end insofar as it would alleviate the disfiguring of liberal democracy as a legitimate process the purpose of which remains the same as it was in its foundations—namely the aggregation of private interests, the maximization of personal utilities, the evolution of something akin to a general will, the resolution of civil conflicts and the authoritative allocation of values (Easton, 1965) in accordance with rules of procedural fairness, equality, equity (Rawls, 1971) and liberty.

It is also a means to an end of greater democracy that, like Caesar's wife, both is and appears to be virtuous. FFP is neither. And it is the appearance of vice that is one of the principal flaws that alienates people and encourages them to remain silent, sullen, uninvolved and what modern minds mean by the term "cynical."

In closing, it is worth mentioning that, by improving the efficaciousness and legitimacy of democracy by treating the toxic consequences of FFP, we may be able to take the next step. I have thus far held that altering the electoral system would be tonic to politics as it is understood today. That form of democracy, of course, is far from perfect even if the political system were to be perfectly run (Kariel, 1966). It would still rely on a definition of the political process as an exercise in interest aggregation, policy formation and implementation as a form of compromise among competing interests. The next steps would include methods whereby existential questions of social continuity including economic disparity and ecological degradation could be solved (or at least ameliorated). They might also include the redemption of the current reaction to a flawed and partial liberalism by opening up the political system to currently repressed interests such as the Green Party and other even less visible presences (aboriginal people, for example).

The dilemma faced by advocates of change, however, is this: in order to improve our political system, we need to replace FFP with PR; but, in the absence of PR, replacing FFP is more than a daunting project. After all, any party that holds power or that can reasonably expect to hold power in the near future is unlikely to introduce an electoral system that may make it extremely difficult ever to hold a majority in parliament again.

Faced with this structural obstacle, we may be left with the realization that, in order to get a better version of liberal democracy, it may be necessary for the existing form to grind to a halt, to become so transparently dysfunctional that even those holding formal power will see the need to remedy a desperate situation. It would do my heart good to believe that such a crisis will be unnecessary. I would like to think that more generous minds will prevail and that, like the majority of liberal democracies, we will see the error of our ways and take steps to correct it.

In the meantime, as citizens, I *believe* that it is our responsibility to organize, to agitate and to instruct an almost anomic electorate. As an educator, I *know* that it is my duty to inform students not merely of the realities, but also of the transformative possibilities that may be in store if the public domain can be restored and the lives of individuals immensely enhanced by the sheer joy of empowerment and the opportunity to make a

real difference in righting social, political, economic and ecological wrongs (Kariel, 1979). At no time in the past have the hazards to civilization and survival been as acute as they are today, and at no time has it been clearer that the best cure for democracy is *more* democracy.

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### **Case Reference**

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