

Representative  
themselves either  
directly or indirectly  
through



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Representative parliaments, the product of the 19th and 20th centuries, became the central institutions of democratic governments. " Democratic ideas fuelled the revolts against colonialism and laid the foundation of the modern welfare state." Democracy, unlike Communism or Socialism, " has never become identified with a definite doctrinal source.

A by-product of the entire development of post-Renaissance civilisation, it indicates both a set of ideals and a political system." Meaning of Democracy: The term democracy is derived from the Greek words, demos and kratos, the former meaning the people and the latter power. Democracy, thus, means power of the people. It is now regarded as a form of government in which the people rule themselves either directly or indirectly through their representatives. Definitions of democracy, as a form of government, are various. But like many other definitions in Political Science, they differ in their content and application. The Greeks meant by it the Government by many and Aristotle considered it as a perverted form of government.

Modern writers do not regard democracy as a perverted form of government. What Polity was for Aristotle democracy is for us? Nor do they employ the mere numerical consideration to designate it so. Their emphasis is that in democracy all persons, who are fit to perform the duties of citizens, should have a share in the direction of the State and their will should ultimately prevail. Seeley means by it a government in which everyone has a share. Dicey defines democracy as that form of government in which the governing body is a comparatively large fraction of the entire nation. Bryce accepts the definition of Herodotus and says that democracy denotes that form of government in which the ruling power of the State is largely vested in the

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members of the community as a whole. He adds, " This means in communities which act by voting, that rule belongs to the majority, as no other method has been found for determining peaceably and legally what is to be declared the will of the community which is not unanimous." MacIver says, " Democracy is not a way of governing, whether by majority or otherwise, but primarily a way of determining who shall govern and broadly, to what ends.

This involves a freedom of choice in electing the rulers and the consent of the electors that those who receive the mandate should alone rule. It means that democracy has a popular base and it hinges upon the consent of the governed. But the mere consent of the people is not enough to make a government democratic. The people ought to be, to use the words of Plato their own " watch-dogs." The consent of the people must be real, active and effective in order to make it a genuine democracy. Eternal vigilance is the very life of democracy, if democracy can really claim, in the words of President Abraham Lincoln, to be a government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

Government is, of course, always of the people, but it need not be government by the people. Monarchies and Aristocracies are governments of the people but not by the people. A government by the people means that people either directly or through their representatives govern themselves, and their will remains supreme on all questions of social direction and policy of the government. It is not correct to say, however, that democracy is a government by the representatives of all people. " The people" has been a

varying term, as Bryce points out, and it has come to mean something vastly different from what it meant to Aristotle, or even to Lincoln.

It now means the majority of the people. Democracy, according to Bryce, is a form of government “ in which the will of the majority of the qualified citizen’s rules, taking the qualified citizens to constitute the great bulk of the inhabitants...” It is obvious that democracy allows every qualified citizen to express an opinion on affairs of the State. But it cannot secure that every man’s opinion shall influence the actions of the State. All citizens cannot be made to agree on all questions of importance.

Moreover, all citizens cannot have a voice in determining the policy of the government. Even the most ardent democrat will not vote for lunatics, criminals or infants. Participation is always limited by age; and frequently by sex, as it is only recently that women have been given the franchise in many leading countries, and in many they have not yet received it.

In many States the suffrage is restricted to those who possess a certain amount of property, and in most cases a certain minimum of literacy and education is required. Therefore, democracy does not mean participation by all the people. Whenever we speak of government by the people or the will of the people, we mean the will of the majority for the time being. There are two reasons for the will of the majority to prevail. First, they are on the whole more likely to be right than the minority. The majority, when considered as a collectivity, possess a wisdom of their own that may be superior to that of any minority. For one thing, it has been pointed out that there may be

several minority groups in the community, each of which claims to be superior to and profoundly wiser to the other.

Quite frequently one minority may clash in a serious way with the other on what constitutes rational causes of action. By allowing the majority to govern, the problem of deciding which of various minorities is “ really” superior is avoided. Secondly, a majority in most cases is physically stronger than a minority. Unless the majority grossly abuses its power, it is politic for the minority to submit to its will, lest the majority should resort to coercion. But it must be admitted that “ the coercion of dissentient minority constitutes a special difficulty for a government founded on the principle of consent.” Democracy can be successful only when minorities feel that they are not subjected to oppression by majority and that their case has been properly heard. When we admit that under a democratic government there is political equality, we mean thereby that opportunity is provided to all citizens “ to pass judgment freely and frequently on the work of the political engineers whose decisions affect their lives.

” It is then only that a government can be by the people. A democratic government cannot please everybody any more than a Monarchical or an Aristocratic government. But the former concedes to every citizen the rights of speech, publication and association. These rights are integral to democracy because they make possible free discussion and the continuous participation of the people in the government. A government by the people must, accordingly, mean a government by discussion and criticism— discussion of competing ideas, “ leading to a compromise in which all the ideas are reconciled and which can be accepted by all because it bears the <https://assignbuster.com/representative-themselves-either-directly-or-indirectly-through/>

imprint of all." Rights of minority, as those of majority, are, thus, embedded in the basic democratic elements of freedom, equality, and rationality. When men deliberate collectively the goodness and rationality rise to their heights. For, in the course of discussion they exchange facts and ideas and also come to appreciate the interests and opinions of others.

In this way the majority emerges with a sense of what its own needs are and, hopefully, what is best for society as a whole. It is, indeed, rare for a majority to impose its will harshly on minorities. Reasonable members of a majority will insist on justice and fair play as reasonable members of a minority will insist on submission and obedience, for today's minority may become tomorrow's majority. This makes democracy a government of restraints in which reciprocity prevails, that is, restraints on a majority as well as on a minority and both respecting restraints relating to each other. The meaning of government for the people can best be explained in the words of Mazzini: " the progress of all through all under the leading of the best and wisest." The test of government is the welfare of the people, and that form of government is to be preferred which gives to human tendencies the fullest scope for development. The primary functions of a democratic government are similar to those of any other form of government. But, in addition to this, " democracy stimulates to self-education, for participation in governmental activities, opens wider horizons for the individual and leads to broadened interests.

" The lessons of democracy are liberty, equality, fraternity and rationality. Its principle is that all persons who are fit to perform the duties of citizens should have a share in the direction of the State so that each man may have

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an identical opportunity to grow and expand to the best of his capacity, and there is no man or group of men who will exploit the weakness of others.

Democracy does not differentiate between man and man. It raises the common man high on the pedestal of social and political glory and this is the meaning of a government for the people. For a democratic government there must be a democratic society.

A democratic government aims at justice and happiness. Justice, because no man or class or group will be strong enough to wrong others; happiness because each man judging best what is for his good, will have every chance of pursuing it. "The principles of liberty and equality are justified by the results they yield." Here liberty and equality have a reference to the well-known dictum of Kant: "So act as to treat humanity whether in your person or in that of another, in every case as an end, and never merely as a means.

"This is the requisite of a democratic society, for it instills the democratic ideal into the human mind. It is the worth and dignity of the human being as an individual which a democratic society recognises and it is, again, the worth and dignity of man which a democratic government provides maintains and guarantees. Both aims at what Bentham has reduced into a beautiful formula: Everyone to count for one and no one for more than democratic one. A democratic government, therefore, can exist and thrive when the society is democratic. Dunning has rightly remarked that our failure to understand democracy in its wider meaning, as a form of society, is the main reason for its being subjected to severe criticism. "Democracy", writes Sir Stafford Cripps "is a system of government in which every adult citizen is equally free to express his views and desires upon all subjects in <https://assignbuster.com/representative-themselves-either-directly-or-indirectly-through/>

whatever way he wishes, and to influence the majority of his fellow-citizens to decide according to those views, and to influence those desires." It means that uniformity of belief or action is neither necessary nor desirable in democracy.

Truth only comes by the clash of opinion with opinion and every citizen has something of value to contribute and he must not be hindered from bringing it forward. Democracy is, thus, rooted in equality and can be found in a democratic society in which all enjoy equal rights and privileges without any barriers of class distinctions. " A democratic society," says Wolf " is a society of free, equal, active and intelligent citizens, each man choosing his own way of life for himself and willing that others should choose theirs.

" The brotherhood of man is the basis of a democratic society and all its members stand equal in the common fraternity. Birth, wealth, caste, or creed does not determine the status of man. A society riddled with social and economic inequalities cannot be called a democratic society. Social and economic inequalities bring inequalities of treatment and right. Where a common man is not as good a factor of society as another, true citizenship cannot be secured and a democratic government cannot succeed in such an undemocratic society.

The Communists give a new meaning to democracy. They deny the need for a democratic government, but emphasise the necessity of a democratic State and a democratic State to them is only a socialist State with the dictatorship of the proletariat. They ridicule the western system of democracy with its economic and social inequalities and regard the



toleration of minorities, which is the life-blood of democracy, as a show of hypocrisy, because for them the existence of minorities does not help the abolition of privileges. It is only in a socialist society which is classless, they assert, that there are no exploiters and no exploited. All the people are toilers and there exists no antagonism among them.

But the Communists are really not democrats and theirs is not a democratic State. They permit the existence of only one party, the Communist, and difference of opinion with regard to the socialist structure of society is not allowed to prevail. All must be ideologically committed Communists and imbued with a socialist spirit. The dictatorship of the proletariat is a transitional phase in the evolution of socialism.

When socialism is fully established, the State ' withers away' and gives place to a Communist society. This may be democracy, but not as we understand it. According to our conception, democracy is not hostile to the State. It is the best form of government and a permanent feature of the State in which equal opportunity is provided to every man, irrespective of the opinion he holds, to contribute his judgment to the determination of public policy.

As a theory of society, democracy stands for that social order which recognises the inherent worth of every human being and has a never-ending faith in the common man. But such recognition can only be ensured by the State and guaranteed by its laws. Democracy is, therefore, difficult to define and Freeman correctly says that " it is commonly very hard to make out what modern writers mean by democracy." It is not a mere form of government.

Dewey has aptly said that “ to say that democracy is only a form of government is like saying that home is a more or less geometrical arrangement of bricks and mortar, or that church-is a building with pews, pulpit and spire.” Democracy, according to Barker, is a mode of spirit, an attitude of mind of those who profess it, and only those who profess it can practise it. There is synchronisation of thoughts and actions and this is the essence of democracy.