

What Does Healthy Democracy Look Like?

Surely nobody in this day and age has the temerity to suggest that there's anything wrong with democracy? Surely I am not doing so?

Well, it depends what exactly we mean by democracy. As always, it's important that we define our terms. Democracy means the rule of the people (Demos = People).

The rule of the people could be the rule of the Majority (note the upper case). This is not necessarily a good thing. Nazi Germany was the rule of the Majority and the oppression by the Majority of the Minorities. The communist regimes in the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China were also governments ruled by the Majority, i.e. the workers, at least in theory (unlike the Nazis, the communists were never elected to power by the "Majority" that they claimed to represent). In theory (it was many more things in practice), Communism was the oppression by the Majority (poor) of the Minority (rich). This form of "democracy" is tyranny.

Ironically, and paradoxically, modern western "democracy" is not always the rule of the Majority but the rule of a coalition of Minorities who use the political mechanisms to further their own sectional interests, through lobbying, control of the media etc. In such pluralistic "democracies" the Majority is often not only silent but impotent. This form of "democracy" is also tyranny, though of a softer variety.

The rule of the people could be the rule of the Mob. This was the danger inherent in democracy that Plato delineates in the *Republic* (and as Shakespeare suggests in *Julius Caesar*). As one might expect of a philosopher of Plato's stature his critique is unsettlingly close to the reality that we are

experiencing in our own time. His wisdom possesses the timelessness that is attached to Truth.

In our day, the control by minorities of political mechanisms, such as the mass media, has led to the manipulation of the minds of the Majority by powerful sectional interests. It has also led to rule by the Mob of Youth, the most immature and naïve members of society, who are therefore the most susceptible to media manipulation. It's a disturbing thought: that the very fabric of civilized society, essentially unchanged from time immemorial, can be unraveled overnight by the Mob of Youth, the lowest and most ignorant kind of mob rule.

There is, however, a genuine form of democracy, which is known as subsidiarity. This understanding of society is rooted in the sacrosanct position of the Family at the heart of society. It protects this smallest of political organisms from the tyranny of Big Power. It calls for democratic structures to be brought closer to the people, i.e. closer to families, through the devolution of power from Big Government to Small Government. It calls for the devolution of power from undemocratic "democratic" institutions, such as the Federal Government or the European Union, and the restoration of real political power to local, regional and state governments, as well as to the family itself, which is the smallest, healthiest and noblest of all political institutions.

I discuss the undemocratic nature of modern macro-democracies in my book, [*Small is Still Beautiful*](#), especially in the chapters titled "A Democracy of Small Areas" and "Making Democracy Democratic".

The problem is not democracy *per se* but the bogus democracy which is really a tyranny.