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## DEMOCRACY - THE MOST UNDEFINED WORD IN THE WORLD

*Democracy should be the means by which society or its parliament may come to a collective compromise. Such a compromise cannot be identified by a majority vote. Indeed, in many instances, the majority vote is only the means by which he who writes the question thereby dominates the political agenda. A compromise can be identified, however, by using a multioption voting procedure, the most accurate (and therefore most democratic) form being the modified Borda count and/or the Condorcet system.*

In theory, democracy, rule by the people, should be a means by which we can all come to a collective decision, to an agreement based upon our average public opinion, our common consensus. In practice, it falls far short of this ideal, for in almost every country of the world, the political process has degenerated into a contest in which one faction seeks to dominate the rest. And wherever there is a background of ethnic and/or religious difference, such a contest often exacerbates the underlying tensions in society and provokes violence and war.

In this paper, I will examine the historical process which led to the evolution of our current adversarial politics, before then suggesting a re-

form via which these existing structures could be reformed.

### SO WHAT WENT WRONG?

The first democracies in the ancient Greek city states involved a direct form of governance in which all male citizens (so no women or slaves) could take part. When the nation state began to emerge, such a direct form of participation had to be replaced by a more practical form, namely, a representative system of government. The first examples of these were not very democratic; some, like the Russian "zemskii sobor" set up under Ivan IV, were nothing more than a collection of aristocrats; even so, it was a brake on what was otherwise the auto-

cratic rule of the Tzar. Elsewhere, in England for example, the first parliament was established on the basis of a very limited franchise, so it too was confined to only the "upper" echelons of society.

Nevertheless, initially at least, it followed a sort of democratic principle. The member for such-and-such a constituency did his best for that constituency, or at least for the rich males in that constituency who formed his electorate, and that was his only loyalty. At the time, there were no political parties. There was a tendency for the English parliament to split into two factions - with one lot of rich males, "the court", regarding the others as newcomers, those who became rich during the civil war, "the country" - and this tendency to split was the almost inevitable result of taking decisions by majority vote.

As society evolved, the intellectuals of the day turned to the pen and democracy was a fairly popular theme. Writers referred to the general will (Rousseau), the greater good (Bentham) and so on. With rather more revolutionary zeal, the rich white males of America were on a similar theme, and there soon appeared that now famous phrase of the US constitution: "We, the people..." At no time, however, did the English or American thinkers question the simple majority vote.

That happened in France. Prior to the revolution, various members of *l'Academie des Sciences* started to think on this theme. In theory, they argued, the democratic process should be one by which can be identified the will of the people or, in a representative democracy, the will of their parliament. But, when they looked across the English Channel at what was then the only existing democracy in the world, they cried "*Man Dieu* - that's ridiculous!" The identification of the will of parliament cannot be achieved by means of a two-option vote such as "are you left-wing or right-wing?" Maybe it is one or the other but, if so, to what extent? Or maybe it is neither, in which case, how should the member vote?

(No, majority voting is a means by which he who writes the question thereby dominates the agenda, which is why majority voting has been used by such notables as Saddam Hussein, Pervez Musharraf, Franjo Tudjman, Slobodan Milosevic, Ayatollah Khomeini, Augusto Pinochet, Frances Duvalier, Adolf Hitler, Ion Antonescu,

Benito Mussolini and Napoleon Bonaparte! It is also used by Tony Blair in the House of Commons, not least by means of the whip system, by George Bush in Congress, and by the same George W when supposedly debating Iraq in the UN Security Council!)

So they thought of different ways. Marquis de Condorcet suggested a league system, Jean Charles de Borda a points system. They argued a little but eventually, in 1774, *l'Academie* adopted the Borda points system and it worked well. Then, however, a new member came along and said an emphatic "non," and that was the same Napoleon Bonaparte. Of course he preferred the majority vote, the perfect means by which a dictator may manipulate others! Since then, for some extraordinary reason, Jean Charles de Borda has disappeared into obscurity, even in France.

But let us return to our history. Parliaments were using the majority vote and, partially as a direct consequence of this practice, those parliaments were splitting into usually two factions. The English split into the Whigs and the Tories, while the Americans split via a rather convoluted process into Republicans and Democrats, (although initially they were the other way round).

(And in a very similar fashion, the first USSR Congress of 1989 split into two, with one "half" under Mikhail Gorbachev and the other under the second Nobel prize winner, Andrei Sakharov. Similar trends have been seen in many Central and East European countries).

Before the emergence of the US political parties, however, there was a very strong opposition against such a tendency. The elected representative should be non-partisan, they argued, and George Washington, for example, insisted that he represented everybody.

But, and here's the rub, Congress continued to use the two-option simple majority vote. Therefore it split into two. Therefore elected representatives formed political parties. Therefore, those political parties became centralised machines, either by the use of patronage and/or by means of a whip system. The story is so often the same.

And hence the very undemocratic situation today where, in so many countries, sometimes the parliament represents the country (depending on how fair is the electoral system) but where the government represents only a faction.

The one notable exception is Switzerland, which introduced all-party coalition government in 1959. Similar forms of power-sharing have been tried from necessity in some post-conflict scenarios, in Bosnia, Lebanon and Northern Ireland, for example. Elsewhere, though, it is either single party majority rule, as in UK and US, that or it is a majority coalition consisting of maybe two parties as in Germany, or as many as 24, as in India.

Hence, to-day, there exists the situation where a member of parliament has two loyalties: one is to his/her constituents, but the other is to his party. Indeed, in many instances, the member for "Contown" will be acting, not only *against* the best wishes of some of his own constituents, but also on behalf of voters *outside* his/her constituency. There is another more worrying consequence. If someone wishes to be a politician as an independent, he/she will have to work very hard, usually in his own home constituency, slowly building up his reputation and so forth. If another less principled character chooses such a career, he can choose a political party and go to whichever constituency will have him. Indeed, if he's lucky, he will get a "safe seat" and not have to bother at all!

#### REFORM

So, what needs to be done? And I accept, I'm not the first to ask "*Что dyelat'?*" The answer is actually remarkably simple: reform the decision-making voting procedure, i.e., replace the two-option majority vote by a more accurate measure of opinion. Before we go on, perhaps we should note that the English word for this system of governance is "majoritarianism" which, in Russian translation is - yes, you've guessed - "bolshevism". Admittedly, the Russian word has acquired some rather nasty connotations over the course of the last century but initially, in 1903 when the word was coined, the *bolshevik* was just the member of the *bolshinstvo*, the majority; and that majority came from a decision-making process which gave all power to he who wrote the question: Lenin.

The necessary reform, then is this: introduce multi-option voting. When a member of parliament is confronted by a vote which is

only *A* or *B*, he has very little choice. Furthermore, if the *A* option is a left-wing variant while the *B* option is a right-wing version, then for the member of parliament who belongs to either a left- or right-wing party, the choice is clear: in other words, the vote is a non-thinking process. No wonder, in many instances, the member doesn't even listen to the debate. His mind is made up already, that or his mind is made up for him. And in those parliaments where the government has a majority of members anyway, the outcome is a foregone conclusion. The whole thing, in other words, is a waste of time.

But bring in multi-option voting and then what happens? Well, when there are three options on the agenda, *A*, *B* and *C*, the member can vote in 6 different ways: *A B C*, *A C B*, *B C A*, *B A C*, *C B A* and *C A B*. If there are four options, there are 24 different ways of voting. If five, 120. And so it goes on. It's called pluralism.

We should emphasise that, in politics, nearly every question is, or should be, a multi-option choice. There are numerous constitutional arrangements, numerous structures of government, numerous economic policies, numerous ways of planning a housing development, and so on. There are also numerous electoral systems to choose from and, it must be said, numerous decision-making voting procedures. For some reason, however, many politicians and journalists think there is only one: the simple majority vote, because it suits them. For thus *they* write the question.

In multi-option voting, however, there are several possibilities and, as Joseph Stalin used to say, "It's not the people who vote that count; it's the people who count the votes." So, let us now look at what methodologies there are, before deciding which are more democratic and which less. We have already mentioned: (i) majority voting, (ii) points voting or a Borda count and (iii) a league system Condorcet, but there is also (iv) plurality voting, (v) two-round voting, (vi) the alternative vote, and (vii) serial voting.

Let's take an example. If we have a seven member parliament consisting of Messrs K, L, M, N, O, P and Q voting on four different options, *A*, *B*, *C* and *D*, as follows:

|                            | Mr K     | Ms L     | Mr M     | Ms N     | Mr O     | Ms P     | Mr Q     |
|----------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> preference | <i>A</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>B</i> | <i>C</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>D</i> |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> preference | <i>B</i> | <i>B</i> | <i>B</i> | <i>C</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>B</i> | <i>C</i> |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> preference | <i>C</i> | <i>C</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>B</i> | <i>C</i> | <i>B</i> |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> preference | <i>D</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>C</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>A</i> |

(i) and (iv) Majority or plurality vote:

Majority voting is used in almost every parliament in the world, while plurality voting, invented in AD 105, is used in some referendums, as in Finland for example.

In plurality voting, we examine only the 1st preferences, in which case in this example, *A* with a score of 3 is the winner, even though an outright majority of 4 think *A* is the worst option!

(ii) Borda count

The Borda count, as noted above, was proposed in 1774, but it was actually invented in 1435.

In a Borda count of  $\eta$  options, a first preference gets  $\eta$  points, a second preference gets  $\eta - 1$  points and so on. In this instance, the scores are  $A = 16$ ,  $B = 20$ ,  $C = 17$  and  $D = 17$ , so *B* is the winner.

Condorcet count

As noted earlier, the Condorcet count was devised at the same time as the Borda count, though it probably dates from the 12th century.

In a Condorcet count, we compare *A* with *B*, then *A* with *C*, then *A* with *D*, then *B* with *C* and so on, six pairings in all. *B* beats *A* by 4 to 3, *B* beats *C* by 5 to 2, and in winning 3 pairings to *C*'s 2 and *D*'s 1, *B* is the winner.

Two-round voting

Two-round voting is often used in elections, in Russia and France, for example, but it is also used in some multi-option referendums, in 1992, for example, in New Zealand.

We take the two leading options from a plurality vote count - *A* 3 and *D* 2 - before then having a straight majority vote second round between these two, which *D* wins by 4 to 3.

Alternative vote

The alternative vote, first proposed in 1821, is used in its PR form in elections in Ireland and Malta.

The first round is based on a plurality count. If no option gains an absolute majority,

we eliminate that option with the lowest score - *C* with 1 point - and transfer that vote to its second preference, *D*. And the process continues until there is a winner, in this instance *D* with a score of 4.

Serial voting

Serial voting originated in Sweden and was introduced into the Finnish parliament in 1905, even though Finland was at that time still under the Russians.

Options are arranged in order, left-wing to right-wing, cheap to expensive or whatever. A majority vote is taken between the two extremes, *A* and *D*. The loser, *A*, is eliminated. Another vote is taken between the next extremes, *B* and *D*. And so on. The eventual winner in our example is *B*.

So, there are lots of ways of counting. And if you count in a different way, as Stalin would say, you often get a different answer. In practice, it will usually be seen that a modified Borda count and/or a Condorcet count give a very accurate representation of the will of those voting. Furthermore, if the Condorcet count coincides with the modified Borda count, we can know for sure that the answer is accurate [1].

A Democratic Structure

To reform the existing structures of government is, as noted above, fairly easy. The first thing to do is to insist that, just as parliament should represent the entire electorate, so too any government should represent the entire parliament. A parliament should therefore elect its government, preferably through a system of PR, and if the chosen methodology is the matrix vote [2] - a PR system by which members can vote, not only for whoever they wish to see in government, but also for the ministerial post they wish each nominee to have, and what's more, to do it all in his/her order of preference - the government will then be an all-party power-sharing grand coalition.

Secondly, if that parliament takes all non-urgent decisions in free, multi-option votes, and

if those votes are analysed on the basis, as we suggested, of a Borda/Condorcet count, then that broad-based coalition will be able to function successfully. There will still be political parties, of course; folks will always tend to congregate with those of a similar bent. But there will be minimal political patronage in both government and parliament.

The feasibility of such a structure will be enhanced by one important quality of a Borda count. If any one particular party wants its own option to win - and doubtless that is the case - it will try to ensure that, come the vote, its option gets as many points as possible. Well, all of its own party members will give it a high preference. But what about the erstwhile opponents? In majoritarian politics, victory depends upon only a faction. In a Borda count, success depends upon the opinion of everyone who votes. Therefore the advocate of any option should try to persuade those supposed opponents of the benefits of his/her option. Thus, in consensus politics, a completely different atmosphere is created: one moves away from the adversarial nature of what is still the British system, and moves towards a more consensual polity.

By combining practice from around the world - by using a Lebanese type of electoral system in which various multi-ethnic lists compete in a PR election, by using a Thai structure in that the second house should be non-partisan, by allowing for the citizens' initiative as the Swiss do, by limiting terms of office as happens in Switzerland again as well as in the US, by using multi-option referendums as happens in quite a few countries, and by taking parliamen-

tary votes on a multi-option basis as is the case in Sweden and Finland - one could actually finish up with a very democratic model indeed. In years gone by, there were some practical difficulties; it is quite difficult, for example, to do a Condorcet count on, say, ten options. Nowadays, however, the advent of the computer has made multi-option voting feasible.

In a democracy, the opportunity to change always exists. That's the theory. In practice, however, the best opportunities exist at a time of great social upheaval, like the collapse of the USSR. If any new structures which emerge in the immediate aftermath, in the Ukraine and any of the other former republics, are strong, they will survive the test of time. If not, if there are some basic faultlines, those faults will become larger and larger as the years go by, until some future moment of social change.

There were faultlines in the majoritarian structure adopted in Russia in 1989, and similar ones in the constitution of Georgia, for example. The crises which have occurred since - the attempted coup in Russia and a very authoritarian regime under Yeltsin, and the wars in Georgia over Abkhazia and S Ossetia - only serve to prove the point. Let us hope that other nations can learn from these and other mistakes. So far, such hopes are slim. Northern Ireland, Kosovo, Kashmir, Macedonia, Moldova, Quebec and Sudan, to name but a few, are all suffering the consequences of majoritarianism as in the prospects of yet more simple majority constitutional plebiscites. What's more, Indonesia has already been called Asia's Yugoslavia. The need for reform, therefore, cannot be over-emphasised.

1. A Borda count has one disadvantage: it is open to the theory of the irrelevant alternative as it is called. While a Condorcet count can be subject to the paradox of voting. Details can be found in the de Borda Institute's *Beyond the Tyranny of the Majority*. By combining the two

counts, and insisting that the outcome can only be enacted if both counts give the same answer, we can then rest assured that the debate was properly conducted and the options fairly set.

2. See the de Borda Institute's *The Politics of Consensus*.

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## ДЕМОКРАТІЯ - НАЙНЕВИЗНАЧЕНІШЕ СЛОВО У СВІТІ

*Демократія повинна бути засобом, за допомогою якого суспільство або його парламент можуть дійти колективного компромісу. Такий компроміс не може бути визначений шляхом голосування простою більшістю. Насправді, в багатьох випадках таке мажоритарне голосування є лише засобом, за допомогою якого ті, хто формулюють питання, визначають політичний порядок денний. Водночас компроміс може бути досягнутий завдяки застосуванню процедури "багатоваріантного вибору", найбільш точної, а відтак - найдемократичнішої форми, що відповідає модифікованому "підрахунку" Бордо та/або системі Кондорсе.*