

Independent Constitutionalists (UK)

“A UK Democracy fit for the 21st Century”

Thoughts on the Meaning of Democracy
Tools for Mindset Change



Note to the Reader

This paper is dedicated to citizens and communities everywhere: that they may begin to embrace Democracy as an intrinsic ethical good. People speak of democracy daily, but rarely stop to ask each other what they mean by the word. Specific issues are being pursued by others with expertise and commitment. This paper is part of IC-UK's purpose to assist others in the action they take, to facilitate and to synergize. To bring the “bigger picture” to their attention and to co-create with as many others as possible a sharable and shared direction of travel. Unfortunately, and paradoxically, Participative-representative Democracy (PRD) must be seen as both vehicle and destination. But, as was long-ago remarked, getting genuine democracy off the ground is a bit like trying to lift the bucket while sitting in it ! Quite a challenge, admittedly, but one we must face.

A Democracy fit for the 21st Century

There are some things that money can't buy, and the New Democracy is one of them

Genuine democracy is about people being involved in, having control over and identifying with the decisions that affect their lives, at all stages of the governance process, from initial proposals through to design for action and follow-up monitoring for evaluation and effectiveness.

We call this **Participative-representative Democracy** or **PRD**. It becomes possible when direct citizen participation combines with accountable representation. The extent to which any community enables its members to be involved in these ways is the measure of how genuinely democratic the community is.

Before we consider how this kind of democracy can be achieved, we need to reach a shared understanding about several underlying issues, among them, what it is to be human.

(1) Human Nature

We humans evolved as social beings, **intrinsically interdependent and interconnected** (with each other and our environment), possessed of **agency** (i.e., the capacity to decide and to do), by nature **deeply collaborative** with a strong sense of **fairness**, and yet, in circumstances of insecurity or material scarcity, capable of highly competitive behaviour.

For most of our history, community sizes were small enough to morally sanction against narcissism and short-term destructive self-interest. But we have now become major agents in shaping the circumstances of human existence. If we are to survive as a species, we must find new ways to regulate behaviour in large complex societies. Whilst coming to terms with our competitive shadow and meeting people's immediate needs, we must learn to live according to our long-term common interest and do so in symbiotic equilibrium with the natural world. This is the task that now befalls us.

(2) Power *with*, not power *over*

A commonly held definition of **political power** is 'the ability to influence and direct the behaviour of other people and guide the course and outcome of events.'

But power as such is essentially the ability to act or produce an effect. It derives from agency, the human individual's capacity to decide and to do. That capacity becomes political power, and its effect is increased, when citizens consent to pool their agency in order to work together. Where such consent is lacking, however, power begins to be a problem: it becomes centralised, concentrated in the hands of self-interested individuals or unrepresentative groups who are then able or allowed to think and decide for others. Provided agency or **decision-making power** remains **dispersed/distributed/shared** and is not allowed, other than through **truly accountable representation**, to disconnect towards the centre, it ceases to be a problem. It is only informed scrutiny through greater citizen involvement as part of a new constitutional settlement that will prevent this disconnect occurring. **Power "with" must replace power "over"**. Inequalities of wealth and education must be overcome to enable informed and consenting citizens to play their essential part and to assume the responsibilities that belong to them.

(3) Popular or People Sovereignty

For Independent Constitutionals, People Sovereignty means three things:

- (1) recognition by a community of the equal *political* (for example, one person, one **voice**), *legal* (equal protection before the law) and *social* status of all its members;
- (2) recognition by a community of the entitlement of all its members meaningfully to participate in the making and realisation of all decisions that affect their lives and, to this end, to their being afforded the physical and educational resources and material security that make such meaningful participation possible;
- (3) recognition of another sovereign community's sovereign status.

(4) Participation

The new democracy must be viewed as both *process* and *practice*. Get this right, and the outcomes will take care of themselves. After all, who better to judge the wisdom of an action than those affected by it? Equally, it must embody the **subsidiarity principle** whereby decisions are taken by citizens at the appropriate level. The more the members of a community are involved in the processes of decision-making, the more they will identify with, feel responsible for and take ownership of what is done: **rights and responsibilities will begin to reconnect**.

Further, **deliberation** in the decision-making and monitoring processes must be subject to the necessary democratic disciplines: listening well and empathetically asking oneself why the other person holds the opinions they do hold, articulating one's own opinion with care and respect in recognition of the attention one is being accorded - i.e., talking "with" rather than "at". These disciplines and the practices they engender apply equally at all levels of governance and within all social-economic institutions. Finally, participative democracy is not so much about the number of people involved as about (1) the extent to which the people involved are representative, for example a pocket-version, of the communities they stand and speak for, and (2) the extent to which the deliberative processes themselves reflect sound participative practice. The latter ensures quality decisions that are optimal if only by reason of the consent they enjoy. **We can no longer outsource our collective thinking to others to do for us.**

(5) Representation

Once a community, through the participative practice outlined above, has decided what it wants to do, if other communities are involved, its intentions must be carried forward through accountable representation. Seen in this light, at whatever level, participation constitutes the democratic dog and representation, the tail it wags. Without clear mandates and instructions, representatives or spokespersons have nothing to represent or to speak for. Such has increasingly been the case in the UK where Parliamentary Sovereignty (in practice Westminster government sovereignty) substitutes for People Sovereignty. This has to change. From now on, elected representatives must remain accountable through feedback to the communities they speak for, and their function not defined by arbitrary time-frames but by their ability and willingness to discharge their representative duties responsibly.

(6) Democracy as Consensus-building

Democracy must be seen as an inclusive process of consensus-building, accommodation and compromise. Voting someone "in" to think and act for you every five or so years is a far cry from PRD, still less if voting one party in for all practical purposes means voting others "out". We can no longer afford to allow Democracy to be confined to the winner-loser competitive entertainment that it is increasingly becoming. Voting, although necessary in some circumstances, must be seen for what it really is: a measure of division.

(7) PRD and Population Size

At what polity size might PRD most likely yield improvements on the current centralised systems of national governance? Answer: polities of up to 5 million persons. Examples in the UK are Scotland and Wales. And why not Yorkshire with its population of just over 5 million? Functioning examples elsewhere in Europe are Germany with its 16 Länder, Switzerland with its 26 Cantons, and to a lesser extent France with its 13 Metropolitan Regions. Other examples of national polities of around this size are Norway, Finland and Singapore (with populations around 5.5 million), and New Zealand with its population of just under 5 million.

Systemic Reform of the UK Political-economy

A Democracy fit for the 21st Century - First Moves ... New Tools

- **Proportional Representation must replace First-Past-the-Post** (to break the party-political strangle-hold and deadlock);
- **Recognition and support for Independent Parliamentary Candidates** (strong government does not equate with good governance);
- **Constitutions** (statements that set out in plain language the shared values and purposes of a community or institution and the rules by which they would wish to govern themselves)
- **Subsidiarity-based decentralisation of decision-making and budgetary control** -Devolution towards **Regional Self-governance**
- **Recognised status for Sortition-selected & fully-facilitated Citizen Assemblies and Panels** (pocket versions of the communities they stand for)
- **A fully-functioning Resulture** (permanent, publicly-funded structures for feedback on the impact of policies)
- **Fully independent media and social-media branches** subject to permanent democratic scrutiny
- **Training in deliberative practice** in all places of learning
- For all citizens – **Adequate freely-available education** and **A guaranteed annual income.**

Economic Thinking fit for the 21st Century ... *Some Essentials* ... ?

Doughnut economics - meeting the needs of all within the planet's finite boundaries.

Circular economics - creating the highest possible use value for manufactured goods for the longest possible time (through repair, remanufacture, upgrades, retrofits and the production of as-new resources from molecule recovery) while consuming as few material resources and energy as possible.

Performance economics - promoting business models whereby user *acquisition* and ownership of products at a given point of sale is replaced by *rental* of their service value or performance over time. Producer liability is thereby extended to cover product-life including end of service disposal and user stewardship engaged.

Fiscal Reform - promoting a **shift** of the current tax burden on productive labour (Income Tax) and consumption (VAT) to revenue-raising by fees on the use of land and non-renewable resources (like minerals, metals, fossil fuels), on end-of-product-life waste disposal activities like incineration or landfilling, and on all private commercial use of other assets and commons of community value, examples being the electromagnetic spectrum and outer space. In particular, restoring thereby the unproductive and largely untaxed gains from the constant uplift in land-location value to the public purse.

Monetary reform - use of debt-free Sovereign Money and creation, as in Alaska and Norway, of Sovereign Wealth Funds at regional and national level.

For further information please email the IC-UK Coordinator at:
michael.mulvey@orange.fr