

Democracy is Nothing but the Government of the Masses Where the Majority* can Throw the Rights of the Minorities Overboard (Thomas Jefferson)

Claudio Schuftan*

Department of International Health, Tulane School of Public Health, Ho Chi Minh City, Saigon (Center), Vietnam

...But is such a democracy a luxury that not everybody deserves? (E. Galeano)

*Minorities within the majority: The importance of Gandhi was to introduce in the 20th century the idea of how powerful a minority *avant-garde* motivated and moved by human rights can be when really committed. He said: "It is not the numbers that count, but the quality; strength in numbers alone does not make a just cause".

We cannot lose a Democracy we never had

- The illusion of democracy is just one of the many illusions that we have been educated to believe
- Many world leaders have been heard lately lamenting the death of democracy. There is actually reason to lament. But for something to die, it must have once lived.*Has there been democracy in most countries around the world? The answer is no. From the human rights (HR) perspective, for too long, there has not been a truly democratic state.

*Confronted with a conflict between evidence and what they want to believe for political and/or religious reasons, many people reject the evidence. Apathetic individuals in society simply accept what they get --provided that not much changes and there are no surprises. They flow with the tide. The problem is not ignorance; it is wishful thinking. And knowing more about the issues widens the divide, because the well informed (you?) then have a clearer view of the evidence they need to oppose those who uncritically sustain their belief in what in reality is an undemocratic system (P. Krugman and C. Fuentes).

- Governments have ruled over millions keeping their basic freedoms and HR abrogated. Indeed, there has been an illusion of democracy, or alternatively, a democracy for the haves only. This, of course, is a contradiction in terms. It is not easy to confront the fact that much of the life education we get is full of indoctrination. On second examination, just lightly scratching the surface, reveals to us what is basically a cover-up of an entirely different reality. Some of us discover this at an early age, others later. There are also those who will never discover this --perhaps they would even prefer not to see it. Representative democracy is perceived to be something positive until we understand that it means excluding a big chunk of the population from their rights. Representative democracy has enabled the pushing aside of many cultures, not infrequently with violence. There are also clichés like: democracy is about 'free' elections.... This is a bothersome thought. Is it possible that everything we were raised on, or at least most of it, is mistaken? What is the significance and consequence of this? (And does asking these questions undermine the fact that representative democracy is abused, often rigged and deeply flawed?) If democracy must be based on wealth, on a strong fist, on pushing out others, on violating their HR, on nationalism, on chauvinism and on militarism, then the answer is yes: mistaken it is. The pleading of too many in society regularly

falls on deaf ears. It appears that the first condition for really fixing this situation, if that is still possible, is the recognition that we did not lose democracy now. We never really had it. (T. Saar).

- Many of our leaders seem to act like in the tragedies of classical Greek theater: Everybody knows what will happen, everybody says they do not want it to happen, but they do precisely the necessary for the undesired, unwelcome (tragic) outcome they want to avoid to happen. (Albino Gomez) Bending to the designs of Capitalism is bad for democracy. Politicians simply too often pursue economic growth policies with disregard for the social costs involved. But democracy cannot be governed by the market. The Greeks already knew it: In decision making, separate the market place from the forum.

Democracy, live it or lose it (F.M. Lappe)

To install a more direct democracy, upping our civil courage quotient is a must. Democracy is in bad need of that 'participative twist' it has been missing. (The Occupy Wallstreet Movement spoke of *Consensus-based Direct Democracy*).

- Democracy is not viable if it does not empower those rendered poor and marginalized, if it does not respond first and foremost to the needs and the HR of the most needy.** We have to recreate our political systems burying all forms of hierarchy, of monarchy, of oligarchy and bury the anarchy of the markets and of capitalism. We must transition from representative democracies in which power serves the interests of the elites to *Communal Direct Democracies* where there are no majorities and minorities, but rather decisions are taken by consensus and where reason imposes itself over rigged voting that leads to unfair and biased decision making. Politicians cannot be allowed to use state administrative, judicial and economic tools for their own private, personal and class interests (Evo Morales).

**The weight of claim holders is not to be in their voting in national elections, but in the demands they place day-in-day-out; demands that bring about the needed conflicts that bring about change (E. Gruner).

*Corresponding author: Claudio Schuftan, Department of International Health, Tulane School of Public Health, PO Box 815, Ho Chi Minh City, Saigon, Vietnam, E-mail: cschuftan@phmovement.org

Received July 22, 2014; Accepted October 25, 2014; Published November 04, 2014

Citation: Schuftan C (2014) Democracy is Nothing but the Government of the Masses Where the Majority* can Throw the Rights of the Minorities Overboard (Thomas Jefferson). J Pol Sci Pub Aff 2: 131. doi:10.4172/2332-0761.1000131

Copyright: © 2014 Schuftan C. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

- As US Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis famously said: “We may have democracy, or we may have wealth concentrated in the hands of the few, but we cannot have both.” In a truly democratic country, the necessary legislation must be preceded by reasoned, responsible demands by organized public interest groups.

We must call things for what they really are

George Orwell already said: “England is a country of good people with the wrong people at the helm”.

- We cannot continue calling national reconstruction processes what in real truth are dictatorships. The actions of such governments are not implemented ‘by mistake’, they are calculated: they address the effects rather than the causes --and all they cannot control is forbidden. (A. Gomez) If these authoritarian regimes do not become increasingly more democratic, it is young people in urban areas that will protest and act (think Arab Spring). The youth has had it with the indifference they see, with the empty speeches and insincere declarations, with the loud and ambiguous declamations and postures that only add to a chronic trend of procrastination and lack of HR accountability (E. Galeano).
- Other large sectors of society remain ignorant and unmoved about what befalls them and why thereby virtually accepting their fate. But this is precisely the consequence of the underdevelopment they have been thrown into for generations. Conversely, there is no ignorance of the elites in throwing society into underdevelopment (D. Caputo).

Human rights in many constitutions: Any good?

- With all the importance that that what is sanctioned in some of our Constitutions has, it means nothing if every person, no matter where, and no matter what her/his activity, does not internalize and demand what is said in those clauses. This, because too often there are huge distances between a Constitution and concrete political practices.

Taking our grievances to the streets: Any good?

Many governments give themselves the license to forget that,

sooner or later, they will have to listen to the voice of the people in chats, in blogs, in tweets and, finally, in all the public squares of their cities. If they ignore this reality, their hour will come (Julian Assange).

- Public street demonstrations are an opportunity for letting off steam, for a certain degree of catharsis (when people can freely express their deep feelings).*** But these demonstrations cannot only be to denounce; they also have to announce a new order --a plan; and that is where they often fail: no concrete follow up plans ...after all dies down, then what?

***At the same time, these acts are not only the consequence of the piling up of broken promises, of leaders’ insensitivity to people’s demands and to overall government laissez faire, but are also the consequence of opposition parties being perceived by the marchers as not forcefully enough representing their demands (A. Gomez).

Democracy will never be supplanted by a republic of experts-and that is a very good thing (T. Piketty)

Whichever way we jump, in HR work we have to do so democratically, becoming the champions of direct democracy ... and there is no sense of waiting forever. (K. H. O’Rourke) we have to take advantage of the HR-given avenues for action and certainly not be afraid of such liberty; much less so be afraid of those who want to restrict liberty and the fulfillment of HR. If not now, when?

Postscript/Marginalia

- There is a better world, sure, but it is very, very expensive. (Les Luthiers) ...In that world of Oz, hypocrisy is without shame.
- The world can be changed. If for better, the challenge needs people power (J. Koenig).
- But beware: The power of truth does not move men. The tenet of neoliberal philosophy that power positions will yield to arguments rationally and morally valid has for long been definitively refuted. Material interests drive capitalist societies and even drive to wars. Power rules; ideas don’t. The argument of power defeats the power of argument (H. J. Morgenthau, B. Russel).
- All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good women do nothing (Edmund Burke).