

Representative versus Direct Democracy – Costs and Benefits for the Citizenry

Abstract

The attempt of this essay is to juxtapose representative democratic and direct (actually half) democratic rule. The first section outlines the historical evolution from mainly monarchical rule to the establishment of democratic rule. In particular reasons are given why representative democratic rule has gained the upper hand over half democratic rule, which is only established in a few countries worldwide. The second section argues why half democratic rule is to be preferred from the perspective of the ordinary citizen. It is maintained that direct democratic means operate in favor of the citizenry. In the third section the roots and the actual meaning of democracy are assessed in more detail. In the light of what has been said in the third section, it is concluded that direct democratic means should certainly be maintained, while a more authentic realization of democracy would imply major steps towards breaking up the central state and forming small-scale political entities that allow for more genuine sovereignty, responsibility and accountability of the individual citizen.

The rise of democracy

Pondering over the greatest merits of European – or more broadly speaking – Western culture in general, the concept of liberal democracy does certainly come to mind. Within the political spectrum there is overwhelming consensus among the left and the right alike that the installment of democracy is one of the most important achievements the bulk of societies all over the world have made in their struggle to develop ever more. And the ones, which are no democracies just yet, would be well advised to become strongholds of democratic rule as well – an implication that follows naturally from the aforementioned fact about democracy being a major attainment of the political society of our days. In a sense the concept of liberal democracy is to be seen as the “end point of mankind’s ideological evolution”, a formulation Francis Fukuyama used to describe this process of democratization. Albeit its fascination does not only stem from the fact that democracy has gained the upper hand over other political systems of government, but also that democracy is seen as the most effective form of government up until the present day [1].

As a matter of fact, by the beginning of the 19th century the Western world had truly been caught by a wave of democratization that has lasted for well over a century affecting numerous countries in various magnitudes at different intervals. Referring to the metaphor of a wave implies that there must have been something the wave was bound to wash away. And indeed there was. What was crushed by the wave of democracy was the European legacy of monarchical rule and sovereign kings. Although there were examples of other forms of governance such as the Athenian democracy, Rome during its republican era, the republics of Venice, Florence, Genoa, the Swiss cantons since 1291, and

England under Cromwell from 1649 until 1660, the history of mankind had been predominantly shaped by monarchical rule [2].

The reason why this act of democratization was initiated just with the beginning of the 19th century is to be found in the fact that a new combination of ideas had matured within the minds of the people of that particular time. Ludwig von Mises rightly stresses the role of ideas in his magnum opus *Human Action*. The way society is structured is an outcome of prevailing ideologies. And concrete ideologies can be traced back to the specific ideas that underlie them. In essence this means that whatever the underlying ideas are, society and its order will be formed by them. Obviously a king's might rests upon the recognition of the monarchical ideology on the part of his subjects. Whenever the acceptance falters because the basic ideas about rulership and governance change, the king's might and rule will no longer be able to keep its subjects in subservience [3].

Such a shift in the way of societal thinking is what led to the outbreak of democratization in Europe. Once the idea of democracy as a viable alternative to monarchical rule had gained enough intellectual power in the minds of those being subject to a monarchical rule, political tides started turning. Monarchical structures were replaced with democratic means all over Europe [4][5].

The author of this essay is well aware that the change in intellectual thinking is not the sole reason for the wave of democratization. Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson elaborate on several other reasons – whose validity are not within the scope of this essay – such as growing urbanization of formerly rural areas, which led to greater integration and increasing inequality among the people that enhanced the change for revolution. Interestingly enough, even they mentioned the ideological changes as a decisive reason [6]. After all it was Victor Hugo that couldn't have stated an obvious truism better by uttering the words: "Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come."

At this point the alert reader might well concede to the statements just made but still wonder about the actual cause of the described fundamental change in societal thinking. In order to answer this concern one is bound to consult the history of political thought. As with a lot of political ideas taking the Enlightenment as ones starting point of investigation is the key toward a better understanding the origin and development of the former. At its core the Enlightenment's rationale consisted of the endeavor to convince and encourage human beings to use their own reason to free themselves from any kind of bonds and shackles they did not consent to rationally, but constrained their freedom and autonomy anyhow. In the words of Immanuel Kant the act of Enlightenment is a man's release from his self-incurred tutelage [7]. Only if man has the courage to use his own reason, will he be enlightened and come to know what that had been holding him in subservience and restricting his freedom and sovereignty all along. Obviously this restraining entity was easily to detect given that one was out to realize it. It was what Thomas Hobbes named "Leviathan", an abstract body, which arises out

of the urgent human need to bring stability to a state of nature in which innately egoistic human beings are bound to wage a bloody and brute war of all against all. Because human beings cannot trust each other, which is why they will all have to delegate their individual power and strength to what is commonly called the state or government. Government exists, because each and every man wants government, respectively is able to rationally conclude that he has to want government. Nevertheless it is government, i.e. the monarchical king, that restricts freedom – to the benefit of all though.

While Hobbes and other thinkers did not settle the question what kind of form of government is to make up the domains of this creature called “Leviathan”, there was one major figure that is highly relevant for our case. It is the important philosopher by the name of Jean-Jacques Rousseau who objected to the view of Hobbes and his likes. Rousseau insisted that the absolute sovereign is not the Leviathan itself led by a king but the people themselves. Having the people exercising the highest power within a society is the will of everyone (*volonté de tous*). The latter automatically turns into the general will (*volonté générale*) and this general will is by definition good, because it is jointly willed by everyone. If a person’s attitude and opinion seems to contradict that of the general will, this very person has to reconsider their own reasoning, since the general will cannot err by definition. Rousseau was very much in favor of a democratic system, in which the legislative as well as the executive powers are combined within one entity, which he considers to be the people. Anything else, especially the execution of the will of the people by representation through a parliament, Rousseau dismissed as a mere illusion. His own words in this regard are as clear as day: “The people of England regards itself as free; but it is grossly mistaken; it is free only during the election of members of parliament. As soon as they are elected, slavery overtakes it, and it is nothing [8].” Therefore, according to Rousseau, the only meaningful way in establishing a democracy is to form a truly direct democracy. Of course, the Swiss philosopher was aware of the fact that such a radical form of democracy can only be established given certain conditions. Among these are: A state of small size, where everyone can know their fellow citizens, a great simplicity of manners and as much material and status equality among citizens as possible [9].

Unsurprisingly, the name “Rousseau” became the French revolutionaries’ battle cry and his formulation of the social contract their unquestioned bible [10]. Even though the immediate consequences of the French Revolution with its establishment of the Reign of Terror (French: *la Terreur*) were rather dire and disillusioning, its long-term merits are seen to be the various initiations of democratic rule all over the Western world. People starting to use their own reason came to the conclusion that while government is necessary as described by Hobbes, it does not need to have a monarchical structure at all. So the idea of the inevitability of monarchical rule and that there are no alternatives to it, began to crumble. With the passing of time the question, which has become the dominating one

within the realm of political philosophy, is not whether or not democracy is a feasible option, but rather what kind or form of democracy is to be aimed at. For the sake of this essay, the differentiation between representative and direct democracy will be made.

Referring to history, it is striking to note that the prevalent form of democracy is representative democracy. There are only a few places, such as Liechtenstein, Switzerland, to a limited extent Australia and New Zealand and a handful of US. States that have direct democratic elements built into their system and do also exercise them in a frequent manner¹. A purely direct democratic form as envisaged by Rousseau does not exist, although one could argue that the *Landgemeinden* in the Swiss cantons such as Glarus or Appenzell Inner Rhodes come very close to what could be called elements of direct democracy². The main reason representative democracy has triumphed over a radical form of direct democracy is due to apparent impracticability of the latter when it comes to nation states. The ever-growing complexity of modern states has made democratic rule through representation inevitable. For one thing, the mere size of basically every nation state is a factual argument against direct democracy. After all, even the intellectual forefather of direct democracy, Rousseau, regarded a small-scale approach an essential prerequisite for direct democracy. For another thing it is not just the size in terms of territory; it is also the magnitude of legislation, the particular areas that need to be legislated, which greatly exceeds the capacity of a people in a system of direct democracy. In the light of this fact, it is only rational from the perspective of the people to outsource the various political procedures such as the development of legislation, its execution as well as its supervision to bodies specifically design for these aforementioned purposes. The common argument holds that just as in a market economy where the division of labor significantly reduces costs for the individual, a political division of labor where political entities orchestrate the matters and affairs of society does substantially cut costs for the citizenry, i.e. the people. Interestingly enough, as is advocated by economic theory, it is not only about decreasing the opportunity costs in the form of time for example, but also about increasing output since a specifically trained political entity, such as the parliament (as well as executive and judicial power, whose examination is not within the scope of this essay though) has a comparative advantage and is thus predestined to more productively organize political affairs for society as a whole.

¹ Although many other states such as for example Italy, France, Ireland, Denmark, Holland and Sweden do know direct democratic elements, these are only applied to decision of major importance – which is rather a rare thing. Most recently, the election in Great Britain on the question of leaving the EU or not is such an example.

² Nevertheless, the system of *Landgemeinden* is still not a perfect representation of what Rousseau conceived. The *Landgemeinde* itself might be conducted according to the specific direct democratic characteristics. As a matter of fact though, even the cantons practicing the system of *Landgemeinde* do have a representative parliament that operates the way every other parliament does. Furthermore these cantons are also integrated into the system of the Swiss federal state that heavily regulates matters.

If one takes modern nation states as monolithic inert givens, the impracticability of radical direct democratic rule certainly stands. Wanting to implement direct democratic rule without representation would create costs of unimaginable high amounts – a fact that makes its virtually impossible. Likewise under the assumption of maintaining today's political complexity the argument of a division of labor between representatives and a people also holds. Dissolving parliament would – given the present circumstances – incur major costs for the citizenry.

What remains at issue is the question, whether a system of democratic rule with a parliament should be enhanced so to speak, with direct democratic elements as they are known from Switzerland, Liechtenstein or California. Ideally such a hybrid system would be best called half direct democracy [11]. Identifying costs and benefits for the citizenry in either system (representative versus half democratic system) cannot be done with high precision. In fact costs as well as benefits are highly subjective matters. Whether or not costs for a society are higher or lower depending on the respective system cannot be accurately measured. It can only be hinted at with arguments that describe a tendency.

Representative versus direct democratic rule

One of the major criticisms the half democratic approach is faced with, is the charge that expanding citizens' rights to actively vote on factual issues does not make sense because too many people are unqualified intellectually and therefore cannot handle the situation of being able to decide on technical matters. As a result citizens are frustrated. Frustration can be evaded if decision making is entirely left to representatives. As an aside it is often observed that people's frustrations are further amplified by the fact, that half direct democracy does not just want them to cast their votes on matters way too complex for them, but also bombards them with far too many decision-making tasks – a phenomenon which is commonly called voter fatigue. The bottom line is that especially psychological costs are brought upon the individual that would not exist in a merely representative democracy.

The argumentation above is not convincing. It is true, modern complexity is an issue. However democratic representatives are not immune to it. Oftentimes the complicated state of affairs today is just as beyond the representatives as it is beyond the citizen. Luckily, reasonable decisions can be taken without having to understand each and every detail of a particular issue. While parliamentary representatives by virtue of being the political elite, the so-called *class politique*, might frantically attempt to factor in as many pieces of information as possible without necessarily making their decision better, the citizen reverts to heuristics, which can be highly effective [12]. It might even be plausible that the individual representative is badly informed, because the party leadership decides beforehand, how its members will have to vote in parliament. Weighing pros and cons of an issue might at best be

restricted to delegates within commissions. Yet, it would be illusory to think that the decisions taken by representatives would represent the commonweal. The own party's interest as well as re-election considerations are prioritized.

As regards the second objection spamming the citizens as this might happen in California mustn't be the case as the example of Switzerland shows, where only 3-4 national issues are to be decided at a time. With this concern being handled appropriately, it is much more likely that voter apathy develops because citizens cannot have a direct say at all. Studies indicate that people are better informed once they are allowed to participate in deciding upon relevant issues directly [13]. As a consequence it could just as well be stated that psychological costs are much higher if citizens are not allowed to have an active say in politics.

The system of half democratic rule is furthermore accused of preventing the political steadiness and longevity a political system needs to flourish adequately. Instead, direct political participation by citizens would make the pursuit of a coherent strategy more difficult because consecutive plebiscites can even be contradictory, which is hostile to stable development of society. As such, a purely representative democratic system is more conducive to a society's goal of following a consistent set of policies.

Even if there might be some truth to this argument, whether representative democracy as an alternative can handle this issue better, needs to be seriously doubted. As Public Choice theory trenchantly analyses, political representatives are just as much influenced by economic incentives as every other individual is. Agents entering the realm of politics do not miraculously turn into perfect beings, which only pursue the common good [14]. Politicians are just as human beings following incentives as citizens are. As a matter of fact, in politics incentives are of a short-term nature. Politicians' actions have a clear-cut tendency to be determined by the duration of a legislative period. A popular strategy is to make all kinds of concessions before an election in order to gain as many votes as possible. Once the politician is elected he does not necessarily have to follow through on all his promises since he can only be voted out of office after another four years. Chances are that in the meantime voters will not pay heed to his earlier words anymore or do not even remember the promises, while he can counter unpopular voices with new possible promises to the electorate. Another non-neglectable incentive incumbent politicians have is to manipulate policy tools such as fiscal and monetary policy hoping to stimulate the economy just prior to an election and thereby greatly improve their own reelection chances. As these manipulations have positive short-run consequences politicians can take credit for the latter while long-term consequences, which are considered to be rather bad can be foisted off on to later generations [15].

While in representative democratic rule representatives can only be held accountable for their actions by not electing them next time, half democratic rule offers citizens at least some way to possi-

bly correct certain decisions made by politicians. Having in mind a representative's short dated incentive structure, such direct democratic tools in the hands of the citizenry can potentially undo wrong action and diminish costs for the electorate.

Following up this last argument is another point of contention. It is stated that the political process in half democratic rule is too lengthy. Because so many civil actors have to be involved in the decision making process, the passing of a bill can take very long. However today's complex circumstances require that political decisions can be taken rather quickly. Only representative democratic rule can adequately response to the flexibility contemporary political complexity demands.

In approaching this argument it is vital to differentiate between two different points of view. Looking at it from the politician's vantage point half democratic rule certainly has greater inertia when it comes to decision making and implementation. From the viewpoint of the citizenry this fact must be seen as positive though as the example of Switzerland shows. While many countries in Europe have already embarked on a political strategy, the Swiss nation might wants to follow suit but in terms of implementation lags behind because of its system of half democratic rule. Because Switzerland is following only slowly, it can look upon the other nations' paths with critical scrutiny, meaning that Switzerland can correct and amend certain policies along the way which have proved to be less advantageous or even disastrous in other countries. A current example might be the energy strategies various countries are pursuing. While Germany has already progressed much farther than Switzerland and can hardly alter any of its implemented policies, the Swiss nation is the convenient position to somewhat learn from the German experience by improving or not implementing at all what Germany has done bad job at. Of course, the question remains whether or not the Swiss nation will be so wise to actually learn from its greater cousin Germany – a question that is beyond this essay. The point made by stressing this example is that the argument brought against half democratic rule because of its inherent tendency to lag behind in the decision making process is not really an argument against but rather an argument in favor of half democratic rule as the example of Switzerland shows.

Another popular argument leveled against half democratic rule is that under such a system the fanning of ungrounded fears among the citizenry is a serious peril. Because people have a direct say in political matters, demagogues have an interest in taking advantage of this by stirring up resentments which destabilize the political system as a whole and cause immense costs for citizens.

Again, this accusation fades away when looking at reality by comparing Switzerland and Germany once more. Because Swiss citizens have a direct say when it comes to political matters, this participation functions as a valve. This way political anger and resentments are not being suppressed. Without direct democratic measures enacted, the probability of producing a citizenry that is livid, bottled up with anger and therefore more susceptible for populists is much higher as the example of Germany

and the forming of various political groups like Pegida indicates. While political controversy is happening within the borders of the “official” political realm, meaning the institutions which are provided for this purpose, in Germany political debate has to take place outside of these non-existing institutions. The destabilizing effect and the costs incurred therefrom are likely to be higher.

A further contention is the following: Usually, it is argued, direct democratic means just function as a magnet for protest voters. In a sense these direct democratic means do not contribute anything of value but are rather a tool for provocation in the hands of the people. Exercising direct democratic means are just empty, non-yielding but cost producing procedures.

This charge against half democratic rule does not really hold water. The reason why direct democratic means are used to protest in the first place is a sure sign that the political representatives are not acting in accordance with the citizenry. If politicians did a better job representing their citizens, the latter would not have to resort to protest voting. So the fact that there is protest voting is no argument against half democratic rule. It is very much an argument for it, since it can be seen as a tool, a political barometer to measure how strongly the electorate thinks its representatives actually do properly act on their behalf.

At the core the controversy about half democratic rule versus representative democratic rule boils down to the principal agent problem that is inherent in every democratic rule. The principal, i.e. the citizens, delegates powers to an agent, i.e. the political representatives. Because of various asymmetries such as moral hazard, adverse selection, conflicting interests a principal’s preferences and an agent’s actions can diverge significantly [16]. Against this background handing the principal (citizenry) a tool to directly influence the political outcome via an initiative or monitor the agent’s behavior via a referendum seems to be an effective way to combat the principal agent problem. Potential caveats against these direct democratic measures have successfully been rebutted on previous pages of this essay.

There is also abundant empirical evidence that half democratic rule performs better concerning various aspects in the aggregate when compared to representative democratic rule. The level of public debt is likely to be lower under half democratic rule [17]. At the same time half democratic rule is effective in reducing government spending [18]. Various referenda and initiatives in Switzerland proof these findings. For example Switzerland knows a balanced budget amendment, which is commonly called the “debt brake” that was implemented after it passed as an initiative in 2001.

Half democratic rule is also an effective instrument against the inherent tendency of every government towards centralization. Because citizens are able to have a direct say, they are prone to choose decentralized policies over centralized ones since the former are closer to the citizens and offer greater supervision [19]. Furthermore half democratic rule seems to be effective in lowering tax burdens for citizens [20]. At the same time there are findings that indicate that the tax morale is higher

under half democratic rule [21]. Once it is acknowledged that public debt, public spending and centralization are lower, the effect of lower tax rates follows naturally. It does also follow that government as a whole is constrained by direct democracy [22]. And a reduction in government size does lead to better economic performance at the margin [23]. In light of this plausible concatenation it is fairly reasonable that under half democratic rule the level of overall satisfaction seems to be higher, i.e. the population claims to be happier [24].

Because many of the caveats and charges issued against half democratic rule have proved to be unsubstantiated – or if there was some plausibility to it, the alternative seemed just as critical, often-times even worse – as well as the analysis in the aggregate in favor of half democratic rule when having the sovereignty and freedom of the citizen in mind, half democratic rule is superior to representative democratic rule.

The roots and the actual form of democracy

From what has been said, it follows that Switzerland, which is commonly perceived as the epitome of half democratic rule, is to be preferred to any other system structured along the lines of representative democratic rule. As a Swiss citizen, the author of this paper is deeply grateful to being born in this nation and being part of this system. However, the fact that Switzerland grants their citizens a greater say in politics, does not mean that Swiss nation as such is a true direct democracy and therefore an immaculate indicator for the establishment of the most radical form of democracy possible. Just copying Switzerland's form would not make things perfect.

When speaking of democracy people do generally have the ideal of ancient Greece before their eyes. Yet there are many more discrepancies, the proud democrats of our days disregard. Nowadays only the aspect of participation is focused on and is being emphasized as the universal feature of democracy. As a matter of fact though, Greek democracy entailed much more. It wasn't just about participation via balloting, but rather about genuine contribution in the form of taking responsibility, i.e., exercising a particular function within the polis. This function was carried out alongside their actual profession and mainly with their own fortune [25]. Interestingly, in the course of their life, almost every second citizen headed the highest function within the polis at least once; so rotation was an integral part. Appointment was done by casting lots. Elections were considered undemocratic by the ancient Greeks because they open the floodgates for potential corruption and intrigue [26]. In the same manner, parties were deemed an undemocratic thing, since they split up the community into different groups, which will inevitably pursue their own interest creating the atmosphere of a political cold war that could heat up anytime.

Keeping in mind the etymological root of the word democracy does really expose the modern inaccuracies surrounding this term. Translating *demo* with people isn't quite correct. The former originally stood for village, which is condensed in the Greek word *deme*. The other Greek word is *kratein*, unlike the other Greek word *archein* is most often considered to mean "having control over or being sovereign over", while the latter Greek word actually translates "reign or lead". Therefore a more historically sound translation of the word democracy would be self-governance of the smallest entity, i.e. village [27]. With this in mind, it becomes clear, why among the ancient Greek the idea prevailed that only a congregation can be called democratic the size of which can be overviewed from a *pnux* (hill). Anything above this size is not worthy of being called a democracy anymore.

In the context of such an original understanding of democracy, it stands to reason that what we call democracy today is not democracy anymore when taking the Athenian democracy as an indicator. Even Switzerland is far away from this. As has been shown above, a major factor that makes the Swiss nation "more similar" to the original form of democracy are their direct democratic tools such as referenda and initiatives. This way the Swiss citizens have a greater say with positive implications for them as has also been shown. Nonetheless the impact of this direct democratic self-rule is a mere charade when spelled out in actual numbers. Operating with average values it can be shown that the Swiss people's share in directly voting on legislation is only about 6,25%. The other 93,75% is legislation enacted by the parliament itself. Although this form of legislation could be challenged with a referendum by the people, the vast quantity of legislation makes this an operational impossibility, which is why only a few laws face referenda. It is important to notice that this ratio of 6,25% compared to 93,75% does not capture the various acts and edicts binding the citizen in their every day life, which are passed not by the parliament but also by the executive and their departments.

Factoring in these latter decrees would make number of legislation directly given and approved by the citizens themselves decline even further [28]. Evidently, the people of Switzerland do not really live under the laws they have given themselves, i.e., they have approved of directly. From this view point, the binding legislation is enacted by 246 politicians and a few executive members plus their entourage, a group of functionaries under the influence of lobbyists. A scenario, which does not resemble what the ancient Greeks called democracy at all.

In fact from a classical liberal point of view there are some real issues connected to direct democratic means exercised by the Swiss people. Is it really desirable if the majority of Swiss people dictate to villages within the canton of Valais that they may only have a secondary home quota of up to 20%, in spite of the fact that the inhabitants of these villages have different preferences? Or what about the fact that direct democratic means nowadays allow for a perpetuation of the injustice that a paying minority is regularly outvoted by a receiving majority on a large scale? Last but not least, the tenden-

cy to use direct democratic means to intervene in private matters such as civil law³ and religion⁴, only to make federal state grow in size.

In the light of these admittedly perverse occurrences and developments many people, including liberals, rush to the conclusion that these problems are in fact caused by direct democratic means. However, direct democracy is not the problem. The actual problem is the attempt of managing the impossible, which is exercising direct democracy on a large scale. An oversized central state and direct democracy do not go together. If there is one inevitable law in political science, this would be it. Dismantling direct democratic means would be counterproductive. What needs to be done is cutting back the central state. But merely making it more decentralized is beside the point. A lot more effective is breaking a central state into various self-governing entities. The order of the day is non-centralism rather than de-centralism [29].

Unshackling democracy from its inherent challenges will never be possible. Making democracy work out for everyone can never be achieved entirely. As a matter of fact breaking it up into smaller parts only displaces the problem to a next lower level. Because individuals have different preferences – a natural fact, which is undoubtedly a good thing – there will always be a minority, someone who thinks otherwise. Acknowledging this fact guards oneself against false illusions. Having said this, it is decisive nonetheless to argue for acting out of democracy on the smallest political scale possible – taking the various poleis or demes of ancient Greece as an example is certainly a good indicator. For a single citizen the small-scale approach is easier to grasp, democratic decisions are more comprehensible and social dynamics every citizen can rely on are much more effective in function as checks within the political sphere. The scope for counter-productive political maneuvering, idle bureaucratic procedures statues as well as the potential to bleed citizens with unnecessary taxes and other fees is vastly reduced. Overall such a small-scale approach much more genuinely amounts to the ideal of the self-governing entity. As a result citizens not only can but most likely have to take more responsibility within their entity. Optimally there will be as many small democratic entities as possible. “A Switzerland” consisting of many different Liechtensteins. Having this large variety of entities, which can definitely cooperate economically but constitute their own political realm, a citizen’s option of turning his back on one of the entities because another one suits his preferences better, is putting him to far less expenses than is the case in our system today. In today’s world of ample nation states, the “You-Can-Always-Leave-Argument” is rather cynical. The vision of a “Europe of the Regions” would certainly add more weight to this aforementioned argument.

Constitutionally limiting the scope of things citizens can vote on is another liberal idea to prevent democratic procedures to interfere with basic personal rights. Following this argument, there should

³ Initiative: „Gegen die Abzockerei“

⁴ Initiative: „Gegen den Bau von Minaretten“

be certain inviolable rights that should be excluded from democratic decision-making processes. As a matter of fact, even today's constitutions formally adhere to this principle. In reality this is hardly the case – mainly because it is generally accepted that the state must act in various ways and he is only able to do so, when neglecting the not so inviolable rights of citizens. After all, the end justifies the means. Instigating the necessary change of mind can only be achieved as such, if the central state is broken up. Constitutional limitation presupposes small political entities, because these allow for true responsibility and authentic accountability.

Conclusion

Although representative democratic rule seems to have gained the upper hand over half or direct democratic rule, this mustn't be taken as evidence for some sort of political evolutionary process, in which later stages (representative democratic rule) are superior to previous stages (half or direct democratic rule). The main reason why representative democratic rule is much more prevalent is linked to the fact that the power of a central state and its political establishment is more likely to increase; so it is in the interest of the political elite to have a representative democratic rule. From the viewpoint of a liberal citizen half democratic rule is an effective tool to slow down the ever-growing expansion of the central state. Even though the psychic as well as the material costs can never be assessed, there is no doubt that these are lower than the psychic and material gains the citizenry gains in sticking to half democratic rule. Logical-deductive as well as empirical arguments spelled out in this essay suggest this strongly. As a matter of fact, the greater the central state, the less freedom there is for the individual, which – as the great socialist experiences have shown – is more bane than boon for the citizenry.

While a genuine analysis does not stop at this point, it is vital to point out that Switzerland, what is nowadays commonly seen as the epitome of direct democracy, does not really have much in common with what is generally regarded as the direct democratic ideal of ancient Greece. Rather than just perpetuating the illusion of democracy and taking Switzerland as an indicator, attempting to work towards actual direct democracy, whose most important prerequisite is political smallness manifesting itself in non-centralistic structures, must be the goal. Even though such ideas seem to be far-fetched under the current mindset, it is of the utmost importance to make sure such arguments do not fall into oblivion. This is why they have to be stressed over and over again until one day the time might be ripe. Again the Victor Hugo's words must be remembered: "Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come."

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