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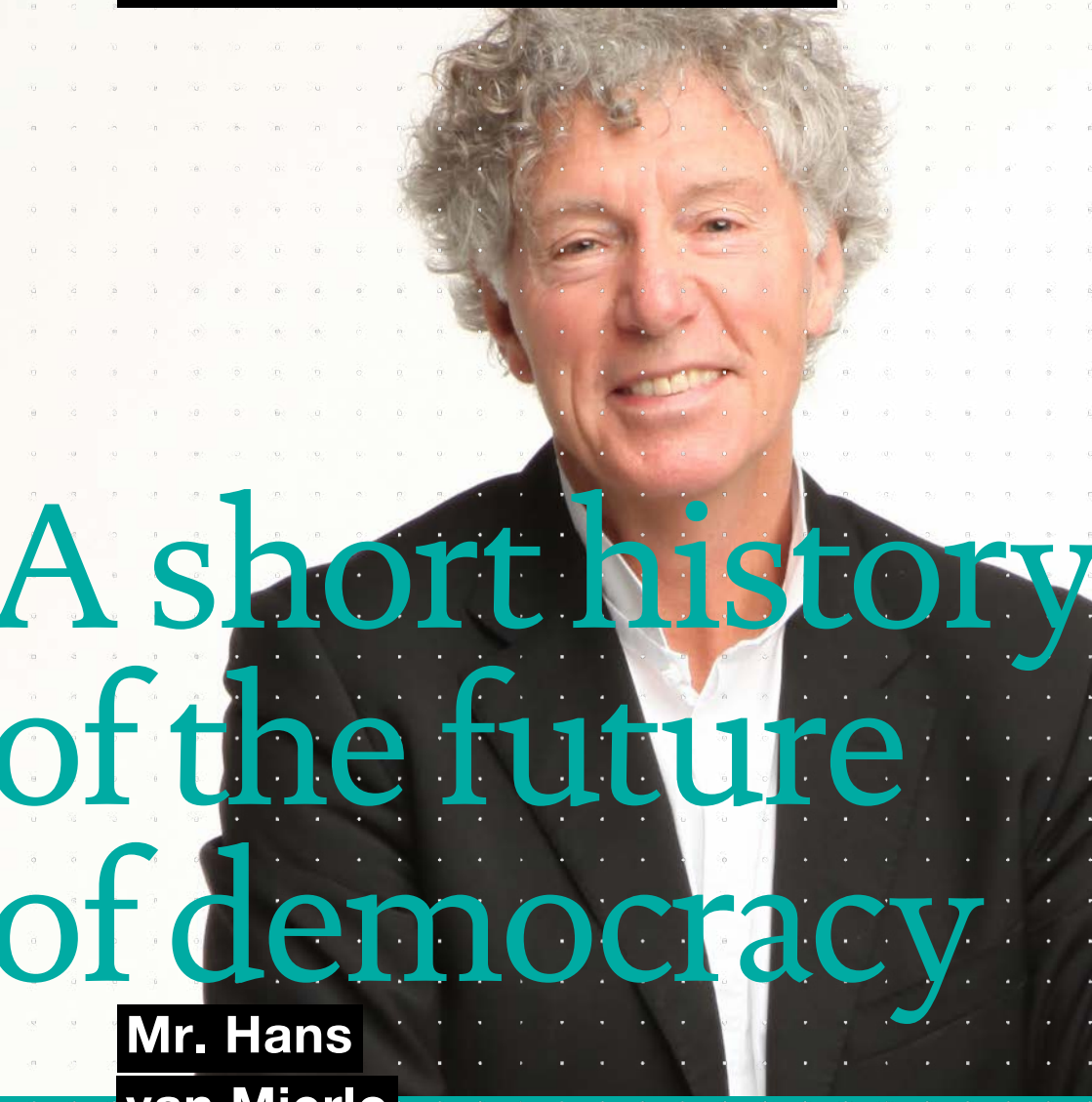


A short history of the future of democracy

Mr. Hans van Mierlo Stichting

Preface

A well functioning democracy is one of the essential components that any social-liberal will defend and cherish. Striving for a society anchored around political and human rights, a say in the matter for everyone, and equality – both in opportunity and regard for each other: these goals are paramount for us. But while the adoption of democracy itself has never been an issue, the functioning and inner workings of democracy are currently under pressure.

In both a global and national context, cracks have been starting to show around the idyllic notion of the representative democracy we have so vehemently rebuilt and nourished since 1945. The cause? Citizens feel their views and issues aren't being heard, and their concerns not addressed adequately. It seems the classic representative democracy based on elections does not suffice anymore; the 21st century requires a new perspective on democracy and specifically the interaction between electors, elected, and those who wield the power.

On December 10th the *Mr. Hans van Mierlo Stichting* organised the annual Marchant Lecture at the Rode Hoed in Amsterdam, an evening which addressed the global and national issues facing representative democracy. In his lecture

titled *A Short History of the Future of Democracy*, Professor John Keane addressed the global orthodoxy of elections being integral to a representative democracy, and how that facade is crumbling at the moment. In her commentary, Jieskje Hollander put these insights in a national context, addressing the lack of faith Dutch citizens currently have in politics and politicians, but not in democracy as such.

In the age of *monitory democracy*, as Keane calls it, elections alone do not cut it anymore. Universal suffrage is no longer a novelty, the buzz has worn off, it does not deliver heaven on Earth. Citizens want and demand more direct input, but the question remains: how? The Van Mierlo Stichting has been working on an analysis of the functioning of the democracy in the Netherlands, and possible ways to give citizens more direct channels to influence, interact, and have impact upon the policies governing their lives. Although questions and issues of this magnitude rarely allow for a clear cut answer or solution, discussing them and putting them on the agenda is just as valuable – after all, democracy is always a work in progress.

Serving as a stark reminder of the importance of democracy, why it must always be discussable, and why, especially when flawed, there needs to be a continuous debate on whether to adjust, adapt, or alter the implemented democracy, the Van Mierlo Stichting's new essay "Koester

de grondrechten en gedeelde waarden" was presented at the start of the evening. Presented as one of the five guidelines for a social-liberal politics, this essay explores the importance of the rule of law, constitutional rights, and their relation to and dependence on a strong democracy. But, as with the written-out lectures of Keane and Hollander found in this publication, our new essay also stresses that each generation must rediscover the importance of democracy for themselves, and when required be willing to change it.

The global role of elections in a democracy, the perils facing the functioning of the Dutch democracy, or the importance of democracy in relation to our fundamental rights and values; these are important discussions with far-reaching consequences. Challenges and issues that lie both in the present and future, and which will require all of us to use our democracy to the fullest – in order to change that democracy.

Frank van Mil
Executive Director Mr. Hans van Mierlo Stichting

John Keane

A short history of the future of democracy

* Annual Lecture presented at the Mr Hans van Mierlo Stichting, Amsterdam, 10th December 2015

A Short History of the Future of Democracy

We live in times gripped by the conviction that periodic 'free and fair' elections at the national level are the heart and soul of democracy. The conviction has deep taproots with a remarkable history. In 1945, there were only a dozen representative democracies left on our planet. Since that time, in nearly 90 countries, national elections have come to be seen widely as the best way of forming good governments, sometimes even as a 'timeless' and non-negotiable feature of the good political life. Article 21 of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in December 1948, famously set the standard. After noting that every person 'has the right to take part in the government of his [sic] country, directly or through freely chosen representatives', the article states the core principle of self-government: 'The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures'.

The way of thinking condensed in these few words has been the global orthodoxy for some time: the crowning moment of democracy is widely presumed to be the 'free and fair' general election based on the universal franchise of citizens

who live within a common territorial state. A simple glance at the history of representative democracy shows that the orthodoxy is time-space contingent; it is by no means either 'natural' or an 'iron law' of political life.[1] It is the product of a variety of intersecting local and global forces. Most obviously, the orthodoxy draws strength from voters who demand free and fair elections, take part willingly in national elections and who have much to say about why and for whom they vote, or (when it is not compulsory) passionately refuse to cast their ballots. The orthodoxy is nurtured as well by state-level political classes operating through political parties, legislatures, lobby organisations and incumbent governments. Periodic national elections are their bread and butter: sources of funding, access to government administration backed by popular legitimacy. The orthodoxy has additional props, including roving reporters and butterfly journalists who flit from one general election to the next, along the way spreading through 'breaking news' headlines the impression among their multi-media audiences that general elections are the alpha and omega, the high-drama moment of democracy. The orthodoxy is equally reinforced by opinion polling agencies. Their efforts to measure voters' attitudes

1 See my account of the strangely disparate origins of ballot, elector, poll, vote and other family member terms in the introduction to *The Life and Death of Democracy* (London and New York 2009).

and opinions using sophisticated algorithms have become big profitable business. And not to be underestimated are the power/knowledge clusters created and serviced during the past generation by political scientists, research funding agencies, pundits and election monitors: all of them have a material interest in keeping alive the orthodox view that national free and fair elections are the defining principle of modern representative democracy.

These multiple forces are mutually reinforcing and their effects are considerable. They have undoubtedly stretched the life span of the originally eighteenth-century view of representative democracy as a novel form of self-government in which citizens elect representatives and parliaments and executives take decisions on their behalf, for a time, until citizens reassert their right of re-electing them, or throwing them from office in a hail of harsh words and paper and electronic bullets.[2] It should be noted that the same forces have simultaneously had silencing effects: the orthodoxy typically says nothing about the dark side of the coming of elections in the post-1945 period (think for a moment of the link between 'free and fair elections' and the atomic bombing

2 Sonia Alonso, John Keane and Wolfgang Merkel (eds.), *The Future of Representative Democracy* (Cambridge and New York 2011).

of Japan) and it speaks little or nothing about the widespread *failure* of free and fair elections to take root in national soils since 1945.[3] The majority of the world's population today lives in polities where there are no 'free and fair elections', yet the failure is usually attributed to the 'backward' or 'deficient' conditions prevailing within the given country, or it is greeted with silence, despite the fact that the most consequential election failure of the past generation, the ill-fated elections of 1947-1948 in the Republic of China, then the world's largest experiment in electoral democracy, helped pave the way after 1949 for a globally powerful one-party state shaped until this day by its active *refusal* to hold general elections. The silence about election failures in China, the new global player shaping the course of the 21st century, is especially telling. It suggests that the orthodoxy secretly harbours an unexplained dogma: the quiet presumption that history is on the side of general elections, a teleology that in turn nurtures the powerful conviction that democracy is essentially reducible to elections, so that wherever free and fair elections are absent a country will be ranked poorly by democracy barometers, freedom scorecards and election monitoring agencies, possibly even targeted by IMF-type economic sanctions or American-led military intervention, as happened during the past decade in

3 Pippa Norris, *Why elections fail* (Cambridge and New York 2015).

Iraq and Afghanistan, where the staging of general elections was considered (disastrously, it turned out) a first step on the highroad to democracy.

The Orthodoxy: Doubts

This is the post-1945 consensus. The world remains in its grip, yet there are signs that this reining orthodoxy is beginning to crumble. All's not well in the house of national elections. Its rock-solid certainty is crumbling. Doubts about the central importance, legitimacy and efficacy of general elections are growing. Questions about why they are so taken-for-granted and why they are at the centre of ordinary political habits are being tabled. Why is this so?

A variety of long-term counter-pressures is arguably eroding the common sense view that periodic elections are the central steering mechanism of democratic states. The most obvious trend is *the disenchantment [Entzauberung] of elections*. When examining the history of modern elections, stretching back into the eighteenth century, it is hard to recapture the blood, sweat and tears that were invested in the historic life-and-death struggles for 'one person, one vote'. The universal franchise was the great animator of early modern democratic politics. Reasoned books made a detailed case for the parliamentary road to democracy, as Eduard Bernstein

did during controversies triggered by the Prussian state elections in 1893, by hotly criticising August Bebel and other defenders of the revolutionary strategy of *attentisme*, the retreat into political isolationism while awaiting the collapse of the capitalist order.[4] Passionate tracts and thrilling poems (think of Walt Whitman's 'Election Day, November 1884') were written in its honour. The universal franchise aroused great expectations of uncorrupted and affordable government, political equality, social dignity and even the collective harmony of a classless society.[5] Muriel Matters, Emily Pankhurst and other suffragettes were among those who predicted it would bring about the end of militarism. 'The ballot is as essential to democracy as the bayonet is to despotism', wrote the American socialist publisher and activist Walter Thomas Mills. 'Majority rule is the only rational method of administering the affairs of a free state. The elective franchise must be universal. It must be given on equal terms to all who share in the advantages and bear the responsibilities of living within the borders of such a state'.[6]

4 Eduard Bernstein, *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie* (Stuttgart 1899).

5 The 19th-century French struggles for the universal franchise and their phantasm of a society without divisions is analysed by Pierre Rosanvallon, 'The Republic of Universal Suffrage', in *Democracy Past and Future* (New York 2006), pp. 98 – 114.

6 Walter Thomas Mills, *Democracy or Despotism* (Berkeley 1916), p. 61.

The radical vision of the universal franchise often seemed utopian, but its champions thought otherwise. They saw its practical relevance confirmed by the snap and snarl it aroused. Nineteenth-century Cornell University president Andrew White warned that most potential voters were 'not alive even to their own most direct interests' and warned that the universal franchise would hand power to 'a crowd of illiterate peasants, freshly raked from Irish bogs, or Bohemian mines, or Italian robber nests'. [7] Mobilising the language of hostility to foreigners, women, the lower class and inferior races, Charles Francis Adams Jr., the grandson of John Quincy Adams and great-grandson of John Adams, similarly cautioned that in the American context 'universal suffrage can only mean in plain English the government of ignorance and vice - it means a European, and especially Celtic, proletariat on the Atlantic coast, an African proletariat on the shores of the Gulf, and a Chinese proletariat on the Pacific'.[8] On the other side of the Atlantic, Henry Sumner Maine's insistence that the one-person, one-vote principle was in practice a drag on modern progress was widely cited. 'Universal suffrage', he wrote, 'would certainly have prohibited the spinning-jenny and the power-loom. It

7 Cited in Terry Golway, *Machine Made: Tammany Hall and the Creation of Modern American Politics* (New York 2014), p. 106.

8 Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (New York 2001), p. 98.

would certainly have forbidden the threshing-machine. It would have prevented the adoption of the Gregorian Calendar; and it would have restored the Stuarts'.[9]

During the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, as we know, this sort of hostile, near-hysterical language disappeared from political life. The virulent opposition to the universal franchise was politically defused and defeated. With important contemporary exceptions (China, Brunei, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, Vatican) universal acceptance and praise of the principle of one-person, one-vote principle became a reality. Omnocracy, the rule of everyone living and voting within the boundaries of a territorial state, became the acceptable and highly-praised norm. But the change had a will-o'-the-wisp quality. When seen in historical terms, the great democratic victory for the universal franchise has proven to be a mixed blessing. In retrospect, we can see more clearly that among its unintended consequences is the dissipation of the energy, purpose and poetry that fuelled the historic post-1789 struggles for 'one person, one vote'. From time to time, elections still come wrapped in public excitement, but the euphoria is nowadays mixed with voter grumbling, disappointment, cynical disaffection and outright

9 Henry Sumner Maine, *Popular Government* (London 1886).

hostility to the cumbersome and costly machinery of elections. The coming of the universal franchise has brought a healthy dose of realism to the shared symbolic significance of elections and the fruits they can yield. In the early years after 1945, there were moments when elections seemed to come wrapped in a metaphysical or semi-religious aura. Italo Calvino's *La giornata d'uno scrutatore* (1963) noted how elections resembled an 'assemblage of afflicted people' called 'to testify against the ambition of human forces'. The act of voting was 'modelled on prayer', a ritual or 'a kind of religious rite' centred on 'the acceptance of human smallness, adding one's own nothingness to the sum in which all losses are cancelled out, assenting to a final, unknown end'.[10] Compare Calvino's account of the solemnity of elections in post-fascist Italy with José Saramago's thoroughly de-sanctified, down-to-earth description of an extreme case of their fading spirit: a sunny election day when a huge majority (83%) of voters refuse to go to the polling stations until late afternoon, to cast a blank ballot, in silent protest against the perceived worthlessness of voting. The choice by the majority to exercise their 'simple right not to follow any consensually established opinion' breeds official outbursts. A cabinet minister calls the electoral blank-out 'a depth charge launched against the system'. The

10 Italo Calvino, *The Watcher and Other Stories* (New York 1971), pp.36 -37.

government panics. Denouncing the 'blind casting of blank ballot papers', it warns the country is facing a terrorist threat. A state of emergency is declared; the secret police spring into action; house searches begin; tensions rise; bombs explode; people are killed, leaving the former democracy to descend into an awful darkness.[11]

The fading aura of the orthodox belief in elections as the lynchpin of democracy is reinforced by an additional challenge: the feeling that citizens can act more effectively outside and beyond elections and the election cycles so praised by textbook treatments of representative democracy. The dynamic prompts new questions: Now that the principle of the universal franchise ('who is entitled to vote?') has become more or less a settled issue, is it just possible that a fundamental political challenge facing so-called democracies is *where* people can vote? Might the new measure of democracy be the number of different places where people can decide things by exercising their vote directly, or through their representatives?[12]

11 José Saramago, *Seeing* (London 2007).
12 Norberto Bobbio, WS 1987, p. 114

These questions have been brought to life by *the redistribution of political passions* to zones of power beyond the reach of political parties and parliaments and the rhythms of national election cycles. The disaffection of minorities who refuse the 'majority rule' principle of electoral democracy (the opening shots were fired by the civil rights movement in the United States, in the early 1950s) is just one of the many drivers within a much broader but still unfinished *transformation of the ecology of democratic representation*. The rapid growth of public scrutiny and power-checking bodies is a striking feature of the post-1945 political landscape. A multitude of monitory mechanisms, or 'parliaments of things', that operate well beyond the fringes of mainstream elections, is transforming the architecture of self-government. Gone are the days when democracy could be described (and in the next breath attacked) as 'government by the unrestricted will of the majority' (von Hayek[13]). Democracy is coming to mean much more than free and fair general elections, although nothing less. The principles of democratic accountability and public participation are applied to a wide range of settings; there is a growing awareness that 'parliaments are only a few of the machineries of representation among many others and

13 Friedrich von Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty: the Political Order of a Free People* (London and Henley 1979), p. 39.

not necessarily the most relevant or the best equipped'.[14] The age of *monitory democracy* has been born.[15] The grip of elections, political parties and parliaments on citizens' lives is consequently weakening. Bodies such as Human Rights Watch, Greenpeace, Oxfam, WikiLeaks and I Paid a Bribe are among the new power-scrutinising and power-restraining innovations that tend to enfranchise many more citizens' voices. They do so by establishing alternative sites of legitimate authority, new types of *unelected representatives* skilled at using what Americans call 'bully pulpits'. The number and range of monitory institutions, or 'third party judges'[16], so greatly increase that they point to a future world where the old rule of 'one person, one vote, one representative' - the central demand in the early modern struggle for representative

14 Bruno Latour, 'From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik; or How to Make Things Public', in Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (eds.), *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass. And London 2005), p. 31.

15 See John Keane, *The Life and Death of Democracy* (London and New York 2009) and *Democracy and Media Decadence* (Cambridge and New York 2013), pp.

16 Pasquale Pasquino, 'Constitutional Adjudication and Democracy. Comparative Perspectives: USA, France, Italy', *Ratio Juris*, volume 11 (March 1998), pp. 38 -50. Pasquino cites the famous letter of James Madison to Thomas Jefferson (October 24, 1787): 'We know however that no Society ever did or can consist of so homogeneous mass of Citizens […] It remains then to be enquired whether a majority having any common interest, or feeling any common passion, will find sufficient motives to restrain them from oppressing the minority. An individual is never allowed to be a judge or even a witness in his own cause. If two individuals are under the biass of interest or enmity against a third, the rights of the latter could never be safely referred to the majority of the three. Will two thousand individuals be less apt to oppress one thousand, or two hundred thousand, one hundred thousand?'

democracy - is replaced with the new principle of monitory democracy: 'one person, many interests, many voices, many sources of authority, multiple votes, multiple representatives'.

The sidelining and downgrading of national elections is bound up with the unfinished communications revolution. *Communicative abundance* is becoming a fact of life; voters, political parties, parliaments and elections are nowadays staged within and structured by media-saturated settings. Mainstream electoral politics is reshaped by networked devices that integrate texts, sounds and images in digitally compact and easily storable, reproducible and portable form. In this high-pressure world of communicative abundance, political parties and elected governments typically function as political machines operated by professional communicators guided by opinion polls, online surveys, focus groups and the collection and algorithmic processing of big data. Old-style patronage run by party bureaucrats declines; political bosses are replaced by political consultants and data monkeys; and strong party loyalties nurtured by face-to-face, locally-based contacts among incumbents, candidates and voters wither. The age when the essence of politics was periodic elections structured by 'political bosses' and the 'psychotechnics

of party management and party advertising, slogans and marching tunes'[17] has passed. Political parties instead become frenzied agents of 'the permanent campaign'.[18] Free time between elections is a thing of the past; the pressure to 'win' the daily news cycle through headline grabbing, announcements and intensive continuous polling rains down hard on voters (think of the pioneering efforts by pollster Dick Morris to get voters to do such things as help President Bill Clinton decide where he would go on vacation). Every political question is treated as a public relations problem; all electoral opponents (as American politicians say) are potential 'rope a dope' victims in perpetual media frenzies.

This drift towards 'psephocracy' (Ashis Nandy), a media-saturated polity dominated by election doings and dramas, proves to be a mixed blessing for the reining orthodoxy. Psephocracy produces large quantities of bellyaching. Communicative abundance fuels rising citizen disaffection with mainstream 'catch-all' parties accused of failing to be all good things to all voters; public fractiousness, volatile turnout rates and political resistance spreads.[19] There are

17 Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York and London 1942), p. 283.

18 Sidney Blumenthal, *The Permanent Campaign* (Boston, Mass 1980).

19 Peter Mair, *Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy* (London and New York 2013).

contexts in which political parties seem strangely hell-bent on disabling themselves through strategies of ruination. In some quarters, voting is judged a worthless waste of time, money and energy; or elections are treated as pay-back moments by angry citizens. Aphorisms and jokes about politicians, parties and parliaments flood through social media. It's said that during election campaigns the air is stuffed full of speeches and vice versa. Others say that elections are political happenings when people find out what politicians stand for and politicians find out what people will fall for. Still others ask whether the only reason we have elections is to find out if the polls were accurate. The mischievous add: if the gods had intended people to vote then they would have given us candidates.

Under conditions of communicative abundance, *electoral rebellions* become easier to organise, and more frequent. In these circumstances of communicative abundance, support by disaffected citizens for populist parties flourishes. Cultivating the style of bad manners politics, appealing to 'the people', populists and their parties use elections to heap scorn on 'rigged' elections said to be dominated by 'the political establishment'.[20] Public support flourishes as well

20 Simon Tormey, *The End of Representative Politics* (Cambridge 2015); Lance Bennett and

for new civic initiatives and other experiments with 'anti-political', direct-action social networks that know the arts of situationist pranking, *détournement* and staging of global media events. [21] The dramatic *occupation of public squares, buildings and parliaments by citizens* in recent years fits this pattern of extra-parliamentary politics. From Avenue Habib Bourguiba and Tahrir Square to Puerta del Sol, Stuttgart, Wall Street, Bungehuis in Amsterdam, Taipei and Hong Kong, citizens' initiatives are directed *against* elections, political parties, parliaments and the whole paraphernalia of electoral democracy.

The interesting anti-electoral form of these occupations merits closer examination. These public assemblies do not suffer nostalgia for the golden age of classical Athenian assembly democracy, or for the age of representative democracy. They are not straightforward expressions of 'the will of the people'; and they are not to be understood as harbingers of a new model of 'real', 'direct, 'participatory', 'grassroots', 'deep' or 'deliberative' democracy. The new public assemblies do

Alexandra Segerberg, *The Logic of Connective Action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics* (Cambridge and New York 2013); Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation* (Stanford 2016).

21 John Keane, 'War Comes Home', *The Conversation* (November 15, 2015), at: https://theconversation.com/war-comes-home-50715

not yearn for a 'purified' representative democracy based on 'free and fair' elections. They are in fact instances of *monitory democracy* in action. These assemblies function as public syntagma, creative remixes of some old democratic tactics, a democratic innovation that combines the peace vigil, the militant sit-in, the public demonstration, the trade union rally, the teach-in and the constitutional convention. These public occupations of our time are multiplex public spaces where indignant, 'pissed off' citizens gather in solidarity to vent their private angers in the reassuring company of diverse others, from all walks of life. They are public spaces in which the principle of political and social equality is reaffirmed; where diverse voices are heard, on various subjects; sites where the dignity of citizens beyond electoral politics is reclaimed.[22] The public occupations are a form of 'prefigurative politics' where fresh futures are imagined and unborn generations are granted a voice, places where citizens warn that unless something gives citizens of the future will be forced to suffer the annoying dissatisfactions and grinding injustices of the present. These self-styled people's assemblies are equally multi-media broadcast studios. Well beyond the confines of elections and election cycles, they are cries to fellow citizens of a city, a country, a region beyond borders; they

22 David Graeber, *The Democracy Project: A History, a Crisis, a Movement* (New York 2013).

are sometimes public appeals to the whole world, to citizens everywhere, to take note of what is happening, to understand how and why their lives and livelihoods are being ruined by arbitrary power. These public spaces are lighthouses, early warning stations, reminders of how easily democracy is destroyed whenever power is exercised arbitrarily, by forces such as global corporations and consortia of states that obey no majorities, no elections, or election outcomes.

Public occupations are examples of how public life within most parliamentary democracies is now pushed and pulled by *rough music politics*, 21st-century forms of the early modern protests of the disaffected and excluded. Once upon a time, when the bulk of the populations of Europe and elsewhere did not enjoy voting rights, the poor and powerless expressed their indignation through ritual, revelry and riot. Raucous ear-shattering noise, unpitying laughter and the mimicking of obscenities were the weapons of the weak. In France, such practices were called *charivari* (Italians spoke of *scampanate*; Germans referred to *Katzenmusik*), while in late eighteenth-century Britain the protests paraded under such strangely obsolete names as 'shallals', 'riding the stang' and 'skimmingtons', rowdy parades expressing moral disapproval

and featuring effigies of the proxy victims.[23] The rough music politics of our times similarly takes place on the fringes of electoral politics. It comes in the form of protest by the excluded against their exclusion from parliamentary politics; and, just as things were in the eighteenth century, rough music politics is energised by the sharpening sense that elections are no longer meaningful or effective ways of determining fairly who gets what, when and how.

Philippines Syndrome

More than a few democracies are shaped by a strangely contradictory trend first outlined by Benedict Anderson in writings on elections in Southeast Asia. We could call it the *Philippines syndrome*: elections wrapped in intense media coverage and great public excitement and robust turnout rates come mixed with bitter public disappointment and despondency produced by citizens' understanding that elections work chronically in favour of the rich and powerful.[24] There are multiple symptoms of this syndrome that now eats away at the reining elections orthodoxy. In all electoral democracies, there are mounting complaints that elections

23 E.P. Thompson, 'Rough Music Reconsidered', *Folklore*, volume 103, 1 (1992), pp. 3-26.
24 Benedict Anderson, 'Elections and Participation in Three Southeast Asian Countries', in R.H. Taylor (ed.), *The Politics of Elections in Southeast Asia* (Washington DC 1996); and 'Cacique Democracy in the Philippines: Origins and Dreams', *New Left Review* 1/169 (May-June 1988).

and elected governments have been polluted by *big money*. The United States is the most talked-about case, for worrying reasons.[25] Under the rules confirmed by the *Citizens United* decision by the Supreme Court in 2010, and backed by an appeals court decision later that year, *SpeechNow.org v. Federal Election Commission*, billionaire donors like Alice Walton, Sheldon Adelson and the Koch brothers are now the gatekeepers of high-level politics. The limits on corporate funds in elections going back to Theodore Roosevelt in 1907 have been abolished. Rich oligarchs, many of whom are champions of 'austerity', contribute limitless amounts to Super PACs sporting names such as the Wisconsin Club for Growth and Priorities USA, supposedly independent political action committees that in effect operate as political parties of their own. The whole process of 'slush fund politics' (Bill Allison of the Sunlight Foundation) is deeply corrupting of the spirit and substance of elections. Billionaires distort nomination races; they confuse candidates into thinking they are more popular than they really are and they often artificially prolong the political lives of unpopular candidates. By law, 'substantial discussions' between billionaires and their pet candidates are not supposed to take place, yet the phrase has

25 Robert G. Kaiser, *So Damn Much Money: the Triumph of Lobbying and the Corrosion of American Government* (New York 2010); Elizabeth Drew, 'How Money Runs Our Politics', *The New York Review of Books* (June 4, 2015), pp. 22 – 26.

never been clarified in law, and is rarely applied. Billionaires enjoy close working relations with their preferred candidate. They shape political agendas; and by working, under the tax code, through organisations that are 'operated exclusively to promote social welfare', their big money donations are kept secret. The whole 'dark money' donations process is fiercely partisan, and is unbreakably rock-solid, at least for the moment. Incumbents who have succeeded through big money politics are reluctant to court alternatives. Candidates vying for office swear they need pet billionaires. And the whole campaign finance system is in any case protected by law and its presumption that spending money to influence elections is a form of constitutionally protected 'free speech'.

General elections are further distorted by *organised lobbying*.[26] Practically every democratically elected government nowadays resembles a beehive swarming with lobbyists busily engaged in linking outside interests with government policymakers. The term covers many types of advocacy, from informal open consultations between legislators and tiny not-for-profit associations through to shadowy but well-organised links between regulators and giant global corporations. Around

26 The following section summarises my lengthier account of lobbying in *Democracy and Media Decadence* (Cambridge and New York 2013).

15,000 trade associations, consultants, not-for-profit NGOs, international organisations, think tanks, regional organisations and other lobbyists currently operate in Brussels, where they seek to shape legislation and regulations of the European Union; and in Washington DC, an estimated 90,000 lobbyists ply their trade within a field dominated by such large lobby firms as Hill and Knowlton, the Duberstein Group and Patton Boggs.

Public defenders of the trend seem unworried. 'The practice of lobbying in order to influence political decisions is a legitimate and necessary part of the democratic process,' notes a much-quoted parliamentary report. 'Individuals and organisations reasonably want to influence decisions that may affect them, those around them, and their environment. Government in turn needs access to the knowledge and views that lobbying can bring.'[27] Seen in this way, to pursue the simile of the beehive, lobbyists are vital pollinators and honey makers, suppliers of information to government policy makers who might otherwise be ignorant of the needs of stakeholders. Lobbyists line the nests and strengthen the cavity walls of democratic government with propolis. Lobbying is a source of campaign contributions. It provides

27 House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee , 'Lobbying: Access and influence in Whitehall', HC 36-1 (London, 5 January 2009), p. 9, available at: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmpubadm/36/36i.pdf

jobs for outgoing elected officials and their staffs; and it enriches the legislative process by providing it with outside expertise, with 'legislative subsidy'.[28]

The points are well taken. Lobbying is not simply a synonym for bribery and there are indeed lobbyists who successfully strive to protect the weak, or who emphasise the importance of following such commandments as avoiding lies, misinformation and exaggerated promises, listening and working with policymakers and providing them with clear-headed proposals.[29] But especially when it draws on big money, lobbying (to extend the beehive simile) introduces poisonous toxins, strange diseases and colony disorders into the heartland nests of elected government. By strengthening the well-organised hand of the wealthy, it distorts election results. Partners within the busy hives of governmental power, lobbyists' brief is to set policy agendas, ultimately by persuading or dissuading legislators or regulators from taking a particular course of action, especially when the issues are big and much is at stake in power terms. Lobbyists typically

28 Richard L. Hall and Alan V. Deardorff, 'Lobbying as Legislative Subsidy', *American Political Science Review*, 100 (2006), pp 69-84, where lobbying is pictured 'not as exchange (vote buying) or persuasion (informative signaling) but as a form of legislative subsidy—a matching grant of policy information, political intelligence, and legislative labor to the enterprises of strategically selected legislators'.

29 Bruce C. Wolpe and Bertam J. Levine, *Lobbying Congress: How the System Works* (Washington, DC. 1996), pp. 13-19.

spend their money, time and energy on a variety of tactics, which divide into two types, the 'outside' and the 'inside'. Using what are called grassroots tactics, 'outside' lobbyists pay great attention to forming public opinion through perpetual media campaigning against their opponents, often through 'sexed up' disinformation. [30] Conventional 'inside' lobbying meanwhile concentrates on striking close links with policy makers within and around official government circles. Influence is the name of the game, for instance through the nurturing of regular personal contacts and friendly working relations with government officials for the purpose of promoting, or amending or blocking legislation. Disregarding elections, lobbyists organise campaign donations, good dinners, corporate boxes, complimentary holidays and media opportunities. They operate a media-intensive 'gift economy' of influential connections lubricated by cash flows. Within and around the institutions of government, the ultimate purpose of lobbying is to secure or strengthen the power of some interests against other, potentially opposing and conflicting interests, and to do so by building connections, regardless of the outcome of elections, or the composition of the existing government.

30 Ken Kollman, *Outside Lobbying: Public Opinion and Interest Group Strategies* (Princeton, NJ. 1998).

An equally threatening trend is the *sidelining of elections* by the outsourcing of state functions to shadowy 'governance' arrangements, such as the global manufacture and trade in weapons. [31] These so-called 'governance' mechanisms in effect render elections obsolete. They typically come wrapped in cross-border power chains, powerful 'flanking' institutions, including military-industrial complexes, corporations and large banks and credit institutions, whose modus operandi both sets aside elections and drags them down, into the maelstrom of dysfunctions produced by contemporary capitalist economies.

31 Andrew Feinstein, *The Shadow World: Inside the Global Arms Trade* (London 2011). This 'world of money, corruption, deceit and death' is connected to states, the United Nations, large listed corporations and covert operators in such intricate and unaccountable ways that most researchers don't seem to know where to begin their investigations, and so don't bother. The whole shadowy trade is fastened by middlemen, agents, brokers, lobbyists and so-called economic offsets in procurement decisions (promises by arms manufacturers to invest in a buying country's economy). It thrives on and protects itself in silence hidden by talk of 'transport and logistical services' and other euphemisms. According to monitory bodies such as Transparency International, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and Corruption Watch, the industry accounts for an estimated 40 percent of corruption in all global trade. Profits run into the billions; losses are counted in human lives, physical destruction and disruptions of the lives of millions of people. Covert export deals worth around $60 billion are annually signed, almost all of them (85%) within the jurisdiction of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (US, Russia, France, United Kingdom and China) plus two other states, Germany and Italy.

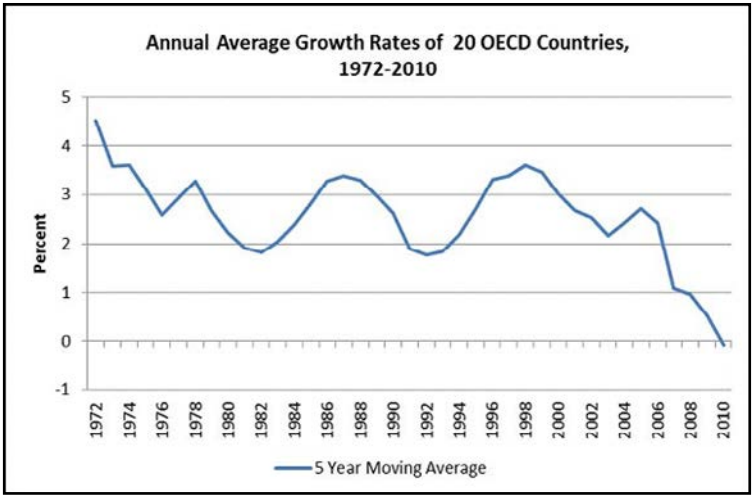


FIGURE I — Source: OECD Economic Outlook: Statistics and Projections

Market dysfunctions are among the most powerful force working to destabilise and undermine the 'free and fair elections' orthodoxy. Charles Kindleberger, Wolfgang Streeck and other scholars have pointed out that the near-collapse of the Atlantic region banking and credit sector in 2008 was only the latest in *a long sequence of market failures* that date back to the mid-1970s, when post-1945 OECD prosperity began to end.[32]

32 Charles Kindleberger and Robert Z. Aliber, *Manias, Panics, and Crashes: A History of Financial Crises* (Hoboken, NJ. 2005); Wolfgang Streeck, *Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism* (London and New York 2014).

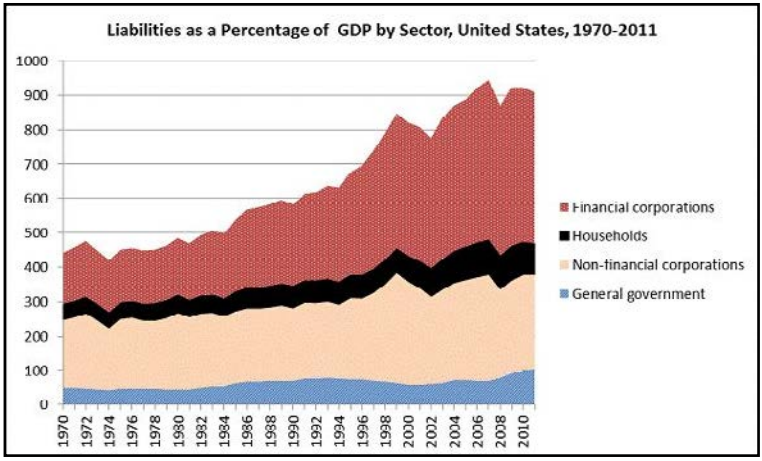


FIGURE II — Source: OECD National Accounts

Successive crises have since grown more severe; an increasingly interconnected global economy has helped spread their effects more widely and rapidly. Global inflation in the 1970s gave way to rising public debt in the 1980s, while fiscal consolidation in the 1990s was accompanied by sharp increases in private sector indebtedness. Disequilibrium, as the economists say, has become the normal condition of OECD capitalism. If capitalism is a social order and way of] life that is vitally dependent on uninterrupted private capital accumulation, then practically every electoral democracy is today trapped within three deep-seated, long-term trends: a persistent decline in the rate of economic growth, recently

aggravated by the events of 2008; continuing increases in overall levels of indebtedness of governments, private households and non-financial as well as financial firms; and marked increases of inequality of income and wealth.

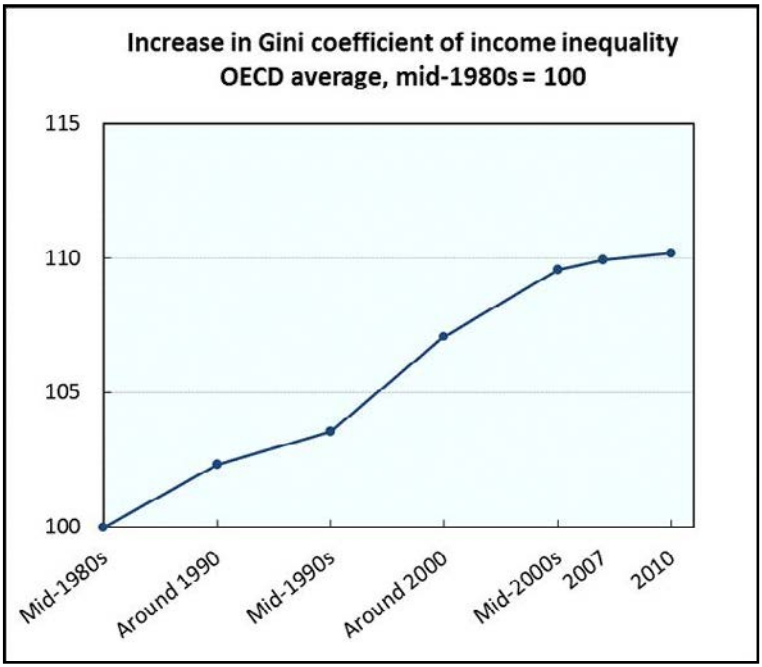


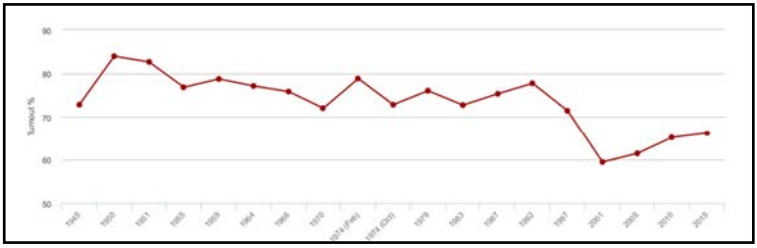
FIGURE III — Source: OECD Income Distribution Database

Steady economic growth, sound money and a measure of social justice, redistributing some of the fruits of capitalism to citizens without capital, were long considered prerequisites

of 'democratic capitalism'. Now that these fragile preconditions have been weakened, or are rendered absent, elections potentially lose their public legitimacy, especially within those parts of the voting population who find themselves for one reason or another towards the bottom of the social pile.[33] Disaffection among 'the precariat' (Guy Standing) is the result, sometimes to the point where elections begin to have an 18th-century feel about them, even in the most 'advanced' electoral democracies, including the so-called 'mother' of parliamentary democracy, the United Kingdom.

Consider the dynamics and results of its 2015 General Election. The scheduled election attracted great global attention and floods of commentary on such matters as the break-up of Britain, the possible exit of Britain from the European Union and the dismal failure of the Labour Party to win over those parts of the middle class convinced there is no alternative to the mean clampdown politics of austerity. The 2015 election was a media event extraordinaire. For a few days, it even featured robust debate about the failings of a first-past-the-post electoral system that awarded only one seat each to UKIP, which won 3.8 million votes, and to the

33 Wolfgang Merkel, 'Is capitalism compatible with democracy?' *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft*, volume 8, 2 (2014), pp. 109 -128.



Voter Turnout, United Kingdom General Elections (1950 - 2015) UK Political Info

By contrast, media assessments of the ocean of public disaffection on which the ship of Westminster and its parliamentary elections are now floating were rare. During the days following the election, for instance, commentaries within the British press on the steady decline of voter turnout since 1950 (the United Kingdom now ranks 76th in world turnout rankings) were absent. There were no mainstream media analyses of the number of citizens who actually voted for the return of a Tory government now blessed (thanks to the first-past-the-post electoral system) with an absolute majority of seats in the House of Commons. The statistics were telling of a malaise: on an overall turnout of 66.1%, a mere 24.4% of adult citizens actually cast their vote for the new Conservative government.

Such figures were mostly ignored by journalists and public commentators. Some expressed lament for the way television

broadcasters successfully managed to push 'horse-race' coverage, for instance by emphasising just how close the contest was between the Conservatives and Labour, why a Labour/SNP coalition government was a real possibility, and whether or not such a government could handle the stagnant economy. Other commentators chose to bang on about the surprise result, and why it happened; or they noted the end of Duverger's Law, which states that first-past-the-post systems typically produce two-party systems. Missing in these reports was any sense of the several ways, slowly but surely, electoral democracy in Britain is drifting backwards, heading towards a 21st-century version of late 18th-century politics. The analogy is deliberately provocative, but it serves to highlight the way present-day parliamentary politics is coming to be dominated by such 18th-century facts as the capture of government by the rich, the weakening of independent parliamentary powers and the near-collapse of mass membership political parties. The regressive trend includes as well cuts to welfare support and urban services for permanently poor people (1 in 5 of the UK population, 13 million people, now live below the official poverty line). Elections that bear more than a passing resemblance to pork-barrel plebiscites, widespread public mockery and disaffection with politics on high and tough law-and-order measures

designed to spy on and control 'harmful activities' are also part of the same backsliding. With just a touch of exaggeration, it can be said that such trends, if not restrained or reversed, point towards a future world run by a political class that heeds the advice given by Vilfredo Pareto to Benito Mussolini: to stabilise the property system and strengthen state power, he recommended, camouflage the transfer of decision-making power from elections and parliament to the closed circles of 'elites'; and do so by promoting rump parliaments that tame the democratic feelings of the masses by giving them the illusion of participating in state power.[34]

Elections Without Democracy

The feeling that elections are ritual manipulations of the powerless by the powerful rich reaches its nadir in the whole phenomenon of *electoral despotism*.[35] In countries such as Russia and Vietnam, in the Gulf region, central Asia and elsewhere ruling oligarchs use periodic elections as an instrument for consolidating and legitimating their rule. These despotisms are unique to the 21st century. They are not

34 Vilfredo Federico Damaso Pareto, *The Transformation of Democracy* (New Brunswick, NJ. 1984; 1921).

35 John Keane, *The New Despotisms* (London 2016), forthcoming.

failed or half-way houses to 'democracy'; they are not 'defective democracies' or 'delegative democracies' (O'Donnell) that lack checks and balances, or 'illiberal democracies' (Zakaria) that fail to uphold the rule of law. They are not in-between, 'hybrid regimes' (Diamond) or 'semi-democracies', or 'semi-authoritarian regimes' or 'semi-dictatorships', or the polar opposites of 'liberal democracy' (Fukuyama). They are something other, something novel. The new despotisms are slick, media-saturated oligarchies backed by great concentrations of wealth held in a few hands. Their oligarchs rule through law and resort when necessary to unrestrained violence and targeted fear. Yet the new despotisms are quite different than old-fashioned dictatorships. They are a state-of-the-art form of manipulative power, a new type of political regime that manages to do something many observers thought to be impossible: the new despotisms win the affection and calculated support of their subjects, not just through the promotion of economic growth and general wellbeing, but also through experiments with top-down 'democratic' techniques of consensual government, including staged elections.

The new despotisms could be described as regimes that practice *elections without democracy*. Previous anti-democratic

regimes, for instance in South Africa, made use of elections, but the despotisms of our time do so differently, in much more sophisticated ways. From Belarus to Azerbaijan, Hanoi and Kuala Lumpur, despotisms embrace the institutional facades of electoral democracy by granting the universal franchise (the few exceptions include the UAE, where women are banned from voting). These regimes offer a selected number of candidates the chance of higher office; subject the head of government to electoral confirmation; and allow a measure of multi-party competition. Despotisms also bring to perfection the dark arts of manipulation. Living proof that elections can be functional instruments of top-down rule, these regimes exclude candidates considered undesirable, buy votes and intimidate voters. They concoct sensational media events, gerrymander, alter electoral lists and miscount and disappear ballots.

Why do despotisms bother with such practices? It is a mistake to suppose that despotic rulers are disconnected from reality, or that they live in a permanent state of denial, or that the elections they convene are merely propaganda-massaged plebiscites. Elections are much more useful tools of rule. They enable dissenters in the governing hierarchy some room for manoeuvre. Electoral contests can help settle old scores,

resolve disputes and offer low-cost exit options for discontented regime politicians. Elections can create opportunities for spotting new talent (that is, budding accomplices of power). They distribute patronage to (potential) supporters and serve as early warning detectors of disaffection and opposition. Elections may be powerful means of placing opposition parties in a quandary: their almost certain loss means they suffer loss of morale and a high risk of disintegration. Elections also have the effect of reinforcing the legitimacy of the sultans who rule from the saddles of high power. The razzamatazz of elections is an awesome celebration of the mighty power of the regime. It may even offer a chance to its subjects to behave as if they believe in the regime, through something like an 'election contract'.

Staging elections can be risky business, of course. When despotic rulers hold elections, they expect to win. But things can go wrong, as they did spectacularly in 2009 in Iran. Hence despots resort to the practice of 'election stealing'. Failing all else, in a hail of truncheons and bullets, the last word goes to the police and army. The exercise of electoral democracy then comes to mean the bludgeoning of the people by the rulers of the people for the claimed good of the people.

Do Elections Have a Future?

All these post-1945 trends, ranging from the widespread failure of free and fair elections to take root in national soils, the disenchantment of elections and the growth of monitory democracy to electoral rebellions and rough music politics, the pollution of general elections by big money and corporate lobbyists, the outflanking of state functions by 'governance' mechanisms, cross-border power chains and powerful state and market actors, plus the rise of electoral despotism, are clear and present threats to the ideals and substance of electoral democracy, and to the orthodoxy that has sprung up around it.

Pressured by such trends, the aura, passion and functional purpose that accompanied the historic post-1789 struggles for 'one person, one vote' seem to be dying, or in some contexts already dead. Elections are losing their former significance, and this raises new questions of global importance. In spite of their declining importance in determining who gets what, when and how, do general elections with integrity have a future? Do they still matter and, if so, is their rejuvenation and improved integrity, against formidable odds, now among the vital political imperatives of our age? Or are general elections slowly losing their grip

on democracy? Are they perhaps in terminal decline, or (as David van Reybrouck and others contend[36]) destructive of the spirit and substance of democracy? Is the universal belief in the universality of 'free and fair' elections a mid-20th-century delusion with 18th-century roots, a worn-out dogma now urgently in need of replacement by fresh visions and new democratic innovations fit for our times?

Convincing answers to these questions are difficult, and it may be that the questions will in retrospect turn out to be not the right questions. Yet one thing is certain: the multiple trends examined above take the known post-1945 world of elections and electoral politics into the future, towards the unknown. The dynamics may tempt the reader to draw the conclusion that the whole analysis presented here is confusedly neither for nor against elections and representative politics, but just the reverse. Vexed ambivalence is actually just one possible type of reaction to the multiple and conflicting challenges faced by general elections, and (normatively and strategically speaking) not such a helpful reaction at that. A clear-headed account of the future options facing the 21st century world of general elections is instead needed. At a minimum, it would include *three possible and contested futures*.

36 David van Reybrouck, *Tegen Verkiezingen* (Amsterdam and Antwerp 2013).

Against Elections

The first scenario is championed by intellectuals, journalists, NGOs, citizen activists and others who are deeply disaffected with electoral politics. Their *refusal of general elections* leads them to favour election boycotts, 'real democracy', extra-parliamentary rough politics and other forms of citizens' direct involvement in public life. 'There's gonna be a revolution', says the British entertainer Russell Brand, 'it's totally going to happen. I ain't got even a flicker of doubt. This is the *end*. This is time to wake up.' Brand rails against a political system that produces 'a disenfranchised, disillusioned, despondent underclass that are not being represented'. Voting is tacit complicity with this system: 'I say when there *is* a genuine alternative, a genuine option, then vote for that. But until then, pfffft, don't bother. Why pretend? Why be complicit in this ridiculous illusion?[37]

The angry tears of disappointment with the whole paraphernalia of electoral democracy are palpable, yet the call to abandon elections, the political strategy of treating periodic voting and political parties as the fossil fuel of

37 From the widely-circulated interview with Russell Brand by Jeremy Paxman, *BBC Newsnight* (October 23 2013) available at *http://www.correntewire.com/russell_brand_vs_jeremy_paxman_the_full_transcript*

contemporary democracy, prompts two immediate objections. More obviously, when citizens turn their backs on elections and fail to exercise their vote, they in effect lose potential access to vital state resources such as taxation revenues, control over policing and law and the crafting of top-down political narratives. Less obviously, the neo-anarchist attack on elections embraces the principle of *unelected representation*, yet it does so secretly, without clearly acknowledging the basis of its own legitimacy, or its own populist or demagogic potential.

The call to abandon elections attracts strange bedfellows, including those who champion methods traceable to the imagined world of assembly democracy in ancient Greece. Here the preferred alternatives include deliberative assemblies and the random selection of decision makers by means of sortition. The Flemish historian and writer David Van Reybrouck has recently caused a minor sensation in the Low Countries by insisting that Western democracies are suffering so much election fatigue (electoral democracy is 'killing' democracy, he says) that what is now needed is the replacement of the ritual selection of representatives to parliament by an allotted assembly. 'The realities of our democracies disillusion people at an alarming rate. We must ensure that democracy does not wear itself out,' he says, convinced that elections are

a cause of paralysis of democracy because electoral democracy is a contradiction in terms, and in practice. Representation is essentially an aristocratic device: a form of delegation according to which 'the person who casts his or her vote, casts it away'. From his neo-classical perspective, elections 'are not only outdated as a democratic procedure, they were never meant to be democratic in the first place. Elections were invented to stop the danger of democracy'. It follows from this conjecture that periodic elections are formulae for periodic frustration and unhappiness among citizens, the cure for which, van Reybrouck concludes, is ridding democracies of ballot box fetishism. 'Three thousand years of experimenting with democracy, and only two hundred years of playing with elections: and yet, we believe that elections are sacred', he concludes. Since there is in fact nothing sacrosanct about elections and their 'one person, one vote' principle, the time has come to embrace the alternative principle of 'one person, one chance'. If democracy is the struggle for the 'the equal distribution of political chances', then sortition, the random sampling of opinions and decisions by citizens considered as equals, is the way forward, to a more democratic polity.[38] Van Reybrouck tellingly notes

38 David van Reybrouck, *Tegen verkiezingen* (Amsterdam and Antwerp 2013), and 'On Democracy', in Philippe van Parijs et al, *The Malaise of Electoral Democracy and What to Do About It* (Brussels 2014), pp. 8 -10

that sortition is already in widespread use in democracies, for instance in the public opinion polling industry; and his attack on psephocracy is often insightful, especially when highlighting the limits of general elections as conflicting producing and conflict resolving devices. He is right to point out that democracy is unique among political forms in its celebration of conflict as an open learning process; that a world 'in which conflicts are constantly being maximized is not a democracy, it is hysteria'; and that 'learning to live with conflict' by various means of conflict resolution, other than elections, is of basic importance to the survival and flourishing of any given democratic arrangement. But his proposal suffers substantial weaknesses. Quite aside from the strategic difficulty of who will support and implement sortition democracy, on a scale sufficient to displace general elections (a difficulty encountered by G1000, a Belgian citizens' initiative funded by voluntary donations and launched with his help during 2011), the whole approach misrepresents the process of representation, which is by no means equivalent to throwing away votes. The critique of elections underestimates the conceptual and practical difficulties that flow from a wholly secular understanding of the *kleroterion* method of making decisions, which in the ancient Greek assembly democracies was widely supposed to be watched

over and shaped by the will of the deities. It ignores the functional advantages of intelligent political leaders who are elected; and in its prevarication about whether or not elected legislatures should be replaced by a 'parliament of allotted citizens', the whole approach secretly embraces the principle of representation, without acknowledging openly that it is doing so.

Both the neo-anarchist and neo-classical attack on psephocracy also ignore two connected global trends in the contemporary field of elections. A striking feature of the post-1945 period is *the changing political geography of elections*. We live in times marked by experiments in deliberative polling, online petitions and audience and customer in such areas as schools, hospitals, factories, offices, airports and popular media entertainment voting (think of the 'clickocracy' of the Eurovision Song Contest). Communicative abundance enables diaspora voting and national elections witnessed by regional and global publics. Cultures of voting extend for the first time into cross-border settings once controlled by empires, states and business organisations. The rules of public scrutiny and representative government are applied to the inner workings of growing numbers of large-scale global organisations, including the WHO, the WTO, the Antarctic

Treaty System and the International Olympic Committee (IOC), whose co-opted governing members meet at least once a year in Session. The IOC assembly, for instance, is open to journalists and is charged with managing the common affairs of the IOC, including the recommendation of new IOC members, monitoring the codes of conduct of existing members and overall performance of the IOC itself.

All these trends suggest that jostling for victory on the battlefield of elections is of *growing significance* in people's lives, and that while it is true that general elections are being devalued at the territorial state level, elections in general are not in fact fading away. If anything the *culture of elections is spreading,* to the point where *national elections are being outflanked and supplemented by multiple types of elections, in multiple locales*. Among the important consequences of this dynamic is a second empirical trend ignored by the rather Eurocentric critics of elections: the *growing frequency of founding elections* at various points on the face of our planet. In 1945, following several decades that saw most experiments in electoral politics fail, there were only a dozen democracies left on the face of the earth. Since then, despite many ups and downs, electoral democracy has become a planetary phenomenon. Fresh research perspectives are needed to make sense of this sea

change; the language and institutions of elections have taken root in so many different geographic contexts that several fundamental presuppositions of electoral democracy have been invalidated.[39] As elections have spread through the world, the world has made its mark on elections. Well into the twentieth century, for instance, Atlantic-region analysts of democracy supposed that the functional prerequisites of electoral democracy included (a) a 'sovereign' territorial state that guaranteed the physical security of a resident population of citizens living within a rule of law system; (b) a political culture favouring mechanisms that were widely supposed to be synonymous with democracy: competition among political parties, periodic elections and parliamentary/presidential government; (c) a more or less homogeneous social infrastructure or 'national identity' bound together by a common language, common customs and a common sense of shared history; and (d) a market economy capable of generating wealth that lifted citizens out of poverty and guaranteed them a basic standard of living sufficient to enable them to take an interest in public affairs.

India, Taiwan, Mongolia, South Africa, Bhutan, Nepal and Tibet are just some of the anomalous cases that throw into

39 John Keane, 'Democracy: Twenty-First-Century Horizons', in Zaheer Barber and Joseph M. Bryant (eds.), *Society, History and the Global Condition: Essays in Honor of Irving M. Zeitlin* (New York and Toronto 2010) pp. 129 – 151.

disarray more than a few presumptions about electoral democracy, whose *indigenisation* has produced many new election-related practices, such as reserved seats, party hopping, vote banking, silent election rallies and voting as solidarity rituals. Efforts to found new electoral democracies have undoubtedly helped keep alive *the joy of founding elections*. During the whole of the post-1945 period, until today, so-called founding elections have become commonplace. Scholars have tried mainly to define their significance in terms of their contribution to the 'transition to democracy'; on this view, when after a period of prolonged authoritarian rule a founding election prepares the way for a succession of 'free and fair' elections, any given polity can be considered to be on the highway to 'consolidated democracy'.

The whole approach - and the first option under review here - arguably understate the 'spirit' of founding elections: not just the joyous celebrations and shared exhilaration of citizens acting as equals in public, but the way in which elections are a special moment in the more extended and deeper process of rendering contingent and publicly accountable the power relations within any given milieu. There are signs as well that founding elections in this sense are not confined to 'transitions to democracy'. The joy of power-monitoring founding

elections can appear at any time, and in a variety of contexts, sometimes without much warning. When this happens, elections and their integrity cannot be measured straightforwardly by voting outcomes or by polling citizens' opinions. Something like an anthropology of elections is needed, if only to grasp the ways in which they function as symbolic rituals. The point missed by the instrumentally-minded critics of contemporary elections is that founding elections are moments when millions of citizens, often for the first time in their lives, experience the thrill of acting together as equals. Putting hell behind them, in search of a future where bosses and beggars are no more, they go the polling stations (to recall Schiller's *An die Freude* [1795]) as if they are capable of kissing the whole world. For that reason, founding elections are not mere instances of instrumental calculation. They are public performances in which the act of voting resembles a joyous carnival of equality, a moment when the world is potentially turned upside down, a celebration of equal togetherness shaped by ancient traditions, present-day world views and collective visions of how the polity might in future be organized.

The Renewal of General Elections?

A second thinkable type of reaction to the corruption and decline of general elections is the effort to *recapture the founding spirit and raise the integrity level* of elections and election procedures. This option typically comes wrapped in strong-language denunciations of the status quo, rejections of established party systems ('la casta') and spirited objections to the spineless ineffectiveness of parliaments, especially the 'alexithymia, the difficulty of recognising the sufferings of others' of politicians. Sometimes there are calls for a 'revolution' through elections, a dramatic new beginning that puts 'honest people where they should be' in place of 'the corrupt, with their champagne, vibrators and dinners, who don't think they're corrupt'.[40]

What are we to make of such bold claims? History matters, for we have seen how the passion and purpose that fueled the historic post-1789 struggles for 'one person, one vote' seem to be dying, or dead. Despite the periodic eruptions of voter enthusiasm and media frenzies, and when measured in terms of their efficacy, elections are not what they used to be. So it

40 James Politi, 'Lunch with the FT: Beppe Grillo', *Financial Times* (London), July 17, 2015.

comes as something of a surprise that our times are equally marked by the organised refusal to let hollowed-out elections get the upper hand. There are not only signs of renewed interest in making elections 'free and fair'; many efforts are under way to improve their forms and invest them with new meaning.[41] Tinkering with election procedures and customs is commonplace. There are efforts to refurbish the powers of legislatures and demands for automatic, same-day, universal voter registration. Court actions against gerrymandering are launched (an example is the current case before the US Supreme Court, Evenwel v Abbott, to decide whether all residents or just eligible voters should be counted in re-districting exercises). And there are calls for the reduction of the voting age, and for tougher restrictions on lobbying, campaign financing and advertising.

These and other measures are designed to counter feelings of the worthlessness of voting ('elections without democracy'), to breathe new life back into the spirit and substance of elections. This second option has much to teach us about the corruption of present-day general elections, and about possible alternative futures of elections. But it also raises the vexed political question of whether political parties

41 Richard L. Hasen, *The Voting Wars: 2000 to the Next Election Meltdown* (New Haven 2015).

can be revived, or their hand strengthened, so that once again they can function as open and dynamic partisan traders of the votes of citizens.

During their heyday, as Robert Michels pointed out in his classic *Political Parties* (1911), political parties were powerful patronage machines within the field of parliamentary elections. They offered paid-up members and supporters significant benefits: jobs, financial support, literacy, promises of one-person one-vote and access to state power and its resources. Parties today are ghostly and often corrupted silhouettes of their former selves, which raises a fundamental question: since representation, making claims and acting on behalf of others, in their name, subject to their consent, is an ineradicable and often positive feature of political life, and given that for the foreseeable future political parties in some form or other will remain indispensable conduits of access to such state resources as taxation revenues, law-making powers and policing and military force, which kind of political party has the greatest chances of success in getting out the vote, attracting the support of citizens during general elections? Do present-day rough music revolts against parliamentary representation signal the end of all efforts to rebuild mass membership parties? Perhaps slimmed-down and flatter

parties using multi-media tactics and Google-type algorithms are better suited to the task of turning heads and inspiring the hearts of voters, a viable alternative to the old mass-membership party examined by Michels? Or when all is said and done, might party forms of the 21st century instead be fated to resemble accountancy parties (let's call them). Might there in future be more of what we have now, so that organised parties resemble firms of well-advertised accountants and tax advisors hungry for business? Drab firms that nose-pinching citizens conveniently hook up with from time to time, when the need arises (elections), to do what they have to do (deal with the state), to submit their returns (by casting their votes), then to resume their everyday lives, at a distance from the party system, all the while complaining about the performance of politicians and poking fun and spinning crabbed jokes about the sad and boring voted?

Monitory Democracy

Answers to these demanding political questions of our time are currently in short supply. They are certainly testing the imagination and resolve of the new parties and public leaders (among them Syriza, Beppe Grillo, Ko Wen-je, Podemos, Jeremy Corbyn and Mayawati) who have tried hard during recent years to breathe fresh life back into electoral politics and to recapture the joyous excitement of founding elections by experimenting with new political party forms. For the many reasons cited earlier, it is doubtful whether a straightforward return to mass-membership political parties can be achieved. It is also unclear whether it is possible to rebuild political parties and parliaments robust enough to tackle the devaluation of elections by such extra-parliamentary forces as corporate power, governance arrangements and cross-border dynamics. Perhaps the most serious weakness of this second option is its rather backward-looking attachment to the orthodox presumption that general elections are the alpha and omega of democracy. In spite of their good intentions, contemporary struggles to refurbish general elections and to make them the centerpiece of democracy arguably misread the post-1945 period, probably to the point where they are fated to dash the hopes and disappoint the expectations of citizens and their representatives. That is why other political forces are now

pursuing a third option: *the active pursuit of monitory democracy*. This third pathway to the future recognises that although *voting in general elections remains important, illusions about its political centrality and significance must be abandoned*. The champions of monitory democracy agree that citizens and their representatives who turn their backs on elections, who follow the neo-anarchist or neo-classical path, risk throwing away weapons that potentially provide the weak with stronger access to taxation revenues, administrative support, the means of law making and law enforcement and other vital resources of state power. Yet when it comes to deciding who gets what, when and how, say the champions of monitory democracy, other legitimate means of publicly controlling arbitrary power are in practice often more important. The role of the not-for-profit International Council on Clean Transportation in recently 'outing' Volkswagen stands as a symbol of monitory democracy in action. In triggering a global media event that has already cost the company heavily, and will almost certainly keep it in the courts for many years to come, this previously obscure non-governmental body has demonstrated that democracy is about much more than periodic general elections. The Volkswagen affair highlights the way in which the democratic politics of our time is caught up in a long-term historical shift, away from the fetish of

elections and parliaments and politicians towards public efforts to scrutinise and control arbitrary exercises of power, wherever they occur, whether in the domestic fields of government and markets and civil society, or in cross-border settings.

In the age of monitory democracy, this third perspective maintains, the politics of citizen activity and representation cannot be confined to elections, parties and parliaments, that is, formal parliamentary politics in the narrow sense. Often in opposition to mainstream political parties and electoral politics, watchdog networks, integrity commissions, activist courts and other forms of unelected and non-party representative politics are flourishing, and need further to be cultivated, say the defenders of monitory democracy. Monitory mechanisms are seen to be fit for a highly complex world in which substantial numbers of citizens believe that politicians are not easily trusted, and in which governments are often accused of abusing their power, or being out of touch with citizens, or simply unwilling to deal with their concerns and problems. By addressing such concerns, the champions of monitory democracy say, power-scrutinising and power-constraining mechanisms perform a variety of functions. They break the grip of the majority rule principle

- the worship of numbers - associated with representative democracy. Freed as well from the measured caution and double speak of political parties, monitory mechanisms grant a voice to the strongly felt concerns of minorities that feel left out of official politics. Some monitors, electoral commissions and consumer protection agencies for instance, use their claimed 'neutrality' to protect the rules of the democratic game from predators and enemies. Other monitors publicise long-term issues that are neglected, or dealt with badly, by the short-term mentality encouraged by election cycles. Still other monitory groups and networks (public occupations are an example) are remarkable for their evanescence; in a fast-changing world, they come on the scene, bang drums, then move on like nomads, or dissolve into thin air. The key point made by the defenders of monitory democracy about all these devices is this: by making room for opinions and ways of life that people feel strongly about, despite their neglect or suppression by parties, parliaments and governments, monitory mechanisms have the combined effect of authorising unelected bodies to raise the level and quality of public scrutiny of power, often for the first time in many areas of life, including cross-border chains of power that run beneath and beyond the institutions of territorial states.

It is worth noting that the monitory democracy perspective sketched here is not straightforwardly an opponent of electoral politics; on the contrary, it courts the possibility of dynamic synergies between monitory institutions and elections, politicians, political parties and parliaments. Yet it should be noted as well that the monitory democracy perspective goes further than visions of a healthy alliance between elected and unelected authority. It highlights the possibility of *expanding the principles and practice of representation*, for instance by extending the vote to constituencies previously denied entry into the field of electoral politics. The *political enfranchisement of our biosphere* is probably the most striking and consequential case in point. The age of monitory democracy features many new power-monitoring platforms that clear space for the entrance of 'nature' into political life. Most obviously, there are green political parties and environmentally conscious 'liquid democracy' initiatives (such as the Best Party in Iceland). There are citizen science projects (the Open Air Laboratories [Opal] project in the UK is an example) and global agreements, such as the recent Paris accord and the Convention on Biological Diversity. Daring multi-media civic occupations of mining operations, megaprojects and construction sites are multiplying. There are green think tanks and green academies; new genres of

literary works emphasising humans' interdependence with the natural world; and bio-regional assemblies, some of them skilled at monitoring highly migratory species of fish, birds and animals. There are earth watch summits and, for the first time in the history of democracy, legal judgements ('wild law') and written constitutions (in Mongolia and Bhutan) that specify that every citizen is a trustee of the biosphere, hence duty-bound to contribute to the protection of the natural environment against all forms of ecological degradation.

All these monitory watchdog mechanisms enjoy a logic and rhythm at odds with general elections, yet by fostering critical awareness and public respect for the biosphere they in effect give 'nature' a public voice in the election process, and in public life more generally. Nature of course cannot speak and act for itself, or vote, in any human sense. Our biosphere certainly cannot enjoy a 'right to vote'; to do so (by definition) would minimally require it to observe sets of duties. But the monitory mechanisms listed above show that in practice nature can be granted a vote in human affairs. The new forms of political representation of our biosphere are means by which humans *limit* and *restrain* their own will to master nature by publicly offering to protect and nurture the

nature to which they belong. Representation is in this sense a fiduciary relationship (from Latin *fiduciarius*, meaning '[holding] in trust'; from *fides*, meaning 'faith', and *fiducia*, meaning 'trust'), a form of voting in which citizens and their representatives are entrusted to speak and act for and on behalf of nature in circumstances where it cannot represent itself.

From the standpoint of monitory democracy, to grant a vote to nature is not to suppose that it is a fixed or given-for-all-time or uncontroversial sub-stratum of human existence. Political representation is not mimicry or communion with Nature conceived as an unalterable foundation linking the earth with the dead and the living and the unborn, as was supposed by early modern European conservatives. Human efforts to represent nature politically invite public controversies, both about the nature of 'nature' and the ways in which it has changed through time, not just according to its own endogenous dynamics but also (and now increasingly) under the impact of predatory forms of human interaction with the bio-environments in which humans dwell. In short, political representation of the biosphere is not another, more subtle and insidious form of mastery of nature. It is rather guided by human awareness that human judgments about what nature 'is' or is 'becoming' are fallible, contestable,

publicly revisable. The political representation of nature in elections and beyond is a form of public monitoring of currently unequal power relationships - not a formula for imagining a new perpetual peace in which humans and nature are united, freed at last from problems caused by ignorance, misunderstanding and doubt. Struggles to extend the vote to nature have a different logic, and thrust, say the champions of monitory democracy. These franchise struggles highlight the costs generated by public ignorance of our bio-surroundings. They call upon human beings to take care of themselves and their successors, to pay attention to what is happening to land, plants and animals, springs, rivers, deserts, lakes, groundwater, reefs and oceans, and the quality of air. These new franchise struggles insist that some things are just not for sale and that human beings' innocent attachment to 'historical progress' and 'modernisation' needs to be replaced with a more prudent sense of deep time that highlights the fragile complexity of our biosphere and its multiple rhythms. These struggles sometimes demand a halt to consumer-driven 'growth'; more commonly, they call for green investments to trigger a new phase of post-carbon expansion. Everywhere they interpret the accumulating dysfunctions of our biosphere as bad moons, as warnings that unless human beings change their ways with the world things may turn out badly - very badly indeed.

By disenchanting elections, widening the franchise and boldly redefining the role played by unelected authorities under democratic conditions, this third pathway can claim to be an original contribution to the political imaginary of democracy. The vision of monitory democracy, say its supporters, is much more than a vision. It is becoming a practical reality, an effective way of enabling citizens and their representatives to deal blows to institutional secrecy, incompetence, corruption, violence and social injustice. The champions of monitory democracy say it underscores the contemporary *limits* of electoral politics. Which is their way of saying that rather than witnessing the end of electoral politics, or bidding adieu to voting, parties and parliaments, all democracies are now faced by *a double democratic challenge*. At a minimum, monitory democracy involves strenuous attempts to breathe life back into elections, without illusions, for instance by widening the franchise and building new political parties that function as trusted representatives of the wishes and needs of citizens considered as equals. But in practice the vision of monitory democracy requires something much more than this minimum: it entails protracted, potentially complementary struggles to push beyond 'the parliamentary road', to extend the principles of citizen involvement and representation into every field of power where arbitrary rule currently violates

democratic norms and distorts and damages the lives of citizens and the environments on which they deeply depend.

This double democratic challenge posed by monitory democracy is without historical precedents. Its vision of a democratic a world beyond free and fair elections has no available strategic manuals. It certainly enjoys no guarantees of success. So is monitory democracy a politically viable alternative to the present-day blind fetish of elections, or the grim-faced disillusionment with its ideals? What are the chances of its survival, or future flourishing? Let's ask the historians of the future.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National Elections and the Public Interest
Comments on Marchant Lecture 2015

Jieskje Hollander

Introduction

Democracy is a topic that prof. Keane – despite its potentially holistic and intangible character – was able to size down to very topical and concrete issues, phenomena and characteristics of democracies and their working nowadays. Narrowing the scope down from the *inter*national to the *national* domain and 'testing' it in the context of the Van Mierlo Stichting project on the 'future of the Dutch democracy', I would like to inquire into Keane's argument's implications and applicability for the Dutch case.

In doing this I will enter into the notion that - from a classical liberal-democratic perspective - a public conversation about the general interest ought to be protected by elections. The notion, in other words, of giving people a 'say in the matter' when decision-making on what is in 'the general interest' is concerned. So: are elections in the Netherlands still functioning as a safeguard of the value of 'public steering of the general interest'. And, if that is *not* the case, to what conclusions should this lead us?

Election dynamics in the Netherlands

We have lots of reasons to discuss the relevance of Keane's analysis for our country. In his lecture, prof. Keane spoke of elections 'wrapped in public excitement, mixed with voter grumbling, disappointment, cynical disaffection and outright hostility to the cumbersome and costly machinery of elections.' An observation that most certainly also holds true for the Netherlands:

First, energetic party campaigns start. They show our various party leaders competing in their attempts to prove that 'their' specific party has the best, most complete set of ideas for the future of the Netherlands. But once the final 'election debates' – extensively covered and hyped by all kinds of media – have passed and the party campaigning machineries have been turned off and election results are trickling in, reality starts to sink in again. Reality meaning: there is no party with a majority! Whereas the Dutch political landscape has always been 'fragmented' to some extent, it currently excels in showing an ever more 'split' vote.

The unquestioned 20th century-power of the established centre parties – PvdA, VVD, CDA and to a lesser extent also D66 - has disappeared in favour of all kinds of bigger and smaller parties on the extremes of the political spectrum – some of them based on single issues. This reflects an increased 'voters volatility' that forms the main challenge

in what follows after the elections: finding a majority to govern the national community. As a consequence, stable political majorities are ever harder to form and the possibility of early new elections always lies in wait. It results in what resembles the 'psephocracy' in the analysis of prof. Keane: that is, I would say, a constant campaign readiness of political parties.

A campaign readiness that – generally speaking – stimulates political parties to always be on the political look out, to constantly emphasise their differences and point out the flaws and failures of all other parties, rather than contributing to a joint effort of government and opposition together to focus on stable governance and formulating long-term policies in the general interest

Democratic scepticism

In a recent Dutch survey of the *SCP,* the Dutch institute for Social Research, titled '*More Democracy, less politics*?' – we find that these dynamics of what could be called 'election driven national democracy' comes at a price. The report shows that whereas the Dutch seem to have a rock-solid trust in 'democracy' as a form of government (93% think it the best form of government compared to other forms of government), politicians and the way political parties operate enjoy much less confidence. 'The essence of the dissatisfaction" – the report states– "is that politicians do not listen enough to

'the man on the street' and are not open tot their desires and needs. They impose their will, are too much concerned with their own needs and/or the needs of the particular group they represent, but do *NOT* show much concern – and this is key – with the 'general interest." The SCP speaks of a "lack of political responsivity". This means that the desires and needs of Dutch citizens are considered not to be translated sufficiently into the political domain and in political decision making. This contributes to an atmosphere of mistrust not in democracy as such, but in the functioning of the Dutch democratic system. An atmosphere that finds its expression in demands that country, government and/or politics 'should be returned to the Dutch citizens.'

More direct democracy as a solution?

In reaction to this atmosphere of mistrust many have suggested – and D66 *is* and *always has been* a forerunner in this regard – that citizens should have a greater and a more direct say in public decision making.

Throughout the past decennia we – social-liberals – have been frontrunners in our plea (and many have followed) for supplementing our representative democracy, in which national elections play a central role, with various more direct 'instruments for decision making power, such as referenda,

direct election of those who govern, direct participation of citizens in policy development, the what is in the Netherlands popularly called nowadays '*de doe-democratie'* etc. And successfully so.

The analysis of John Keane shows how representative democracy, not only in the Netherlands but in larger parts of the western world, developed into a monitory democracy in which citizens, voters, media – old and new – (lobby) organisations and companies in various places, and along many paths are effectively influencing or trying to influence political decision making. They are choosing alternative, and *direct* routes because they believe – and are confirmed in their beliefs – that these are more effective than participating in the wider representative democratic game. And not only professional or 'constructive' groups are active in this 'monitory' game, also the players of what Pierre Rosanvallon has defined the 'counter democracy' play their parts.

Generally speaking we – members of D66 – tend to welcome and cheer the development of new and direct 'channels to the power'. And rightfully so, I think. However, being convinced Democrats, I believe we should also be on the lookout for possible *downs*ides or new democratic challenges arising from the development of a separate democratic structure, parallel to our representative democracy.

Parallel democracy concerns

And downsides *there are*. In the Dutch public debate reflecting on developments of the Dutch democracy, important and critical points have been put forward with regard to the good to be expected from 'participatory', direct or *'doe democratie'* and the growing influence of all kinds of monitory groups. Dutch public-intellectuals such as Eveline Tonkens, Frank Ankersmit, Herman Tjeenk Willink, to only mention a few, have warned, that the players in these fields represent nothing but their own exclusive interest, or those of their interest group. They become active only when these exclusive interests are at stake. As a consequence, they have no intentions, nor are they equipped, to weigh various or opposite interests.

The question that follows is how their 'democratic' influence relates to establishing and safeguarding the classical core value of our representative democratic system – that is a continuous conversation on what's in the "interest of all"; or what's in the 'general interest' so to speak. This question of 'who in the participatory or monitory democracy guards the general interest?' becomes even more pressing when combining it with the earlier observation that nowadays elections seem to drive the Dutch representative democracy – a trend, as I said before, that also tends to distract from a joint discussion on what the Netherlands and the Dutch people as a whole need and how we are going to reach that. From this perspective,

prof. Keane's lecture on the changing role of elections and the development of new democratic structures can be read as a warning against the loss of something that liberal-democrats should cherish: a credible representative democracy in which parties feel a joint responsibility to expose and take care of what is in the general interest.

Key question for today

This leaves us with an important question. Are we able to think of ways of putting the 'general interest' back at the heart of the Dutch representative democracy? Or at the heart, to be more precise, of the Dutch national elections? Is it possible, for instance, to stimulate political parties to act in such a way that voters will vote for them because their proposed approach and political measures are in the general instead of an exclusive party or group interest? These are central questions behind the issue of our periodical *idee* to be published later this month. Questions also - I discovered when preparing for this evening - that have – of course! - been discussed thoroughly in the history of political theory and indeed also in our party history.

Glastra van Loon leading the way

Jan Glastra van Loon, one of our party's founding fathers, professor and renowned philosopher of law and former party

chairman, is responsible for a most insightful and applicable – today maybe even more than ever – exposé on the relation between elections and decision making in the general interest. In an essay on Democracy in the Netherlands of 1967 Glastra van Loon claimed that elections might well be a *necessary* condition for realising a form of government to be referred to as 'democratic' and 'aimed at realising what's in the general interest', but not a *sufficient* one.

Of an even more essential interest is what Glastra van Loon referred to as "the forming and sustaining of group cohesion for political opinion and decision-making." The question, according to Glastra van Loon, is - and I quote - that "for a group to be able to make decisions (and especially political decisions) it should have a certain degree of social cohesion. That coherence or connectedness of a group is not a state caused by a permanently present force or a form of inertia, but it has to *come* into being and *kept* into being by social processes. The degree of distortion of social cohesion makes the group unable and its members not available for taking decisions aimed at realising goals transcending the preservation and recovery of the group cohesion."– goals in other words transcending private interest and serving the general interest. The essence to be emphasised in the light of tonight's lecture – I believe – is Glastra's point that no matter what the practical importance of elections in the light of forming

a government may be, the expectations of the function of elections should not be exaggerated. In line with the words of professor Keane: Glastra van Loon also pointed to the fact that democracy *can not* and *should not* be reduced to elections. More important than elections as such, is what *precedes* them.

The extent to which a society, in the run up to elections, shows itself able to produce social cohesion and ways to maintain this cohesion is a far more important indicator of its ability to produce what we call 'democratic' decisions and government than elections themselves. To put it in other words: (the organisation of) elections are not necessarily an indicator of democratic quality, but the extent to which a society is able to produce social coherence and let decision making reflect this coherence *is*. Looking at the Netherlands of 2015, we may conclude – many analyses point in this direction – that whereas there's no doubt – (well, only with Jan Roos *cum suis* perhaps) – that the Netherlands scores high on 'formal democratic arrangements' (such as free, unrestricted press, free and fair elections, etc.) – we still have work to do when it comes to social cohesion and preventing the development of a so called 'gap' between higher-lower educated, the fortunate and the unfortunate, etc.

Restoring, or improving the quality of the joint Dutch discussion on the general interest and how to guard it – always, but especially in the run up to Dutch elections - would be one step.

Then, the question that remains is: how? Can we think of interventions that do so? Following Glastra van Loon's line of thought, I think it important to note that these interventions should not necessarily start with or should be restricted to 'democratic interventions' in the legal, or constitutional sense of the word. Social cohesion and a political agenda to stimulate it starts with stimulating and guaranteeing equal opportunities and social justice in the broadest sense of the word. Access for all to good schools, equal opportunities on the labour market, a society in which many (not only a few) are able to adapt to ever changing economic circumstances; that's what it starts with. And this is where (social liberal) politicians should start from.

Then, moving to 'democratic interventions', boosting the awareness that we 'are all in this together' and therefore we should work together, I believe that, on the local level permitting local government to impose local taxes is a good idea. As we all know – nothing human is foreign to us – discussion develops when and where money spending is involved, so this would be a political intervention that most certainly would contribute to a joint local debate on what *is* and *isn't* in the public interest.

On the national level, G1000- experiments, called after David van Reybrouk's suggestion and variations on our 2005 National Convention might be thought of, but – *and I will conclude*– also political parties should think of their role.

As prof. Keane clearly marked: in elections, polarisation is central. But, is it truly necessary that all parties equally and on all levels polarise? Or should they also reckon with the fact that in the interest of the 'general interest' it is necessary to cooperate, to reach compromises and – by consequence – also compete on these points? Political parties are not necessarily victims with bounded rationality who *have* to polarise to the utmost to become a sizeable minority. Illustrative are the various 'ad hoc coalitions' in the Netherlands in recent years, in which D66 often was (and is – as we saw this week) a key player and which were appreciated by the Dutch electorate, as opinion polls have shown.

If we would be able to translate the various party notions of 'the general interest' into political campaigns and make it a central element of discussion also in the run up to elections and translate it into campaigns, we would both stimulate a debate on what is in the best interest of our country as a whole, and also clarify which political parties are willing (and which ones are not) to accept the consequence that cooperation is key in bringing the Netherlands further.

Colophon

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