

Where is our Democracy heading?

It seems that every time I turn on the news, politicians are saying and doing things that would never have been acceptable before. Not only are we seeing our government and our leaders, as well as other prominent figures, attacking institutions that are the bedrock of our democracy, but we also see them attempting to achieve their agenda by working around standard rule of law processes. We are then seeing them in turn being assaulted by various special interest groups. The attacks and the complaints seem to be more ominous with each passing day. It would be easy just to say it is a sign of the times, but I worry that we might never return to normalcy. Whether you reference the issues with the Presidency in the United States, or the yellow vest protesters in France, the Brexit turmoil in the U.K., or here in Canada with the current SNC Lavalin corruption issue, I can't help but wonder if democracy worldwide is under siege. If that is the case, what will our Democracy look like in another twenty years, or fifty years, or even one hundred years?

We should consider what forms of governments are in use today to understand how governments provide for their citizens, elect or appoint their leaders, and what freedoms they allow the general population.

Governments have existed since the beginning of civilization in one form or another. Whether it was a leader for a hunter gather group, or just a tribal head, leaders were always assuming the mantle of governance throughout time. We could say that governments exist as it is preferable to the alternative, which would be anarchy. Governments preserve order, provide defense of the population, manage economic conditions, redistribute income and resources, and provide collective goods and services. To understand our democracy better, we need to understand how democracy has evolved throughout history. Aristotle categorised governments into three distinct entities, which are Monarchy, Aristocracy, and Polity.

Initially there was monarchy, which provided absolute power for the King or Queen. Then over time aristocracy developed, allowing governance by the nobility, and usually provided secure power as well. Polity can be described as an enlightened form of democracy, and was used in various governments in various forms, at different times in our ancient history. Democracy as we know it today did not exist in Aristotle's era, but vestiges of democracy were inherent in some governments at the time. I have discussed forms of government as the basis for my questions to you. What exactly is democracy, when did it materialise, and where is it going? We tend to think that democracy has been around forever, but in reality, in the form that we recognise it as today, is actually quite a recent form of government.

There have been some forms of democratic behaviour used by various governments throughout history, but I would argue that democracy in its current form has only existed for about one hundred years. As a starting point for modern times, we should look at England. It is often said that democracy in the west was born in 1215 with the signing of the Magna Carta at Runnymede. The Magna Carta was simply a peace treaty between King John and the barons. Although the Magna Carta is described as a "Charter of Liberties", the document was only intended for the King and the barons and not the common man. The setting of the Franchise in 1430 under King Henry VI stated who could vote and established the basis for

property qualifications for voters. Up to then the only people allowed to vote were knights, and the burgess. It was not until the civil war of 1688, when William of Orange defeated James II, and removed the monarchy, that real change would be enacted. William reinstated the monarchy in a weakened form, which became the basis for what we now know as a constitutional monarchy. This led to the creation of a "Bill of Rights", providing for more control by the parliament for the affairs of England. The next major change would be the Reform Act of 1832. This Act made wide ranging changes to the electoral system, especially for selection for members for the commons. Even in 1832, tight control was placed on those who could vote, allowing the rulers and leaders to have immense control who would be eventually elected. It was not until after the Great War in 1918 that changes were made to voter's rights. The changes removed all property restrictions, and allowed for women over the age of thirty to vote. It was not until 1928 that all women of the age of twenty one could vote. Please note that since 1688 till 1918, voting was totally controlled by the ruling class. Vote restrictions only allowed for the nobility and land owners to vote. This meant that the wealthy and the educated would continue to control the wealth of the country. In addition to property restrictions, there were income restrictions, and race and sex restrictions. Closed ballots were not introduced until 1872. Up until that time the nobility and land owners held sway over employees and tenants on how they would vote. In 1800, approximately 5% of the population could vote. In 1867 voters were now about 32% of the population. This made it easy for the vote to be controlled, allowing for the result that was required by the ruling class. Based on the level of control the ruling class had over the general population, I don't see how this type of governance could be classified as a true democracy. It was still a form of aristocracy, laced with federalism. I therefore suggest that true democracy in England was only achieved in 1928, when it was declared that anyone could vote. Based on this timeline, democracy in the United Kingdom, in the form we know it today is just over 100 years old.

If we look at the United States, it can be seen that the U.K. timeline was followed quite closely. It was not until 1870 when amendments were made to the constitution that the basis for voting referenced human rights, including race, colour, sex, and class. It was not until 1920 that women won the right to vote. Additionally, up to 1962, the black vote was very heavily suppressed as well as the minority vote. Based on the above, I suggest that true democracy as we know it was not achieved in the United States until 1920. If we follow the process of voting regulation in Canada, we can see that the timeline is not very different at all, and mirrors closely what transpired in England. In 1867 the Dominion of Canada was formed under the British North American Act. In 1885 the Franchise Bill was introduced allowing only white male residents to vote. This equated to approximately 25% of the population. Up to 1920 electoral rules were based on property and income, race and gender, and white and resident. Voting age was 21. In 1920 the suffragette requirements were eliminated, resulting in women being allowed to vote in their first federal election in 1921. Based on the above, true democracy in Canada was only achieved in 1920.

I would strongly suggest that a democracy must allow all of its citizens to vote in free and honest elections, otherwise there is no democracy. It would be a form of democracy with federal control, which could be classified in many ways. Democracy must allow for free elections, human rights, and rule of law. This is the basis for a true democracy. Today we are awash with discussions regarding

democracy, and capitalism, and of course socialism. In almost every form of democracy there exists conditions of capitalism, and socialism. They can be combined, and if done successfully, provides for a free market and private enterprise, along with services for the population which can include transportation, water and electricity for all as well as services such as health care. The threat to democracy happens when an imbalance occurs. If we place too much emphasis on capitalism it can promote inequality. If we claim that health care as an example, is a socialist only benefit, and we refuse to apply this to the entire population, we again create inequality. If we suppress human rights and water down the rule of law in favour of the landowners, corporations, and the wealthy, we can create inequality. These inequalities threaten our democracy, and the steps taken to appease those in power under the guise of providing jobs and economic benefits, as well as making changes and or controlling the judiciary, could very well be what changes how our democracy functions, resulting in another form of democracy, different than what we have today.

Everything changes. The only constant in our world today it seems is change itself. Consider how communism has changed in Russia since Lenin took power in 1917. You could argue that Russia has assumed some aspects of democracy, but the country as a whole is still rigidly controlled. Today Russia's government is described as a federal semi-presidential republic. In regards to China, communism has been the form of government since 1949. However there have been changes in China as well, such as allowing private companies, and some private enterprise. However, how much control the Chinese government has over these entities we do not exactly know. A good example is Huawei. This company is a private company operating globally. The current issues surrounding Huawei are concerned with their ability to monitor and reap statistical data on networks using their equipment, which could then be used by the Chinese government. A form of high tech spying is what western countries are concerned with. The question of how independent a private company in China really is could be seen as the main concern that western governments have in this regard. The use of the rule of law, allowing free speech, and promoting human rights in Russia and China, is questionable at best. My point is however, is that communism has changed/evolved in China as well. It should be noted that communism is just over one hundred years old, covering roughly the same period of time as democracy as we know it today.

How our governments function today, will affect how our democracy works tomorrow and into the future. I think democracy has lost its innocence. We are allowing bad behaviour to be accepted as normal behaviour. We are wittingly or unwittingly allowing racism to thrive once again. We are placing wealth above common decency. We are allowing those who produce things to do whatever they want, as long as they seem to be providing benefits to the general population. News outlets provide a barrage of information on a daily basis, and it is becoming more difficult than ever to distinguish the truth from falsehoods. We are allowing our resources to be used and abused at an increasing rapid rate, which will result in a shortfall for future generations (water and clean air come to mind). We have allowed capitalism to influence/control our way of life, and our governments. This has created inequality, and the rift between the rich and poor, small business and corporations, is becoming greater with each passing year. If we look at our buying power today versus just twenty years ago, we have to work approximately four times as long to achieve the same buying power we had in 1999. Wages have not kept pace with inflation, but the profits of the large corporations are increasing. We are promoting, or at

least giving credence to governments around the world who do not provide human rights or rule of law for its citizens, don't even mention free elections. All of this is having a negative effect on our democracy. Democratic western nations have been a bastion for developing countries around the world. These countries looked to the progress made through democratic governments and strived to achieve the same results. Western democracies promoted human rights, and free elections with vigour, which helped various governments, overcome totalitarian regimes and become more democratic over time. However, the democratic model is not viewed as favourably as it once was on a global scale, and those on the tipping point of becoming a democracy are watching what we are doing in the west and maybe thinking how they can adapt their government to show an outward facade of democracy while a form of totalitarianism exists in reality. Power it seems is what everyone hopes to achieve. Whether it is power in your private life, your work life, or in government, power is what seems to drive us forward. With power comes wealth. To state an old saying; power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Most of the greatest civilisations in the world almost always had either a monarchy or totalitarian government. This allowed total control of the population as long as the rulers could afford a large army. History shows us that nothing lasts forever, and totalitarian regimes usually only last as long as there is enough wealth to buy control, through politicians or the military. The Roman Empire lasted approximately five hundred years; the Egyptians lasted approximately three hundred years. A rough average for empires of the past is about two hundred to three hundred years. Modern democracy, based on the arguments above, is just over one hundred years old, roughly one third of its life span by historical terms. How long will our current form of democracy last?

I don't think that there can be any argument that the greatest democracy in the world is the United States of America. Over the last one hundred years they have provided security for the world, provided humanitarian relief whenever it was needed anywhere in the world. Some of the largest companies in the world are American and some of the greatest philanthropists are also American. Americans have welcomed immigrants like no other country ever had before. Americans are noted for helping the disadvantaged, the oppressed, and the poor. Americans have steadfastly endorsed decency, human rights, and equal rights, rights of access, religious rights, free thought and most importantly perhaps, free speech. Free speech and the ability to make governments and corporations accountable, is what has allowed democracy to stand heads and shoulders above all other forms of government in the world today. Free speech and freedom of the press, speaker's corners, and the civic right to state your thoughts and views, is what has made democracy a viable form of government. But even as I say this, all of the above strengths and benefits are being attacked from outside and from within. Our own leaders are at times democracies worst enemy, and could ultimately spell the downfall of democracy as we know it today. Possibly what is happening right now is a wake-up call, a call to arms if you will. A call for all of us to stand up and fight for what democracy provides for all of us. We can't succumb to those promoting racism or sexism. We have come too far to falter now. We must stand up for free speech and the free press, and not allow those spewing propaganda, lies, false truths, and just plain nonsense, win our hearts and minds. We are better educated than that. We can't allow suppression of voters and/or voters rights, whether by colour, race, sex, age, or wealth, as these rights were won by personal sacrifice

by many people, on many levels, over many years. We must adhere to the rule of law, as this provides equality in our society. At present it seems that the pillars of democracy are under attack on all fronts. How we defend against these attacks will form the building blocks for the democracies of the future.

Democracy will evolve. Changes in our world through economics, population levels, wars, energy, and agriculture demands will be the challenges for our governments going forward. Will our leaders rise to the challenge and keep democracy alive, or succumb to the demands of the few and move towards more control and a federal based government. There are other factors such as climate change, pollution, scarcity of water and food that could drive governments towards isolation and federalism. What appeared to be a drive towards globalization and equality has recently shifted to isolation and protectionism. This change could be the main factor in how democracy evolves. When a vacuum is created on the world leadership stage, someone will eventually rise to fill the position. Which could mean a power shift? At the moment, it seems to me that a shift away from democracy is currently underway.

I sincerely hope that the attack on our institutions of law and order, and the rule of law will cease. I hope that our leaders will once again speak the truth, and work towards providing for and supporting their citizens and not working for personal reasons/benefits, and the benefit of their financial supporters. I hope that we can look beyond our racist views and begin to treat everyone as we would like to be treated. I also hope that all of our rights including voter's rights are upheld and applauded, and not diminished in any way. As these are our rights as citizens of a true democracy. Where will our democracy be in the future is anyone's guess. I just hope that current and future generations understand that democracy is worth fighting for, and that the pillars of democracy are upheld. My grandchildren's future depends on it.