

THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY; THE DEMOCRACY OF THE FUTURE

A Book Proposal

Five fast years after the fall of the communist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe, the political system of the western world is under siege. Fortress democracy looks dangerously weak and vulnerable. The attack is not being waged from outside the walls, but from within. Nor is it anti-democratic parties or classes which are the main assailants. Rather, western democracy has become its own worst enemy, through failure to bring ideology, structures and practice in line with the requirements and possibilities of the post-industrial age.

While manifestations of democracy's deficiencies vary from state to state, the general tendencies are clear. In most developed countries, we observe how

- democratic politics have become synonymous with financial scandal, as legions of office-holders are caught with their fingers in the cookie jar - and beholden to interest groups whose interests can be seriously at odds with those of individual electors: Italy's *tangentopoli* is but the tip of the iceberg;
- mainstream political parties show signs of degenerating into protectionist conspiracies, seeking to shield parasitical bureaucracies and industries of a bygone era against the creative forces of new technology - and often in the process - championing that what is heralded as national against that which is condemned as foreign;
- popular confidence in the democratic process is in serious decline: politicians compile ratings in opinion polls which are more akin to baseball than basketball scores, while widescale voter apathy contrasts with the growing attraction of anti-democratic movements and strong-arm ideologies.

With domestic credibility and legitimacy under fire in many states of the western community, the great hope of 1989 that they would succeed in spearheading an expanding community of democratic nations is being sorely called into question - so much so, that it is entirely open whether it will be democracy, or new and old authoritarianisms which will shape history as we move towards, and into, the third millenium.

THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY;THE DEMOCRACY OF THE FUTURE will identify key dimensions of democracy where new thinking is required and put forward ideas for reform. Themes to be addressed will include the following.

1. **Democracy is "ever-unfinished business"**, a dynamic phenomenon which has to be adapted continually to changing societal conditions, and regularly restructured accordingly.
2. A democratic system of government has to be capable of ensuring **just-in-time transfer of decision-making competences** between the various aggregate levels constituting society. As social time continues to accelerate and social space compacts, this is becoming a "make it or break it" requirement for modern government.
3. Politics is about the relationship between individuals and groups of individuals in so far as they concern society. "One individual, one vote" can only work in tandem with dispositions providing for **"one group,one vote"** - whereby what constitutes a group in an electoral context and how the notion of group democracy is put into effect is a central dilemma facing contemporary social engineers
4. Democracy cannot survive if the popular impression persists that those who contribute funds to political party campaigns have greater impact on the decisions of government than those who "only" cast their vote. **Democratic political party financing** needs to be transparent, sufficient and sanctionable: the electoral majority as the largest and most important lobby of all must be re-enfranchised. To this end, the money value of its vote must be at least as substantial as that of any other interest group.
5. Financial reform is a *conditio sine qua non* for modernising the socio-economic basis of the political party, recruiting the best minds of the nation for the political process and ensuring that the requisite **professionalism** is brought to bear. Societies get the politicians they are prepared to pay for. The world has become too complex a place not to secure the top skills available to attend to its leadership and management challenges.
6. **Direct democracy** holds out promise as a method for re-involving the electorate in the political process and re-empowering society in the affairs of state. More frequent consultation of the electorate on key issues can help overcome prevailing voter disengagement and disinterest, energise political parties and provide an additional check on elite misuse of decision-making prerogatives.
7. Modern communications offers opportunities to render direct democracy more direct by enhancing scope for interactive relationships between the electorate and its elected representatives. Discriminate recourse to **online**

8. **Computer-aided political analysis** can be used to render the policy options of political parties more transparent and understandable. The electorate needs help in evaluating politicians' proposals prior to implementation, sizing up policy trade-offs and assessing results. The time has come to complement the politician's warm handshake, broad smile and generous pledge with rigorous monitoring of policy implications, costs and follow through, and tough scrutiny of promises made relative to promises delivered.
9. In a world in which the connection between government and territory is being eroded by technological change, political parties will increasingly be obliged to transcend their traditional theatre of activity, forge cross-border alliances and foster transnational and global cooperation.
Deparochialisation of party structures can be supported, *inter alia* through party-financing systems. Key positions in multinational institutions should be subject to democratic vote, rather than co-optation.
10. The **fading of the nation-state** and the ongoing "**revolution into small**" presage sea changes in the nature and the role of the constituent communities of larger statal entities. Coping with collapsing states and separating communities constitutes a rising challenge of the first order. Democrats need to be intellectually re-armed for the attendant transformation of the geopolitical landscape and the agonising transitions which are on the horizon.

This, as other points discussed above, is a matter of some urgency for
THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY; THE DEMOCRACY OF THE FUTURE.

THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY; THE DEMOCRACY OF THE FUTURE will take a broad view of the current state of western democracy, exposing its critical shortcomings and exploring opportunities for radical repair. In particular, it will

- explain why, in the last decade of the twentieth century, western democracy has been plunged into a crisis of systemic proportions;
- detail the main features characterising democracy's malfunctioning in the developed world;
- define the preconditions for efficient, effective democracies in the post-industrial age;
- describe the fundamental reforms on which the future of democracy depends;
- speculate as to the consequences of failure to re-engineer democracy.

THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY; THE DEMOCRACY OF THE FUTURE will focus essentially but not exclusively on the evolving situation in the G-7 countries. It will also address trends in the traditional and new third worlds, including such issues as why

- authoritarian tendencies appear to be so popular in the boom-cities and -states of Asia;
- Potemkin democracies are likely to be with us for some time to come in the post-communist East;
- democratic expectations will probably be outdistanced by economic, political and social possibilities well into the next century in large parts of Asia, Africa and the Americas;
- several long-established democratic states may revert to undemocratic conditions.

democracy is not science fiction; it is technically feasible today.