



'If its citizens feel powerless, is a democracy really the best form of government?'

To mangle Sam Johnson: *'Democracy has many pains, but dictatorship has no pleasures.'*

Plato claims that democracy is a danger to society because it allows excessive freedom. He also argues that, in a system in which everyone (in theory) has a right to rule, all sorts of selfish people, who care nothing for the people at large but are only motivated by their own personal desires, are able to attain power. I think he has a point - I personally don't believe Donald Trump is in politics for the greater good.

The word 'Democracy' is from the Greek 'demos' meaning people and 'kratos' meaning power, so democracy literally means power invested in the people. This reminds me of 'Citizen Smith' and his cry of 'power to the people'! Although Wolfie Smith is a revolutionary, albeit a failed one.

There are two forms of democracy: a *liberal* democracy which is a representative democracy with protection for individual liberty and property by the rule of law. In contrast, a *defensive* democracy limits some rights and freedoms in order to protect the institutions of the democracy

There are **so** many different models of democratic government around the world that it is sometimes easier to understand the idea of democracy in terms of what it definitely is not. Democracy, then, is not autocracy or dictatorship, where one person rules; and it is not oligarchy, where a small segment of society rules. Properly understood, democracy should not even be "rule of the majority", if that means that the interests of the minority are ignored completely. A democracy, at least in theory, is government on behalf of all the people, according to their "will". But if democracy is government by the people, are there any real democracies in the world?

Since I agreed to look into this topic for 'Thinking Allowed', I've been suffering from red car syndrome. Every time I've switched on the radio, I've heard discussions about democracy: it's advantages, disadvantages and threats to

it. And now the Prime Minister is talking about 'mob rule' and its threat to our democracy. The more I've heard, however, the more I've come to the conclusion that we, who have lived in a democracy all our lives, don't know how well off we are.

There are so many things we take for granted. We have a free press. I would agree that it's a bit rabid sometimes and could do with some oversight but I would hate to think that the press was unable to publish what it wanted to publish because of government restrictions. I am sure there are times when the papers are 'encouraged' not to publish a story but, by and large, editors are free to publish in this country without being in fear of their lives or freedom. Look at the letters that come from this very village criticising our MP. There are many countries that don't have that right of overt criticism - look what happens to those that openly criticise Putin?

Although we may occasionally feel we are without power, if we think more carefully, we have the right to vote. For women particularly, the right to vote was hard won and every time we go to the ballot box we should think ourselves lucky. We also enjoy the right to peaceful protest. Most of us don't use this right - probably because of our age - but when I was at university in the 80s many people I knew were members of CND and joined the marches for nuclear disarmament. We may not feel the urge to use it but we still have that right of protest - again, largely without fear of imprisonment. Could it be that may be we are not powerless but are merely apathetic, taking for granted the many freedoms we have?

Programmes like 'Questiontime' on BBC television allow the average citizen to ask questions of elected officials. We have an active party of opposition, who are meant to help us (citizens) call the Government of the day to account. Although we have recently been led to believe that some MPs are worried about their personal safety, generally they are free to speak their minds and voice their political beliefs.

Rightly or wrongly, I have come to the conclusion that democracy may not be without drawbacks but, on the whole, it is the best form of government. If we, as its citizens, feel powerless that is because we don't exercise the powers we have. We may not be powerful but nor are we powerless.