

Johan Galtung: **IMPROVING DEMOCRACY** 15-01-2016

Alfaz, Spain: Democracy is rule--decision-making--by the consent of the people, the demos. There is a very good argument: the people will suffer the consequences. Hence rule of, by, and for the people.

Problem: which level dominates the decision-making? Level [4] national (government-parliament-courts); [3] regional (provinces-departments), [2] local (LAs, municipalities), level [1] individuals? In theory [1] is primary, basic, sovereign; in practice level [4]. Through elected representatives, packaged in electoral districts; representing individual preferences, packaged in party programs.

Comment, from Germany: "The sovereignty comes from the people--and never comes back" ("vom Volke raus, und kommt niemals zurück").

The representatives kindly open a window every 4 years or so, 8-12 hours, 1-2 days, for the people to confirm or disconfirm the government. 1-2 days out $4 \times 365 = 1460$ (+1): around 1 per mil.

However, society has fault-lines, by gender-generation-race, class, nation, territory. Only territory is built into the system through the elections by districts, the vote catchment areas.

There are increasing demands for lists of candidates also to represent genders, generations, races and nations. As opposed to only white-male-middleaged candidates, disturbingly similar on the posters. There is more than territory and programs to represent; and states are now competing especially for the highest percentage of women deputies.

However, Society=State+Capital+Civil Society; this is all State.

For the many NGOs in Civil Society we now have the same rule: they--rotarians, priests--should also bridge fault-lines, making society more representative, and in that sense more democratic.

However, in Capital CEO autocracy is frequent, consulting with the Board, not with organized customers. A dictatorship Trojan horse; by privatization free from some democratic control of state capital.

The most democratic state in the world is Switzerland. The others are majority dictatorships (how majoritarian depends on the electoral system); president-, parliament-, party-, bank-ocracies (sliding from real to finance economy, using paid politicians), technocracies (leaving decisions to the executive power); "peoples", "popular" democracies (decision-making by one more or less democratic party); oligark-ocracies (secret services), autocracies (one single person).

Switzerland "unpackages" three aspects of the standard formula:

* demos, divided into ethnos--speaking German, French, Italian, Retho-roman--so that no ethnic group can dominate by their numbers. Hence 26 democratic, ethnically relatively homogeneous cantons, and the state as a democratic federation of autonomous and democratic ethnic groups.

* territory, divided into levels: 1 state, 26 cantons, 2,300 local. The local level is so close to the individuals that direct democracy--a plaza, a stadium--is possible if that level has real power. It does.

* programs, divided into issues. The people have the right to vote directly on issues, not only on parties but in a referendum on issues; and through an initiative to demand a referendum, at all local levels. Result: Switzerland, 1 per mil of the world population, accounts for 60% of state-wide referenda. Through federation and referenda Switzerland balances the four levels; all four levels have real power.

As the government can be overruled both by a vote in parliament and by a referendum it is responsible both to the deputies and the people. The 7 cabinet members reflect both by being

divided 3+2+1+1 by the languages, and 2+3+2 by parties, left-center-right. An political and ethnic coalition government benefiting from the insights of all.

The deputies can by education understand the other languages and speak their own with dignity, respecting the others by understanding.

There is much for Spain--6 nations?--to learn from all of this. No party has monopoly on truth, no nation monopoly on communication.

But a democracy is much more than a structure of inter-level balance, and a culture of inter-level transparency. The focus of the debate should not be reduced to how to elect representatives. Much more important is how people themselves can arrive at good decisions through the state, the capital, and the civil society systems.

One answer: by asking them. A referendum is a question, and people grow by making up their minds, not having it made up for them.

Another would be for local communities with difficult problems to ask the inhabitants for good ideas, delivered "by midnight Sunday".

Most importantly, at all levels to decide by dialogue-consensus, not only by debate-voting. There are underlying cultures of victory for debates, and of solution for dialogues, towards something new.

Creativity of-by-for the people will matter ever more because of level [5]: alliances like NATO, communities like EU, Capital as TNCs can overrule states. And most states--except the biggest in population and area, China-India-Russia-USA--absorbed into regions, are also challenged from below by LAs, non-dominant nations and NGOs. Sometimes with terrorism from below and state terrorism from above.

Shifts from politics within and among States to politics within and between Civil Society and Capital at all levels is hard on people. People will to a large extent have to fend themselves, through Civil Society, against Capital, with networks and cooperatives against Capital, and banks buying the deputies. The best struggle is positive, like by linking NGOs and cooperatives democratically in a world chain of cooperatives promoting the basic needs of humans and nature.

People can through nonviolent struggle create and reconquer democratic decision-making. Strengthen the local level. Reflect ethnic differences. Boycott bought deputies. More referenda. More decisions through dialogue-consensus, to be continued in coalitions. More decentralization. More diversity. And much more creativity.