

A Requiem for Democracy

By G. M. MES

In the days of my youth—the first two decades of this century—the subject that occupied us young ones most was the (terrible) fact that God had died and that one had to face up to the question how one could live without Him. The argument is still essentially the same but now it concerns another dated belief. Democracy is what is dead and the question has become if one can live (an acceptable life) without it.

What has changed is not the world—or the universe—but we ourselves. We no longer have the awe that made religion a necessary and integral part of the structure of the lives of our forefathers and we no longer really have what it takes to live democratically.

The structure of any society and even of any part of a society is not something that is there by itself. It is the expression of the nature of the members concerned in it because—in the final count—it is no more than the sum-total of numberless individual and personal decisions and acts, each one marked indelibly by the qualities of honesty, loyalty and conscientiousness (or their lack) of those who do them, together with the basic attitude each man has toward life and his fellow citizens. In democracy things are not done under pressure or fear of punishment but, simply, because (as the English language expresses it so beautifully) it is, *for democrats*, that what “is done” and that what “is not done.”

The essence of democracy lies not in the presence of a functioning “representative parliament” and, still less, in a “democratic constitution.”

This has been demonstrated with terrible clarity during the “liberation” of Africa. Each newly fledged black “nation” started off with a “democratic constitution” (mostly tailor-made in Whitehall), many already had a functioning, installed democratic machinery, but, within months or a few years, nearly all of them reverted to (or attained!) the, for them *natural*, structure of what, despite the verbiage and trappings, are more or less total autocracies in which the white man boss has been replaced by the black man boss.

Democracy, as such, has also nothing to do with “freedom of the state.” Russia, Saudi Arabia and Spain (as Nazi Germany was in its time) are as free as any country could ever be. “Freedom of the state” is, at the most, a necessary prerequisite for the *possibility* of the development of a democracy. One can give a country or a nation its freedom—or, as we colonialists did,

go home and stop ruling it—but one cannot give a “people” freedom. They can only give that to themselves.

The principle of democracy—a ruling of the people by the people—also has little if anything to do with “one man, one vote” or, even, with “equality.” These too are merely details of a machinery which *tries* to implement the democratic principle and the validity they have in any given case depends mostly on the mentality of the theoreticians who have defined (or would like to define) the constitution. It is *their* realism, idealism, naïveté, optimism or pessimism which decides what is considered to be the “demos” that is—or should be—“ruling itself.”

The mechanisms and structures of democracy are almost as varied and numerous (and as unimportant) as the national costumes of the different democracies but what they all have to have in common is the democrats who are their citizens *and the democrats who rule them.*

In the absence of a *sufficiency* of either one or both of these two, their democracy (as such) will become obsolete and—like an “unimplementable law”—disappear simply because, in the individual events and relationships that go to the *functioning* of the state, the judgment and motivation of the persons responsible for them will not self-evidently be those of a democrat. The things that are done and, especially, those that are left undone, will not be democratically determined while the functioning of the controllers and the controllers of the controllers will be tainted with the same defects.

In the absence of enforcement by fear and intimidation, a system of government (like a law) can and will only be implemented when a significant majority of those subject to it, as well as of those who have to implement it, are basically convinced that *that is how things should be done*—and that that is how things should be. (In the system enforced by fear the criterion is not “how things should be” but “how those in power insist that it must be”).

The fundamental, genitive factor in a democracy is, therefore, the (mainly inborn) nature and characteristics of what we can call the “democratic citizen” and his counterpart the “democratic ruler.”

In both cases it is not important what or whom the democrat considers to be a co-member of his “demos.” What is important lies in the second syllable of the word “demo-cracy”—that is: in the self-evident accepting of the fact *that there must be a “ruling” and, therefore, a “commanding” and an “obeying.”* In this there need be no “law” or even an “adhering to precedent,” although in practice, it would be very difficult to do

without these shortcuts to “standard” conclusions and procedures.

Our modern, almost idolatry, insistence on the “rule of law,” which in certain sets of relationships becomes almost what one would call a “nomocracy,” is, in itself, a symptom of the death of democracy among us. In such a nomocracy the people would not be ruled *by themselves* but by what is actually a codification of what was thought to be “just” and “necessary,” *in other circumstances*, by those long dead. This attempt to establish an absolute “rule of law” is actually no more than a desperate effort to keep the *mechanisms* of democracy (from which life has departed) going.

In regard to the “ruling” of his community, the “democratic citizen” knows, consciously or unconsciously, that his rôle must be the passive one of “one who is ruled” because, for one or more of a variety of reasons, he *prefers* to leave the ruling to others.

He may have his own affairs to attend to and/or lacks the ambition, or drive to want to tell others what to do. He may also realise that he does not have the ability, the nature or the personality to do so. He is more interested in his personal relationships with his private niche in the community and is unwilling to devote his time and energy to the running of the whole but—by nature again — he is *willing to delegate* that part of his “duties” to others.

The second fundamental characteristic of the “democratic citizen” is that he realises that he *himself* is not “the demos” but that his voice and his interests are one among many while the “will of the demos” is expressed by the “majority”—a fact, simplistically expressed by the magic formula of “one man, one vote.” The latter is a quantitative counting of heads instead of a qualitative summation of what is in the minds—*each evaluated and loaded* according to the measure of knowledge, understanding, judgment and social responsibility that has gone into the formation of the conclusion at which that mind has arrived.

(It is one of the major and inescapable weaknesses of the “democracies” as we know them, that it is practically impossible to make this evaluation and it is, at best, only approachable by various attempts at formulating an appropriate “qualified franchise” based on in how far the person has *demonstrated* these qualities by the degree to which he has been able to make a success of his life in the community.)

Nevertheless, in whatever way it has been arrived at, once the “will of the demos” has been expressed and defined, it is again a characteristic of the true, born democrat, that he, then, is not only willing to accept that decision but able to see it as

how it should be—and to give it his undivided loyalty while playing his part in implementing it to the best of his ability—all because of the simple fact that he identifies himself with his “demos.” Thereby, what has been decided upon also becomes *his* will.

In his heart he may not agree—or fear the consequences—but he realises that going counter to the will of the demos would do more harm than honestly to try and make it work. He will only balk when he is convinced that there is a real danger *for the whole of the community*.

The “democratic ruler” on the other hand, is a man who, again for one or more of a variety of reasons is willing to sacrifice his personal interests, private life and, often his peace of mind, for the sake of the group to which he belongs and to take over the duties and responsibilities inherent in the activity of ruling.

As our analysis is concerned with what are, after all, ordinary, fallible, human people, our definition may seem to be a hopelessly exaggerated idealisation—but that is not altogether true.

It is doubtlessly true that a large percentage of our “democratic citizens” have not thought about their democracy at all. They take the society into which they have been born and in which they have grown up for granted, reaping what benefits seem to be available and voting (if they vote at all) out of a sense of duty. There is no real consciousness of delegating power. The democratic ruler is, again, more often than not, consciously motivated by the wish to be a “someone,” a respected person of acknowledged importance—something he could not hope to achieve in his own niche in the community. Besides this there are, even for the honest ruler, a large number of material perquisites and opportunities and social advancement, and it would be foolish to deny that many people obtain positive pleasure out of being able to command and to force others to obey.

When there is a crisis and something threatens the democracy as a whole, there is, however, a closing of the ranks because both the citizens and the rulers become conscious of the meaning of what, to the superficial observer, may have seemed to be no more than lip-service to “ideals.”

It is then that the consciousness of being a member of a herd makes itself felt—of the herd which, even among animals, was already an original, basic phenomenon of living together. A democracy is actually “a herd” and the only form in which that phenomenon has occurred among men who (being thinking and judging individuals) do not naturally and easily combine into a system of relationships the rules of which they “automatically” obey.

One can compare this with the pattern of the “hunting pack” which is the prototype of most of the other human societies we know.

Where, in a herd, leadership and authority is largely decided by *acknowledged* ability and the “gift” of leadership—in the pack the criterion is the ability to fight—or, at least, to instil fear. Therefore, the structure of an autocracy is a power-pyramid in which each individual has to find his place according to his temerity. In it, he may give loyalty and even adoration to the leader, if not of his own free will, then at least *as the only way to retain his self-respect*.

The democrat is proud of being a member of his democracy. In the other systems the individual is (or can be) proud of *belonging* to a great and mighty overlord — shining in his reflected glory.

The democrat identifies himself with his herd, the others identify themselves with the glory and fame of their master. And, probably the most important difference is that the democrat feels himself to be the *source* of (part of) the power of his democracy. The others receive what powers they have “from above” as all the power there is is the power of the ruler. They look upward in fear (and admiration) hoping for grace and benefits and treat those in their (delegated) power with an iron fist—as, miniature replicas of their master.

Imperfect as the realisation of the ideal of democracy certainly has always been, it was still the best, most “human” form of government.

One has to fear, however, that we will not have it with us much longer, even in its present adulterated form for, as said, it needs a sufficiency of “democratic citizens” and “democratic rulers” to remain alive and the democratic quality is fast fading out of our democrats before the onslaught of the modern ideal of the “free man” who, in theory at least, is the “Master of his fate and the captain of his soul.”

If our understanding of ourselves is that we are all equal and equally capable of acting like intelligent human beings, capable of forming reasoned opinions on all matters of state and yet free to do what we personally think best for ourselves—or simply what we want to do, as expressed in the phrase “doing one’s thing,” it is inevitable that all the accent will come to fall on the “rights” — the so-called “human rights” of the individual while the function of the state becomes restricted to seeing to it that that right is not interfered with (by others “doing their thing”). For the rest it will be confined to providing all that we have a “right” to, while protecting us from the results of our own folly—such as by providing pensions, doles, hospitals, amenities, bread and circuses.

The childish self-centred inanity of this "ideal" is, immediately apparent when one realises that this "state" on which the citizens have now overtly become mere parasites also has to consist of human beings "making a living" for themselves and there is no possible sense in expecting them to be self-sacrificing idealists "doing *our* thing" for us. If, in the members of the demos, there is no loyalty, no conscientiousness, no sense of a deep, inner duty to the whole, it must be inevitable that those who rule will be of the same kidney and with the powers *they* have, that must lead to almost unrestricted corruption as they look after "number one."

The essential point is that a real democracy consists of men *who rule themselves* (according to the structure of the community in which they live). If there are a sufficient number of these then the *way* in which the group is ruled is of secondary importance.

The man who claims that it has to be "undemocratic" when a group of men and women appoint one man to rule them, is not a democrat. He judges others by himself and he knows that, if he were given such a chance, he would not be able to resist the temptations it offered. "Ruling," to him, means exerting power over others *against their will* while democratic ruling means an organising and directing of the social and economic interrelationships of the members of the democracy. The cynic may not believe it but it has been done often, even without realising that it was something extraordinary.

To round off this argument, we can now make the following statements.

A group of people can be ruled either by power (that is: by "fear of punishment") or by a common knowledge and acceptance of "how it should be." If they are ruled by power, the will of the ruler *is* the law.

This rule will last only as long as the ruler is able—or willing—to punish. If he tires, gets bored with it or weakens (or becomes more concerned with his own personal pleasures)—or when he starts to aspire to the luxury of becoming "ethical" instead of ruthless (where it seems necessary)—he is lost and is ploughed under. At best he can (within the framework of his mastership and "from strength") try to apply his personal sense of "justice," thereby ameliorating, to a certain extent, the need for suppression. Nevertheless his rule remains contingent on his ability to instil fear and the obeying is done because of fear and not (normally) because that is what the subject wants to do—or feels that he should do.

The latter is, or should be, the rule in a democracy. Therefore, a democracy *needs* no "laws that have to be obeyed." At best its laws are a formulation of the rules of conduct agreed

upon by all and merely verbalised as a guide to decisions where there is legitimate doubt as far as civil law is concerned. Criminal law is there to rule those in the community *who are not democrats* and who, therefore, *have to be ruled by power (and fear)*. It is as simple as that.

In this context, the democrats are in the same position as the tyrant. It is *their* will that is expressed in the law and, when they too (like the tyrant) lose the will to punish, when they tire, or become afraid, or too much concerned with the luxuries their way of life makes available to them, or, most important, when they become “ethical” instead of ruthless, their democracy is lost and they will also be ploughed under.

At best they can (within the framework of their mastership) and “from strength”—not as a “must” but as a gesture of good will—apply their personal sense of justice by formulating a “law” that will lay down the “rules of the game.” This law the criminals will not accept as valid and they will feel themselves free to break it, but, if strictly applied it will give them a dependable framework in which they can find the possibility of survival, thus making them less “desperate” and more easy to control.

Now, in our time, as what democrats there are left have become tired and fearful and full of undeserved twinges of bad conscience, doubting their “right” to punish because “understanding is forgiving” (and no one wishes to declare himself “unable to understand,” or “vengeful”) all of it against the background of the impracticable, but oh so wonderful chimera composed of ethical and brotherly ideals absorbed in their nurseries, we can say:

“Democracy is dead!
Long live Sthenocracy! ”

It is, however, also true that this new name (indicating a rule by the strong and the aggressively virile) is still hopelessly idealistic. In this age of the “equaliser” (which makes it unnecessary for David to acquire the skill of using his sling to kill his Goliath) it is obvious that ruling will no longer be decided by “one man, one vote.” It will be by some form of what is now so crudely, being demonstrated in Angola: election by “one gun, one vote.”

The Reality of Race

By JOHN R. BAKER

In recent years there has been a tendency among social anthropologists in many parts of the world to treat man as though he were more distinct from other animals than in fact he is. Many of them accept the evolution of man intellectually without really facing the facts that man is basically an animal and that he resembles very many other terrestrial ones (including his nearest living relative, the chimpanzee) in being classifiable into races.

We need to look back to a period when there were great men who did not shrink from accepting and expounding the facts disclosed by sciences, however unwelcome these might be to many people. "Anthropology," wrote T. H. Huxley¹ more than a century ago, "is a section of ZOOLOGY . . . the problems of ethnology are simply those which are presented to the zoologist by every widely distributed animal he studies." In these words he expressed a fact that is indeed familiar to modern zoologists, namely, the reality of race. The study of man would become less inhibited and more realistic if every student of anthropology could have an opportunity to attend a course of instruction in the principles of taxonomy, given by an authority on this rather difficult but very important subject, on which a large body of knowledge and understanding has been built up by those who have devoted themselves to the study of animal life.

A *species* may be roughly defined as an interbreeding group. If a terrestrial species is very widely distributed, it may be found to differ in physical characters in different parts of its range. The technical term for the main divisions of a species is *sub-species*. It is convenient to use the word *race* as equivalent to subspecies, and this practice is followed in the present article. The Europids (so-called "Caucasoids"), Negrids (Negroes of Africa), and Mongolids (Mongolians and their relatives) may be quoted as examples of races. Most human races are divisible into subraces; for instance, the Nordids, Mediterraneanids, and Alpinids are some of the subraces of the Europid race. Here and there one finds "local forms" of mankind, recognizably different in trivial characters from other members of their race or subrace.

It follows, from the rough definition of a species given in the preceding paragraph, that hybrid individuals exist; for if races did not hybridize to some extent, they would not be races, but separate species (or separate *Formenkreise*). Hybrid individuals may show all degrees of intermediacy between one ancestral race

¹ T. H. Huxley, "On the Methods and Results of Ethnology," *Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 1, pp. 257-277.