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Towards a Better Democratic Constitution

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There's a lot of confusion about democracy right now. Since Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, a lot of people are saying that democracy is a bad idea. But I would say that's a bad joke, because we don't actually *have* real democracy anyway!

Democracy means 'the people rule'. Voting once every few years between well-funded, power-hungry political parties: is that the best we can do?

I think not!

If we choose people to rule for us, we are not doing the ruling ourselves – just as if we hire someone to do our plumbing, we are not doing the plumbing ourselves. It's as simple as that. For over a hundred years now, we have been taught to think that elections are the whole of democracy, but it's a lie. Elections never are, and never will be, the whole of democracy. But they could operate in a more democratic way, as I will show.

The reason why it's important to have some *real* democracy is this: unless the whole community has a say in making the laws, one group of people - the group with power – will make laws to give themselves an advantage. That's what's been happening over many years now. That's how sixty-two individuals have come to own more than the poorer half of the world's population; that's how the health of the world has been put in peril.

Real democracy *has* existed in the past, and traces of it still exist today. I'm going to outline a few practices which are truly democratic, and which could be more strongly incorporated into our way of doing things.

First, when local assemblies have real powers, communities come alive. People takes an interest. The local assembly here in Brockley is alive and well to the extent that it has a little money to distribute. This money makes a difference: it funds people to do things that make Brockley a better place.

Second, political juries. Truly democratic constitutions use juries not just in courtrooms, but also to decide on political matters. In courtrooms, juries consist of twelve people, selected by lot from the general population. Over many centuries, they have proved that ordinary people make good decisions even on difficult and technical subjects, when they have time to consider the facts.

A *political* jury can consist of any number of people. For an important decision – like 'should we go to war?' or 'should we spend billions on new nuclear submarines?' it

might consist of a thousand people. Just like a jury in a courtroom, a political jury listens to evidence from people who know about the problem in hand from all points of view; then it makes a decision.

Third, a more democratic way of choosing representatives is for local assemblies to choose people they know to represent them at higher assemblies. Good and conscientious individuals get chosen, rather than faithful servants of a political party. The practice could carry on up through various levels, to the highest assembly in the land.

These practices would involve more people in politics. People would become more motivated, interested, aware. That means that the fourth democratic institution I'm going to recommend – the Referendum, which has come in for so much abuse recently – would be something we vote in from a position of experience. We would no longer feel like small children being shouted at by grown-ups. In Switzerland a referendum is triggered by public demand, when 100,000 signatures have been collected. The result is binding. Every year quite a number are held, on a variety of different subjects.

Another thing which happens in genuine democracies is 'the scrutiny'. Anyone involved in public life must have their finances open to scrutiny. The public purse is the biggest in any nation, and robbing it has become a national pastime in many so-called democratic countries.

The most important thing we could introduce right away would be a review of laws. This would be done by the political juries I mentioned earlier.

For three hundred years in England, laws have been made to favour rich people, big corporations, and government power. How many voters pay attention to the details of new laws?

How many people know, for instance, that we have laws which allow banks to actually *create* money?

How many people know that our laws, about commercial corporations, oblige workers to work often against their moral instincts for the profit of shareholders?

A legal system which relentlessly robs workers and feeds money to those who exploit them must eventually produce the kind of economic and political crisis we see today. It's the classic modern tale: humiliate and rob people enough and they will vote for monsters. A different kind of politician appears – a Putin, a Donald Trump – who promises to make everything good, but is actually a kind of demon from hell.

Our elites appear to be busy trying to convince themselves that actually Trump is not so bad. Haven't we been here before? That's what western politicians were saying about someone else eighty years ago, and look what happened next... How much worse will it be, this time round?

Today, we have bureaucracies running the place; police and judicial systems enforcing the law; diplomatic services smoothing international relations. So long as these people

are competent and not corrupt, they run things pretty well. So, we might ask: What exactly are politicians for?

Well, politicians are responsible for making laws and taking decisions which set the general direction. Sadly the general direction today is towards ecological catastrophe, proliferation of horrendous weapons, and the prospect of war between nuclear powers. Have our politicians done a good job? Could we do better?

Luckily a lot of people around the world are working to introduce these ideas into public debate and practice. Let's have more discussion and reform before it's too late.