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Contemporary Reposition of Egalitarianisms into Totalitarianisms and its Reverberations

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ABSTRACT

Plodding but palpable and perilous decline of tangible liberal democracies and they being steadily swapped by authoritarian governments, in the veil of popularist and national liberals, is a deplorable but unpreventable state of affairs in this day and age. The predicaments in non-partisan egalitarianisms is often seen through the most prevalent prism is the concept of 'populism'. The involvedness and heterogeneity of populism makes it problematic to generalize about its insinuations for democracy in contemporary period. Individuals have turn out to be 'more cynical about the pre-eminence of democracy as a politically aware arrangement, less hopeful that anything they do might influence public policy, and more enthusiastic to express support for authoritarian alternatives'

"In every age it has been the tyrant, the oppressor and the exploiter who has wrapped himself in the cloak of patriotism, or religion, or both to deceive and overawe the People."

— Eugene Victor Debs

Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin wall, democracies again face a struggle against authoritarianism. This is not the ideological battle of the Cold War, but it is a confrontation between systems of government. As democracies are showing cracks and as authoritarian regimes are gaining strength, the global balance of power is beginning to shift to a world where authoritarian regimes are setting rules for new global challenges, especially in information, technological, and in some cases economic spaces. Using economic and technological tools once thought to be democratizing forces, authoritarian regimes are undermining and eroding democratic institutions while enabling the growth of more authoritarian governance systems. Liberalism and authoritarianism are on the march at the expense of liberal democracy.²

Plodding but palpable and perilous decline of tangible liberal democracies and they being

¹ Author is a Teacher at HHS, IIT Campus, Kharagpur, India.

² Laura Rosenberger, 'Authoritarian Advance: How Authoritarian Regimes Upended Assumptions about Democratic Expansion', GMFUS, September 13, 2019

steadily swapped by authoritarian governments, in the veil of popularist and national liberals, is a deplorable but unpreventable state of affairs in this day and age. The predicaments in non-partisan egalitarianisms is often seen through the most prevalent prism is the concept of ‘populism’. The involvedness and heterogeneity of populism makes it problematic to generalize about its insinuations for democracy in contemporary period. Individuals have turn out to be ‘more cynical about the pre-eminence of democracy as a politically aware arrangement, less hopeful that anything they do might influence public policy, and more enthusiastic to express support for authoritarian alternatives’

Different from ancient republicanism, for modern republicanism (1) individual rights (which did not exist in ancient times) are at the center all public matters (*rei publicae*). Different from platonic republicanism, modern republicanism (2) relates claims of universally true (rational) solutions for political problems and institutional design to arbitrary and contingent will formation. Finally, the rationality of modern republicanism is based (3) not on vote (Kant) but on voice (Habermas), hence, on the (truth-related) communicative generation of power (Arendt).³

The pervasive proliferation of personality cult as a pinch-hit poses serious threat to egalitarianisms as they are turning to be majoritarianisms. Majoritarianisms habitually turning into partisan politics and every so often mingling social problems with national pride. Robust liberalism can accommodate continued immigration with strong definitions of achievable but also meaningful national standards for integration. But, we today observe how threats to the liberal order—particularly the successful rise of domestic populism—can upset this compromise by reframing inclusive nationalism not as a solution but as part of the problem.⁴

Among authoritarian populism’s most ominous tendencies is its disdain for the rule of law, or what Neumann in “Concept of Political Freedom” dubbed legal or “judicial liberty”. When in power, right-wing populists tend to remodel legal and constitutional practice according to the adage “for my friends everything, for my enemies, the law”. That is, they transform law and courts into a discriminatory weapon against their political “enemies”, while looking the other way when allies and “friends” skirt the law’s boundaries.⁵ when we scratch below poststructuralism’s shiny veneer, we generally encounter a warmed-over legal skepticism,

3 Vatter, M. (2000) *Between Form and Event: Machiavelli's Theory of Political Freedom*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands and Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

4 Moffitt, Benjamin. 2016. *The global rise of populism: Performance, political style, and representation*: Stanford University Press.

5 J.-W. Müller, *what is Populism?* *op. cit.*, pp. 60-68.

incapacity to do proper justice to the normative core of modern liberal democracy (and especially the key idea of freedom), and a kneejerk antistatism.⁶

The liberal nitty-gritties of democracy give the impression that they are shakier than ever before. In the face of such upsetting signs, nevertheless, democracy remains possibly the utmost efficacious political idea in modern history. Over two decades after Francis Fukuyama's victorious celebration of the "end of history", it seems that liberalism, both economic (free trade) and political (pluralism, civil liberties, constitutional safeguards), is in grave catastrophe. We thus face a paradox: while electoral democracy continues to be acclaimed everywhere, a series of indicators measuring political and civic freedom show it to be in deep trouble. This paradox of democratic success but liberal decline calls for a more fine-grained analysis and a sharpening of our analytical tools if we are to better understand the rise of these new forms of elected but authoritarian governance⁷.

When the German playwright Bertolt Brecht wrote that, "All power comes from the people," he went on to ask the rather important question, "But where does it go?"⁸ Dalton Trumbo's satiric statement, "everybody now seems to be talking about democracy. I don't understand this. As I think of it, democracy isn't like a Sunday suit to be brought out and worn only for parades. It's the kind of a life a decent man leads, it's something to live for and to die for" grabs one's attention during this period of acute crises. While crying wolf is rarely recommended, sometimes there really is a wolf skulking through the wood. As was rightly observed by Atifete Jahjaga, 'Democracy must be built through open societies that share information. When there is information, there is enlightenment. When there is debate, there are solutions. When there is no sharing of power, no rule of law, no accountability, there is abuse, corruption, subjugation and indignation'.

Vandana Shiva an Indian scholar, environmental activist, food sovereignty advocate, and anti-globalization author believed that Gandhi is the only person who knew about real democracy and she reiterates the Gandhian idea which views democracy, 'not as the right to go and buy what you want, but democracy as the responsibility to be accountable to everyone around you. Democracy begins with freedom from hunger, freedom from unemployment, freedom from fear, and freedom from hatred. To me, those are the real freedoms on the basis of which good human societies are based.' In the absence of such scenario the words of wisdom spoke by Franklin Delano Roosevelt sounds pertinent, "The liberty of a democracy is

⁶ *On Foucault's antistatism, see M. Dean and K. Villadsen, State Phobia and Civil Society. The Political Legacy of Michel Foucault, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2016.*

⁷ **Dominic Eggel** and **Marc Galvin**, Research Office, The Graduate Institute, Geneva

⁸ Chris Patten, London, BIRN, March 4, 20200

not safe if the people tolerate the growth of private power to a point where it comes stronger than their democratic state itself. That in its essence, is fascism - ownership of government by an individual, by a group.”

As a concluding remark the words of Mahatma Gandhi are repeated here, “What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or in the holy name of liberty or democracy?” Thus “Democracy must be something more than two wolves and a sheep voting on what to have for dinner.”⁹ If A democracy tends to be real it must address the general will not the will of all or the will of the majority as was suggested by Rousseau. It must be close to the Platonian idea which says each according to his needs and each according to his ability. Though not complying with yet the observations of Francisco Weffort seems befitting here which states, ‘The superimposition of democratic forms on authoritarian relations, the prevalence of statist ideology even among those who called themselves anti-statist, and the resulting acceptance of coup-making as an everyday form of political action, are all characteristics which cut across left/right divisions. We are capable of calling authoritarianism democracy, and an act of usurpation is called a revolution’.¹⁰

⁹ James Bovard, *Lost Rights: The Destruction of American Liberty*

¹⁰ Weffort, 1983/1989, 329