



In Praise of Dictators: A Satire

Liberal democracies are on the decline.

“An appeaser is one who feeds a crocodile, hoping it will eat him last.” - Winston Churchill

Why are people so hung up on democracies? Obviously, they haven’t paid attention to the words of John Adams, one of America’s Founding Fathers: “Remember, democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide.” And how correct he was.

All around us we can see the slow extinction of democracies. These governmental designs are just too unstable. As Adams also noted, the death of democracy isn’t sudden. It happens slowly through apathy and indifference. The French philosopher Montesquieu said it best, “The tyranny of a prince in an oligarchy is not so dangerous to the public welfare as the apathy of a citizen in a democracy.”

Furthermore, democracy can be quite boring. Wasn’t it Orson Welles who observed, “In Italy for 30 years under the Borgias, they had warfare, terror, murder, and bloodshed but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and the Renaissance. In Switzerland, they had brotherly love; they had 500 years of democracy and peace and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock.”

Fortunately, an increasing number of countries are seeing the light. Autocracy is on the rise. Many

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nations have come to realise that voters don’t have what it takes to make democracy work. Not only are citizens apathetic, they also tend to be poorly informed. It’s often been said, “The best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter.”

Democracy is just too difficult

Introduced by the ancient Greeks, democracy is a crazy idea. It suggests that people must remain tolerant of fellow citizens who hold views different from their own. Effectively, democracy means permitting variety and criticism – a pathway to disaster. It also implies giving people freedom. How messy. Besides, anyone with half a brain can see that citizens aren’t very good at picking their leaders.

A functioning democracy can only exist if the population is well-educated, highly engaged and well-informed. What a joke! Just think about it, how many people are truly educated? As Chairman Mao Zedong said, “To read too many books is harmful.”

In addition, democracy requires a citizenry passionate about the ideas of equality and liberty. People who firmly believe in the dignity of the individual. People who have good judgment and empathy. After all, without empathy, it is hard to arrive at compromises in decision making.

Moreover, people should be interested in the common good rather than personal concerns.

I think you will agree with me that finding such people is almost an impossible task.

The average voter has no sense

How could anybody even imagine having a working democracy when most of the electorate are more interested in the antics of the latest movie stars, athletes, or social influencers? Democracy is an extremely dangerous proposition if we accept that it is only as good as its citizens.

As the Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw put it, “Democracy is a device that ensures we shall be governed no better than we deserve.” Therefore, isn’t it fair to say that even a somewhat incompetent dictator will be less stupid than most of a country’s citizenry?

In addition, as democracy is based on compromise, it doesn’t make for strong, decisive leadership. Adolf Hitler showed true foresight when he said, “There is a better chance of seeing a camel pass through the eye of a needle than of seeing a really great man ‘discovered’ through an election.”

People aren’t democrats by nature. Most people don’t want to think independently. While they may say that they don’t want to be led, they clearly crave it. They just love the idea of somebody else deciding for them. Benito Mussolini no doubt understood this. “Yes, a dictator can be loved. Provided that the masses fear him at the same time,” he said. “The crowd love strong men. The crowd is like a woman.”

The advantages of dictatorships

Honestly, there are so many advantages to being a dictator. Life becomes so much simpler. You don’t have to worry too much about the welfare of the masses. To prevent unrest, it generally suffices to keep the stomachs of the citizenry full, so long their heads stay empty. What’s far more important is to make the few people that count happy. I’m referring to family and friends.

As a dictator, it is your prerogative to place your family and friends in lucrative governmental positions, a practice that’s frowned upon in democracies. Strangely enough, they look at it as an abuse of power. Some even say corruption. Clearly, democratic nincompoops don’t understand the word loyalty. Loyalty always trumps competence.

Let’s face it: Effective governments tend to be dictatorships. When one person calls the shots, decisions are made in no time. Public policies can

be implemented so much more rapidly. As the German-American writer Charles Bukowski remarked, “The difference between a democracy and a dictatorship is that in a democracy you vote first and take orders later; in a dictatorship you don’t have to waste your time voting.”

Also, what misguided defenders of democracy fail to see is how fatiguing it can be to maintain a democracy. In fact, the very design of democracy makes it a highly illogical political system. Just think about it: After winning an election, winners need to maintain the institutions that may enable their political adversaries to win the next time around. What nonsense.

What else is annoying about democracies? Checks and balances. They make it very difficult to push forward initiatives, since everybody can obstruct everybody else. Free speech can be a real burden too. At the minimum, it forces leaders to listen to people who are disagreeable. At worst, it is an invitation for chaos. Fortunately, as a dictator, you throw all these checks and balances out of the window.

Media are a nuisance

Another irritant is a robust media. This countervailing force to the government is a pathway to great misery. Why confuse the electorate with nuanced accounts of reality? Today, factoids are the way to go. Of course, journalists can still be useful, if they can be made to understand exactly what they ought to write about and how.

Let’s look at an enlightened leader such as the founding head of the Soviet government, Vladimir Lenin. As a connoisseur of power dynamics, he knew that – to quote Hitler’s propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels – “a lie told often enough becomes the truth”. In that respect, Lenin had the fine insight that whoever controls the narrative, controls the people; and whoever controls the news shapes destiny.

Also, Lenin understood that to disseminate the “right” information, it was best to start very early. Dictators worth their salt know that altering school textbooks is an effective way to enlist impressionable youths. They also know that education is a weapon whose effect depends on who wields it.

Another benefit of controlling the media is that it offers many possibilities in terms of rallying the crowds. It works particularly well when you can make people believe that they have a common enemy. It is so much easier to unite people in hatred than in love. Dictators take advantage of the natural human tendency to blame others and to

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oversimplify.

Rule of law is overrated

There will always be dissatisfied people who don't recognise the advantages of dictatorships – people who prefer to rebel. These ungrateful and unappreciative people can usually be kept under control by secret police and a dedicated military. As Chairman Mao said so thoughtfully, "Power comes from the barrel of a gun."

Advocates of democracy argue that without the rule of law, chaos ensues. But isn't it the other way around? Isn't it so much better to have a dictator who issues clear edicts? It helps people to choose the right path. President Augusto Pinochet of Chile did exactly that. "I'm not someone who usually sends out threats. I warn only once," he said. "The day they touch one of my men, the rule of law is over."

Of course, it is also expedient to have the judiciary on your side. An independent judiciary just slows decision making. Effective dictators learn that creating uncertainty is a great way to keep citizens in line. As Roman dictator Caligula said so poignantly, "I don't care if they respect me so long as they fear me." And if that doesn't work – if some deluded citizens have gone beyond fear – death can be the solution.

To quote another enlightened leader, Joseph Stalin, the former secretary-general of the Soviet communist party: "Death solves all problems. No man, no problem." He knew all along that democracy is liberty run wild.

The minor imperfections of dictatorship

Of course, dictatorships do come with a few minor drawbacks. Political scientists try to remind us that dictators exploit the anxiety of their people to their advantage. But what's so bad about some guidance from people in the know?

Also, they say that dictators live in an echo chamber. That they cause the world's worst problems. That they are responsible for collapsed states and devastated economies due to corruption and grand theft. This is pure negativity.

It is tiresome to hear complaints that dictatorships invite genocidal activities, imprisonment and torture. There are even people who talk about the terror of the doorbell early in the morning – insinuating that the people who ring will not be the milkmen. But even if that were true, those who get such a visit must have deserved it.

If anything, the ones who are truly taking a heroic

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risk are the dictators themselves. Just think of Iraq's Saddam Hussein, Romania's Nicolae Ceaușescu or Libya's Muammar Qaddafi. After giving their country their best, they all died in less than glorious ways. No wonder dictators are typically surrounded by military and police who are armed to the hilt. Many must be terrified of their own people. They know their rule can unravel unexpectedly and very quickly.

If you're still not convinced that dictatorships are the way to go, please consider the facts: Liberal democracies have been on the decline. Their numbers seemed to have peaked in 2012 with 41 countries, and presently there are just 32. They are home to **only 14 percent of the world population**, according to V-Dem Institute, a nonprofit involving 3,500 scholars and other country experts that study democracy.

Everywhere around the world, autocratic rule is increasing. More people have come to realise that over the centuries, faceless bureaucrats have done more harm than tyrannical dictators. The democratic way of making compromises just doesn't cut it anymore.

Thanks to the power of apathy, time is on the side of autocrats and dictators. Speaking of apathy, isn't it heart-warming to read the account of the German Lutheran pastor Martin Niemöller? In 1946, in a confessional prose, he wrote:

"In Germany, the Nazis first came for the communists, and I did not speak up, because I was not a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak up, because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak up, because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I did not speak up, because I was not a Catholic. Then they came for me ... and by that time, there was no one to speak up for anyone."

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