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The Anglosphere and the Campaign
for Ineffective Democracy

by Gwydion M. Williams

What we owe to General Giap

by Gwydion M. Williams

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Democracy and the Campaign for Ineffective Democracy

by Gwydion M. Williams

The Anglosphere claims to be waging a global campaign "for democracy". Which is always taken to mean "Representative Democracy in a Parliamentary System with multiple competitive parties and media lightly regulated and independent of the state".

No attention is paid to alternative systems, popular autocracies, one-party states, or states like Singapore where multiple competitive parties exist, but one party has an overwhelming majority. When the long dominance of the Liberal-Democratic party in Japan ended, the Western media viewed this as A Good Thing, even though Japan since then has worked rather worse than before. Likewise the ending of the peculiar and corrupt Italian system centred on the Christian Democrats, even though this led to the much worse dominance of Berlusconi.

Systems of one-party or autocratic rule are condemned as the antithesis of democracy, even though it might be noted that the majority of the population actually approve of it. The Anglosphere view seems to be that no one has the right to make choices like that.

The belief in the inherent virtues of Representative Democracy in a Parliamentary System with multiple competitive parties is strong enough that the West has in some cases pushed it against its own interests. It should have been obvious that if this system were applied to Iraq after Saddam, the newly created parties would separately compete for the Kurdish, Sunni and Shia vote, with Religious Shia likely to be the single biggest

force. Yet that let it go ahead and Iraq is vastly more sectarian than it was under Saddam. The same in Egypt: it should have been obvious that honest multi-party elections would give power to either the Muslim Brotherhood or to harder-line Islamists. But the Western media ignored warnings from several different sources at the time of the Arab Spring, and then expressed utter astonishment when exactly this happened.^A

Multi-party democracy is declared best for everyone. But in practice (though this is nowadays covered up), the Anglosphere also has a long history of organising coups against governments it dislikes. Back in the 1950s and 1960s, Britain and the USA encouraged and sometimes organised military coups against mildly racial governments in the Third World, and even in parts of Europe. The West effectively endorsed the Greek military junta of 1967. 74. They intimidated the Italian Christian Democrats to prevent them including the Italian Communists in any coalition. And it's possible that kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro was organised by Western secret services to sabotage the prospect of an Historic Compromise between the Christian Democrats and Communists. (It's also entirely possible that the Red Brigades were dumb enough and vain enough to sabotage the prospects of the left without being paid for it: there are many other such instances and large numbers of pointlessly negative and destructive individuals on the Hard Left.)

It's also notable that Iran is viewed with deep hostility, even though it does hold regular contested elections which make a difference to policy, and in which rivals have so far handed over power quite

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with a system of multiple competitive parties is that it depends on a shared understanding of how the political system should work. In a lot of newly created states there was no continuous political tradition and it had to be invented from scratch. And there were lots of coups and many separatist movements, which contributed to the violence.

Multi-party systems work when the opposition behaves moderately in the hope of being back in power soon, and a defeated party can step down from government in the expectation that the new government will respect their rights and not prevent them from returning to government in the foreseeable future. What can easily happen instead is a series of short-lived parties making unrealistic promises and then using their time in office to loot, assuming that they will get no second chance. Mostly they plan to ship their wealth overseas, mostly to those convenient Numbered Bank Accounts that the Swiss provide. This is vastly more destructive than corruption by members of a relatively stable elite who keep their money at home and who also believe in the long-term welfare of the society.

This "patriotic corruption" was the actual situation in Britain during the key Georgian years of the Industrial Revolution, commonly dated as 1760 to 1820, or perhaps 1840. And some would say it began rather earlier, but it's not disputed that it occurred in the era of "patriotic corruption" and largely before the clean-up of the Victorian era. Likewise in the USA, the society became industrialised in its notorious "Gilded Age". After World War Two, there was quite a lot of corruption in the new fast-changing USA, including the alarming Military-Industrial Complex. But economically was brilliant, and similar success was combined with blatant corruption in both Italy and Japan. There's reason to believe that things were just as bad in France, but France under de Gaulle

managed to turn itself round and catch up with Britain, having been visibly poorer in the 1950s.

China, Brazil, South Africa and the Republic of India are current examples of "patriotic corruption". China, lacking any of the checks and balances that the West recommends as cures, has delivered much the fastest growth and the greatest increase in the living standards of ordinary people. (None of them are shining examples of social justice, all have too much inequality, but by all social and economic tests one would have to rate China as decidedly the least bad.)

Multi-party systems don't usually fix "patriotic corruption", though they may destroy the system's effectiveness and re-create the corruption while destroying the patriotic element. Or be ineffective even when honest and well-intentions.

Worse things happen with competitive political parties in countries with many different ethnic groups. Electoral politics directly generated the split between what were originally West and East Pakistan, now Pakistan and Bangladesh. The basic problem was that West Pakistan was in charge but an East Pakistan party won the election, and attempts to compromise failed and led to civil war. Civil war was also generated in Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon) by one set of parties working on Sinhalese resentment of the more privileged Tamil minority, while another set of parties worked on Tamil desire to have either autonomy or independence. A similar process broke up Czechoslovakia, where there were separate parties for Czechs and Slovaks and a peaceful and agreed separation happened when Czechs voted Centre-Right while Slovaks voted Centre-Left. This was helped by the fact that both were fast-tracked for membership in the European Union, meaning that the separation was not all that decisive.

A similar process might have allowed Former Yugoslavia to peacefully evolve into several small states within the European Union. Instead the European Union with

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were being asked to accept governments based on a rival nationalism: nationalities that had been entirely willing allies of Nazi Germany in World War Two. This was a result of a complex set of bargains made within the European Union after the Soviet collapse. Germany chose to back its old friends the Croats, attached to German interests for centuries. Britain under Thatcher chose to rat on Britain's old ally Serbia, the defence of whom had been the official cause of World War One, and who had provided most of the non-Communist resistance to the Nazis in World War Two. The best defence one can make of Thatcher is that she was genuinely ignorant of the likely result of her actions. But politicians are not supposed to act from ignorance: they should either know or leave the matter to someone who knows.

But one doesn't need to look so far away for an example of two sets of rival political parties looking for votes from two rival nationalities. This has been the situation in Northern Ireland from its creation, and remains the case after the Anglo-Irish Agreement, in which Thatcher ratted on the Ulster Protestants. She seems to have swallowed a promise that this would allow the nice moderate SDLP to win Roman Catholic votes at the expense of the IRA: the very opposite as happened.

Someone who tried arguing for the unusual merits of Representative Democracy as distinct from other systems of democracy would find themselves on weak ground. Much easier to say "democracy" when you actually mean "Representative Democracy in a Parliamentary System with multiple competitive parties and media lightly regulated and independent of the state". It's phoney, but it tends to pass unchallenged.

We owe the word "democracy" to the Greeks, but they meant something very

different by the term. Greek city-states had retained or perhaps revived the ancient notion of a Tribal Assembly, while also being literate enough to write about it.^B The approximate meaning is "the people rule": but note that "the people" meant "all citizens", with non-citizens automatically excluded. Women were not citizens, though those women who were the mothers, sisters, wives and daughters of citizens had special status and protection.

This ancient system was also based on regular meetings of the entire citizenry, what we now call "Direct Democracy". These were people who knew each other, whose whole lives were spent in each other's company. Which didn't mean they always got along, bitter factionalism did happen. But it must have helped.

The idea of Representative Democracy was alien to Greek thinking. It wasn't they they'd never thought of it. The various leagues formed among city-states sometimes had chosen representatives. All of the democratic state had elected officials, but their were mostly strong limits to their powers. Similar limits also applied to the later Italian City-States. In both Classical Athens and the Venetian Republic (and presumably other places) there were systems of careful randomisation that would choose someone from a large number of suitable individuals, and thwart any intent to select one particular person the majority wished to choose. (See *Demarchy*, in the Appendix below.)

The Roman Republic had a quasi-representative system in the Senate, which was composed mostly of individuals who'd been elected as magistrates. Of course the Republic was never a democracy, having a voting system for magistrates that was heavily weighted towards the richer citizens. Also Senators had a job for life, and had to be quite rich to qualify. It was however an efficient system of government in the early and middle years of the Republic. Its power was balanced against that of several different sorts of popular assembly, and the official formula for state authority was SPQR, the Senate and

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lots of on the power of the elected Consuls. It worked quite well when there was broad consensus on how the state should be governed. Was doomed when the Senate became systematically at odds with the will of the majority of citizens, as expressed in Rome's various "Popular Assemblies".^D But the general population lacked the coherence to govern directly, so in practice they rallied round various charismatic leaders, mostly successful generals. Julius Caesar was transitional, loved by the people and murdered by Senators, but founding the first line of Emperors through his distant relative and adopted son Octavian, later known as Augustus. The Emperors were generally more popular than the Senators, but in practice it was the loyalty of the army that was decisive.

The decay of the Roman Republic is often treated as some sort of unique anomaly. But taking a wider view, the various democratic or part-democratic Republics of the ancient world had a way of collapsing into some sort of monarchy or autocratic rule. It was all too easy for the checks and balances in a Republic to produce weak and ineffective government.

Today's successful and long-lasting systems of Representative Democracy come overwhelmingly from states and societies that were Representative or Parliamentary before they were Democratic. Parliaments spread widely in mediaeval Europe, and normally included the "Commons", which actually meant a rich minority within the society. Normally there were property qualifications for voters, and since MPs got no salary it was only open to those who got a sufficient income from property without the need to work.

These traditions in turn rested on older European notions of a tribal assembly and even the election of kings. There was also the whole classical tradition of Greece and Rome, showing that such systems were possible. And the Christian Church had a

continuing tradition monks and nuns electing their own superior when the old one died, and a selected group of electors choosing bishops. This was only suppressed during the European Reformation, with most Protestant bishops appointed by their monarch and Catholic clerical officials appointed by the Pope, though normally with the agreement of the monarch.

Trying to start a Representative Democracy from scratch usually fails. The USA might appear to be an exception: a constitution was adopted from scratch and was highly successful. But each of the original thirteen states had possessed its own system of Representative Government. George Washington spent many years in the House of Burgesses of Virginia, and other states had a version of direct democracy with Town Meetings. And of course they looked to a British government in which the dominant power was the House of Commons. Their initial demand was the right to elect their own MPs to the Westminster Parliament. Westminster showed one of the weaknesses typical of Representative Assemblies: it has the atmosphere of a privileged club and a feeling that outsiders had no right to a say. The election of MPs from British North America would have been perfectly feasible in an era when General Elections mostly occurred as a series of local contests extending over several weeks. And once at Westminster, the MPs from the different colonies would have been likely to form different ties, probably with the South joining the Tories and New England the Whigs, with the middling colonies undecided. But when forced to fight or obey, the British North Americans chose to fight and then opted for independence. Still, the Constitution wasn't hugely different from the British model, just with the hereditary element removed and various existing practices enshrined in a written Constitution.

The newly independent USA was also not a democracy, even in the limited sense of giving the vote to all white adult males.

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though outside the formal party structure which was organised during his presidency. His successor was a Federalist, but in 1800 they lost both the Presidency and both houses of Congress to the Democratic-Republican Party.

Democracy in Europe was mostly limited by property qualifications in the 19th century. Up until the 1832 reform, the British House of Commons was under the effective control of a couple of hundred rich families. A few seats had a large electorate, but many were functionally in the gift of some aristocrat. Only in 1884 was voting extended to a majority of adult males in the British Isles. Just as important was the introduction of the Secret Ballot in 1872 . before that electors had to vote publicly and were open to pressure, particularly tenant farmers considering voting against their landlord.

The 1874 General Election was the first to use the Secret Ballot. It saw the Home Rule party in Ireland come from nothing to win 60 seats. Also considerable losses for the Liberal Party in rural areas of Britain where the landlords were Liberals but the population preferred the Tories.

Property qualifications in British elections lasted until the Reform Act of 1918, which also gave the vote to women over 30. Arguably this was when Britain itself became a democracy, albeit with unfair treatment for women. But you could argue it several ways, and many people felt that adult males were not "citizens" unless they had some sort of property.

The 1911 edition of the much-respected *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (available on-line at https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911_Encyclop%C3%A6dia_Britannica/Democracy) takes a view of democracy that would be off the scale by modern standards. It says:

"Moderate democracies have adopted a low property qualification, while extreme democracy is based on the extension of citizenship to all adult persons with or without

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Note also that the Westminster Parliament ruled the entire British Empire, at that time about a fifth of the world's population. White settlers in that Empire mostly had their own regional electoral bodies, which had considerable powers. The non-white majority had either no elections or a powerless assembly that could be ignored by the Westminster-appointed Governors, as was the case in the Indian Subcontinent.

Meantime a different concept of Democracy was around. Even when a majority had the vote, it was often found that the wishes of the majority were not implemented. And there were at least two other meanings of democracy in common use:

a) Social Mobility, people gaining power and position on the basis of ability rather than social connections.

b) Control over their own lives for ordinary people, those without any unusual ability or social connections.

The nature of democracy has been an issue since the French Revolution. An interesting account of this is found in the 1966 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*:

"The term democracy is used in several different senses.

"(1) In its original meaning, it is a form of government where the right to make political decisions is exercised directly by the whole body of citizens, acting under procedures of majority rule. This is usually known as direct democracy.

"(2) It is a form of government where the citizens exercise the same right not in person but through representatives chosen by and responsible to them. This is known as representative democracy.

"(3) It is a form of government, usually a representative democracy, where the powers of the majority are exercised within a framework of constitutional restraints designed to guarantee the minority in the enjoyment of certain

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freedom
liberal

"(4) Finally, the word democratic is often used to characterize and political or social system which, regardless of whether or not the form of government is democratic in any of the first three senses, tends to minimise social and economic differences, especially differences arising out of the unequal distribution of private property. This is known as social or economic democracy.

"To avoid misunderstandings, these various uses of the term should be carefully distinguished"^F

The USA is seen as the starting point for modern democracy, but not an automatic consequence. Though it was referred to a "democratic revolution" by its critics in Britain . see the letters of Adam Smith, for instance . leaders like George Washington did not see it so:

"The first major experiment in constitutional democracy was inaugurated as a consequence of the American Revolution, although this was not the primary purpose of the revolutionary movement. The grievances which led the colonies to separate from the home country were essentially the same as those which had led to the break between king and parliament in 17th-century Englandí

"The constitution which emerged from these deliberations was a compromise between democratic and antidemocratic ideals. Although the states were left free in general to be as democratic as they liked, their capacity to interfere with property rights was restructured by giving a number of important economic powers to the federal governmentí

"Of the two parties which first competed for the favour of the American electorate, the Democratic Republicans í soon won the upper hand. The Federalists í who continued to reflect the predominantly antidemocratic mood of the Constitutional Convention, had many able leaders and a number of powerful theorists, but their fear and suspicion of the people as 'a great beast' proved uncongenial to the American publicí

"By the middle of the 19th century, the

outcome of the American Revolution had been to create the first successful example of modern constitutional democracy. It is true that slavery still existed, and that the rise of the Negro to a position of full equality was destined to be a slow and painful process extending far into the future. At this time women's suffrage, too, was practically unknown. With these exceptions, however, the battle for political equality had already been won. By 1845 adult male suffrage was the rule in all but one of the states, which did not abandon property qualifications until 11 years later. There was also a strong atmosphere of social equality which gave American life a quite distinctive flavour."^G

At a time when the new USA was still dominated by Federalist ideas, something much more radical happened in Europe:

"The second great landmark in the history of modern democracy was the French Revolution. Unlike its American counterpart, this was not a movement based on an established constitutional traditioní little remained of the mediaeval parliamentary tradition and few of the revolutionists had any interest in reviving ití

"The political instability of the movement was reflected in the rapid succession of regimes which followed from 1789 to 1804í All during this period the revolutionists acknowledged the people in theory as the true source of legitimate authority, and even the empire was confirmed by a plebiscite based on universal male suffrage. But although everyone spoke in the name of the people, it was impossible to reach any lasting agreement on concrete political institutions through which the people might be allowed to speak for themselves.

"The French Revolution had a curiously mixed effect on the development of modern democracy. It was successful in undermining the traditions of the ancient regime and in fostering the idea of a society based on liberty, fraternity and equalityí But by associating this idea with the practices of Jacobin and Napoleonic dictatorship, the movement also served to inhibit the growth of democratic institutionsí Most revolutionists believed that legal and social equality was an end which

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"At the time of the French revolution, the British constitution was still the oligarchic system established by the revolution of 1688. But the British constitutional tradition proved to be strong and flexible enough to adapt itself to democratic pressures without loss of continuity. The United States, starting from its own version of that tradition, had already shown how much could be done to develop it in a democratic direction, and in the course of the 19th century the British did likewise."^H

As I said earlier, the British ruling class managed to keep much of its continuity while extending the vote to most Britons. And managed to keep most of them voting for the parties of the ruling class. Meantime France had proved chronically unstable and prone to civil war, and unable to meet the needs of ordinary people despite giving the vote to all adult males in 1875. (No women till 1944, and the colonies treated unfairly.) So Lenin had good grounds for viewing Representative Democracy as a failure and going for the spontaneous emergence of a different sort of democracy with the Soviets.

How this might have worked out without foreign intervention and a vicious civil war is something we can only speculate about. Under the pressure of actual events, Lenin's Bolshevik Party took absolute power within the remainder of Lenin's lifetime. All functional opposition was suppressed. The Bolsheviks quite possibly did have majority support: they definitely did have a mass following and dominated the cities. But Lenin and the other Bolshevik leaders decided to establish an authoritarian system that didn't give the population a chance to say "no". Still, it was in principle supposed to be the people's choice:

"Although the U.S.S.R. did not aspire to be a liberal state, it laid great emphasis on what it claimed was its popular and democratic character"

"The theoretical origins of this new conception of democracy go back to the period

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of the French Revolution, and the ideas of economic democracy which emerged as a minor but persistent phase of the revolutionary movement

"The result was the creation of a new type of political regime, one best described as totalitarian democracy."^I

In my view, "totalitarian" is a rather meaningless phrase used to describe some (but not all) of the political regimes that seek the level of ideological and social control that has been normal for most of history. Modern liberalism has been the grand exception, loosening controls in the hope that nothing too bad would happen. But also its starting-point in Britain was not at all tolerant when it needed to fight for survival. Functional liberalism in Britain begins with Oliver Cromwell, with the 18th century Whig party descending fairly directly from surviving Cromwellian elements who tried to exclude James the 2nd & 7th from the English and Scottish thrones. The very name "Whig" came from the Whiggamores, Scottish Puritan extremists. Later liberals had to be more tolerant when it came to the viewpoint of other Britons, though generally not Irish and definitely not unfamiliar foreign nations. Liberal ideologist John Locke was an investor in the Atlantic Slave Trade and it was liberal free-traders who cheered on the British Empire in its Opium Wars against China. Apostle-of-liberty John Stewart Mill also approved of the use of opium to break open the Chinese Empire, and was happy to spend most of his working life in the London offices of the East India Company without saying anything at all about the pervasive racism that excluded the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent from equality in their own land, regardless of how well they might assimilate British values.

British liberalism changed the world, which would be unrecognisably different without it, and would probably not have evolved modern democracy. But British liberalism also wrecked its own conditions of existence by failing to stop the Great War some time in early 1915, when it should have been obvious that it would not be won

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Russia had an elected Parliament and a press that was free to criticise the idea of war, at least before it started.

This was the context in which Lenin decided to grab power with the support of a determined minority. He could reasonably have said that he would deliver what the majority had asked for. there was a clear majority for the various socialist parties.

The short-lived liberal republic that existed between the overthrow of the Tsar and the Bolshevik Revolution failed to deliver anything that the majority of the people actually wanted. The abolition of the monarchy cut them off from loyalist and traditionalist feeling and laid them open to a military coup, which was attempted by General Lavr Kornilov. But they also alienated moderate reformers by failing to meet the demand for "bread, peace and land" which the Bolsheviks raised.

The short-lived liberal republic in Russia would probably have been short-lived even if Lenin hadn't overthrown it. When Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933, almost every other newly created Representative Democracy in Eastern Europe had already collapsed. Czechoslovakia was the main exception, and Britain chose to abandon it and instead start the war in defence of Poland. Poland had ceased to be a Representative Democracy in 1926, though the autocratic rule of Piłsudski probably did have majority support.

In the former Tsarist Empire, the Russian Constituent Assembly election of November 1917 showed a massive majority in favour of some sort of socialism. Only 24% voted for the Bolsheviks, but another 40% voted for the Social Revolutionaries. Less than 5% votes for the Constitutional Democratic Party ("Kadets"), the main non-socialist party.

Lenin was already in power when the Constituent Assembly met, and chose to close it down. He had a partial justification

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in as much as the Social Revolutionaries split, with the Left Social Revolutionaries in coalition with the Bolsheviks until the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. They later tried overthrowing the Bolsheviks, and were suppressed. Some Social Revolutionaries worked with the White forces in the Russian Civil War, until Admiral Kolchak expelled them in November 1918.

Lenin was almost certainly right in thinking that Representative Democracy had no future in Russia as it then was. Parliamentary bodies allow for the peaceful resolution of mild power-struggles: they cannot act decisively in a major crisis or war.

Experienced parliamentarians can handle this. When Winston Churchill became Prime Minister in 1940, he was distrusted by the Labour Party and was deeply unpopular with a majority of Tory MPs. But they had enough self-discipline to shut up and see what he could do, and this made all the difference. That's what you get from centuries of parliamentary government: the thing that is usually absent when a collection of individuals of different and frequently antagonistic origins get elected to a Parliament without social roots. The relative success of Representative Democracy in the Republic of India owes a lot to the Congress Party dominating for the first few critical years, and Nehru dominating Congress.

My view of Representative Democracy is that where it works, it is fine. Introducing it as a curb within a flourishing existing political system is risky, and the actual benefits are doubtful. And expecting it to reliably deliver what the majority want is unrealistic and contradicted by actual experience. At best, it can allow radical demands to be met without revolution and the consequent painful loss of political continuity and legitimacy.

^A I predicted this in my *Newsnotes* just after the event, suggesting that the Westernising or liberal protestors

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- ^A And the luck to have cultural heirs who copied those writings, none of which survive in the original.
- ^C In Latin, *Senatus Populusque Romanus*
- ^D There were several, with different powers and voting patterns.
- ^E Entry for "Democracy" for the 1911 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*
- ^F Entry for "Democracy" in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1966 edition. I have turned the five points into paragraphs

use with

for greater clarity.

^G Entry for "Democracy" in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1966 edition.

^H Entry for "Democracy" in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1966 edition.

^I Entry for "Democracy" in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1966 edition. None of the text I quoted survives in the current CD edition, which I found fairly useless on the topic.

(Someone looking for a research topic could try looking in more detail at how the Britannica's viewpoint changed across the years.)

Appendix

Encyclopaedia Britannica (1911 edition). ^x

DEMOCRACY (from .. the people, i.e. the commons — rule), in political science, that form of government in which the people rules itself, either directly, as in the small city-states of Greece, or through representatives. According to Aristotle, democracy is the perverted form of the third form of government, which he called 'polity' or 'constitutional government,' the rule of the majority of the free and equal citizens, as opposed to monarchy and aristocracy, the rule respectively of an individual and of a minority consisting of the best citizens (see Government and Aristocracy). Aristotle's restriction of 'democracy' to bad popular government, i.e. mob-rule, or, as it has sometimes been called, 'ochlocracy' (— mob), was due to the fact that the Athenian democracy had in his day degenerated far below the ideals of the 5th century, when it reached its zenith under Pericles. Since Aristotle's day the word has resumed its natural meaning, but democracy in modern times is a very different thing from what it was in its best days in Greece and Rome. The Greek states were what are known as 'city-states,' the characteristic of which was that all the citizens could assemble together in the city at regular intervals for legislative and other purposes. Direct democracy is impossible except in small states. In the second place the qualification for citizenship was rigorous; thus Pericles restricted citizenship to those who were the sons of an Athenian father, himself a citizen, and an Athenian mother. This system excluded not only all the slaves, who were more numerous than the free population, but also resident aliens, subject allies, and those Athenians whose descent did not satisfy this criterion. The Athenian democracy, which was typical in ancient Greece, was a highly exclusive form of government.

With the growth of empire and nation states this narrow parochial type of democracy became impossible. The population became too large and the distance too great for regular assemblies of qualified citizens. The rigid distinction of citizens and non-citizens was progressively more difficult to maintain, and new criteria of citizenship came into force. The first difficulty has been met by various forms of representative government. The second problem has been solved in various ways in different countries; moderate democracies have adopted a low property qualification, while extreme democracy is based on the extension of citizenship to all adult persons with or without distinction of sex. The essence of modern representative government is that the people does not govern itself, but periodically elects those who shall govern on its behalf (see Government; Representation).

Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2005

Democracy (Greek, *demos*, the people; *krattein*, to rule), political system in which the people of a country rule through any form of government they choose to establish. In modern democracies, supreme authority is exercised for the most part by representatives elected by popular suffrage. The representatives may be supplanted by the electorate according to the legal procedures of recall and referendum, and they are, at least in principle, responsible to the electorate. In many democracies, both the executive head of government and the legislature are elected. In typical constitutional monarchies such as Great Britain and Norway, only the legislators are elected, and from their ranks a Cabinet and a prime minister are chosen.

Although often used interchangeably, the terms democracy and republic are not synonymous. Both systems delegate the power to govern to their elected representatives. In a republic, however, these officials are expected to act on their own best judgement of the needs and interests of the country. The officials in a democracy more generally and directly reflect the known or ascertained views of their

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own judgement.

English Dictionary (CD, version 4.0)

of government in which the sovereign power resides in the people as a whole, and is exercised either directly by them (as in the small republics of antiquity) or by officers elected by them. In mod. use often more vaguely denoting a social state in which all have equal rights, without hereditary or arbitrary differences of rank or privilege.

2) That class of the people which has no hereditary or special rank or privilege; the common people (in reference to their political power).

Wikipedia (as at 17th October 2013) - Democracy

Democracy is a form of government in which all eligible citizens participate equally, either directly or through elected representatives, in the proposal, development, and creation of laws. It encompasses social, economic and cultural conditions that enable the free and equal practice of political self-determination.

In virtually all democratic governments throughout ancient and modern history, democratic citizenship consisted of an elite class until full enfranchisement was won for all adult citizens in most modern democracies through the suffrage movements of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Wikipedia (as at 17th October 2013) - Liberal democracy

Liberal democracy is a form of government in which representative democracy operates under the principles of liberalism, i.e. protecting the rights of minorities and, especially, the individual. It is characterized by fair, free, and competitive elections between multiple distinct political parties, a separation of powers into different branches of government, the rule of law in everyday life as part of an open society, and the equal protection of human rights, civil rights, civil liberties, and political freedoms for all persons. To define the system in practice, liberal democracies often draw upon a constitution, either formally written or uncodified, to delineate the powers of government and enshrine the social contract. After a period of sustained expansion throughout the 20th century, liberal democracy became the predominant political system in the world.

A liberal democracy may take various constitutional forms: it may be a constitutional republic, such as France, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy, or the United States, or a constitutional monarchy, such as Japan, Spain, the Netherlands or the United Kingdom. It may have a presidential system (Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, the United States), a semi-presidential system (France and Taiwan), or a parliamentary system (Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, Poland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom).

Wikipedia (as at 24th October 2013) - Demarchy

Demarchy (or lottocracy) is a form of government in which the state is governed by randomly selected decision makers who have been selected by sortition (lot) from a broadly inclusive pool of eligible citizens.

The Athenian democracy made much use of sortition, with nearly all government offices filled by lottery (of full citizens) rather than by election. Candidates were almost always male, Greek, educated citizens holding a minimum of wealth and status.

The Venetian Republic was well known for the demarchical aspects of its long standing and stable government. While other Maritime Republics withered under the strain of factionalism, Venice was renowned for its unity under the Doge. This unity allowed Venice to prosper as an economic city state superpower for several centuries while other nations came and went.

^x [\[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911_Eencyclo%C3%A6dia_Britannica/Democracy\]](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911_Eencyclo%C3%A6dia_Britannica/Democracy)

owe to General Giap

Gwydion M. Williams

Defeat in Vietnam was an immense humiliation for the USA. Britain was not involved, because Tory Prime Minister Harold Macmillan had the sense to keep us out. But since then, the British elite has got into the habit of joining every damn-fool war the USA wishes to wage. Defining itself as Number Two in the world-dominating Anglosphere, rather than accepting a lesser role as just another large European nation. Our political elite and most of the media have become mentally dependent on the USA.

In this spirit, both the BBC and *The Guardian* obituaries for General Giap (who died on 4 October 4th 2013, aged 102) were decidedly mean-spirited. The BBC quotes General Westmoreland speaking of his disregard for human life^K and the Guardian highlights similar remarks, "any American commander who took the same vast losses as General Giap would have been sacked overnight."^L

Other obituaries also quote Westmoreland's rather lame excuse for losing the war. The most fair-minded version I've found says:

"But his critics and his nemesis, the late US General William C Westmoreland, said he was effective partly because he was willing to sustain huge losses in pursuit of victory.

"Any American commander who took the same vast losses as General Giap would have been sacked overnight," General Westmoreland was quoted as saying in Pulitzer Prize-winning author Stanley Karnow's 1983 book *Vietnam. A History.*"

"Karnow wrote that General Westmoreland seemed to misunderstand how determined the communists under Ho Chi Minh and his general

really were."^M

This is a shade muddled. Giap was Westmoreland's nemesis. I've not read Giap's own writings, but I assume that he viewed Westmoreland as a bungler who had no idea how to make intelligent use of the USA's gigantic war machine.

The more important point is that most Vietnamese saw it as a war for national independence, first against the French and then the USA. The difference between the populations of North Vietnam and South Vietnam were small, defined first by whether the Chinese or British took the surrender of Japanese troops, with a dividing line at the 16th parallel.^N The Kuomintang were mostly interested in looting and gave the Communist-dominated Viet Minh a free hand. In the South, the French restored colonial control, with British help.

The only Western news-source I've seen that recognised this is *The Economist*. Despite its belief in unrestrained market forces, it is written for business people and needs a sense of realism. So it says:

"The French might be professionals straight out of Saint-Cyr, but they did not know what they were fighting for. The Americans who came in laterò when Vietnam had been divided and an anti-communist regime had been set up in the Southò might bomb his forces from B-52s and poison them with defoliants, but the GIs did not want to be there. His men, by contrast, were fighting to free their own land. From the start, in 1944, he had drilled his tiny musket-and-flintlock resistance army in the ideology of the struggle, setting up propaganda units to indoctrinate peasants in their villages. The result was a guerrilla force that could live off the land, could disappear into it (as along the labyrinthine Ho Chi Minh trail that supplied, through jungle paths and tunnels, communist fighters in the South from the North) and was prepared, with infinite patience, to distract and harry the enemy

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"He was proud, hot-tempered, blustered into a number of unnecessary pitched battlesô but won his two wars, just the same, demonstrating irresistibly to the rest of the colonised world that a backward peasant country could defeat a great colonial power."^o

Unlike Westmorland, *The Economist* recognises that the Vietnamese communists were much more strongly motivated. Westmorland failed to see this, assuming that a foreign country would readily accept the US definition of things. He was fairly typical of US citizens in this, and it seems that the BBC and *The Guardian* have swallowed this viewpoint wholesale. Westmorland gets singled out because he was unlucky enough to be the general whose main role in history was to decisively lose the Vietnam War, as Commander of US forces in Vietnam in 1964-68 and Chief of Staff of the United States Army from 1968 to 1972.

"He was called a war criminal, was burned in effigy on campuses, and historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. called Westmoreland possibly 'our most disastrous general since Custer'í

"Westmoreland's military strategy was to conduct a war of attrition, trying to kill enemy forces faster than they could be replaced. American soldiers, in units no smaller than 750 men, were sent on "search and destroy" missions to inflict the heaviest possible losses on the biggest units of North Vietnamese troops. Because there were no front lines, Westmoreland and his officers measured success by counting the number of enemy troops killed. But the Army's 'body count' reports became widely disbelieved.

"Worse, his optimistic assessments of how the war was going ran up against increasing numbers of American dead.

"He later said he was prevented from waging a full-out war by rear-echelon second-guessers and by war protesters on campuses who took to the streets. President Lyndon B. Johnson, worried that the Chinese would join the fray and turn the conflict into a full-scale world war,

refused Westmoreland's appeals to enlarge the battlefield."^p

Westmorland also encouraged the massive use of Agent Orange, a defoliant that was also hugely damaging to humans, causing horrendous long-term damage:

"The most commonly used, and most effective, mixture of herbicides used was Agent Orange, named for the orange stripe painted on the 55-gallon drums in which the mixture was stored. It was one of several 'Rainbow Herbicides' used, along with Agents White, Purple, Pink, Green and Blue. U.S. planes sprayed some 11 million to 13 million gallons of Agent Orange in Vietnam between January 1965 and April 1970. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Agent Orange contained 'minute traces' of 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin (TCDD), more commonly known as dioxin. Through studies done on laboratory animals, dioxin has been shown to be highly toxic even in minute doses; human exposure to the chemical could be associated with serious health issues such as muscular dysfunction, inflammation, birth defects, nervous system disorders and even the development of various cancers.

"Questions regarding Agent Orange arose in the United States after an increasing number of returning Vietnam veterans and their families began to report a range of afflictions, including rashes and other skin irritations, miscarriages, psychological symptoms, Type-2 diabetes, birth defects in children and cancers such as Hodgkin's disease, prostate cancer and leukemia.

"In 1979, a class action lawsuit was filed on behalf of 2.4 million veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange during their service in Vietnam. Five years later, in an out-of-court-settlement, seven large chemical companies that manufactured the herbicide agreed to pay \$180 million in compensationí

"In addition to the massive environmental impact of the U.S. defoliation program in Vietnam, that nation has reported that some 400,000 people were killed or maimed as a result of exposure to herbicides like Agent Orange. In addition, Vietnam claims half a million children have been born with serious birth defects, while as many 2 million people are suffering from cancer or other illness caused by Agent Orange."^Q

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Strategies used to minimise US casualties, with minimal concern about what it did to the Vietnamese. But in the end this failed: since Vietnam was marginal to US interests, he could not afford to lose many US lives. As it happened, 58,000 deaths was considered too much for a war that showed no signs of being won. Vietnam lost maybe two million, but it was a matter of asserting Vietnam's status as an independent nation.

The Saigon government was called "nationalist" by the West, but was never much more than a front for US domination. President Ngo Dinh Diem was quasi-independent during his time in office (1955-63). But his power rested on Vietnam's Roman Catholic minority and he increasingly alienated Buddhists in the anti-Communist forces. And the USA had no trouble getting rid of him when they saw this as suiting their interests. Which was probably a blunder, because none of his successors had much credibility as national leaders.

In the end, it was the Communists who had the best claim to be Vietnamese nationalists. A similar situation had existed in China, where Chiang Kaishek had wanted to be another Ataturk, but lacked the guts to directly confront Imperialism and risk the consequences as Ataturk had. When Chiang Kaishek arrived at Shanghai, he had the option to declare the International Settlements abolished and fight a war as a proper Chinese nationalist. Instead he chose to massacre the Communists . not then serious rivals . and to present himself as a more useful servant of Imperialism than the old-style warlords. He also repeatedly failed to confront the Japanese, when a clear willingness to fight an unlimited war might have caused a change in policy in Japan before right-wing and military elements had achieved a clear dominance.

Giap and other Vietnamese communists in confronting the USA functioned as normal nationalists fighting for the future of

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their nation. Willingness to lose lives in such circumstances is quite normal, and very much applied to the USA's own Civil War.

Vietnam at the time of the US occupation had a population of about 31 million, with both sides having fighters from both North and South. The USA also had a population of about 31 million at the time of its 1860s Civil War. Total casualties were estimated at 618,000, though a recent estimate would raise that to three quarters of a million.^R And the proportion of deaths to men of military age was obviously much higher for the White Confederate population

The white population of the Confederacy was 5.5 million.^S The Wiki shows total casualties of more than a quarter of a million (260,000). 4.7% of the total population, obviously a much higher proportion of men of military age. For Vietnam, the Wiki suggests 400,000 to 1.1 million military casualties, 3.5%.

General Robert E. Lee lost proportionately more men for his cause than Giap did, and also lost the war.

Total Vietnamese casualties were higher than 1.1 million, of course. This was because the USA had a policy of systematically attacking the non-military population in almost all of its wars, through bombing and through blockades designed to produce starvation. It was a follow-on from what had been done in their wars against Native Americans, with repeated massacres of women and children. And it was also in line with what the British Empire did in its final few decades, inventing the Concentration Camp in the Boer War and causing enormous death and suffering by stopping food supplies getting to Germany during the Great War. (A policy that was continued after the Armistice to force Germany to accept humiliation with the Peace of Versailles in 1919.)

So what were the consequences of the Vietnam war? Some, including General Westmorland, now claim that they stopped a global communist advance. This seems very unlikely. When the USA decided not to let South Vietnam collapse in the early 1960s, there was nowhere else where communism and nationalism were

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subverted the Indonesian army, which massacred the largely unarmed Communists in 1965.

Any time between 1965 and the collapse of 1975, the USA could have made some sort of compromise peace. Their main "achievement" was to organising a coup against the neutralist Prince Sianouk in Cambodia. Deposing Sianouk was done without a referendum, contrary to what has happened elsewhere, as in the case of Italy after World War Two and Greece after the fall of the Colonel's Junta. It was done that way because there was no serious doubt that the mass of Cambodians would have supported Sianouk and voted out the parliamentary majority which had deposed them, given the opportunity to chose. This breach of the rules of Representative Democracy helped turn the Khmer Rouge from marginal movement that was mostly in exile into a successful mass guerrilla force against the USA and Vietnamese. And then an incompetent government, but the USA did everything it could to make life hard for the Pol Pot government, ignoring the fate of those Cambodians who had trusted them. Allied forces who ceased to be useful to US power have almost always been callously dumped.

Looking at wider consequences, the Third World was able to establish its freedom because the USA was scared of losing the Cold War. Defeat in Vietnam fed into the general feeling that the sovereignty of these new states must be respected. The end of the Cold War saw a renewal on a global scale of the US habit of trying to knock over foreign governments that displeased them. This time round, it has mostly been Islamists rather than Communists who have frustrated them, which is why I'm quite definite that the Islamists are the lesser of two evils.

Just as important is what happened in the West during and after the Vietnam War. During the Cold War, the 'hippy' element in the USA and Western Europe was tolerated because it was seen as less dangerous

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than the Hard Left. Defeat in Vietnam could be seen as a vindication of this Alternative Politics, which helped define the new norms that we now live by. Including the emergence of the New Right, with many individuals making a smooth transition from Hippy to Yuppie. And with most of the individuals who created Microsoft, Apple etc. being strongly influenced by hippy values. Not, indeed, that this was the only way it could have worked out. But the Hard Left in Western Europe scored a massive own-goal in the 1970s, believing that there would be a left-wing revolution if it could sabotage moderate left-wing reforms like Incomes Policy and Industrial Democracy.

The left in Britain has suffered from a refusal to recognise Corporatism as a step towards socialism. Marxism has become a defence against unwelcome facts, and increasingly less useful as vast numbers of ideas of broadly Marxist origin have become incorporated into mainstream thinking.

What happened in the 1980s was that the New Right managed to privatise very large areas of the highly successful Corporatist system that had been created in the 1940s and 1950s. Despite the rhetoric, there was no real end to tax-and-spend: the big difference was an insistence that tax money was handed over to gigantic profit-making corporations to provide public services. Meantime there was a collapse of traditional "respectable" or bourgeois values, a great increase in personal liberty. It was largely done in the selfish hippy spirit of "wonderful me" and "complete freedom for me", with much too little concern for vulnerable people who got hurt in the process. Still, it was done. Mainstream politics belatedly met demands for sexual and social equality which the Hard Left had insisted that only they could provide.

The behaviour of the USA and Western Europe after the Soviet collapse of 1989-91 gives a taste of what might have happened if the USA had won in Vietnam. Nixon managed to persuade white racists in the US South to switch from Democrat to Republican, while avoiding the taint of being overtly racist. A really nasty populism was in the process of being put together, helped by a lot of Black Activists rejecting

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Watergate scandal emerged as a convenient pretext, he fell in disgrace. When similar forces emerged again under Ronald Reagan, it was much more of a sham conservatism, the lifetime-best performance of a Hollywood actor. The Reagan administration sounded as if it were going to restore 1950s values but actually doing nothing much about it.

Meantime the entire Leninist block under Moscow's leadership made a series of blunders. Failed to realise that it was necessary to compromise with local nationalism, and also failed to recognise the widespread desire for more personal autonomy once basic material needs were met. The decisive error had been made in 1968, when Brezhnev crushed a reform movement in Czechoslovakia that had every prospect of regenerating the system on a broadly socialist basis. (And which might have saved Czechoslovakia as a political entity, since the leading elements were Slovak and the two highly similar nationalities were in harmony at the time.) It seems also . though there is no hard data and difference sources disagree on the details . that Giap was edged out of decision-making and was against Vietnam's disastrous decision to invade Cambodia. But the bottom line is, he won his war and changed the world for the better by humiliating the USA.

The USA lost more than 58,000 in the Vietnam War, more than 36,000 in the Korean War, more than 405,000 in World War Two.^T But they won World War Two, so World War Two was "the good war". They could claim a limited victory in Korea, which was not so good but tolerable, even though they suffered a limited but definite defeat in the portion of the war they fought against People's China.

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(The Korean war could be viewed as three "rounds". Round One was North Korea inflicting a massive defeat on South Korea and the US forces stationed there, very nearly driving them out of their last foothold. Round Two was the USA and its allies sending in much larger forces and driving the North Koreans to close to the border with China. Round Three was China stepping in and forcing battle-hardened US and British units to retreat hundreds of miles, something that has seldom happened and did not happen in Vietnam. The battle-lines eventually stabilised close to the original dividing line.)

Korea could be viewed as a limited success for the USA, in as much as they saved their dependency of South Korea, which has since become an independent-minded and successful nation-state. The Vietnam War was unacceptable because it was a clear defeat. And part of the proves that has spread selfish individualism within US culture: a process that makes the much smaller US casualties in Iraq and Kuwait unacceptable. The USA is increasingly unable to enforce its wishes and its global hegemony looks doomed.

That's what we owe to General Giap.

^K [<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-13561646>]

^L [<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/04/vietnam-general-giap-dies>]

^M

[http://web.orange.co.uk/article/news/vietnam_war_general_vo_nguyen_giap_dies]

^N [<http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/vietnam/index-1945.html>]

^O [http://www.economist.com/news/obituary/21587762-vo-nguyen-giap-who-drove-both-french-and-americans-out-vietnam-died-october-4th] ó article available to non-subscribers.

^P [<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/07/18/AR2005071801713.html>]

^Q [<http://www.history.com/topics/agent-orange>]

^R [<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/03/science/civil-war-toll-up-by-20-percent-in-new-estimate.html>]

^S [http://www.sewanee.edu/faculty/willis/Civil_War/tables/ConfedPop1860.html]

^T [<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL32492.pdf>] ó official figures from the Congressional Research Service