

#### **4. Should a totalitarian party that gets enough votes to form a government through a democratic election be allowed to rule?**

It is said that we get the politicians we deserve, yet should we always get the ones we want? Wishing to reflect the will of the people democracy faces a dilemma with the emergence of totalitarian movements. The participation of such movements within a democratic system creates friction not only ideologically, but also practically in the governing of the limits of what is allowed within the democratic process. If we imagine a totalitarian party getting enough votes within a democratic election to rule – can such a party be restricted from government without contradicting the democratic principles, and if not, what are the dangers of allowing it? The question of democratically elected totalitarianism poses the peculiar issue of whether we can really choose our own unfreedom, and what the political implications of allowing such a choice are. Totalitarianism might blind us from its true nature in appropriating the democratic process, which is we ought to realize that this is in fact in essence a contradiction, which should be made impossible.

According to Rawls, the tolerant society has the right to restrict the liberty of the intolerant if they pose a danger to the tolerant society and its institutions of liberty. Similarly, we can argue that the democratic society has a right, if not obligation, to self-preservation and that this must be achieved by restricting the democratic rights of totalitarian movements that essentially wish to eradicate democracy despite participation in its processes. Within liberal democracy we can easily find justification for prohibiting totalitarian parties through Mills harm principle – recalling the potential for physical as well as psychological harm in the nature of totalitarian ideology, both in its use of force as well as indoctrination of values. As totalitarianism removes the opportunity for political correction and dissent, incentives against exercising coercion as well as overrunning certain interests in the search of the “ultimate good” disappear. Additionally the dangers of hate and discrimination, often implicit in totalitarian ideology in its assumption of absolute truth, should not be underestimated. Here there is potential for incitement of violence directly as well as indirectly through the creation of an atmosphere of hostility. Waldron in fact argues that there is harm in hate speech in that it attacks the democratic order of society, denying some people a feeling of *“assurance that they can rely on being treated fairly”*.

Apart from the possible justification from the harm principle we also ought to examine the consequences of allowing a totalitarian party to rule. According to Popper the paradox of tolerance lies in that the toleration of intolerance ultimately leads to the destruction of tolerance and the tolerant society with it. Popper was wary of the danger of undemocratic movements exploiting freedom within a democratic society in order to promote their own agenda and ultimately destroy this very freedom. Here, it seems at best naive to allow such movements to rule, as Sartre warned; *“The democrat is snobbish about tolerance and even extends it to the enemies of democracy ... fascinated by those who plot his downfall”*. The potential harm in a totalitarian takeover might be debated in regards to force, yet the imposition of ideology and removal of the democratic process ultimately limits the freedom of individuals. Although it can be argued that people are exercising a free choice in electing a totalitarian party through a democratic process, this very action destroys the potential for a free choice in the future. As it is in the nature of a totalitarian party to restrict

opposing views, deemed unnecessary within the perfect totalitarian society, the public will thus no longer have a free choice in regards to how society is governed. Consequently in allowing development we are not only choosing our own unfreedom, but also choosing it on behalf of others who did not vote for such a party, and for future generations.

Yet if this unfreedom is chosen freely, is not the most democratic state one where the public has chosen not only its party of governance, but also the type of governance? Would not the ultimate realization of the democratic ideals be to allow the public not only to decide within a mode of governance, but to determine this very mode themselves? However, we should not so easily take what is presented as a free choice to be one. It is unrealistic to assume that we can truly know the consequences of policies that completely dissolve the system we examine them within. Thus, what appears as an informed choice might easily be an illusion, as we are limited to our current system of governance in examining alternative ones. Once totalitarianism is imposed, the relevant question becomes whether there is any way out of this way of ruling. The imposition of ideology assumed by totalitarianism, as well as the dissolution of dissent consequently removes the freedom of choice for what kind of society future generations wish to live in.

Naturally, the same argument can easily be made for democracy as well. How much fundamental freedom do we really possess if we are limited to exercise our interests and political ambitions within an established political system which despite assuming universality might serve to preserve specific interests more than others? Are we really choosing democracy if it is assumed as our way of governance and no parties are allowed that do not conform to its rules? According to Churchill democracy is the least bad out of all bad systems of ruling, yet on what grounds does democracy presuppose itself as the ultimate form of governance – limiting the emergence of alternative structures? How much freedom do we really have if it is only within current systems of power? Furthermore, it is fundamentally difficult to restrict the exercise of the political power of the people without contradicting the very principles of democracy. Despite variations within types of representative and direct democracy, the democratic idea remains that the will of the public is reflected through the state, with elections representing the sentiments of the public, providing the basis and justification for governance. Consequently, popular support and not the exercise of force or the lure of corruption ought to be the ticket to influence. Here, the interest of the public is ensured to be preserved through the distribution of power and the opportunity for dissent as well as later shift of power. It might be argued that democracy is not responsible for providing freedom outside of its own system, yet if freedom is only allowed within the existing boundaries, restricting the right to representation, it seems legitimate to ask what the value of such democracy really is, and if its justification holds up. If opinions and movements that fundamentally differ from those currently in power are not allowed, we risk Mills marketplace of ideas from being limited, and the public does not have the benefit of seeing truth collide with error or observing the actual translation of certain ideologies or movements into power. Thus, we risk the benefits of democracy being limited in an attempt of stating its superiority.

Attempts at prohibiting totalitarian movements from ascending to power, on the grounds that they are undemocratic in nature and pose a danger to society, rely on the assumption of knowing the best interest of society and having the warrant to act to preserve it – even if such action is contrary to the

opinions of the public. This kind of justification of intervention resembles the idea of positive freedom, by Berlin deemed a monstrous impersonation of freedom, which thus makes democracy appropriate the methods of its enemy. As long as a totalitarian party participates within the democratic process and thus competes at the same level as others – what right does the state have to deny the public the right to such a choice, especially if the state bases its legitimacy on being the reflection of the public? From an existentialist perspective it is our own responsibility to choose our way of governance as there are no objective ideals “out there” - if we choose fascism then fascism is the truth of man. Within an idealist conception of values and politics we remain unable to assert any authority in imposing one type of society, and democracy becomes vulnerable to counteracting its own principles trying to defend itself. Has democracy forgotten its real task if it assumes responsibility to not merely reflect the interest of the public, but also to prevent certain types of governance to emerge? From these considerations it appears that the restriction of totalitarian parties to power poses a risk to the very basis of democracy. The democratic state cannot easily fight totalitarianism without resolving to its methods, yet does this mean that the democratic state has no choice but succumb to such movements if this is the will of the people?

In his *Notes from the Underground* Dostoyevsky describes a will to freedom, more fundamental than anything else. Here, the main character would rather live in an imperfect reality than a perfect society without freedom, the latter easily imaginable as some totalitarian ideal.

Similarly, I would argue that the value of a democratic society lies not only in aims but just as much in its process. From our everyday experience it seems most of us would like our compassion to be out of choice, our sharing to be voluntary, and our opinions to be the results of individual considerations over the interests of ourselves and others. Some would argue that the appeal of totalitarianism lies exactly here in the relief of this responsibility. The presentation of a holistic understanding of society removing the necessity of opposite views would by Sartre be deemed as the ultimate exercise of bad faith. According to him we cannot choose our own unfreedom just as we cannot sell ourselves freely into slavery. In attempting to remove the freedom of ourselves as well as those of others, we in fact rely on this very freedom when making the decision – making it an impossible and contradictory choice. Consequently, even if a totalitarian society could provide us the “best” governance we ought to prevent its emergence, because the ultimate interest of the people is in fact the political participation ensured by democracy – and that is why the democratic state needs to prohibit totalitarian parties from government.