**Democracy**

**Democracy, like love, can survive any attack – save neglect and indifference. *(Paul Sweeney, in The Quarterly)***

**Democracy is the worst system ever invented – except for all the rest.**

***(Winston Churchill)***

**The chief defect of a democracy is that the only political party that knows how to run the country is always the one that’s out of office. *(Bits & Pieces)***

**It has been a disappointing decade for democracy. The fall of the iron curtain is receding into the past. Instead, in places like the Arab world that were supposed to be turning the corner, we have seen an authoritarian revival. In Russia and China, any tilt toward democracy has been reversed; Hong Kong stands as a searing example of how freedoms can be taken away. Established democracies have taken a turn toward cults of personality. Each of these – Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey, Narendra Modi in India, and, yes, Donald Trump in the United States – comes with its own flavor. But they all share a basic disregard for minority rights and institutional safeguards. Modi in particular has risen with a brand of explicitly xenophobic and violent Hindu nationalism. Yet last week the United States hosted Modi in lavish style. At home, autocrats are cracking down. Abroad they are showing off and playing their strong hands. The unfortunate truth is that increasingly the United States is being forced to choose between evils. There are the evils that are known – Vladimir Putin – and those that are substantially unknown, like Yevgeny Prigozhin. There are the adversaries we need to keep in check, like China’s Xi Jinping. And there are the autocrats whose goodwill we need to cultivate. Worst of all, the autocrats know this, and have become skilled at triangulating between the U.S., China, and Russia, and pulling the levers – oil, refugees – that make the West swallow hard and put moral conviction on the back burner. There is no easy solution here. But in the long run, advancing democracy and safe-guarding human rights are our own brand of realpolitik; our values are also our interests. The only world that is safe for the United States is one in which democracy is ascendant. Whatever compromises we make along the way, that remains the goal. *(Mark Gimein, in The Week magazine, July 7 / July 14, 2023)***

**In a democracy, dissent is an act of faith. *(J. William Fulbright)***

**Democracy In Action: Seen on the corner of Broadway and Sixth Avenue: A guy holding a sign that reads: “Running for President -- Need Money for Campaign.” *(Rocky Mountain News)***

**Just 34 of the world’s 195 nations are liberal democracies, down from 42 in 2012. Seventy percent of the world’s population, or 5.4 billion people, currently live under a dictatorship, while only 13 percent live in a liberal democracy with free elections, the rule of law, and individual rights. *(Axios, as it appeared in The Week magazine, April 15, 2022)***

**It is a strange fact that freedom and equality, the two basic ideas of democracy, are to some extent contradictory*. (Thomas Mann)***

**I swear to the Lord I still can't see why democracy means everybody but me.**

***(Langston Hughes, Renaissance poet)***

**Democracy is like a tambourine – not everyone can be trusted with it. *(John Oliver, on Last Week Tonight with John Oliver)***

**Democracy is a process by which the people are free to choose the man who will get the blame. *(Associated Press)***

**Democracy produces both heroes and villains, but it differs from a fascist state in that it does not produce a hero who is a villain. *(Margaret Halsey, writer)***

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**We Americans grow up assuming that democracy is the ideal form of government. But is it really? The ancient Greek philosophers didn’t think so.**

**Neither did the founding fathers who wrote our Constitution. Pure democracy – one person, one vote – gives the average person a lot to say about how things are run. But is it wise to trust the future of a great country solely to the opinions of an average voter? More than 2,000 years ago the Greeks had some unfortunate experiences with democracy. Demagogues led the people blindly into regrettable, bloody decisions – mob psychology at its worst. The Greeks, as a result, distrusted democracy. They preferred to put their faith in a government by a well-educated, public-spirited aristocracy. The trouble is such aristocracies don’t last forever. And when they turn selfish and self-interested, what can you do about it? Short of a revolution, that is.**

**The founders of our Constitution tried to combine the best of both approaches. First they established the House of Representatives, which is chosen directly by vote of the people in a general election. Representatives have to be reelected every two years. If they don’t represent the public point of view, the voters can get rid of them promptly. The Senate was more along the lines of an elite aristocracy. It was supposed to consist of two outstanding citizens from each state elected, not by the public, but by the state legislatures. Senators were subject to reelection only once every six years, and that not by the general public. This gave them more freedom to do what they thought best for the country without worrying about the immediate voter reaction.**

**Unfortunately, in 1913, in order to give the average person more voice in the government, we amended the Constitution and changed the way of electing Senators. Now they are elected by popular vote, the same as Representatives, and have to be much more alert to voter opinions. This has seldom been more obvious than it was during the Senate hearings concerning the nomination of Judge Bork to the Supreme Court. Pressure groups on both sides were openly threatening to oppose various Senators at their next election if they didn’t cooperate. The change in Senate election procedures may also be responsible for the fact that we can no longer control public spending. Saying no to the public demand for various spending programs is substantially more risky than it used to be. Few Senators care to stand up and do it.**

**Is this what we want in both houses of Congress – people who merely reflect the views of the average voter? Shouldn’t we have, in at least one house, people of superior background and experience who are free to do what they think best for the country, people without such fear of losing their jobs in the next election? That’s what our founding fathers intended. We suspect they knew more about what they were doing than the people who amended the Constitution in 1913. *(John Luther, in Bits & Pieces, March, 1988)***

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**Our great democracies still tend to think that a stupid man is more likely to be honest than a clever man. *(Bertrand Russell)***

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**Television is democracy at its ugliest. *(Paddy Chayefsky)***

**Television has made dictatorship impossible but democracy unbearable. (Shimon Peres)**

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