

Thoughts on Strategy

Many politically conscious people will probably admit the necessity to reform western party-based "democracies" by increasing direct citizen participation in decision-making. Many, even a majority might, however, raise practical objections. How can a reform be achieved in systems dominated by party politicians (who are hardly interested in radical change) and characterized by wide-spread political apathy and the probably still prevalent belief that party politics is the only viable form of democracy?

We believe that the transition to direct democracy can be achieved by successively introducing elements increasing the influence of individual citizens into existing systems. This process has already begun. Several parties in the West are now giving voters the possibility of personal election, namely a list of candidates from which the voter can choose by making a cross. (Although some parties overtly reject this procedure and stick to their monopoly regarding the choice of candidates, if the party as such has obtained a sufficient number of votes.)

Another potentially democratic element is computer voting and e-mail addressed to decision-making centra.

Replacement of manual voting by computer voting has - as far as we know - not yet been considered by any political party or government, although this type of use of electronic technology has begun to be discussed by experts.

Continued development in modern societies might, of course, induce certain foresighted party politicians to broaden their views and to press for reforms involving direct democracy in spite of the fact that the power of the organization would thereby diminish to the benefit of the grass-roots. They might gain the insight that pertified conservatism in this area could prove counter-productive and that this might result in the collapse rather than the preservation of organizational power. The fate of communist parties is a deterring example.

If such politicians come to the fore and begin to initiate reforms involving direct democracy, either within the framework of the respective party or perhaps by founding new parties, they should, of course, be supported by all democratically minded people. Historical experience shows, however, that reaching a position of power tends to result in a change of behaviour. It is by no means certain that advocates of direct democracy will actually introduce it after having climbed to the highest echelons of an established party system. The result could be a stalemate, in spite of all promises and good intentions.

Such a stalemate would probably not be permanent. Development would continue. The

problem, however, is that we are running against time. The next few decades and, in extreme cases, perhaps even a few years, will be decisive for the efforts to stop and reverse the rapidly progressing destruction of natural environment - the condition sine qua non for the preservation of higher forms of life on this planet. For this reason, we believe that we should not rely on the foresight on the part of party politicians - components of the system responsible for today's critical ecological situation - but that there should be an independent movement for direct democracy, consisting both of Brains Trusts and groups of activists promoting democratic reforms by initiating and organizing public debate.

It goes without saying that all kinds of violence must be avoided. Neither should such a movement try to again create rigid hierarchic structures, as the case has invariably been until now. There should only be flexible and shifting forms of co-operation.

The primary task of the movement should be to spread the insight that in order to assure the survival of mankind, ordinary citizens must not only obtain the possibility of making the most important decisions themselves, but that they must also assume the responsibility for their implementation. We can no longer rely on others to take care of us and solve our problems. We must do it ourselves.