

Carlsbad 1819

Like another Chouannerie

Democracy dies in science

August 20, 2018 by Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur

It is quite true that democracy obtrudes itself, but the government of the democracy should be intrusted to the most intellectual members of society. All for the people, nothing by the people. As Cicero said, “Ut in populo libero plauca per populum pleraque senatus auctoritate gererentur.” There is only one way of saving modern democracies, and that is to endow with predominant power a senate which shall include representatives of all the great social forces, including agriculture, trade, commerce, and especially science in all its branches. The Roman senate secured ten centuries of incomparable greatness to the Italian republic. Venice owed to her senate all her wealth and power and her long existence amidst numerous enemies by whom she was surrounded. It would be therefore wise to give science and experience a larger share in the democratic government.

An equally essential point is energetically to combat the corruption infesting political matters, as it always does under republican administrations; and to begin with, that abominable maxim, “To the victors belong the spoils,” must be wholly abolished. The application of such a principle as this amply suffices to vitiate the representative system and to impede honest administration. It is as difficult to govern as to judge wisely. When once a state is possessed of a good administrator, it is only wisdom to keep him. Would not a landowner be considered mad if he changed his agent every four years? The remedy is clear. As in Germany, all government functionaries should be guaranteed against arbitrary removal from their posts.

It is equally indispensable that the elections should no longer be subjected to bribery and undue influences. The best way to obtain this would be to adopt a system of completely secret voting, similar to that practiced in Belgium, so that it would be to nobody’s interest to purchase suffrages by money or promises, on account of the impossibility of knowing how an elector votes.

To conclude, the danger threatening modern democracy is in the contrast between the equality of rights proclaimed and the inequality in fact existing. Ancient democracies perished in the struggle between the rich and the poor. It is therefore imperative that this conflict should not recommence. If you give the right of suffrage to all, let all have a chance of becoming owners of property. Modern democracies will not perish in civil wars, like those of Greece, if they manage to realize the ideal revealed by Christ, true Christian brotherhood. But if the antagonism between capitalists and laborers continues and becomes fiercer, it is much to be dreaded that, in Europe at least, democracy will end in Caesarism. Nations, tired of endless and issueless struggles, would sacrifice their liberty and seek rest under the shelter of despotism. This is the danger which is already threatening France.

— Emile de Laveleye, “Perils of democracy” (1889) [[source](https://archive.org/stream/theforum07newy#page/244/mode/2up)
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(Any attempt to set the clock back means revisiting this impasse.)

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