

# Democracy

*Le Frondeur*  
1981

Originally published online at the [John Gray website](#) with a note that “this text appeared in the journal *Le Frondeur* (No. 7, Spring 1981) published in Vitry.”

This text doesn't pretend to deal with the topic of democracy in an exhaustive way. It is only an outline which we hope will provoke a fruitful debate.

1. Several centuries before Christ democracy emerged in Greece as the necessary product of the dissolution of primitive relations through the development of commodity relations. Human activity was no longer directly social, it had to pass through the mediation of exchange to be recognised as social, it was fragmented by the logic of value, and consequently humans lost the power to act. Since then there has been the problem of the power to act and the problem of power. What had been divided and separated now had to be reunified, and an essentially conflict-ridden society had to be re-organised in the most harmonious way possible. In this search for reconciliation democracy was the most adequate tool found. Activity was fragmented and the exercise of power became the privileged activity of a minority.
2. However in this period at the dawn of history, democracy could only develop to a limited extent as there still persisted a degenerate form of ancient communitarian society in the village community. The atomised individual, cut off from the production of their material life, who constitutes the absolute precondition for real and unfettered development of democracy, had yet to be born.
3. After having been buried in profound apathy throughout the middle-ages, it resurfaced during the decomposition of feudalism when it [which?] was no longer suitable to maintain social coherence in the face of erosion by the capitalist movements of expropriation and evictions (severing the connection with the land). People were now reduced – or in the process of being reduced – to the state of “free” individuals, freed of all attachment and all property, in short stripped of everything. It was from this fertile soil that democracy flourished a second time growing with extraordinary vigour.
4. Following the 1789 revolution important areas still remained outside the grasp of capital, which – unable to use violence permanently – was forced to reach a temporary compromise with the representatives of those who remained embedded in the earlier social relations in order to succeed with its effective domination of society. This compromise between antagonistic classes operated through political democracy. When the proletariat rose up in 1848, this fact was recognised by the introduction of universal suffrage, and so democracy involving all the components of society was constituted. Politics is the place where different classes confront each other (the bourgeoisie, within which there are various fractions, the aristocracy, the working class, the peasants) each with the goal of using the state to further their own

interests. More precisely, the workers and peasants made the most of the bourgeoisie and aristocrats.

5. Capital through its non-exclusive domination of the social tissue, also conquered the state. Nazism, the concentration of politics at the level of the state – dictated by exceptional circumstances – is the first (imperfect) manifestation of this new reality. Although defeated, its experiences were bequeathed to the democracies.
6. Modern capital, shored up by its own – contradictory – process of unifying society, has filled politics with its particular content. Henceforth, the debate with strata of a prior mode of production gives way to a debate completely in a framework which is defined by capital. The parties all have the same goal: the management of the system. Even the means proposed differ less and less. To the extent that authority personified by the boss disappears to be replaced by economic necessities which are better accepted the more they are hidden (c.f. the limited experience of self-management) democracy tends to become totalitarian. Social democracy is achieved.
7. Democracy is a compensation for the mutilation of human beings. Its first form appeared with their separation from the primitive community. However it constituted a reconciliation with it (c.f. thesis 2). Capitalism on the contrary destroys the totality of human beings. A part of this totality re-appears as a political aspect (as in elections) which reflects their powerlessness.

The communist movement, the movement of self-dissolution of the proletariat, and consequently of all classes, is the negation in action of democracy, politics and the state.

The human community, the reconciliation of human beings with their activity, and hence with themselves and others makes all these mediations useless.

## **Table of Contents**