

# The changing face of modern governments

*an essay by David S. Gorham*

The events transpiring in the streets of Eastern Europe demonstrate to us the enormous power and efficacy that a raw, unformed democratic spirit can have. That democratic yearning and call for reform can bring down a well entrenched and powerfully armed government as it did in Poland. It can force the government to respond where there was only stone-faced intransigence before, as it did in East Germany. This is not violent revolution by night but bravery without war. The movement in the streets to demand that morally, politically and ideologically bankrupt regimes either reform or give power over to someone else, is a demand for human

government. The corruption engendered by absolute power is not only witnessed in the Communist parties of Eastern Europe but is also evident in the United States. The New York City political system has for many years been ruled by virtual one party rule in the form of the Democratic machine. The political system of that metropolis is one in which is built upon corruption, a necessary way of political life. What is the source of such corruption? In the case of both the Communist parties and the Democratic machines or any other entrenched political machines, the problem is one of power. "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely" is the oft quoted aphorism of Lord Acton. The problem of corruption is often a problem with the conception of democracy. A small group of officials enriches itself whilst the majority casts a ballot for some corrupt official. In the case of New York City there is often little choice, a choice between corruption or more corruption.

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enrich themselves at the expense of the broad spectrum of the populace.

What is required is an organic conception of democracy, which acknowledges all humans are fallible and that power is best dispersed across a broad section of people and interest. A human government which expands and contracts in concert with the human condition is essential for a healthy democracy. The principle to be put forth is one where the stress of that human condition is spread out over a wide platform of minds, attitudes, experience and knowledge. All persons are unique and all have a different experience. People are not automations and therefore no one rigid system of governance will suffice. Government should be fluid and organic, absent of stiff, mechanically engineered political systems. Dogma cannot contain human needs and aspirations.

One important suggestion which needs be made for attaining a human government is that we must place a renewed emphasis upon referendums and local plebiscites. Many of those who have a well packaged

ideology object to referendums as there is no certainty that their goals or ideologies will be the ones ultimately accepted. There is no certainty for communists, capitalist, socialists or any other ascendant ideology. The danger of dogmatic ideology maiming the society would seem to be greater where it is a small number of persons ruling. One person's frailties become magnified greatly under an elite rule. When a large number of citizens, or a more representative sample of the population is included, then the danger of ideological tyranny decreases.

The re-vitalization of citizen participation in government of course requires education. This does not mean propaganda or enforced indoctrination through a compulsory school system, but rather, freedom of information in an open society. When a government, its agencies or statutory authorities hoards information to the point that secrecy becomes a virtue, then it has ceased to represent the people it claims to. It confirms instead that it is a shadow throne, the transitory exercise of power for the sake of lifeless bureaucracy and corrupt guardianship.

David Gorham is a Law student at UNB and a regular contributor to the *Brunswickian*.

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