

# Week 1

## Reading:

### Chapter 1 (Democracy and Liberalism In Australia):

#### Democracy:

- Derived from Ancient Greek, literally translates to rule by the people.
- Direct democracy (also known as pure democracy) is a form of democracy in which people decide (e.g. vote on, form consensus on) policy initiatives directly, is not practical in large societies.
- Large modern states lean towards representative political institutions.
- Representative democracy (also indirect democracy) is a variety of democracy founded on the principle of elected officials representing a group of people.
- Main form of direct democracy in Australia is the use of referenda to change the Constitution.
- Mainly we as citizens delegate power to elected officials to make decisions on our behalf.
- Thus, democracy can be criticised for departing from the initial idea of the rule of the people.
- The term 'democracy' is now generally used to describe any political system where the will of citizens with equal political rights is reflected in law-making and governing, where this power is used indirectly or directly.
- The political systems shape is influenced by tradition, the size and nature of the political community, and ideas about politics that were dominant at crucial times in the development of each system.

#### Liberalism:

- Arose from the thoughts and writings of Locke
- The rights of individuals in relation to the state were the primary concern of reformers and revolutionaries, rather than participation in government.
- The role of Parliament was not principally to achieve widespread participation in government by citizens, but to limit the power of government in order to protect citizens rights and liberties.
- John Locke sought to limit the power of state by the recognition of rights and individual citizens.
- Lock believed that we had rights as human beings particularly with regards to life, liberty and property.
- This challenge the idea that monarchs had an automatic right to exercise absolute power over all the people in their territory.
- Citizens will obey the governments as long as it protects their rights, thus a social contract is formed.
- If and when the government infringes upon the rights of the citizens then it has violated the social contract going beyond the limits of its authority and rebellion maybe justified.
- Liberalism is a broad political ideology, a variety of thinkers may differ over important issues, however they are likely to agree on the following tenets of government:
  1. The rights of individual seasons should be respected, these include the basic freedoms of assembly, speech and religion.

2. The rule of law should ensure at the state treats everyone equally.
  3. Power should be divided.
  4. Executive and legislative functions should be separated.
  5. The government should be accountable to citizens.
  6. The judiciary should be independent of government influence.
  7. These above tenets should be secured through a written Constitution.
- These are rarely contested in modern societies.
  - Many liberals are wary of democracy because they fear that it poses a threat to the individual.
  - Just because a government may have the majority there is no guarantee it will respect individual rights and liberties.
  - This is the problem of 'tyranny of the majority', one of the many reasons liberals believe the power of governments should be limited.
  - Because the liberal safeguards associated with liberal democracy place limits on the power of the democratically elected government there is tension at the core of liberal democratic ideal.
  - However, there are positive connections between the two traditions:
    1. Certain rights and liberties must be protected for democracy to be meaningful.
    2. Individual rights and liberties seem more secure in a democracy than they would be under a dictator or hereditary leader.
    3. Democracy allows citizens to have an equal say in resolving political disagreements, thus exercising their right to suffrage.
    4. Some conceptions of democracy such as the notion of consensus democracy | Based on the notion that the minority views must be taken into account in a democracy.

### **Types of Liberal Democracy:**

#### *Parliamentary Systems-*

- Liberalism had a gradual effect on European political institutions over centuries.
- This occurred partly to the influence of the Enlightenment thinking and partly because the liberal prescription of divided power suited the rising middle class who wished to place greater limits on the power of the traditional aristocracy.
- A crucial part of this was the acceptance of liberal and humanist views of the rights and worth of the individual.
- The role of Parliament was essential to the development of European constitutional monarchies.
- In some countries monarchies were overthrown but in many there was a gradual transfer of power between monarch and parliaments overtime.
- In modern times the role of the monarch is purely ceremonial.
- These European parliaments were populated by the gentry and middle classes rather than a representative of the entire society.
- Historically representative parliament was thought the best way to protect the rights of the people.

#### *Presidential Systems:*

- The American revolution (1775-1783) gave the residents of 13 former British colonies the opportunity to build a new political system.
- Having fought a war in the name of freedom from tyranny, liberty was the highest priority for the leaders of the new nation in designing its political system.
- The American system is designed to limit the accumulation of power.

- The American Constitution separates the executive, legislative and judicial power and provides a number of checks and balances in order to limit the power of a single institution.
- The United States is the archetypal presidential democracy.
- Outside the United States presidential systems have been highly unstable.
- Many democracies limit the power of the presidency by formalising a system of power-sharing with Parliament. The best known of the semi presidential systems is France.

#### **The Evolution of Australia's Liberal Democratic System:**

- The Australian Constitution was not a product of the revolution or of institutional struggle.
- It was designed by men who have respect for both systems of government.
- The Australian Constitution says nothing about the office of Prime Minister or cabinet and very little about political parties.
- Reading the Australian Constitution gives the impression that the governor general is the most powerful actor in national politics.
- Australia was among the first countries to extend the electoral franchise to all adult men and women with the exception of Indigenous Australians.
- Indigenous Australians only gained the vote in the 1960s.
- Introducing salaries for members of parliament was also an important step in ensuring that those from background other than the wealthiest in society could afford to run for parliament.
- The power of the high court underlines the limits to the Democratic authority of Parliament.
- The people are sovereign within the Australian political system.

#### **The Limits of Liberal Democracy:**

- Although it took a different forms around the world the liberal democratic ideal has come to enjoy widespread popularity by the end of the 20th century.
- Critics argue that liberal democracy is an abandonment of the democratic ideal; its commitment to democratic ideas of equality and participation too weak.
- While a commitment to human equality is implicit in liberalism it took several societies hundreds of years to ensure that all members of the political community were treated equally.
- Until the 20th century the right to vote was a given to a minority of the population.
- Votes for women became common around the 1900s.
- Free and fair elections give governments the authority to act on behalf citizens, citizen involvement is limited.
- Rousseau argued that true democracy could only be achieved with the direct participation of citizens in the decisions that affect them.
- In civil society citizens and interest groups are free to raise and debate issues, organise themselves into trade unions or protest government decisions.
- Participation in politics is time consuming and so delegating that responsibility to elected representatives maybe a rational response to the demands of a modern society rather than a democratic deficit.
- It is important that parliaments are responsive to the wishes of the people.
- The elitist view of democracy sees voters as powerless because the power elite places and limits the types of issues and options that constitute political debate.