



Democracy in the West is Left Hopelessly Exposed

The story unfolding over the past two weeks shows no sign of ending soon, as the US Federal Electoral Commission and the British Electoral Commission both open investigations into recently alleged breaches of electoral law. At the centre of the story are the activities of a British digital services company Cambridge Analytica, along with an unfolding network of linked companies, who are accused of using psychological profiling techniques to contact and influence voters in recent American presidential elections and the British European Union referendum.

The discussion in the media is focused on the complicated campaign funding laws in America and Britain, and how the companies obtained the data relating to voters, without their permission. The scandal had also exposed the company had boasted of manufacturing fake news to influence elections around the world.

Comment:

The most important story, however, is not the intriguing details of this latest tale of electoral fraud, even as it comes right on the heels of allegations of Russian interference in British and American elections. What is more important to ask is why there needs to be such complicated funding and foreign interference laws to protect the elections?

It is well known that US elections are fought on the basis of enormous campaign funding, increasing exponentially year on year. Big businesses donate to their preferred candidate, directly and indirectly, in the hope of favourable policies. The net result is that the more money you have to spend, then the more you can influence the election. The same is true in Britain, although the sums involved are less.

The fantasy of democracy is that all votes are equal - "one man - one vote" is the slogan. The reality is that one very rich man can effectively buy a lot of votes, meaning that his voting power is wholly unequal to the rest. This is very different to the role that democracy plays in popular imagination, fuelled by Hollywood, that it is a supreme ideal of justice and accountability, worth dying for to defend.

So important is the dream of ballot-box accountability that most citizens have outsourced all political participation to professional politicians, believing that they can hold them to account once every four years. To make matters worse, large media organisations have long controlled what is said publicly about policies and the politicians, so political discourse of the people has also been outsourced to them. The stark reality, on the other hand, is that even on those rare occasions, the powerful elite leave nothing to chance, so ordinary people have practically no ability to account the political class. The electoral rules themselves and these reported attempts at influencing elections through campaign driven by psychological profiling, all expose how ludicrously simple elections are to manipulate, given the right resources.

The complicated election campaign funding rules are written to balance the powers between the wealthy capitalists and to prevent any one of them trampling on the interests of the others. Ordinarily people and their interests do not factor into this equation. The current news of Cambridge Analytica and the consequent unearthing of shady election practices are about US president Trump's backers and the pro-leave Brexiteers attempting to steal some of the influence of the traditional media conglomerates, and the establishment pushing them back.

Democracy in theory has always been about the mighty dominating the weak the will of the masses trumping that of the few. In practice, it will always be the will of the mighty few dominating that of the powerless masses. Democracy brings far less accountability of the political class; indeed, it causes the creation of a political class due to the people being satisfied by very little in terms of participation and accountability.

Western secular liberals often like to point accusations fingers at Islam, saying that women are excluded from political participation. The reality is that all people, men and women, are excluded from meaningful political participation in democracy, while Islam demands true participation in politics of every man and woman. Islam made political thinking and awareness an individual duty on all Muslims, and accounting the rulers by enjoining the good and forbidding the evil a collective duty on all Muslims.

As long as there are democracies, you will continue to find masses of people enslaved to the will of a powerful few for as long as they believe the popular lies of freedom and accountability there. Only the Islamic systems, implemented by the Khilafah (Caliphate) on the way of the Prophethood, can liberate the people from such enslavement, giving them genuine opportunities to account the rulers and to participate in taking care of the affairs of the people according the Quran and the Sunnah of Muhammad (saw).

Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by

Yahya Nisbet

Media Representative of Hizb ut Tahrir in Britain