

## I. TYPES OF GOVERNMENT (IDEOLOGIES)

### A. DEMOCRACY

The term **democracy** comes from two Greek words: the word *demos*, which means "people", and the word *kratos*, which means "rule". So when the two words are put together, "democracy" means "rule by the people".

Democracy in its purest form is a kind of government in which the people rule themselves. Of course, we all know that this is not literally possible in a large, modern, and complex society. Simply put, the populations of modern countries are simply too large for each person to have a direct say in the everyday affairs of the government. Imagine every single person in Canada (all 32 million of us) going to Ottawa to make decisions for the country. It would be chaos! So, in today's world, democracy means that the public are ruled by representatives - representatives are people especially chosen by the public to speak and make decisions in government on behalf of the citizens.

Democracy is an ideal. In this context we can view an ideal as an attempt at achieving perfection. By Grade Eleven surely you have observed situations related to government and democracy when you would like to scream, "this is not the way its supposed to work", or "that's not fair". Ideals in any context are seldom entirely achieved. Does this mean we should abandon ideals? By no means! Winston Churchill, the famous Second World War Prime Minister of Great Britain and defender of democracy against Nazi aggression, once said: "Democracy is the worst form of government I know - until I consider the alternatives".

A modern democratic system has the following elements:

1. The most fundamental aspect of a democracy is the **constitution**. A constitution is a set of rules that represent the essential principles (the ideas and values) of the nation that both the government and the public must follow. In reality, the constitution severely restricts what the government can and cannot do. One of the most important functions of a constitution is to limit the powers of all levels of government. The government cannot violate the rules set out in the constitution. Should the elected government overstep its authority the courts can rule that decision is a violation of the constitution and the decision is revoked. In summary, the constitution is so important to the function of a democracy because between elections the people have given their government much power. Without a constitution that power could be abused.
2. Human rights are enshrined (protected) in the constitution. Human rights are also often referred to as civil rights. In a genuine democracy, citizens may go about their daily lives without having to worry about whether their rights are protected. Some of the most important human rights in a country like Canada are:
  - a) Basic freedoms like the freedom of speech, the press, religion and a long list of other freedoms protecting citizens from various forms of discrimination. These freedoms must be in the constitution (as opposed to just a set of laws passed by parliament) because laws are easily changed, while the constitution is very difficult to change.
  - b) In Canada, citizens' rights are protected in that portion of the Constitution called the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, commonly referred

to simply as the "Charter." In a multicultural country like Canada, one very important role of the Charter is to protect the rights of minorities. Because in a democracy we vote, and the vote of the majority is then accepted, it is possible that the rights of the minority could be abused. Many aspects of the Charter were written to prevent this mistreatment. The philosophers who defined democratic practices referred to this type of neglect as the "tyranny of the majority."

3. In a democracy, regularly scheduled, multi-party (known as bi-partisan) elections are held. Without giving the voters a real choice between at least two political parties in the electoral process, democracy cannot function.
4. Universal **suffrage** (the right to vote) is practiced. This means that all adults can vote.
5. The judicial (courts) and the political (parliament) roles of government are separated. For example, judges in Canada cannot be removed from office unless they commit a criminal offence. This prevents the government from dismissing a judge if he/she rules against the government.
6. A country like Canada is known as a federal union. This means that we have several levels of government (i.e., national, provincial and municipal). An important role of the constitution in countries such as this is to carefully define the powers of each level of government.

In order for a country to be considered democratic, all of the items in the above list must be present. Some so-called democracies do not have all of these items and are thereby known by various other names. These 'partial' democracies are often referred to as "strong-man governments." They usually have a constitution and elections, but the government does not follow all the aspects of that constitution.

## B. COMMUNISM

Karl Marx (1818-83) was the "father" of communism. He was certainly not the first communist, but he deserves this reputation because he was the first to unify the whole package of ideas that represent communism. He believed that it was the duty of the state to develop economic equality so that all the people would share equally the wealth generated in a country. This conviction led him to believe that the capitalist system must be overthrown. After the communist revolution, communism would be practiced in such a way that there would be no classes of people like the "rich", "the middle class", or the "poor". Everyone would have approximately the same amount of wealth.

First, it is important to understand the difference between capitalism and communism. **Capitalism** is an economic system in which individuals or companies are free to compete with one another to produce goods and services for profit. In this type of system, the government does not interfere very much in the economy. The market (supply and demand) determines prices, and individuals are free to buy and sell whatever they want. In the capitalist system there are no limits on the amount of wealth an individual can accumulate. In a capitalist system it is common to have "wealthy", "middle", and "poor" classes of people. On the other hand, **communism** is an economic system based on community ownership of all property and the means of production (the facilities that make things). This means that individuals and companies are not free to pursue business in any way they want; rather, the commu-

nity of workers makes decisions about how much can be sold, to whom, and at what prices. Karl Marx predicted that one day the *proletariat* (meaning the workers of the world) would unite and overthrow the *bourgeoisie* (meaning the managers and owners). This violent revolution would be followed by a new system, which would eventually result in a communist state. In theory, a true communist society would mean that there would be no more private property. In other words, individuals could no longer own anything—everything would be owned by the state and divided up accordingly. However, throughout this Social Studies Eleven course it will become evident that communist governments have not been able to live up to Marx's ideals. Communism is made up of the following elements:

1. In communist countries, the government is tightly controlled by a small group of people who are members of the Communist Party. Very few people have a say in what the government does. During elections, citizens can only vote for a member of the Communist Party because there are no other parties to vote for.
2. In addition, many of the freedoms we enjoy in a democracy do not exist in the communist system. For example, communist governments restrict all publications, radio shows, and television shows (this restriction is called censorship).
3. In reality, even though economic equality may be achieved in part through social programs such as education, medical care, and housing, there are often many examples of situations in which the rich (usually high-ranking party officials) get richer and the poor get poorer—the very situation that communism is intended to eliminate.
4. Essentially, in a communist system, individual liberty is sacrificed for what is supposed to be the good of the entire state.

### C. SOCIALISM

The term socialism can be confusing. In what once were communist countries people used the term socialism interchangeably with the term communism. In North America we use the term quite differently. In general, we use it when we want to refer to a very mild form of communism. When you study the list below you should remember the key features of a communist state for comparison.

#### 1. WHAT IS SOCIALISM?

##### a) The Economy

In a communist state the government runs *all* aspects of the economy. In a socialist state the government runs only some aspects of the economy, but free enterprise (that is, capitalism) still functions. Usually the government will own or operate public utilities (e.g., public transit, the phone system, electricity distribution). In British Columbia for example, the government owns the British Columbia Ferry Corporation, B.C. Hydro and ICBC. It runs these on behalf of the people of this province. Does this make British Columbia a socialist state? Only marginally. Socialism, as referred to in our culture, is a matter of degree. So it would be safe to say that we have a few elements of socialism, but on the whole our economy is capitalist.

##### b) Ownership

In a communist state the individual is allowed to own only the barest essentials. Diehard communists used to say somewhat with tongue-in-cheek

that the only things an individual should own is their toothbrush and their hair brush. In a socialist state the individual is allowed to own many things- these things are generally known as consumer goods. So it is safe to say that in a socialist state people can own a car, their house and an indefinite number of other items.

### c) Government

Again we must remember that in our society socialism is a relative term. Some governments have only a few elements of socialism (e.g., Canada, British Columbia) while others have many more. Sweden is a good example of a country that has many elements of socialism. This brings us to an element of socialism that often confuses students. Communist governments allow only one political party and are generally known as totalitarian. (See the first page of Chapter Four for a definition of totalitarianism). Often we simply call such states dictatorships. Socialism, on the other hand, can function very well in democratic states, and in fact most of the time socialist states are democratic. People either elect a party that believes in socialism or they chose not to go that route and elect a party that does not believe in socialism. For example, when a socialist government faces an election and they lose, they then resign to be replaced by (often) a non-socialist party. They do this because they are not dictators, but believe in the democratic process.

One of the most important things you can remember about socialism is that it is a relative term. Relative in this context means that this word is used in comparison with something else or in proportion to something else. A state, therefore, can be mildly socialist all the way to extremely socialist. Communism, on the other hand, is not used as a relative term. A state is either termed 'communist' or not.

### D. FASCISM

*Fascis* is a Latin term, which refers to a bundle of rods, tied firmly together, with an axe coming out of the centre. This image was originally intended to symbolize the absolute authority of the state in ancient Rome. The word "fascism" was first used by Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) during his reign as the leader of Italy from 1922-43. **Fascism** as witnessed in Italy and Germany was made up of the following elements:

1. A belief in action over thought. This notion is also called pragmatism. Put in everyday language we would say, "If it works, do it." This belief rules out any decision-making based on moral convictions or principles. (This is in direct contrast to a democracy, where the constitution lays out the convictions and principles the nation must follow.) This belief was responsible for many of the unsavoury aspects of life in a fascist state.
2. A belief in extreme nationalism (love of country and willingness to sacrifice virtually everything for it).
3. A belief that the purpose of the individual is to serve the state, and that obedience and service are the ultimate duties of the citizens. In a democracy this relationship between the individual and the state is reversed, where at least in theory the state is to serve the individual.
4. A belief that all economic and intellectual resources of the state are to be directed towards the building of a proud, united country with a very

strong military. The ultimate goal of a fascist state was an imperial war of conquest. In such a war the fascist state would conquer another country and then enslave the people to benefit the conquerors. Largely, it was this aspect of fascism that led to the Second World War in Europe.

It is important to note that the type of fascist government found in Italy and Germany in the 1930s no longer exists. You may encounter the term, however, in reference to governments that maintain strict control over intellectual and economic life, and emphasize the development of strong militaries.

## II. THE CANADIAN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

The primary function of government is to ensure the well-being of its nation and citizens. It is important to note that laws and regulations alone cannot accomplish this feat. Although most people think of government primarily as a system of rules, its role is actually quite complex. In Canada, the government does maintain order in society through laws and policing services; but it also provides us with services such as health care, education, welfare, employment insurance, and pension plans. In addition, it maintains our rights and freedoms, such as the right to speak freely, the right to an education (in English or in French) and the right to a certain standard of living. You will find out more about these rights and others in the section on Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms. First, let's look at some of the basic terms that will help you to understand how the Canadian government functions:

### A. DEFINITION OF TERMS

#### 1. GOVERNOR GENERAL

In Canada, the monarch (King or Queen of England) is represented by the **Governor General**. The Governor General is chosen by the Prime Minister, and appointed by the Queen. He/she "governs" for a term of approximately five years. Although the Governor General announces many government decisions, he/she acts almost entirely on the advice of the Cabinet Ministers in the House of Commons. That is, the Governor General only very rarely makes decisions. He/she usually makes formal announcements of decisions that have already been made by others in government.

#### 2. HEAD OF STATE

In Canada the **head of state** is the nation's supreme representative, but has no political powers. In Canada, the Governor General is the head of state. As mentioned above, in Canada, this is largely a symbolic position.

#### 3. HEAD OF GOVERNMENT

The **head of government** in Canada is the **Prime Minister**—the political leader of the government of Canada. The Prime Minister is the head of a political party and has the responsibility of governing the country. Because the Prime Minister controls the Cabinet and thereby the House of Commons he/she has much power in the Canadian political system.

#### 4. PARLIAMENT

**Parliament** is the name given to the group of representatives who govern the country. Parliament is the branch of government that makes laws. A **Member of Parliament (MP)** is elected for each **riding** (an area containing approximately 100,000 people). Other terms used in place of riding are constituency, electoral district, or seat. The Prime Minister is the top executive of parliament. Below