

Towards citizen-led democracy

Call to action by iniref, the campaign for direct democracy in Britain

Summary

Socially responsible people are invited to join the growing movement to strengthen democracy and empower citizens in local and central politics. Popular movements in Germany, Netherlands and eastern european countries have in recent years succeeded to win rights to “more” citizen-led democracy. Public protest has commonly been ignored by governments and “big business” but citizen law-making can overrule government and regulate companies. We describe the “essential tools” of direct, citizen-led democracy: Initiative, Referendum-on demand, Recall of elected politicians. With the tactic of protest-vote, we show how to pressurise parliament and simultaneously raise public awareness of the need for “citizen-led democracy”. Links to background information and contact for support are supplied.

With a plan to exploit the imminent United Kingdom 2010 general election, socially responsible people are invited to join the growing movement for real democracy and empowerment of citizens in local and central politics.



Copenhagen December 2009

With the advent of the Chilcot Iraq war inquiry and before, many critics claim that our system of government failed by ignoring around one million protesters against the threatened invasion of Iraq in February 2003. Can we improve our democracy and system of government in order to avoid similar events in future? Here is a suggestion about how to do this along with a tactical idea about how to “vote” for stronger democracy.

Most politicians oppose strong democracy, the sort in which the electorate, citizens are able to participate effectively. Once elected, politicians want to be in charge without having to worry about interference by the people who elected them. The people's view is that a bit more control of politics and the ability to better steer our own public affairs would be good for all of us.

How can we organise real empowerment? Are there ways to enable the people and electorate to “set the points” of public policy in vital areas such as war and peace, environment, health and education and finance? Can we start to decide on real public problems and issues, going far beyond electing politicians in the forlorn hope that they may do (at least some of) what we want? We answer all of these questions with a big “Yes: We need radical, citizen-led democracy”.

What’s in it for socially active people and groups ?

quote

Elsewhere in Europe, there are campaigns to develop democratic practice beyond the apparent full stop of a ballot every five years or so. In Germany especially, the movement to create institutional structures for Direct Democracy, has been active for over twenty years. Although various groups differ in their aims and strategies they share a common end to make a 'citizen's vote' a part of daily political life.

'Citizens vote' is essentially referendum from below, the enshrinement in law of the right of any group of citizens to call a referendum when, and whatever subject, they wish. The first realisation of this system was in Bavaria in October 1995, and in the year that followed over 100 citizen's votes were organised on issues ranging from opposition to a marina to a proposal for building new kindergartens. It has had profound impact on people's participation in the running of their villages, towns and boroughs.

Next time you are asked to sign a petition against the closure of your local library, imagine how it would be if you knew that (ed: if) over 10% of the people in your ward or parish signed the same piece of paper, a vote could be called on that one issue. A date would be set, the issue properly debated in the local press, a ballot taken and the result - hopefully against the closure of the library - was legally binding. *unquote* From: Do it yourself democracy. Anonymous online publication 1997.

After the experience of failed protest against the war against Iraq, nuclear/abc armament and environmental destruction we must consider new ways to influence public policy. Protest and demonstrations may change public opinion but can be ignored or „cleverly“ manipulated by politicians. The citizen-led „initiative“ can be used to put forward radical proposals and force governments to comply with them.

Even a few politicians have expressed support!

An example: Not long ago an ex-minister of the british Labour party suggested that our democratic deficit could be improved if “citizens have a right to call a referendum on any issue they like, so long as they gather enough signatures. (...) This really would be direct democracy in action. Suppose (...) we were to require a 5% threshold: that would require nearly 2 million people to sign up – an exacting demand, but by no means a prohibitive one. It would radically transform our politics.”

What are the essential tools of citizen-led democracy?

The three main elements which we at INIREF <http://www.iniref.org/> propose are:

1) The Initiative. A proposal which has been endorsed by an agreed (large) number of voters must within reasonable time be debated in Parliament or Council. If Parliament (or Council) rejects or fails to address the proposal then a plebiscite ("referendum") must be held.

2) The Veto Referendum. A law or ruling made by Parliament or government must be put to referendum if a large number of voters demand this.

Once we have “1)” we can push through many further reforms such as

3) The Recall. Members of parliament may be dismissed in the period between elections. An agreed large number of electors from the MP's constituency may demand that a ballot be held to decide whether the MP should be dismissed. A dismissed MP would be disqualified from a resulting by-election.

To achieve reforms like this, faced by opposition of the powers-that-be, will require a broad campaign of information and persuasion. Below we outline an IDEA FOR ACTION, some tactics for the coming few months.



Direct Democracy Works!

Idea for action: open campaign around UK parliamentary election expected in 2010
<http://www.iniref.org/carta.htm>

The election-campaign plan-of-action

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Register as a voter early or check that you are still on the roll.

Select one or more parliamentary candidates who could perhaps win your support.

Approach candidates and sitting MPs (see link to Open Campaign below) and ask them to sign our **Statement On Democracy** (currently on our front page)

Suggest that they publicise this **Statement On Democracy** and place a signed copy on their web site ;-). If you agree with their politics then consider voting for these pro-citizen-democracy politicians.

Tell candidates who refuse to sign and refuse to support the direct democracy campaign that as a result they will NOT receive your vote.

If there are no suitable candidates standing in your constituency then use your vote to protest! Do NOT vote for any candidate. Write on your ballot slip, REFERENDUM ON DEMAND! and DIRECT DEMOCRACY NOW! Drop your ballot slip into the box. If enough people do this word will get around, other people will join in and perhaps some politicians will be persuaded to change their ways ;-). Future candidates will be more likely to support direct democracy reforms.

Tell your friends to join in! Use internet, mobiles etc., facebook, twitter and co. to spread this plan-of-action!

LINKS

Climate/environment success with direct democracy <http://www.iniref.org/alpine.html>

Direct democracy across the world

<http://democracybythepeople.googlepages.com/direct-participatory-democracy-links>
DEMOCRACY BY THE PEOPLE and LA ESQUINA CALIENTE (World)

OPEN CAMPAIGN

<http://www.iniref.org/carta.htm> election campaign call

INIREF web site index to information about direct democracy

<http://www.iniref.org/index.enter.html>

CONTACT

Information and help can be found via e-mail [info AT iniref.org](mailto:info@iniref.org) and web site <http://www.iniref.org/>

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