

Original Article



Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Is That Possible?

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Abstract:

This motto of the French Revolution has had a major influence on the political and social development of mankind. Human rights were formulated and integrated into the constitutions of many countries. Nevertheless, today we see that humanity is moving away from these democratic principles. The question therefore arises as to whether these three principles can be implemented together in reality. The answer is: not under the given conditions. Freedom and equality are only compatible if fraternity also exists as the basis for living together. Fraternity demands solidarity with the weaker, the minorities, those without the power to assert themselves. However, in representative democracies - apart from dictatorships - the strongest prevail, they become rich and gain power. It is therefore worth considering whether aristocracy would not be the more suitable form of government.

Introduction

There is a popular saying: "If you are not a socialist at 18, you have no compassion, but if you are still a socialist at 60, you are out of touch with reality." That's what happened to the author. The theory and intentions of socialism to solve many of humanity's problems seemed plausible, but unfortunately the reality in the countries that tried or are still trying to put "real existing socialism" into practice does not correspond to this. A self-appointed elite regularly took power.

The French Revolution of 1789 was probably the most significant turning point in recent history. The revolution had set itself the goal of turning the three objectives of liberty, equality and fraternity into reality, in opposition to the absolutist rule of the nobility, the clergy and the king. As we know, it failed. However, failure is not proof of impossibility. The goals had been partially anticipated in the American Constitution of 1776, although in the USA it had not been a popular uprising, as no codified form of government had preceded it. There was an opportunity for a new beginning, and this was seized (Figure 1).



Figure 1, France's legacy to humanity

The Revolution

The French Revolution from 1789 to 1799 is one of the most momentous events in modern European history. The abolition of the feudal-absolutist corporative state and the propagation and implementation of fundamental values and ideas of the Enlightenment as goals of the Revolution - in particular human rights - were among the causes of far-reaching power and socio-political changes in Europe and had a decisive influence on the modern understanding of democracy (1,2,3,4,5).

From the French Enlightenment of the 18th century, two thinkers stand out because of their particular importance for different phases of the French Revolution: Montesquieu's model of a separation of powers between legislative, executive and judicial power was applied during the first phase of the revolution, which led to the creation of a constitutional monarchy (6).

Rousseau provided important impulses for the radical democratic second phase of the revolution, among other things by seeing property as the cause of inequality between people and criticizing laws that protected unjust property relations. He propagated the subordination of the individual to the general will (*volonté générale*), rejected the separation of powers and proposed the election of judges by the people (7).

After the rural population had been reassured in this way, the National Assembly continued its work on a Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, which was adopted on August 26, 1789 and began with the assurance: "From their birth, men are and remain free and equal in rights." Among other things, property, security, the right to resist oppression, constitutional principles, freedom of religion, opinion and the press, as well as popular sovereignty and the separation of powers were also guaranteed. According to Furet and Richet: "These seventeen short articles of wonderful style and intellectual density are no longer an expression of the cautious tactics and timidity of the bourgeoisie: by freely defining its aims and its achievements, the Revolution gives itself, in the most natural way, a banner that must be respected by the whole world." Bourgeois individualism had thus received its Magna Charta under public law (8,9).

Although Napoleon Bonaparte later crowned himself emperor, he spread the ideas of the revolution throughout Europe. He introduced the "Napoleonic Code" in the countries he conquered. This gave these countries a civil code for the first time, which guaranteed human rights for the people and removed the arbitrary rule of the nobility and clergy (10,11).

The Motto

The concepts of liberty, equality and fraternity, which Fénelon associated with each other at the end of the 17th century, became widespread during the Enlightenment phase of the 18th century (12). During the French Revolution, "liberty, equality, fraternity" was the most common slogan invoked. In a speech on the organization of the National Guard in December 1790, Maximilien de Robespierre

advocated writing the words "The French people" and "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" on flags and uniforms (13).

Like many symbols of the revolution, this motto was forgotten during the subsequent Empire period (14). During the February Revolution of 1848, it was taken up again and was now given a religious component: priests celebrated the Christ of brotherhood and blessed the liberty trees that were planted at this time. When the Constitution of 1848 was drafted, the motto "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" was elevated to the principle of the Republic.

The slogan was initially shunned by the Second Empire. Under Napoleon III, *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* was declared its slogan more than 50 years after the French Revolution (15). However, there was still some resistance, even among other supporters of the Republic: "solidarity" was sometimes preferred to "equality", which implied social leveling, while the Christian connotation of fraternity did not meet with general approval. On the occasion of the July 14 celebrations in 1880, the motto reappeared on the gables of public buildings. The motto was incorporated into the Constitution of 1946 and enshrined in the Constitution of the Fifth Republic of 1958. Today, the motto is part of France's national heritage.

So far - so good. Many countries around the world have adopted similar constitutions and describe themselves as representative democracies. Switzerland is regarded as a role model here, as it has had a direct democracy in the canton of Appenzell for centuries, and the nobility and clergy have been out of power for a similarly long time. In addition, the entire population must vote on important decisions. A successful model. Furthermore, Switzerland is exemplary in integrating different ethnic groups and languages by dividing the country into cantons, which have extensive autonomy. The government is always composed in proportion to the election results of the parties (according to the so-called magic formula)(16).

If this model were applied to the many countries in which majorities and minorities of ethnic groups and religions fight each other, the causes of many tensions, including civil wars, would no longer exist.

More recently, however, we have noticed that the preferences of the populations of many countries are moving away from the desire for democracy towards the famous "strong man". We must therefore question the three parts of the motto "liberty, equality and fraternity": are they feasible and practicable together?

Freedom and Equality

Let us first consider the compatibility of freedom and equality. Are they in harmony with each other? Let's do a thought experiment: let's imagine that a group of people start from near zero under the same conditions. They have complete freedom to realize themselves. What would it look like after a certain time? We would see that the equality has dissolved and there are considerable differences. The financially gifted (e.g. good salespeople) would be rich, the untalented poor. The extroverts and rhetorically gifted would have taken over political power, the introverts (e.g. book readers) would be powerless. Conclusion: Freedom

leads to inequality if no rules take into account the talents and strengthen and protect the less assertive people.

The two talents listed here (financial and rhetorical) are also predestined for success in our society today. The rich can buy politicians who then tell the people their fairy tales... But where are the musically gifted, the scientifically gifted, the skilled craftsmen and others? What use are high taxes for the rich if they can avoid them and still become trillionaires (soon to be trillionaires)? Under our current conditions, freedom is predominantly abused by those who have the necessary greed for money and power.

Let us remember: even Gautama Buddha (17) declared greed to be the most important negative driving force, and even Plato in his *Politeia* recommended that only those who do not seek power should be given it (18). Even before Jesus Christ, the Jewish Rabbi Hillel declared that the Golden Rule of the Sermon on the Mount, not to inflict on anyone what one does not want, could ensure peace among people (19). And Mahatma Gandhi declared passive social resistance to be more sensible than fighting (20).

We are a long way from this in our societies, and people are correspondingly disillusioned with democracy as a form of government. The way to come to power today starts with political party meetings in the back rooms of pubs, and whoever has the "biggest mouth" gets their way. He is hardly the best, but presumably strives for power. Wouldn't a genuine aristocracy (ancient Greek, from ἄριστος *aristos*: the best), i.e. the rule of the best, be the better form of government?

Fraternity

There is a solution to this dilemma through the integration of fraternity, also known as solidarity. If all people were like brothers and sisters who did not take advantage of each other, a democracy that includes freedom and equality would be feasible. Increasingly, the opposite is the case: whereas in the past an egocentric or fraudster could not do much in a limited environment, today the Internet and e-mails provide him with ways to reach a large number of people. The same applies to hackers.

In some countries, politicians are trying to counter this dilemma by introducing a social points system. Every good deed scores positive points, every transgression negative points. If the number of points drops, civil liberties are no longer available to the person concerned. Of course, this requires complete monitoring and control, and the data is entered into an electronic ID card or a cell phone app. The result is like Orwell's "1984" (21). Of course this is not desirable, but it is the plan. It is reminiscent of the "terror of virtue" of the French Revolution (22). Dissenters will not die by the guillotine, but through social isolation. The military and police prevent a civil war through constant deployment.

Without fraternity, freedom and equality cannot be reconciled. The latter can be introduced into society through laws and regulations and, above all, by reducing them to the essentials. Fraternity, however, cannot be decreed; it is undermined by fundamentalism and fanaticism, characteristics that are becoming increasingly widespread.

What can we do, what will happen?

It should be noted that it is not possible to implement the revolutionary motto under today's conditions and circumstances. We are increasingly living in Old Testament conditions based on the principle of revenge: "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth". But why have the teachings of the great teachers in human history, which were all geared towards humanity, not been able to prevail? Why have Christian countries and rulers had the largest share of all wars for around 1,700 years? Why were the teachings of Jesus Christ not only not implemented, but counteracted (23)?

Religions and churches have largely lost their authority within the so-called 1st world, as they bless the weapons of both warring parties. And they have no objection to killing in war being described as a heroic deed, but killing in the private sphere as murder.

Perhaps the greed for power and money was not only a priority for rulers and governments, but also for religions and churches... In any case, we no longer hear the cry in them as we did in impoverished Europe after the Second World War: "Never again war", but a "just war" has become conceivable and socially acceptable again. If Jesus Christ were to carry out his promised return in spirit today, he would have to send a clean-up squad first. Since he will probably not do this, it is the task of humanity to develop upwards. If it fails to do so, the old cosmic saying applies: "Those who do not want to learn must feel".

Negative forces on our planet are striving for a reduction in humanity; plans to this effect can easily be found on the internet (24). The suspicion could arise that the positive forces do not necessarily want to prevent this, as the potential for aggression of a smaller humanity would probably be lower after the parts that are eager to fight and wage war have killed each other. This would make an upward development of the "vibration" of humanity more realistic.

Conclusion

The motto of the French Revolution "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" was of great social and political significance for the modern era. It developed a dynamic out of the static rule of the nobility and clergy. The people were finally given meaning, and all people were regarded equally as children of God or as parts of nature. However, the democracies that actually exist have not necessarily developed positively, as surveys show that populist movements are becoming increasingly significant and that the separation of legislative, executive and judicial powers is being broken down in some places. It is shown here that freedom and equality can only be realized together if there is also fraternity and solidarity among people. However, this is hardly ever the case: "homo homini lupus" (25). This means that a genuine aristocracy as the rule of the wisest would be the most likely form of state if we do not want to accept chaos, civil wars and wars.

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