

On Participation

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Of all the dangerous thoughts and explosive ideas abroad in the world today, by far the most subversive is that of democracy. Taken seriously, the idea of democracy threatens every established elite of privilege or power, all hierarchy and deference, the legitimacy of virtually every government in the world. It undermines the ideological support of bureaucratic state capitalism as much as that of bureaucratic state socialism. That is why governing and privileged strata everywhere seek to suppress the least sign of a genuinely democratic movement, and why those who would fight against oppression must take the idea most seriously. At first glance, democracy may seem a battle long won, but that is only because we pay lip service to the term without thinking about its meaning, let alone trying to live by its implications. The idea of democracy is the cutting edge of radical criticism, the best inspiration for change toward a more humane world, the revolutionary idea of our time.

The basic idea is simple: people can and should govern themselves. They do not need specially bred or anointed rulers, nor a special caste or class to run their affairs. Everyone has the capacity for autonomy, even quite ordinary people—the uneducated, the poor, housewives, laborers, peasants, the outsiders and castoffs of society. Each is capable not merely of self-control, of privately taking charge of his own life, but also of self-government, of sharing in the deliberate shaping of their common life. Exercising this capacity is prerequisite both to the freedom and full development of each, and to the freedom and justness of the community.

Implicit in that simple democratic creed is a more complex understanding of what it means to be human, simultaneously both creature and creator of history. We are the species that makes itself, collectively, through the gradual accretion of technology, custom, and civilization. We are all involved in that process, but our individual contribution is minute and, for the most part, the inadvertent byproduct of our intentional activities. The opportunities available to each and the limits on private freedom to pursue personal goals are set by social conditions, which are humanly produced and sustained, yet not in our control.

It is only in political activity that we sometimes can recognize those conditions as human creations, take charge of our history-making, deliberate about what we are doing, and set policy for ourselves. Only public deliberation and political action allow citizens to realize—both to make real and to become aware of—their dignity and powers as responsible agents and judges. And only thus can a community achieve justice. Through participation, the needs of all and the unique perspective of each are taken into account.

We shall not advocate this creed, but presume it. We address those who already share it, or would share it if only they could persuade themselves of its contemporary relevance, its feasibility under modern conditions. The latter group, we suspect, is large, for we have all been schooled to a prudent resignation in this matter: the voices consigning democracy to a golden but irretrievable past are legion, and they come as much from the left as from the right. Participatory democracy, they say, may have made sense long ago, in small and simple societies whose citizens met under the village oak, but it is irrelevant to governing, or mobilizing masses in a modern nation-state with its huge population, mass communications, nationally and internationally organized economic structures, and enormous technical complexity. Here only hierarchy, centralization, bureaucracy, and expertise make sense. Even those who would redirect society in radical ways must adapt to these requirements. Mass apathy can only be countered by disciplined organization; establishment technocrats must be matched by radical experts, established ideology by radical propaganda.

Genuine and serious obstacles do challenge the realization of democracy today. But the notion that it is impossible is an illusion, largely self-induced among would-be democrats; conceding it makes it self-fulfilling. The conviction of democracy's irrelevance has many origins, but surely one is the unthinking acceptance of a conceptual framework formulated by the enemies of democracy and derived from a tradition that has, on the whole, sought to prevent rather than encourage participation. Even on the left, our understanding of democracy is captive to the currently dominant liberal conception of politics as a competitive struggle among self-interested individuals over who will make the rules allocating "values." Politics concerns "who governs," which means determining "who gets what, when, how." For all but a few professionals, it is a remote, disagreeable, strictly instrumental activity. So democracy is assimilated into representation by way of the division of labor: professionals take care of politics so that the rest of us are free for more gratifying and gainful activities. Even radicals, sharing these assumptions, often seek to mobilize power in the interest of the oppressed, rather than involving them directly in democratic political action. In this perspective, fellow citizens are at best useful means, more often competitors and obstacles; and the public good is simply an aggregation of individual interests.

But this liberal perspective also offers a traditional countertheme, familiar

from grade-school civics classes and patriotic ceremonies but taken seriously by almost no one. This minor theme insists that there is indeed a public good to which all are obligated, duty requiring the subordination of personal preference and private interest. Here citizenship is less a privilege than a burden: the civic duty to vote, keep informed, pay taxes, obey the law, even to "lay down one's life in the service of his country."

This countertheme is ostensibly opposed, yet actually complementary to the dominant understanding. The one construes politics in terms of self-interest, the other in terms of self-sacrifice. Yet both assume that politics is disagreeable; neither takes it as intrinsically gratifying or valuable, or recognizes its radical potential. Democracy is bound to be distorted when viewed through these lenses. If politics is simply the pursuit of self-interest, active citizen participation will seem so potentially disruptive of order and communal ties that only a unanimously harmonious community can afford it. If politics is self-sacrifice, democratic participation will seem a burden to be reluctantly accepted or cynically dodged, and the public good will seem external to the self. Unless an alternative is found to this dilemma, participatory democracy cannot be achieved.

Lacking an alternative, even the friends of democracy often define it in ways that make it seem utopian, utterly irrelevant to the real needs of ordinary people. This essay will examine two examples of such theorizing, both valuable contributions from whose limitations we can learn: the work of Hannah Arendt and Jane Mansbridge. In criticizing their ideas, we begin to develop an alternative and less crippling conceptualization. It will not remove the real obstacles in the way of democracy today, but it can dispel some problems and clarify our goal.

Hannah Arendt wanted to restore appreciation of public freedom, participatory citizenship, the capacity for action.¹ Believing that those ideas have become almost incomprehensible to us, she invoked the ancient Greek understanding of politics, emphasizing its sharp distinction between public and private. The public realm meant freedom, the opportunity for action, individuality, the pursuit of glory, and relations of mutuality among peers. The private, household realm was only a means to public life. It meant necessity, production to satisfy bodily needs, shame, an absence of individuation, and relations of hierarchical domination. Arendt's stress on the value of public action is of the greatest importance to democrats, for it is powerfully dereifying and humanizing. It

¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973); *On Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1965); *Between Past and Future* (Cleveland and New York: World Publishing Co., 1968).

reminds us that institutions are humanly made and therefore humanly changeable; and that in politics we deal not with inanimate objects but with each other—with *persons*, each having the capacity for action, as well as distinct cares and commitments. But in focusing on the Greek polis, on citizen equality, glory, and the sharp distinction between the political and the private, Arendt often makes the participatory ideal seem wholly irrelevant to ourselves and our world. Separating action from labor and work, she often sounds airily idealistic—as if politics must exclude all economic and social considerations—and at the same time antidemocratic, as if she would exclude from citizenship all those who work, are poor, or sympathize with the suffering of the poor. And so she makes politics seem empty, its glory vain.

Arendt is right to want to protect action and citizenship from attitudes appropriate only to the productive transformation of objects and the satisfaction of physical need. Freedom is threatened by the helpless victimization often felt by oppressed people; it is likewise threatened by the self-righteous ruthlessness of their would-be champions, and by the narrowly self-interested technical outlook often found in liberal interest-group politics. But the remedy for these dangers lies not in excluding but in politicizing people, and transforming their claims. In political participation, apathetic victims can discover that what they had taken for personal troubles are widely-shared, politically-actionable social conditions. In political engagement, both the irresponsibly fanatic and the narrowly self-interested can come to feel their stake in justice and principle, in mutuality and the common good.

Politics always concerns both the competitive distribution of scarce resources and the community's shared way of life—competing needs and shared principles. Neglect either aspect, and you lose the dynamic potential of democracy. Arendt tried to shift the balance from need and greed toward glory, from passivity and self-righteousness toward responsible action. But she missed the crucial function of political engagement itself in *connecting* personal with public good, interest with principle. These connections only get made if people jointly make them for themselves.

That becomes clearer when one examines Jane Mansbridge's *Beyond Adversary Democracy*.² Mansbridge also sets out to challenge the dominant contemporary understanding, which she calls "adversary democracy," in the name of the participatory "unitary democracy" she observed in two small self-governing groups: a New England town meeting and an urban "crisis center" collective.

Unitary democracy, she says, is based on friendship and a "rough equality of mutual respect" among the members, who make decisions by consensus after face-to-face discussion. The crucial feature that "determines" which model of

² Jane J. Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), p. 3.

democracy is appropriate is the degree to which members share common interests.³ While the adversary model can accommodate conflicting interests, since each member is most concerned to protect himself, in unitary democracy the predominant concern must be promoting the common interest. So unitary democracy can only work where significant conflicts are few; ideally it "would, over time, require" unanimity on "every conceivable" policy question, while the adversary model ideally assumes agreement only on "the peaceful settlement of disputes." Neither model, of course, ever actually exists in its pure form; and Mansbridge urges small groups to mix or alternate between them. But for national, or even state and urban politics, she takes it as obvious that only adversary democracy makes sense. Since conflicting interests are unavoidable there, the unitary model could only be a sham, cloaking the oppression of minorities behind a show of consensus.

As a result, Mansbridge defines participation as pernicious just where democracy might really matter politically. In her understanding, there is no way for either model of democracy to resolve serious conflicts into anything like justice or the common good, since unitary democracy cannot have serious conflicts to resolve, and adversary democracy knows no common good. Having dissected the concept in this way, Mansbridge cannot restore it to life by her suggestion to mix or combine the two models.

She has accepted too many liberal assumptions, notably a definition of interest as "enlightened policy preference": the policy one would prefer if perfect information were available about all possible consequences. By stressing "policy preference," she blocks from view the very real stake people have in the manner and principles by which policy decisions are reached. Mutuality, openness, dignity, persuasive deliberation, justice, are not mere procedures for the "peaceful settlement of disputes," yet they are not policy preferences either. They are intrinsically valuable because they define how we live together: who we, as a community, are.

Democratic politics is an encounter among people with differing interests, perspectives, and opinions—an encounter in which they reconsider and mutually revise opinions and interests, both individual and common. It happens always in a context of conflict, imperfect knowledge, and uncertainty, but where community action is necessary. The resolutions achieved are always more or less temporary, subject to reconsideration, and rarely unanimous. What matters is not unanimity but discourse. The substantive common interest is only discovered or created in democratic political struggle, and it remains contested as much as shared. Far from being inimical to democracy, conflict—handled in democratic ways,

³ All quotations in this and the next four paragraphs are from *Beyond Adversary Democracy*, pp. 25–28.

with openness and persuasion—is what makes democracy work, what makes for the mutual revision of opinions and interest.

Rightly stressing that interests need not be selfish, can be “altruistic,” “public-regarding,” “ideal-regarding,” Mansbridge employs the model of personal friendship. But that provides no escape from the liberal dilemma between self-interest and self-sacrifice. Sometimes, to counter selfishness, Mansbridge makes membership even in a unitary democracy sound like a dutiful burden; at other times she construes its unity as so intense that—as she says of friendship— “the separate individuals fuse, in a sense, into one.” No wonder, then, if its extension to large and diverse groups seems to imply the crushing of minorities, and anything short of unanimity seems to indicate a failure in “fusion.”

Small groups of the like-minded are useful to democrats, for instance as a context where oppressed people might first dare to articulate their real thoughts. But as a model of democracy such groups will not do, and they suggest the wrong strategy for democrats. Rather than seeking doctrinal purity and regarding internal dissent as pathological, democratic groups must welcome diversity and dispute. For the real revolutionizing power of democracy lies not in deploying a massive army of unanimous, disciplined followers for this or that radical policy preference, but in transforming people from consumers, victims, and exploiters into responsible citizens, extending their horizons and deepening their understanding, engaging their capacities, their suppressed anger and need in the cause of justice. As Mansbridge acknowledges, democracy is a matter of “what happens to the citizens themselves” rather than of “policy outcomes.”

One day, as Albert Camus puts it, “a slave who has been taking orders all his life suddenly decides that he cannot obey some new command,” and he says, “No more!”⁴ So one begins, and others join in; together they try to take charge of their lives. Historically, such popular empowerment has appeared both on the large, dramatic scale of revolution, and on the small, everyday, and local scene. It appeared in the sections of the Paris Commune and the “popular societies” and political clubs of the French Revolution, in the soldiers’ and workers’ soviets of the Russian Revolution, the “fanshen” assemblies of the Chinese Revolution, in the Committees of Correspondence of the American Revolution. Still visible to Tocqueville in the America of the 1830s, it reappeared in the Populist mobilization of the 1880s and 1890s. But it can also be found in Swiss cantons and Yugoslavian factories, in early Israeli kibbutzim, in the “Prague Spring,” the literacy campaign of the Nicaraguan revolution, the struggles of Japanese peasants to oppose expansion of the Tokyo airport, at times in the labor movement,

⁴ Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, trans. Anthony Bower (New York: Random House, 1956), p. 13.

the Civil Rights movement, the women's movement. It can begin in some local incident (a bus in Montgomery or a shipyard in Gdansk) and spread to mobilize most of a nation. It can occur among colonized people, among slaves, among the subjects of a ruthless dictator. It is no mere fantasy or utopian absolute, but a relatively familiar recurrent phenomenon, a persistent struggle pursued in the widest variety of ways, under the most diverse and inhospitable circumstances. People find ways of being citizens even when they are excluded from the formal institutions of power.

The romantic, abstracted, and thoroughly unpolitical image of participation offered by recent theorists needs to be corrected by such a list of historical examples, showing that democracy is no dim and distant chimera, confined to the Greek city or the idealistic affinity group, remote from people's needs or presupposing automatic harmony, but a very real, practical human enterprise of the greatest possible political significance, repeatedly undertaken by ordinary people. Such a list of historical examples is, of course, motley, mixing rebellion and revolt with democratic movements, democratic societies, democracy as an established form of government. Few of the instances listed can be said unambiguously to have succeeded. Historically, such efforts have not only aimed at democratizing their societies, but also themselves provided the democratic experience for their participants. At what point and in what ways shall we say that such a movement has failed or ended? Certainly many "failed" movements left both the world and their members significantly transformed in democratic directions.

Nor is it obvious what might be proved by a record of democratic defeats. It might, for instance, be taken as confirming the thesis that democracy is dangerous: as soon as such a movement gives any signs of succeeding, all the resources of established power and privilege will be brought to bear "to destroy it, divert it, buy it, or try in any way to gain effective control over it," as Lawrence Goodwyn has written.⁵ Or the record might be taken as indicating how often democrats are misled by bad theoretical formulations, failing to nurture and preserve within their own groups the democracy they seek for their polity as a whole.

Certainly such a review of historical examples reminds us that hope—and the democratic impulse—springs eternal, even in the face of the most forbidding circumstances; and that from small, seemingly harmless beginnings, great and genuinely radical movements can grow. Much of the history of democracy has taken place within movements struggling to transform societies that were themselves far from democratic. The power and radical nature of those movements grew specifically from the liberating, transforming capacity of political action. So the decision of a tired black woman to sit in the front of the bus can become a

⁵ Lawrence Goodwyn, "Organizing Democracy: The Limits of Theory and Practice," *democracy* 1, no. 1 (January 1981), p. 47.

national drive for human dignity and equality; a self-help cooperative providing credit for poor farmers can become a democratizing national movement; sections of the Paris Commune can, in demanding cheap bread, simultaneously begin developing "a new type of political organization" that will enable people to be "participators in government."⁶

Democratic movements become stronger and potentially more radical as they diversify and reach out to other groups: when workers join with peasants, antinuclear ecologists join with nuclear plant workers and the unemployed, civil rights activists join with blue-collar workers and feminists. Not only do they acquire new members and allies, but they grow more political, and more just. As the group becomes more inclusive, members move beyond scapegoating toward increasing sophistication about the true social causes of their pain, and toward a more principled justification of who should pay what price to relieve it. So members discover their connectedness—and forge new connections—with others, with principle, and with their own capacities. Democrats must be as committed to fostering participatory politics within their movements as they are to the intrinsic value of participation in democratic government.

When people say that democracy is "obviously" not suitable for a large population, they fall captive to an abstract notion of assembling more and more people in one place: "no room can hold them all." But that is not how democratic movements grow, nor how real democratic polities function. Consider the America Tocqueville discovered in the 1830s, a people deeply engaged in democratic self-government: their "most important business" and their greatest pleasure. Take away politics from the American, Tocqueville said, and you rob him of half his existence, leaving a "vast void in his life" and making him "incredibly unhappy."⁷ Yet Tocqueville's America was no city-state, nor could its citizens assemble in one place. If size was no bar then to so lively a democratic engagement, it need not be now.

Face-to-face citizen assemblies are indeed essential to democracy, but one single assembly of all is not. Representation, delegation, cooperation, coordination, federation, and other kinds of devolution are entirely compatible with democracy, though they do not constitute and cannot guarantee it. Disillusioned democrats from Robert Michels to Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward have argued that any large organization and any differentiated leadership neces-

⁶ *On Revolution*, p. 247.

⁷ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J.P. Mayer (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1969), p. 243.

sarily must take the life out of democracy, rigidifying into bureaucratic hierarchy. But formless, spontaneous mobs in the streets disrupting an established order cannot by themselves be a source of enduring change or even enduring challenge. Even if ossification were ultimately inevitable for any democratic engagement, surely the democrat's task would still be to prolong and revitalize the early, militant stage of popular involvement. The point is not to eschew all organization and all differentiated leadership, confining democracy to the local and spontaneous, but to develop those organizational forms and those styles of authority that sustain rather than suppress member initiative and autonomy. From historical examples we know that such forms and styles exist; it has sometimes been done.

Democrats need to think hard—both historically and theoretically—about the circumstances and the institutions by which large-scale collective power can be kept responsible to its participatory foundations. In the new American states, for example, after the disruption of British rule, radicals insisted on unicameral legislatures, weak or collective executives, frequent elections, rotation in office to prevent formation of a class of professional politicians. Most important, representatives were elected by participatory town or country meetings, thus by political bodies with an identity and some experience in collective action, rather than by isolated voters. Consequently, dialogue between representatives and their constituencies was frequent and vigorous; representatives were often instructed and sometimes recalled. But there are many possibilities for vital and fruitful interaction between the local and the national community. Recent resolutions on nuclear disarmament passed by New England town meetings are a promising experiment. All such devices, however, depend ultimately on the character of the citizenry, their love of and skill in exercising freedom; and these, in turn, rest mainly on the direct experience of meaningful local self-government.

Tocqueville argued that what made the American nation democratic was the vitality of direct participation in small and local associations. Face-to-face democracy was the foundation—not a substitute—for representative institutions, federalism, and national democracy. In direct personal participation, Tocqueville observed, people both learn the skills of citizenship and develop a taste for freedom; thereafter they form an active rather than deferential, apathetic, or privatized constituency for state and national representation, an engaged public for national issues. Size is not an insurmountable problem. On the basis of local, face-to-face politics, all sorts of higher and more distant structures of representation and collective power can be erected without destroying democracy—indeed, they can enhance it. Lacking such a basis, no institutional structures or programs of indoctrination can produce democracy.

From the question of size, turn next to that of technology. Has the technological complexity of modern society, requiring specialized expertise, rendered democracy obsolete? Here it is useful to remember that while the technological

society may be new, the claims for expertise against democracy are very old, at least as old as Plato's *Republic*. The idea that ordinary people are incompetent to deal intelligently with the issues affecting their lives rests now, as it always has, on an overly narrow idea of what constitutes politically relevant knowledge, and a confusion between knowledge and decision.

First off, stupidity knows no class. Maybe most people are foolish, but foolishness is found in all social strata. Education removes some kinds of ignorance, but may entrench or instill others. The cure is not to exclude some but to include as diverse a range of perspectives and experience as possible in political deliberation. Second, expertise cannot solve political problems. Contemporary politics is indeed full of technically complex topics, about which even the educated feel horribly ignorant. But on every politically significant issue of this kind, the "experts" are divided; that is part of what makes the issues political. Though we may also feel at a loss to choose between them, leaving it to the experts is no solution at all.

Finally, while various kinds of knowledge can be profoundly useful in political decisions, knowledge alone is never enough. The political question is what we are to *do*; knowledge can only tell us how things are, how they work, while a political resolution always depends on what we, as a community, want and think right. And those questions have no technical answer; they require collective deliberation and decision. The experts must become a part of, not an alternative to, the democratic political process.

Technology as such is not the problem for democracy; the problems here are popular deference to experts, and the belief in technology as an irresistible force, an "imperative" beyond human control. Since such deference and fatalism originate in people's experience, which is rooted in social conditions, they may be fought wherever they arise; and that is reason for hope and perseverance. The apathetic oppressed constitute an enormous pool of potential democratic energy. And as the historical examples remind us, even the most oppressed people sometimes rediscover within themselves the capacity to act. Democrats today must seek out and foster every opportunity for people to experience their own effective agency: at work, at school, in family and personal relations, in the community. Democratic citizenship is facilitated by democratic social relations and an autonomous character structure; dependency and apathy must be attacked wherever people's experience centers. Yet such attacks remain incomplete unless they relate personal concerns to public issues, extend individual initiative into shared political action. A sense of personal autonomy, dignity, and efficacy may be requisite for, but must not be confused with, citizenship.

And so we return to the need for direct, personal political participation. As Tocqueville already made clear, not just any kind of small or local group can provide the democratic experience: the point is not gregariousness but politicization.

To support democracy, face-to-face groups must themselves be internally democratic in ways already discussed, must deal with issues that really matter in their members' lives, and must have genuine power to affect the outcomes of those issues. One can experience freedom or learn citizenship no better in a "Mickey Mouse" group where nothing of importance is at stake than in a hierarchical organization.

Tocqueville's America was already big, but many important matters could still be addressed and resolved on the small scale. Confronting the realities of large-scale private power and social problems today requires national and even international organization. Such organization can be democratic, we have argued, if it rests on an active, engaged citizenry. Technology, too, can be democratically handled by such a citizenry. But such a citizenry emerges only from *meaningful* small-scale participation. Is that still a realistic possibility in a society such as ours?

To answer that crucial question, one must distinguish between short- and long-run requirements. In the long run, if we truly want full democracy, there is no doubt that we shall have to change our society and economy in fundamental ways. But in the short run, the right means toward that goal are participatory democratic movements. That such movements can still occur was shown in the 1960s; nothing fundamental has changed since then. Today's democrat must hope that in the brief experience of active participation that follows a flaring up of the democratic impulse, ordinary people, discovering the connections between local problems and national structures, coming up against the repressive power of established privilege, will themselves discover the need for more fundamental changes. We must be prepared to use the impulses toward and the experience of democracy, where they occur and while they last, to produce the social and economic changes that will further facilitate democracy. Each time it is, one might say, a race between the radicalizing and liberating potential of political action, and the dispiriting and paralyzing effects of the repression and political defeat likely to follow.

Confronting this most central and difficult problem, we need to recall not only Tocqueville and Revolutionary America, but also the movements of the 1960s, to build on their achievements and learn from their mistakes. On the whole, these movements did not see themselves as building participatory alternatives, nor as engaged in a long-term transformation of consciousness and social conditions to make possible a more democratic America. They looked for immediate changes on specific issues, mobilized people for short-term successes, and saw their own internal organization largely in instrumental terms. Even the Students for a Democratic Society, which did begin with a larger vision and did value internal democracy, eventually became absorbed in ending the Vietnam War. Neglecting democratic organization for immediate policy changes, the 1960s move-

ments failed in what Goodwyn has called "democratic patience," the capacity to sustain democratic momentum for the long haul.⁸ Yet they left behind a changed America, and many less conspicuous yet active neighborhood groups, and radical opposition groups in unions, the professions, and among consumers.

A democratic movement for the 1980s must come out of such groups, out of local organizing around the grievances and aspirations people now feel. It must encourage local autonomy, ways of doing for ourselves and doing without, so as to cut loose from the system. Yet it must also encourage a widening perspective on the issues, their connections with the larger social structures of private power; it must foster alliances and debate among such groups. People must organize in ways that constantly enlarge rather than suppress movement members' active engagement, independent judgment, and preparedness for continued struggle.

Such local and ad hoc beginnings by no means preclude a commitment to radical systemic social and economic change. In the long run, democracy's full realization might well entail abolishing the joint-stock limited-liability corporation; or abolishing private ownership of the means of production; or even abandoning the Faustian dream of mastering and exploiting nature to gain infinitely expanding wealth.

But that is to get ahead of ourselves. For surely the privileged elites of corporate power will not permit such radical changes today or tomorrow, nor are our fellow citizens ready to fight on such grounds. We must not postpone the practice of participatory democracy until after such changes are achieved, nor expect it to emerge automatically from them. Democracy is our best means for achieving social change and must remain our conscious goal. Then the vicious circle of social process, in which democracy seems to presuppose the conditions that only democracy can bring about, can become grounds for hope: wherever we do cut into the circle, we thereby transform all the rest of its course. We can begin where we are.

8 Goodwyn, "Organizing Democracy," p. 50.