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## What does Democracy Really Mean?

IN RECENT CONFRONTATIONS between the Government and political parties in Hong Kong, people sometimes misinterpret the true meaning of democracy.

The English word “democracy” comes from two Greek words “demos” (people) and “kratia” (power). Although Greece is known as the founder of democracy, it was not true democracy, because only male citizens had the right to vote. Women and slaves were excluded from the voting. Democracy nowadays includes women, and every permanent resident, rich or poor.

Too many people consider that democracy has been achieved if everyone over the age of eighteen has the right to one vote. However, “one person one vote” does not necessarily bring about a democratic society. Several countries in our neighbourhood have universal suffrage, but the people still have no power. True democracy depends upon the calibre of the politicians who are elected. Do they really represent the people, or is their purpose to gain power for themselves or their party? Is each member truly accountable to the people or loyal only to the party? Do the majority of eligible voters go to vote? Does the party in power have more than half the support of all citizens?

If the elected candidates feel they have won fame or fortune for themselves or their party, they will destroy the hopes

of the voters. Instead, if they are really democratic, they will feel a huge sense of responsibility to all the people. They will support legislation that raises the standard of living for all, and that builds up an economy that will result in a more egalitarian society. They will listen to the views of the people, and decide what is reasonable and feasible. They will explain clearly if they do not agree with the views of other parties. The electorate, too, must be reasonable and not expect everything to be decided according to their own personal interests.

I sometimes feel disappointed that various parties try to defeat each other’s proposals, because they want to be loyal to their party’s views. They should consider the good of the people at large. I even wonder whether a party system is really good for the community. Is it really essential for party members to vote with their own party? Should they vote against their own conscience in order to protect their party’s power?

I personally believe that true democracy requires accountability to the people as a whole, and not only to their parties. Maybe you disagree with me! You have the right to do so.