

## THE APPROPRIATION OF POLITICAL POWER IN CONTEMPORARY TIME

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*In this paper, I will focus on the nature and appropriation of political power, and explore the right appropriation of political power given the present political and social condition. I discuss first the nature of political power, and then the three political alternatives in the appropriation of political power, namely, the centralized, the dispersed, and the balanced power. I argue that although there are still states that hold on to the centralized power, given the present political and social condition, the balanced appropriation of political power is the best alternative.*

### INTRODUCTION

The governance of political societies from the earlier civilizations to the present has been shaped according to the dispensation and appropriation of political power. In the earlier civilizations, political power has been concentrated on the hands of one or the few, those who either claim to have been appointed by the divine being or chosen by the people. But as human history advanced, especially in the West, there was a gradual dispersion of political power, from the hands of the one or the elite few to some major political groups and down to the majority of individuals; and this dispersion continues in our present time. The result is what may be called the *fragmentation of political power*. The governance of present political societies or states can be classified according to how political power is appropriated. In an authoritarian state, the political power is vested in one leader or only a few, hence authority to govern belongs only to the leader. In a liberal democratic society or state, the political power is somehow distributed or shared by the leader with other sectors so that political power or authority to govern is not concentrated on the leader alone but is delegated to others. In the present time, it is difficult for political power to be concentrated in one leader alone. With the advent of postmodernism, which advances the narrative of the marginalized and the minority, the narratives of authoritarianism and liberal democracy have been questioned and challenged. People are now empowered and they can already express their political sentiments through various means. They are now able to express their views

as to how the government should exercise its power, and have the capacity to influence governance. Of course a political leader who controls the machinery of the state can always use them against those who oppose him. But sooner or later, as shown by many political upheavals in the recent past and in the present, this leader will eventually lose his grip on power. In the present time there are also smaller groups and other interest groups who also wield political power and influence. The political terrain of our present society is so complex and therefore requires intelligent and careful appropriation of political power.

In this paper I will focus on the nature and appropriation of political power and expound on the right appropriation of political power given the present political and social condition.

### THE NATURE OF POLITICAL POWER

Michel Foucault (1982) believes that power is exercised through the relationships of power with the aim of using actions to modify the actions of others. Power can only exist when put into action and is not a function of, or relies on consent, although consent may be given. Power then takes effect when it affects the actions of others. Although violence or force maybe used, power is not violence or force. For Foucault then, there are two essential elements required for the articulation of a power relationship: first is the “other” or a person who acts; and second is an endless amount of options available as potential actions. Foucault (1982, 789), therefore, defines power relations as:

...a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions.

In the political sphere the exercise of power requires the guidance of another’s actions; and this is done through ‘government’ as a means to structure the available choice of actions of the governed or subjects. Political power is a social power focused on the state. It involves control of other men for the purpose of influencing the behavior of the state, its legislative, administrative, and judicial activities (Michael Curtis 1971, 163). Because of political power, leaders can govern over the society and can command over people; without this power no one can lead a political society. There are many theories about how political power emerged, foremost of which are the divine theory and social contract theory. The divine theory stresses that political power is vested on leaders by the divine being, while the social contract theory explains that it is vested by the people by an act of contract to political leaders. John Locke, one of the leading proponents of the social contract theory, advances in his political opus, *The second treatise of government* (1954, 44-54), the definition of political power as that power which every man in the state of nature has decided to give up into the hands of the society and therein to the governors whom the society has set over itself, with the express or tacit trust that this power shall be employed for their good and the preservation of their property.

Political power, whether vested by the divine or by the people, entails a two-sided

relationship. On the one hand, there are the people, the governed or subjects who although are endowed with reason are sometimes unable to use such reason for their common benefit, and therefore cannot get their acts together to protect their interests and to work for a common goal or objective. People in society have their own interests and individual purposes and these various interests and purposes must be coordinated towards a common objective, a common goal. On the other hand, there are the leaders who are endowed with the power to lead, to coordinate the varied interests of people and put order to society. They wield the power to compel people to obey commands, rules, and laws. The leader can draw such authority or power from several sources—his power bases. It can come from his ability to provide for the needs of his followers or subordinates, from his intellectual capacity or expertise, from his character or personality, from his wealth or influence, or from force.

Political leaders must, therefore, create an emotional and rational response from the people, from those they rule, so that they can institute order in the society and regulate individual interests for the common welfare. Failure to create such responses would lead to a collapse of political power or authority to lead on the part of the leader or ruler.

But the question is, how should political power be exercised? How should a leader handle it so that he is able to create the right responses from the people, and consequently put order in society and achieve the common welfare? Man, the political animal that he is, as observed by Aristotle, from the earliest civilizations has developed ways and alternatives how to use, handle, and dispense political power. Political thinkers have also debated as to the seat of political power. Where does political power ultimately reside, in the hands of the few or in the hands of the majority? The fundamental question is, should political power be vested and concentrated in the hands of one or a few leaders, or should it be dispersed among the people, the members of a society? Political philosophers have offered us different political alternatives in the appropriation of political power, but the most notable are those that stress that it could be concentrated on one or the few (centralized power), dispersed to the many individuals (dispersed power), or balance between the few and the majority (balanced power)—liberal democracy comes close to this. There are of course some regimes or governments that posture to be democratic but may be *de facto* authoritarian.

## CENTRALIZED POWER

Many of the major civilizations in the past have been based on systems of organization and control that have stressed concentrated or centralized power in the belief that the quality and continuity of society must be established and maintained through a strong government, where power is concentrated on a few. Political power is concentrated on one or a few because doing so will promote security and stability and ensure the good life for members of the society. The purpose is to create and ensure a stable, orderly, and impregnable way of life. The classical dynasties of China, Egypt, Rome, and pre-Columbian America were founded on the forceful integration of economic, religious, and political power. The totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century that emerged in Germany, Italy, China, and Russia are recent examples of political systems committed to a highly concentrated power.

As society evolved, the proponents of concentrated power developed theories and proposed systems to underscore the need for centralized authority and to justify its existence (Stanley Honer, Thomas Hunt, and Dennis Okholm 1999, 209). “Concentrated political power

is often defended and justified on the philo-sophical grounds that human affairs must be guided by ideas or principles that are somehow superhuman “ (Honer *et al.* 1999, 209).

One example of this is the ideal state that was proposed by Plato, which he outlined in his famous work *The republic* (2008). Plato held that the fundamental purpose of the state is to create order in human affairs, and the ideal or perfect state would reflect the natural harmony of the real world, the world of Forms. This social order, which is reflective of the natural harmony in the world of forms is possible only under a state that is supreme, absolute, and authoritarian. A state or society “can be judged good or right only if it is so ordered and governed according to the objective structure of universal reality” (Honer *et al.* 1999, 209).

The ideal state for Plato is not just a collection of individuals; it is an organic whole made up of human beings who perform their own respective duties (producers, soldiers and rulers) and is ruled by one who has competence and peculiar abilities to fulfill the functions of a ruler. Human beings are not born with equal capacities; and individuals should assume their natural stations in life and play their assigned roles in society. In the ideal state, the ruler is one who is fully educated and has come to understand the difference between the visible world and the intelligible world of Forms, between the realm of opinion and of knowledge, and between the appearance and reality. Such ruler is the philosopher king who is vested with political power, and who exercises absolute sovereignty over all members of the state. In Book V of *The republic* Plato (2008) states:

Until philosophers are kings, or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, and those commoner natures who pursue either to the exclusion of the other are compelled to stand aside, cities will never have rest from their evils,—nor the human race, as I believe,—and then only will this our State have a possibility of life and behold the light of day.

Plato’s republic, the ideal state, then is aristocratic not democratic, where the rational element embodied in the philosopher king is supreme and each person’s reason controls his appetites. For Plato, there is no tolerance for dissent or rebellion. As citizens, people have duties, not rights, and their freedom is to serve the state, which completely supervises their lives. Individual human beings are born and die, but the state, which gives meaning and purpose to their lives, continues to exist in its own right over and beyond the separate existences of its members. For Plato, the reason why philosophers should be rulers is not because of their sheer physical or military power, but because of their intelligence and wisdom.

Another proponent of this philosophy is the seventeenth-century Englishman Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes in his work *The leviathan* (1962) argues the case for a powerful state from radically different premises. He explains that in the original state of nature human beings are selfish but rational animals living in a material cause-effect world. Each human being struggles to survive and to maximize his or her own pleasure and interests. Individuals are roughly equal in strength and cunning so their selfish actions result in a war of all against all. Hobbes contends that in the state of nature human beings are free and roughly equal, but they are also terribly vulnerable. But because they are also rational animals, they also see the advantage of entering into an agreement, a “social contract,” with others to establish a

power that will regulate their behavior in the interest of long-range felicity and survival. They need—and rationally decide to accept—a power that will provide order and security. Hobbes (1962, 132) proposes:

The only way to erect such a common power, as may be able to defend them from the invasion of foreigners, and the injuries of one another, and thereby to secure them in such sort, as that by their own industry, and by the fruits of the earth, they may nourish themselves and live contentedly; is, to confer all their power and strength upon one man, or upon one assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, unto one will: which is as much as to say, to appoint one man, or assembly of men, to bear their person; . . . and therein to submit their wills, every one to his will, and their judgments, to his judgment.

For Hobbes, there is a covenant and by this covenant the multitude or many becomes united in one person, the sovereign. He (1962, 132) further explains

This is more than consent, or concord; it is a real unity of them all, on one and the same person, made by covenant of every man with every man. . . . This done, the multitude so united in One person is called a Commonwealth, in Latin *Civitas*. This is the generation of that great Leviathan, or rather, to speak more reverently, of that Mortal God, to which we owe under the Immortal God, our peace and defense.

The contract once made is irrevocable. Power once granted becomes irrevocable. The protection human beings seek by agreeing to submit to authority is ensured only if that authority becomes permanent. And the one bestowed with this power is the sovereign.

A widely supported stand on the historical need for concentrated power is also found in the writings and speeches of Vladimir Lenin. In one of his speeches, Lenin (1972, 90) forcefully stresses the need for concentrated power:

But let me begin with a word or two about the first of the questions mentioned—will the Bolsheviks dare take over full state power alone? I have already had occasion, at the All-Russia Congress of Soviets, to answer this question in the affirmative in no uncertain manner by a remark that I shouted from my seat during one of Tsereteli's ministerial speeches. And I have not met in the press, or heard, any statements by Bolsheviks to the effect that we ought not to take power alone. I still maintain that a political party—and the party of the advanced class in particular—would have no right to exist, would be unworthy of the name of party, would be a nonentity in any sense, if it refused to take power when opportunity offers.

Following the Marxist ideology, Lenin urges that power be concentrated on the elite few, the Bolsheviks and stressed the need for power to be so highly concentrated and applied to so many aspects of life, making such form of government already a dictatorship.

Power is thus highly concentrated (as long as the leaders can hold it, by whatever means), and individual rights or liberties are enjoyed only at the sufferance of the state. Those to whom power is given have the right to back up their claim with physical force. This brings the state into being, and the original contract remains legitimate as long as the state shows itself capable of exercising power. In Hobbes's view, every citizen owes total allegiance to the government—whatever type it is—as long as that government is able to rule. Human beings contract for society but society then becomes superior to its members and necessarily imposes restrictions on the behavior of individuals (Honer *et al.* 1999, 210).

## DISPERSED POWER

Extreme individualists typically insist that they are free from political control, political obligation, and political definition. They favor dispersed power and emphasize individual freedom, rights and equality, and undermine the political power of civil leaders.

One proponent of this alternative was Mohandas K. Gandhi, a twentieth-century spiritual and political leader in India who attracted world attention by demonstrating the effectiveness of organized non-cooperation in political affairs. As a reaction to the British oppressive rule in India during his time, he initiated the passive resistance through non-cooperation. After returning to India from exile in 1914, he became critical of the unjust colonial rule of the British and launched an organized campaign of passive resistance against the government's oppressive laws. Together with his followers, he fought through nonviolent non-cooperation for independence of his country. As a foundation for this passive resistance, Gandhi (1948) conceived and developed the notion of *Satyagraha* or Truth-force, which made nonviolence the foundation for his method of engaging everyone in the pursuit of truth, whether the objective was individual or community development, or resistance against oppressive rule (see Mohandas Gandhi 1948). *Satyagraha* came to cover a broad canvas of human aspiration (David Taboulay, 1997). Gandhi stressed the cultivation of spiritual resources as an antidote to materialism and the tactics of force. He categorically opposed violence of any sort and, even though he believed in the necessity of establishing a new social order, took the moral stand that indefinite bondage is better than violent revolution. When political negotiation for human rights did not succeed, he advocated the tactic of refusing to cooperate with the forces of oppression. Gandhi believed that power is to be disseminated to its broadly human and spiritual roots, and that it is possible to redeem a world dominated by the false doctrine of force.

A century before Gandhi, Henry David Thoreau, nineteenth-century American transcendentalist, launched a one-man crusade against organized authority. In his essay "Resistance to Civil government," Thoreau (1849) says:

I heartily accept the motto, "That government is best which governs least"; and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe — "That government is best which governs not at all"; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient.

Invoking the doctrine of individual nullification, Thoreau preached and practiced a program of civil disobedience. It was his conviction that individual conscience stands above all law and government, and that there is a personal obligation to disobey any rule or statute that conscience cannot affirm. Thoreau maintained that a single individual standing for the right is more worthy than the largest of majorities standing for the wrong. He held that good governments are those that govern least, and the best government is one that governs not at all.

Gandhi and Thoreau share the conviction that moral obligation derives from a principle that transcends the sphere of power relationships in worldly affairs. They insist that morality is not established by political authority and does not reside in human law. Moral ends can never be achieved by force. The only justifiable tactic for righting a moral wrong is active or nonviolent resistance. In the final analysis, what is good and right is not validated by the political power of the state. The ultimate criterion is individual conscience. These ideas of Gandhi and Thoreau had a profound influence on the political philosophy and activities of other political activists such as Martin Luther King, Jr (Honer *et al.* 1999, 213-214).

A similar position is taken by the libertarians, who insist that human beings instinctively or intuitively know themselves to be morally responsible creatures. Moral responsibility implies some degree of choice in which free will can be truly exercised. In situations where actual alternatives confront us, we must choose to do with the practical political realities of a particular time or place (Honer *et al.* 1999, 215). What is socially approved or politically expedient is not the major issue. There is a "higher politics" that can be known and expressed only by individuals who think and act as responsible agents with free will. The rights to political power and the values of political systems are matters decided by rational human beings. For the libertarians, legitimate political power, like all power, resides ultimately with the rational chooser in response to moral imperatives. Power is thus dispersed and is not the legitimate right of either arbitrary legal systems or organized groups.

Modern existentialists often reflect a similar stance on power, one example is the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre who advocated the absolute freedom of man. Theoretically, an existentialist might freely choose to affirm any political philosophy or system, but one of the most visible characteristics of those who adopt the existentialist posture is indifference or opposition to established political principles or organized political systems. This nihilistic leaning tends to make existentialists an enigma and a threat to those who believe that structured political arrangements and permanent political principles are essential to human life.

## COMPOSITE OR BALANCED POSITIONS

In a composite or balanced position, power is not concentrated on a select few but is dispersed to the leaders and the people. Here the exercise of power is shared between the leaders and the people. Liberal democracy to some degree is the most common form of this position of balanced power.

The earliest form of this balanced position is reflected in the political philosophy of Confucianism. It proposes a paternalistic and humanistic view of government. In Confucianism, the state is justified under a mandate from Heaven. It becomes the moral obligation of government to produce the same natural and hierarchical harmony that characterizes the

well-ordered family. . The key elements in this structure are respect for those in authority, virtue on the part of lead-ers, and a benevolent concern for the common welfare (Honer et al. 1999, 217). The political power of the state is charged with the responsibility to give ethical direction to members of society in the name of peace, security or protection, and human well-being. Power is harmoniously dispersed, according to the Confucian view of political affairs, “with the ideals of harmony, virtue, and filial piety providing a stable foundation for the continuous ordering of social life through the generations” (Honer et al. 1999, 217).

Hence, what might be interpreted as a forceful and unyielding form of concentrated power in Confucian political philosophy is mitigated by the underlying premise that ordinary people are ultimately more important than either rulers or territory. Education for leadership is available to all, and the most learned and most virtuous can aspire for positions of status, trust, and responsibility; in other words, leadership is earned and not inherited. A ruler who fails to honor and implement the heavenly mandate is expected to abdicate in favor of a more able and virtuous person. If the ruler refuses to step aside, people can assert their right to overthrow and replace him or her—by a revolution, if necessary. (see Honer et al. 1999, 217)

Liberal democracy is another form of balanced power. In a liberal democracy, individuals recognize the necessity of granting certain powers to the state, but these powers must be exercised only with their consent. Power resides ultimately in the hands of the people, not in the hands of political leaders. This stance clearly distinguishes all democratic political systems from totalitarian or anarchic ones. Liberal democracy traces its roots in the political writings of John Locke. Locke built his liberal theory on the assumption that human beings are by nature moral beings, and that there are natural moral rules that they ought to obey (Honer et al. 1999, 218). People are born free and equal, and with the capacity to make rational choices. Unlike the idea of Hobbes, for Locke man is naturally good. Each individual is morally obligated to respect the freedom and self-determination of other people and deal with them on the basis of equality. On these premises, Locke, in his *The second treatise of government*, (1954, 40-43), fashioned his central principle of the natural rights of every individual, whereby out of the need to maintain their natural rights, people voluntarily give up some of their freedom and enter into a “social contract” to create a political authority capable of preserving these rights and restraining transgressors

Political power is vested on the political authority for the protection of their lives and properties. Locke (1954, 42) stressed that this power which every man has in the state of nature, and which he surrenders to the society in all instances where the society can secure him, must be used as a means for preserving man’s own property in a way that the state of nature allows him. Government authority, therefore, stems from the act of making a contract, and the power thus formed is limited by the terms of the contract and is subject to continuous review by the citizens involved. The contract is specific and strictly limited, and the power given up to the government is not absolute. According to Locke, the people by majority consent draw up a contract for the establishment of a government and obligate themselves to abide by the decisions of the majority. Thus, Locke (1954, 50) says:

Whenever, therefore, any number of men is so united into one society as to quit every one his executive power of the law of nature and to resign it to the public, here and there only is a political or civil society. And this is done wherever any number of men, in the state of nature, enter into society to make one



people, one body politic, under one supreme government, or else when any one joins himself to, and incorporates with, any government already made; for hereby he authorizes the society or, which is all one, the legislative thereof to make laws for him as the public good of the society shall require, to the execution whereof his own assistance, as to his own decrees, is due.

But such power is not absolute and should not be concentrated on the hands of the rulers. Such power is vested for a specific purpose and should never be over the lives and properties of all. The end and measure of this power, when in every man's hands in the state of nature is the preservation of all of his society - that is, all mankind in general. It can have no other end or measure when in the hands of the leaders but to preserve the members of that society with regard to their lives, liberties, and possessions. Consequently, it cannot have absolute, arbitrary power over their lives and fortunes (Locke 1954, 42).

According to Locke, the basic rights that people seek to preserve by political means are the rights to life, liberty, and property. The individual's right to private property is one of the most important guarantees made by government. And one of the fundamental moral rights retained by the individual is the right to challenge and resist authority. Locke proposed a constitutional, representative government, and denied the legitimacy of any permanent or absolute ruler.

John Stuart Mill also defended individual liberty in the realms of thought, speech, and action against repressive authoritarian regime. In his essay *On liberty*, Mill (1986) traces the meaning of liberty. Mill (1986, 7) opines that liberty during the ancient times meant "protection against the tyranny of political rulers," because rulers and subjects were often thought to have a necessarily antagonistic relationship. The leader did not govern by the will of his people, and while his power was seen as necessary, it was also considered dangerous. The powers of the leaders are then limited in their exercise of power over the community. These are done in two ways. First, the people gained recognition of certain immunities called "political liberties or rights." The leader was thought to have a duty to respect these immunities, and there was a right of rebellion if these rights and liberties were infringed. Second, constitutional checks developed, under which the community or their representatives gained some power of consent over important acts of the governing power (Mill 1986, 8).

Eventually according to Mill there was a time when men progressed in human affairs to a point where they wanted their leaders to be their servants, and to represent their interests and will. It was thought that it was not necessary to limit this new kind of ruler's power, because he was accountable to the people, and there was no fear of the people tyrannizing itself. However, when an actual democratic republic developed it is not the people who rule themselves. Rather, the people with power exercise their power over those without power. Mill (1986, 10) observes that the will of the people means now the will of the most numerous or most active part among the people. In particular, a majority may consciously try to oppress a minority. Mill also argues that society can also tyrannize without using political means, and that the power of public opinion can be more stifling to individuality and dissent than any law could be. Such social tyranny is more formidable than any kind of political oppression because it penetrates deeply into the details of life and enslaves the soul itself (1986, 11). Thus, there must also be protection for people against the prevailing

public opinions, and the tendency of society to impose its values on others.

But the question is, where and how to limit or make the fitting adjustment between social control by way of public opinion and individual independence. According to Mill (1986, 16), the only time individuals or society as a whole can interfere with individual liberty is for self-protection. The argument that a certain law or public opinion might be for an individual's own good or welfare does not suffice to justify the coercive power of a law or public opinion. Coercion by the many toward the individual is only acceptable when an individual poses a threat to others. Mill believes that political control should be restricted to those matters in which the needs of society cannot be met in any other way. Individuals should be free to pursue their own goals in their own way so long as other individuals are not deprived of their freedom (Honer *et al.* 1999, 218).

### **APPROPRIATION OF POLITICAL POWER IN CONTEMPORARY TIME**

We have mentioned that political power is social in nature in that it involves a two-sided relationship between the leader or ruler and the followers or the governed. Foucault (1982) stresses that power is an integral part of civil society. Foucault (1982, 791) further says:

... power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus, not reconstituted "above" society as a supplementary structure whose radical effacement one could perhaps dream of. In any case, to live in society is to live in such a way that action upon other actions is possible – and in fact ongoing. A society without power relations can only be an abstraction.

Of course there are many social factors that may influence this relationship and the appropriation of power. The psychologist Fred Fiedler (1967), in his book *A theory of leadership effectiveness*, mentioned three factors or dimensions of a leader's effectiveness; namely: (1) power position of the leader, which is the level of authority of the leader; (2) the task structure, which concerns whether there is a favorable or unfavorable condition for the task of the group; and (3) the status of the follower, which refers to the characteristics of the followers pertaining to whether they are mature, cooperative and have a positive attitude. There are two things that we can consider here. First is the power relation between the ruler and the governed; and second is the status of the governed. The power relation is defined by the concentration of power—whether it is concentrated on one or few, or dispersed among the subjects or governed, or whether there is a reasonable balance of power between the ruler and the governed or between the government and the people. In a centralized power there is always the tendency and the temptation to dominate and undermine the individual liberties of the people. In a dispersed power set up, while people can enjoy their individual rights and liberties there is also the danger of the government being chaotic and disorderly to the extent that there is no governance at all. That brings us to the third option which I believe is the best option, although the crucial point is where to strike the balance between, for example, government control and regulation, on the one hand, and individual liberties, on the other. Up to what extent, for example, can a government delegate power to the people, and what would be the limit of governmental control over individual liberties, are

the critical questions.

As to the status of the people in terms of political maturity, I think in the present time the people as followers or subordinates are no longer the unreasonable, uninformed, unconscious and submissive followers of the past. The people have matured and have already recognized and embraced their rights and their status in the society. They are no longer the obedient and submissive herd of the past. They express their opinions and sentiments, and affirm their own individual interests. They have started to express their collective thoughts and desires so that it is no longer accurate to simply label them as followers or subordinates. In other words, if before the appropriation of power is only in the select few, people now have also claimed their own power. So it is acceptable to say that today political power also rests on smaller political groups with their own little narratives. The power position then of the leader in our present time is already being challenged by smaller groups which claim to be the voice of the people. Even if there are political coalitions formed, the political power of these coalitions actually rests on the autonomous political groups. Smaller political groups and parties are gradually and consistently being formed, all having their little narratives about progress, peace, unity order, etc.

## CONCLUSION

There may still be states which advocate centralized power, like China, North Korea, Cuba and Russia, but there is now a growing dispersion or delegation of political power in many of the present states and societies. Many societies have abandoned the narratives of authoritarianism and totalitarianism. And whether the monopolistic and totalitarian political parties in these societies like it or not, their political power could be fast eroding unless they make full use of the mechanism and propaganda of the states. The political alternative of centralized power, therefore, can no longer function effectively in our present age for they can easily lose their grip on power. The perceived stability and order in a centralized power is at best artificial and fragile. The promise of stability, order, and progress which was the intention of earlier political systems can be better achieved when individuals are allowed to voice out their opinions and interests, enjoy freedom, and to some extent appropriate power for themselves. The contemporary political leader must follow a new brand of politics that allows some space for the expression of political sentiments and sets the condition for self-regulation and self-determination.

While there is a dispersion of political power and the abandonment of the ideology of centralized political system and the advent of a new brand of politics, power cannot just be dispersed absolutely to the individual or to the people. The positions taken by Thoreau and Gandhi are at best a counter position to totalitarian regimes or any government that undermines individual liberties. Such a scenario when driven to the extreme will lead to disorder and chaos. Political power still needs to be vested on the responsible individuals who would use such power for the good of the people. On this point, it is worth noting again Plato's ideal of the philosopher-king. While Plato's appropriation of political power is authoritarian, he has the good reason of choosing someone or a few who are virtuous and, therefore, can lead the state to genuine stability and order. Of the three political alternatives that we have discussed in this paper, the balanced power position remains to be the most appropriate political option. But this balanced power must be based on a responsible liberal democracy,

one that recognizes the rights and interests of individuals and listens to the sentiments of people. At the same time, it must utilize power for the common welfare and interest, and set the condition for self-regulation and self-determination.

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