

Review: *Post-Democracy* by Colin Crouch

Post-Democracy is an intelligent small book written for those who still care about perspectives of political egalitarianism – and it explains why egalitarian society is not any more on the agenda of post-democracy. Crouch's main contention is that while modern democracies are keeping up the facade of formal democratic principles, "politics and government are increasingly slipping back into the control of privileged elites in the manner characteristic of pre-democratic times" (p. 6). Since the big wave of deregulation in the 1990s the socially and politically extremely narrow shareholder value paradigm has discriminated intellectual all efforts in search of a wider stakeholder economy.

Crouch states that the neo-liberal effort to withdraw the state from providing for the lives of ordinary people and to focus on freedom of the markets was always accompanied by a growing colonisation of the same state by corporate interests. General elections in western democracies have degenerated to tax cutting auctions.

The key institution of the post-democratic world is the global firm. These are corporations that have outsourced all substantial tasks, focussing on the global movement of their brand assets and the electronically traded value of their shares. Beautiful epigram: "*Having a core business itself becomes a rigidity*" (p. 37). Not surprisingly governments tried to mimic this organisational pattern that they envied by outsourcing their core competencies. The result is ridiculous, but more sad than funny: "Government becomes a kind of institutional idiot, its every ill-informed move being anticipated in advance and therefore discounted by smart market actors." (p. 41) This explains the paradoxical "return to corporate political privilege under the slogan of markets an free competition." (P. 51)

Crouch's opusculum is neither over-promising revolutionary potentials, nor giving reasons to fall into depression and political apathy: "Egalitarians cannot reverse the arrival of post-democracy, but we must learn to cope with it – softening, amending, sometimes challenging it – rather than simply accepting it" (p. 12)

Now, egalitarianism is not really my cup of tea and some of the critical observations about liberalism are not quite new. But I was intimidated by Crouch's analysis of the "growing incapacity of modern citizens to work out what their interests are" (p. 28) and the big picture of post-democracy in which he put it. "The consumer has triumphed over the citizen" (p. 49) and citizenship is what he cares most about. The author lived in Italy under Berlusconi and this has probably given him a very concentrated insight into the orchestrated attempt to expropriate individuals of their capacity to form political judgements. From the German and Japanese side I can personally witness the same exhaustion of political intelligence, also the shift to more formal concepts and practices of democracy. This is why I think that Crouch's statement is right: post-democracy has already begun.

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