

# Betrachtungen über „disqualifizierte Minoritäten“ und demokratischen Konsens

Auszüge aus seinen im Schumpeter-Archiv publizierten *Pieces of manuscripts, discarded manuscripts, notes and other material for the socialism book*

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“This makes all the difference. An attempt to enforce the surrender, regardless of its will, of a minority (let alone majority) whose social vitality is as yet unimpaired, is one thing: an attempt to enforce the surrender of an atrophic minority that merely hangs on by virtue of the inertia of social institutions, is quite different another thing: commonsense tells us that meaning as well as chance of success differ fundamentally in both cases.<sup>1</sup> From this standpoint a synthesis becomes possible of Consent und Compulsion which is no mere compromise between fundamentally irreconcilable elements but has a sound meaning of its own. Of course it is very difficult to apply in practice: some people will always hold, other people will never admit that a given minority is disqualified in the sense defined. But this does not affect the principle; we have nevertheless get hold of a rational solution of the conflict which disturbs the minds not only of modern socialists but of non-socialist democrats. In order to show this and also in order to guard against a very natural misunderstanding.

Let us take an aeroplane and “hop off” to France, not to modern France, but to the France of the twelfth century. We observe – disregarding certain elements, especially the towns – a feudal organization. The feudal lord and their henchmen form a minority of the population. But we readily understand that in the circumstances of time and country no other organization of society could be a practical success and that any attempt to do away with it would end in chaos in wholesale destruction of cultural values and even in danger of injury to the survival interest of that society. Now let us choose another plane, one which flies between New York and Paris of 1789. We observe another social structure. It also contains feudal elements. But they are readily seen to be no longer necessary wheels of the social engine which on the contrary could work more efficiently without them. Hence alighting from our plane, we have no difficulty in realizing that abolition of their privileges which had become functionless dead word is now a completely different matter. It was, in historical fact, substantially secured by convent on the famous night

1 Bezogen auf die von Schumpeter schließlich realisierte Gliederung von *Kapitalismus, Sozialismus und Demokratie (KS&D)* sind die nachstehenden Entwürfe dem 23. Kapitel des Werkes und näher dessen III. Abschnitt *Demokratie in der sozialistischen Ordnung* zuzuordnen.

of the forth of August. But if it had not been or if in spite of that convent there had been sectional resistance, compulsion would look to us in a different light.

I have chosen a favorable example. It suffices however to show that our distinction between enforcing the surrender of “vital” and enforcing the surrender of “disqualified” minorities is not otiose or practically futile. Nor is it merely a matter of our subjective preferences. The point to grasp is our recognition of the vitality of a minority group or of the functions such a group fills in a particular national organism – I cannot stay to show why the two will as a rule coincide – is entirely independent of whether or not we sympathize with groups or approve of those functions. Being modern men or women and flying the Stars and Stripes from our plane we should probably like the feudal stratum that we recognized as vital just as little as we should the bathroom arrangements of twelfth century France. And if we traveled to France of 1792 or 1793, we might appreciate those cultural value whose carrier the persecuted aristocratic stratum continued to be and hate from the bottom of our hearts – I for me should – the stupid phrases, the sanguinary brutality, the moral squalor incident to the method by which the institutional deadwood was being eliminated. But neither class of feelings nor personal value-judgements is relevant to our criterion which turns on a question of fact and not on a question of valuation.

In our everyday life however and in our thoughts on social subjects we are in the habit of adopting exactly the opposite criterion. We take our stand on our personal or group-wise valuations and recognize or disqualify other group or interests or ideals precisely according to whether or not we sympathise with or hate them. Whenever some of value is of sufficient moment to us and whenever we hold it with sufficient zest, as at certain junctures we hold religious convictions or at other junctures certain substitutes for them, the other fellow walks in darkness and this darkness, however widely spread, must not be allowed to prevail over the light. For the socialist – as far any “ist”, in fact, prohibitionist or other – the non-socialist is not simply in error but also in sin: this is the test of any belief which lays claim to absolute truth and knows no argument outside of the propaganda for and the exposition of the true faith. This attitude is one of the outstanding facts of our time as with varying connotations it has been one of the outstanding facts of all times; it is practically much more important than the one we have adopted above, we shall keep it steadily in view. Just now however I have merely to advert to the danger of confusion between the two, a danger which is particular great if we speak of a vital minority as “justified” by a social “function” and of an atrophic one as disqualified by the absence of it.

But it should be clear that our criterion of disqualification can only apply to minorities: it supplies a condition which democratic practice requires for deviating from the principle of government by consent and without which it is no part of that practice to override the will of minorities. The other criterion has no reference to whether dissenters are in a majority or in a minority and no place in the theory of democratic practice: on the contrary, it supplies a condition for attitudes and decisions which are, and at all times have been, among the chief sources of antidemocratic tendencies.” (Schumpeter 1934 ff.: 353 ff.)<sup>2</sup>

2 Online: <https://www.schumpeter.info/schriften/edition%20hedtke.pdf#page=353>, 21.07.2022.

“Finally, the selective theory provides a rationale that is otherwise lacking for the majority principle. We have seen that if far reaching measures, especially measures of social reconstruction, be taken in response to the will of the majority of a representative body or even of the electorate and if the will of minority be unconditionally overridden, all that has ever been claimed for democracy will be as good as lost. There is in fact no argument except one derived from the absence of a more rational criterion for such an unconditional privilege for fifty one and such an unconditional enslavement of forty nine percent. We have recognized this by our theory of the disqualified Minority and may add that barring this case democratic practice does not typically override minorities, in particular minorities which form a complete social organism but carries measures that are believed to be of fundamental importance by consent. This principle can be exemplified by English practice according to which a measure that is being seriously fought and secures but a small majority at the second reading is as a rule not proceeded with at all or allowed to be killed or emasculated in committee. The large privileges allowed to the opposition and the forbearance shown even to filibustering point in this same direction. The exceptions are numerous but probate regulariser. An administration that forces issues risks its political life. And major deviations – the outstanding one was the American civil war – are likely produce national catastrophes.” (Schumpeter 1934 ff.: 405 f.)<sup>3</sup>

“Even about this, however, there is a difficulty which we must now digress to notice. It will stand out more tellingly if we consider it not in abstracto but in the concrete setting by England parliamentary practice. As a rule, England governments resigned or dissolved not only when actually defeated but also when their majorities fall below a margin which, though elastic and a matter of the Cabinet’s judgement was yet, at any given point of time, a very factor in the political situation. There were exceptions but these only strengthen the inference. For whenever a government that was thus insufficiently supported, was allowed to stay in office, it behaved, and was treated by the opposition, exactly like a government in a minority which sometimes was also accorded qualified support on certain understandings about what it would do or not do. Similarly, a government supported by a small majority rarely opened up major controversial issues and if it did, this was looked upon as something very like political misconduct. Major measures involving large questions of interests or principles were proposed and carried either by at least tacit agreement with the opposition or part of the opposition – such as old age pensions or tariff reform – or else after sweeping victories at the polls and by the resulting large majorities. If majorities were not large or if they ceased to be so at the second reading of a major measure, this measure was as rule not proceeded with and either dropped or shelved.

Why so if the will of the majority is law? Closer observation of the half dozen or so of standard cases will I think convince you that this question cannot adequately be answered by consideration of tactical commonsense. Of course, a cabinet that decides to go on with

3 Online: <https://www.schumpeter.info/schriften/edition%20hedtke.pdf#page=405>, 21.07.2022.

a margin of a few votes will expose itself to the danger of humiliating defeats in the conduct of current business. Still more will it have to risk party values, if it attempts legislation of a controversial nature when support is already inadequate independently of it. This is true, but it is not the essential point. There have been many prime ministers who were quite willing to take their lives in their hands and to fight against very heavy odds. Sometimes they even succeeded as e.g. Disraeli did in the late sixties. But the point is that they and both their followers and opponents looked upon such a proceeding as improper. Everybody felt that great issues should not be decided by victories cleverly snatched by a neck. Parliament and the nation ought to more thoroughly persuaded first. And if attacks on the House of Lords were not more successful this was precisely due to the fact that what we may term the theory of it's function came to be increasingly based on that very consideration which appealed even to people who were on principle most violently opposed to that institution.

Now this attitude is very significant. It means not less than the principle that the will of minorities should not, in a democratic community, be unconditionally overridden or the will of the majority unconditionally prevail – but only if that minority, besides being simply a minority, presents also other characteristics, for instance if it is small, if it is felt to represent a single interest without importance to the rest of the community, if what it want is morally disapproved of and so on. Whoever puts this attitude into practice, votes each time want of confidence in the abstract majority principle. At the back of it is, on the one hand, the belief that there is a right and a wrong answer to every political question which it is possible to formulate in a simple and trustworthy fashion, and, on the other hand, the belief that the overwhelming majority of the people can be made to see it and to act upon it the “common good” by means of a straightforward process of rational persuasion. Impossible not see the derivation of these beliefs from the rationalist (and exploded) psychology and sociology of the Enlightenment, roughly the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Equally impossible not see that practicable application of those beliefs can successfully work only under very special circumstances. Presently we shall have to face the consequence of this, do not let us forget two shining truth: Right or wrong as to the underlying theory of political behaviour that ideal was certainly the most human – and humane – one of all, also the one that took the most generous view of human nature; and, possible or impossible as a general canon of political structure and action, it actually almost worked at least in our modern country, England, and under the particular conditions of, roughly, the nineteenth century.” (Schumpeter 1934 ff.: 356 ff.)<sup>4</sup>

4 Online: <https://www.schumpeter.info/schriften/edition%20hedtke.pdf#page=356>, 21.07.2022.