

The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

Have you noticed that the electorate of many democracies falls in and out of love with their leaders almost as quickly as I change my knickers. I noted, last Thursday-week, that US President George W. Bush, on his arrival in Brazil, was greeted with demonstrations that turned a little nasty. In the US, it is said that President George W. Bush is among the most-disliked Presidents of all time. In Western Europe – Italy, Germany, France, Spain, etc – most Eastern European countries where democracy is the political order of the day, and in The Philippines, especially, there are many demonstrations and riots against the elected leaders. In India, sometimes the rioting over anger with the government of the country gets very bloody. Only in England, it seems, are there few demonstrations against the leaders of the government of the day. Compare these examples with that of the Government of China: There are very few demonstrations against the ‘elected’ leaders of this country. Is one to conclude that the people of China are well satisfied with the calibre of the political leadership of their country? In Hongkong, the Chief Executive of the territory is democratically elected by a very limited number of people, carefully selected by Beijing, and, although it is said that some people did not love the First Chief Executive, Mr Tung Chee Hwa (), or the present Chief Executive, Mr Donald Tsang Yam Kuen (), there has never been a demonstration, leading to violence, culminating in aggravated assault. About the closest thing to violence, ever witnessed in Hongkong due to alleged disenfranchisement, was when Mr Tung Chee Hwa was trying to direct the actions of his government and people got a little fed up with his inability to make any kind of a decision of importance – even to banning smoking in restaurants and public places. The lesson to be learnt, it appears to me, is that, in most Western-styled democracies, they are prone to civil disobedience from the very electorate who cast their ballots for their leaders of the day. In authoritarian governments, on the other hand, such as in Singapore and China, they are not as prone to civil disobedience as in Western-styled democracies. Could you imagine a large gathering of the Singapore disenchanted in Orchard Road, Singapore? It would take, I would imagine, all of 5 minutes before the Singapore Police would disperse the crowd, with billy clubs, cracking a few skulls in the process. Singapore, by the way, is among the most-successful governments in Asia. So, one has to take one’s hat off to the Lee Kuan Yew Family, the ruling family of Singapore since 1959. In China, if the government of the day determines that this or that has to be done, it is done. No question about it. In Hongkong, on the other hand, you will note that the redevelopment of the old Kaitak Airport is still on the drawing board. It has been on the drawing board for the past decade, since the opening of the new Cheklapkok International Airport in 1997, in fact. The same is true of the former HMS Tamar site: It has taken, so far, one decade for the Hongkong Government to decide what to do with this peach of a site. Of course, I realise that a lot of the procrastination with regard to the redevelopment of the Kaitak Airport site was due to the bungling efforts of Mr Tung Chee Hwa who, clearly, did not know or, alternatively, did not fully understand that he was expected, as the Chief Executive of Hongkong, to make definitive decisions, but, nevertheless, it shows that, when you have a situation where there is a number of people, within a political system, people who are permitted, by law, to voice opinions against the legally elected government of the day, you may well have problems from time to time. In order to avoid this type of problem, a political system, fashioned in the manner of Russia, China, or even Singapore pays large dividends, history appears to prove. Of course, there is a small downside to dictatorships/authoritarianism, also, I realise this, but, on occasions, some people have to be sacrificed for the good of the country/territory, it is reasoned. You will note, also, that both Singapore and China believe in deterrent sentencing of felons so that those people, who may be planning to act, contrary to the law, have to think long and carefully because the consequences of their acts may well be the final acts of their lives. In Russia, there is a different

way to deal with felons or would-be traitors to the State: The poison pill remedy. Take note, My Dear Grandchild, Singapore, China and Russia are all massive powerhouses and are gaining in strength, daily, both militarily and economically.

Ironically, the governments of the world, which have, historically, been the most successful, have, always, been dictatorships of one sort or another: Imperial Rome, followed by Republican Rome, lasted more than 600 years; the Egyptian Empire, under the divine rule of the Pharaohs, lasted thousands of years; and, even France, under Napoleon Bonaparte, immediately springs to mind. Napoleon I (1769-1821), the First Consul of the French Republic (1799-1804) as Napoleon Bonaparte, and Emperor of the French (1804-1814; March-June 1815), was the single, most-dominant figure in modern European history. He led France to heights, unimagined in his day. He planted the seeds, leading to institutional reforms. He made France, and himself, the virtual masters of Europe. In fact, he was far more successful than was Adolf Hitler of Germany between 1939 and 1945. Napoleon Bonaparte's administrative reforms still mark Europe, today, and, when Charles André Joseph Marie De Gaulle (1890-1970) came to power in 1959 as the country's first President, he took careful note of the Napoleon Bonaparte's administrative reforms and the manner of his administration. In contrast to France under the President Charles De Gaulle's decade of power, in Singapore, the uninterrupted 48 years of Lee Kuan Yew Administrations have resulted in what I would label as paternalistic, authoritarian dictatorship, veiled in a democratic constitution in a very similar fashion to that of China. The major difference between Singapore and China, however, is that China prefers to treat its felons with the alacritous respect of extreme prejudice whereas, in Singapore, successive Lee Kuan Yew Administrations use the laws of libel in order to silence dissenters and/or bankrupt trouble-makers with a single judge, appointed by the Lee Kuan Yew Administration, to interpret Singapore law as it is drafted and amended, from time to time.

Make no mistake, My Dear Grandchild, I am not suggesting that dictatorship is better than democracy, but what I am saying is that legislative bickering over trivia for the sake of having one's voice heard, the ulterior motive, being the hope of corraling future votes in order to perpetuate one's political lineage, can be an obstacle to any democratically elected government. Democracy, today, is considered the best form of government because nobody, as yet, has formulated a better system of government. At the same time, democracy may not be the best and most-expedient manner to get things accomplished when needs be such – as, clearly, may be demonstrated by the many failures of Hongkong's governments, first under Mr Tung Chee Hwa and, today, under Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam Kuen. However, I do recognise that the present Chief Executive is a definite improvement over his predecessor. I cannot help but wonder, however, into which rowboat I would prefer to sit: One with a gaping hole in its bow, or one with a gaping hole in its stern?

Talk to you, next week.

Chief Lady

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