

6th May 2021

Democracy

“So, Two cheers for Democracy: one because it admits variety and two because it permits criticism. Two cheers are quite enough.”

E M Forster, Two Cheers for Democracy, 'What I Believe'

Today we vote in the Scottish Parliamentary Elections. With a parallel election in Wales, a bi-election in Hartlepool, and Council, Mayoral and other Elections throughout England, it's been labelled "super-Thursday". But, simply put, it's another day to be proud of our democracy.

I've never missed an election of any kind for fifty-three years – Westminster, the Scottish Parliament, European elections, local Councils in a variety of manifestations, Referendums on Scottish self-determination and independence, Europe (in, out, shake-it-all-about). I still experience a frisson of excitement going to my Polling Station, having my name checked, taking my ballot-paper, entering my crosses or numbers and dropping my choice in the Ballot Box. Participating in democracy is *so* important. Blood has been spilled so I have the freedom to vote.

Why, then, did E M Forster write in 1951 that *two* cheers for democracy were enough? What was missing alongside the importance of "variety" and "criticism"? For me, a third cheer is missing when people don't participate in our democracy. Perhaps we're apathetic, take our freedoms for granted, or don't trust politicians. But let's not give up on our rights. We change things and hold decision-makers to account by casting a vote. Democracy, if it is to work fully, needs full participation.

And what about trust? We need politicians at all levels to value democracy and focus on issues that transcend party-political positions. Too often, promises made at elections are discarded in favour of the party line, and the "third cheer" for democracy once again falls silent.

Charles Baudelaire, the French poet and critic, wrote to a friend after a particularly troublesome election in 1852:

If I had voted, I could only have voted for myself.

Come on, man! You should have got out there and voted in the first place. And if *you're* not on the Ballot Paper, make sure you value your choice of someone who can speak for you in a democracy.

A prayer for today

Lord, thank you for my freedoms. Help me not take them for granted. Amen