POLITICAL FICTIONS AND REPOLITICIZATION

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Democracy, political legitimization and public opinion

Recognition is the touchstone of political legitimization in Western democracies. Once freedom is acknowledged by political thinking and discourse to be both ground and origin of political society, the pre-eminent status of recognition is unarguable. All forms of political obligation must be based on freedom.

Freedom, however, does not function without the impress of rationality. Free recognition is a fruit of rationality. Deference to public opinion is the means by which a democratic system reaches a shared rationality that may give rise to consensus.

The political decisions taken by those in power must reflect the citizens whom they govern; indeed, the citizens must see those decisions as their own. The identity of governors with the governed marks one of the key differences between democracy and other political systems. C. Schmitt holds that democracy is adopted as a form of political organization which contains no specific political content of its own. Throughout its history, democracy has been the ally of diverse political ideas: socialism, liberalism, and even conservatism. Power rests with the people as a whole – that is, the will of the people as a whole. A reading of the description of democracy offered by Rousseau in *The Social Contract* appears to suggest that the need to ignore the will of the vanquished minority lies at the heart of the democratic process. The concept of “general will” is a key to Rousseau’s understanding of democracy; moreover, it is clear that