

The turmoil in the Arab World reflects the rise of people against the corruption and autocratic rule that has impoverished them. And there is much to learn from these uprisings. In South Africa, we have had all this pointed out to us by the situation in Zimbabwe but in our country only the poor, displaced by the displaced poor of Zimbabwe, complain and act in the only way they can find to express their outrage.

And then we accuse them of xenophobia but do nothing about the root cause of their unhappiness.

Instead our government continues to hold hands with Robert Mugabe.

It is interesting that it is only in this week that our government has expressed an opinion about the civil war that is going on in Libya.

And the AU, which seems to be a club for autocrats and therefore unable to pronounce against the brotherhood, is a totally ineffective body that cannot act against the flouting of democracy because they do not believe in it.

So viva Gbagbo in Côte d'Ivoire, viva!

All the happenings in Africa are mirrors being held up to us in South Africa for us to learn. But our eyes are turned away, as we turn them away from Zimbabwe.

We do not see that Zimbabwe and Libya presage our future.

Will it also take us forty-one years, as it has Libya, before we have the courage to break away from tribalism and demand an end to the corruption in the government that leads to the impoverishment of the governed?

Let us not be fooled into thinking that freedom from tyranny is the same as democracy. In fact, we should really examine the concept of democracy.

It is an ideal and it has never been practised anywhere in the world.

The Athenians, the accredited initiators of democracy, practised government by rich men.

In the modern world, because we live in national states, not city-states like the Athenians, we have representative democracy. We elect representatives to look after the welfare of the community. Once they have been elected, however, they do not remember that they are representatives; they become a ruling elite.

And they immediately demonstrate that government is really control; they set up institutions and bureaucracies that control every aspect of human life.

This is what is called democracy today.

Democracy has come to mean control.

If a country has a somewhat benign ruling elite, then some benefits are passed down to the electorate.

This beneficence is not an expression of a belief in liberty, fraternity and equality but is simply insurance against being ousted at the polls.

In Africa, of course, that insurance has long been dispensed with in most countries where the ruling elite either created a dynasty, (Egypt, Tunisia, Kenya) or ignored the polls (Zimbabwe, Côte d'Ivoire) or banked on tribalism that has little understanding of democratic ideals and turns voting into a perfunctory ritual.

There really is no such thing as democracy. It is an ideal towards which we strive. When corruption is rife, there is no striving towards democratic ideals.

And what we vote for at every election is not democracy; we simply vote for opportunists wanting power.

And power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely.

The Libyan people, like all people who struggle for freedom, believe that the struggle is a demonstration of democracy.

It is not; it is a power struggle and once so-called freedom fighters become the ruling elite, they adopt the ways of the ruling elites that they overthrow.

The present leaders of revolutions will follow the same path.

It takes decades before the people rise up against despotism and when they do, the ex-revolutionaries now the ruling elite, who have built up armouries, are ready for them.

And that is why we needed an arms deal. When the people in South Africa eventually rise up against the oppression of corruption, the government will be ready for us.

As I have no understanding of battle strategy and army manoeuvres, I am not sure how those super submarines that we purchased will be used.

I am sure, however, that the ruling elite knows how to turn them against us.

Democracy is a myth. As I have written before, it is the present-day opiate of the masses.