Planetary Government in *Traveller*

One of the social factors in the Universal World Profile is called government type, and it purports to indicate the style by which the local government rules itself (or is ruled by others). The list of government types is long and spans the available options from the simple participating democracy to the esoteric charismatic oligarchy. Most notable, however, is the absence of some routinely expected government types; types such as empire, presidency, or monarchy. Similarly, breakdowns such as aristocracy, plutocracy, or matriarchy are also omitted.

The reason, in reality, is that they are not omitted or absent; the many varied types of government which can be imagined all fit into the basic scheme given in the **Traveller** government tables. To understand this, it is important to remember just what purpose the government factor is meant to serve. **Traveller** players and characters are rarely involved with governments on the international and interplanetary level. That is to say, they do not deal with kings or presidents or heads of state; they deal with individual members of broad government mechanisms, they deal with office holders and employees whose attitudes and actions are shaped by the type of government they serve. As a result, travellers are rarely interested in the upper reaches of government; they want to know what they can expect from the governmental structure at their own level. For example, if a group of travellers were to journey across the United States from coast to coast, they would be interested in the degree of responsiveness they could expect from local governments, in how easy the local court clerk would respond to information requests, or in the degree of difficulty that could be expected in obtaining certain licenses. As they moved through Nebraska, the fact that that state has a unicameral legislature would be of little or no importance.

For this reason, among others, labels such as monarchy have been eliminated. Calling a government type "monarchy" would conjure up images of a king and his retinue, but still leaves a lot of information unrelated. Within the **Traveller** system, such a government could be classified as a self-perpetuating oligarchy (hereditary monarchy), representative democracy (constitutional monarchy), feudal technocracy (enlightened feudal monarchy), captive government (puppet monarchy), civil service bureaucracy, or any of several others. The simple term monarchy becomes nonsense when one attempts to apply it to a widespread classification system.

Another reason for the labels that are provided in the government classification system is as an aid to imagination. The unaided imagination of even the most inventive referee can go dry after generating a few simple worlds. Using die rolls to create the individual factors for planets jogs the imagination, forcing the referee to think of rationales for the combinations that occur. The use of too familiar terms (such as monarchy) can stifle imagination by allowing the referee to settle into old lines of thought.

The list of government types[3] given in **Traveller** can, however, sometimes seem obscure. The following is that list illuminated by examples.

0. No government structure. In many cases, family bonds will predominate. Examples: The early American West, Indian tribes, or frontier situations.

1. Company/Corporation. Ruling functions are assumed by company managerial elite and most citizenry are company employees or dependents. Examples: Oil drilling rigs at sea, and company towns such as mining towns or self-contained manufacturing towns.

2. Participating Democracy. Ruling function decisions are reached by the advice and consent of the citizenry directly. Examples: New England towns (town meeting), many clubs with parliamentary procedure by-laws, or Scientific Associations.

3. Self-perpetuating Oligarchy. Ruling functions are performed by a restricted minority with little or no input from the mass of citizenry. Oligarchy means rule by the few. Examples: Monarchy, especially a hereditary monarchy, matriarchy or patriarchy, plutocracy, and the communist party, in the sense that membership is restricted, and the party, rather than a single individual, rules.

4. Representative Democracy. Ruling functions are performed by elected representatives. Examples: The United States, each individual State, the United Kingdom (a constitutional monarchy), and many corporations (shareholders elect a board of directors).

5. Feudal Technocracy.[12] Ruling functions are performed by specific individuals for persons who agree to be ruled by them. Relationships are based on the performance of technical activities which are mutually beneficial. The lower levels of government (all the way to the citizens themselves) support the upper levels of government for as long as the general system provides a living for all. Examples: Japan (in that companies tend to hire employees for life, and strong loyalties are formed), and the United States (in that some populations have strong party loyalty in return for local assistance by the party in the form of jobs and handouts).

6. Captive Government. Ruling functions are performed by an imposed leadership answerable to an outside group. A colony or conquered area. Examples: The military (especially military bases with dependents; they have little or no say in local government). Manchukuo. France under the Nazi occupation, or prisons and prison camps.

7. Balkanization. No central ruling authority exists; rival governments compete for control. Examples: The Balkans, 1910 to 1920 (as a result of the power vacuum created by the breakup of the Ottoman Empire). Iran during Meirislamie Revolution (as rival factions each claimed power and authority and then attempted to consolidate their holdings), and Earth.

8. Civil Service Bureaucracy. Ruling functions are performed by government agencies employing individuals selected for their expertise. Examples: Imperial China (where selective tests determined the fitness of the individuals to assume government posts), and some aspects of the Federal government of the United States.

9. Impersonal Bureaucracy. Ruling functions are performed by agencies which have become insulated from the governed citizens. This type of bureaucracy is typified by "red tape" entanglements. Examples: Most welfare agencies, customs officials, and tax departments.

10. Charismatic Dictatorship. Ruling functions are performed by agencies directed by a single leader who enjoys the overwhelming confidence of the citizens. Examples: Germany under Hitler, Italy under Mussolini, China under Mao, the USSR under Lenin, and the United States (to some extent) under FDR.

11. Non-Charismatic Leader. A previous charismatic dictator has been replaced by a leader through normal channels. Examples: The USSR after Stalin or China after Mao.

12. Charismatic Oligarchy. Ruling functions are performed by a select group of members of an organization or class which enjoys the overwhelming confidence of the citizenry. Examples: The Communist Party in the USSR, the Fascist Party in Italy, or the Democratic Party in Chicago.

13. Religious Dictatorship. Ruling Functions are performed by a religious, mystic or psionic organization without regard to the specific individual needs of the citizenry. Examples: Iran as an Islamic Republic.

Note how the above list of government types gives considerable overlap. No classification of governments can cover all aspects in one listing; the list is, however, a guide to the types of situations which a referee and players can expect to encounter. Looking at the individual classification can provide a springboard to usable information for an adventure or a campaign.

By the very nature of the classification system, it is also possible for the referee to create and add additional government types for any specific campaign. Remember that the generation system is intended primarily as a prod to imagination. For example, a referee may wish to define a specific type of government more fully, and to establish a specific factor or code for it. Although it is possible to envision a military government within several of the existing codes, it is also possible to define one specifically – perhaps as the result of a coup, or as the rule of a militaristic society similar to that of Sparta. In such a case, the letter M could be allocated to military or Spartan government. Once such a note is made, the referee can then impose that government where he or she thinks it appropriate; the adventure or campaign effects follow from that point.

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[1]Feudal Technocracy was the dominant government form in H. Beam Piper's Space Viking. Organized in a system of kingdoms, duchies and other small states, ruled by (frequently-warring) noblemen. Despite (or perhaps because of) the political instability, the government achieves
[2]I would call the structure of the Imperium a Feudal Technocracy.
[3]This article was written prior to the adding of government types 14 and 15.