

“We have met the Enemy and He is Us”

Walt Kelly

Is it possible we are missing what causes the things we hate about politics?

Is it conceivable it can actually be fixed?

There is little doubt that people are upset and disillusioned with the political process of the day. We are not talking about a specific group of people but the entire population of the world. Be they Republican, Democrat, Libertarian, Environmentalist, Pro Life, Pro Choice, European, Asian, rich, poor, taxpayer, welfare recipient, etc., etc... any daily newscast confirms that just about everyone is angry about anything political. In an even broader sense, historically, this has pretty much always been a constant element of human existence. As we continue to listen to our candidates discuss their sincere desire to serve the public and correct the multitude of perceived injustices, the problems continue and our hopes seem doomed to eternal disappointment.

It doesn't seem possible that every conceivable cause and effect of this human condition has not been considered and a solution sought. Perhaps we have missed some underlying cause that we have not considered. This article hopes to provide a new perspective that may change your understanding of these problems. It is an unusual viewpoint that logically leads one to the realization that we may play a more significant role in causing these problems than we realize. The anger that we direct at our politicians and the political process may be self-fulfilling outcomes of our own nature. Even more importantly, there may be a solution that has not been considered before.

In order to establish a pathway to understanding this solution, it is necessary to start the journey a bit further up the line of the political process so we can begin at the beginning. We need to discuss the selection process whereby individuals elect others to be their representative in a governance role. This process is well-known and reasonably well-understood universally.

A period of campaigning generally occurs where individuals, seeking to become representatives, utilize various forms of communication to inform the voters of their positions, intentions, philosophical leanings and plans. At some specified point in time, the voters can choose to participate by voting for the candidate of their choice. These elections are invariably in the format of secret ballot and the candidate with the most votes becomes the representative for the particular constituency that has elected them.

This process is well-established and broadly accepted as appropriate. It is monitored very closely and numerous checks & balances exist in most free countries. Internationally, when there is doubt about the integrity of the process, we often insert monitors to assure fairness. This is heavily focused on assuring that the concept of secret ballot has not been compromised to the point where coercion or oppression corrupts the ability of individuals to vote their conscience.

Secret ballot voting is globally accepted as a major factor in assuring that votes truly represent the opinions and desires of those voting. We take this principle for granted today but it has really only been around since the mid nineteenth century. A global movement usually referred to as the [Chartists](#)

established six key tenants in its efforts to attain “Manhood Suffrage” or expand the right to vote to all men over the age of 21. Secret ballot was a key element of this platform, “To protect the elector in the exercise of his vote.”

Australia is often credited with making secret ballot a legally required process for public elections and the concept was actually referred to as the, “Australian Ballot.” Historically, France was actually the first adopter in 1831 while Australia ratified the process in 1856. The U.K. did not ratify until 1872, Canada in 1874 and the USA change did not take place until 1896.

Secret ballot has been adopted almost globally as a necessary element of a free elective process. To highlight the concept put forth in this article, it is important for the reader to focus on this generally accepted principle more closely.

One must ask oneself, “Why is secret ballot so universally accepted?”

In considering this question, the typical answers focus on the negative aspects that occur in the absence of secret ballot like coercion, pressure, intimidation, bullying, etc. This process has been so ingrained in our lives that many have never actually been personally subjected to these negative consequences as related to a public election process.

There are lots of other situations where we are exposed to 3rd party coercion and pressure but we might not connect that to the concept of secret ballot. It does relate to our perception that to openly declare our opinion in some situations may be at least uncomfortable or at worst personally dangerous. The academic field of Group Dynamics has much to say on this aspect of human nature so there is no shortage of scientific data on the subject.

So how does this lead one to a new perspective on the political process that may change our understanding of the cause of actions that result in our disappointment and anger? Let me try to connect the dots.

We must focus on the fundamentals of human nature that make the secret ballot process work so well. When an individual feels safe in expressing their opinion, we will get results that truly reflect the individual’s conscience. The secret ballot process assures this by keeping the individual’s vote anonymous. We will know the outcome of a vote but, we will not know how any specific individual voted on the issue concerned. Since most issues have a variety of supporters and dissenters, this assures any voter they will not have to face to wrath of a person or group with an opposing position on the topic. Without the protection of anonymity, any voter would have to consider a multitude of issues peripheral to the specific subject of the vote. This may be as simple as disappointing a friend, as complex as defying a group or as serious as jeopardizing one’s job or life. As most realize, people will generally act in their self-interest. When these other considerations are in play, individuals may vote contrary to their conscience on the issue at hand because the other concerns become more significant than the subject of the vote. It would not be reasonable to expect anyone to put their livelihood, their family’s safety or even their life at risk in a vote on any controversial issue. There are many examples of systems that demonstrate this principle.

One of the basic premises of free market economics recognizes that individual's acting in their own best interest is a fundamental feature of freedom. Concepts that recognize and allow the natural exercise of individual human nature seem to work while those that violate those principles don't.

Ludwig von Mises entitled his celebrated economic text, "Human Action" in recognition of this. Adam Smith expressed the requirement to allow the, "Invisible Hand" to determine the actions of individuals in order for optimal economic progress. The concept of, "Laissez Faire" economics is likewise aligned to allow human beings to operate in tune with their basic nature.

Systems like socialism, communism, fascism, etc. all violate these principles and invariably fail to accomplish their goal of improving the human experience. The modern-day political process is trapped in this same contradiction.

In a political campaign we have the opportunity to listen to hopeful candidates tell us how they want the chance to improve society as our elected representative. We sometimes listen, sometimes hope they can actually do what they say and sometimes vote for them trusting they can actually improve society via their role as our representative. We are hopeful and supportive of their stated mission in the face of historical disappointments from all who have gone before. We trust them enough to vote for them and send them off to implement the improvements we desire. I guess you could say we trust them to do what's right, fair, logical, etc.

Our representatives probably assume their role with a similar sense of hope in improving our society (especially the first-timers). They would like to represent us honorably, face issues head on with logical and fair resolutions. Unfortunately, they soon realize that their ability to face issues head on and vote their conscience is almost impossible. On every issue there are factors that overshadow the subject at hand. Their party exercises power to coerce, special interest groups have the ability to pressure, their financial supporters expect reciprocity, their constituents expect to benefit, people with questionable ethics may even bribe or threaten them. All of these 3rd parties have power to enforce their positions because they can verify how their representative votes on all issues and therefore coerce conformance. The very factor that makes us so adamant about protecting ourselves from these external influences in a public election have been tossed out as unacceptable for those who represent our interests in a governmental role. We loudly and consistently affirm our "right to know how our representatives vote" without realizing the harm this causes. All the while we blame politicians, special interest groups and corrupt individuals for the fact that the government does not address the issues that concern us.

It is time we considered our role in insisting on a practice that assures our representatives cannot actually deal with the issues of the day. Trusting politicians to act responsibly is not the point in this concept. The well-established understanding of human nature and group dynamics is the issue. Requiring open balloting at the political level actually causes many of the problems that exist in the political process. We have instituted a system that violates these well-understood principles of human nature and its failure to accomplish our intended outcome is guaranteed. We are facilitating, albeit unintentionally, the power brokers and enabling their ability to eliminate any possibility of government by the people and for the people. We need to address the cause of the problem instead of attacking the inevitable outcome of this flawed system.

An outcry from the public, based on an informed understanding of the problem, is the only way to eliminate open balloting in all political bodies. This is so counter-intuitive to the norms of the day that building support for the concept will take time, review and open discussion. The original effort of the Chartists took decades of growing public awareness and millions of followers to achieve the mission and this improvement to the process of governance will also require a long term, persistent effort by a growing number of rational supporters who understand the fundamental principles involved.

If you recognize the logical basis of this concept and would like to join the movement to change this flawed system, you can join the Association to Improve Government by emailing, [mailto:“info@ImproveGovernment.org”](mailto:info@ImproveGovernment.org)