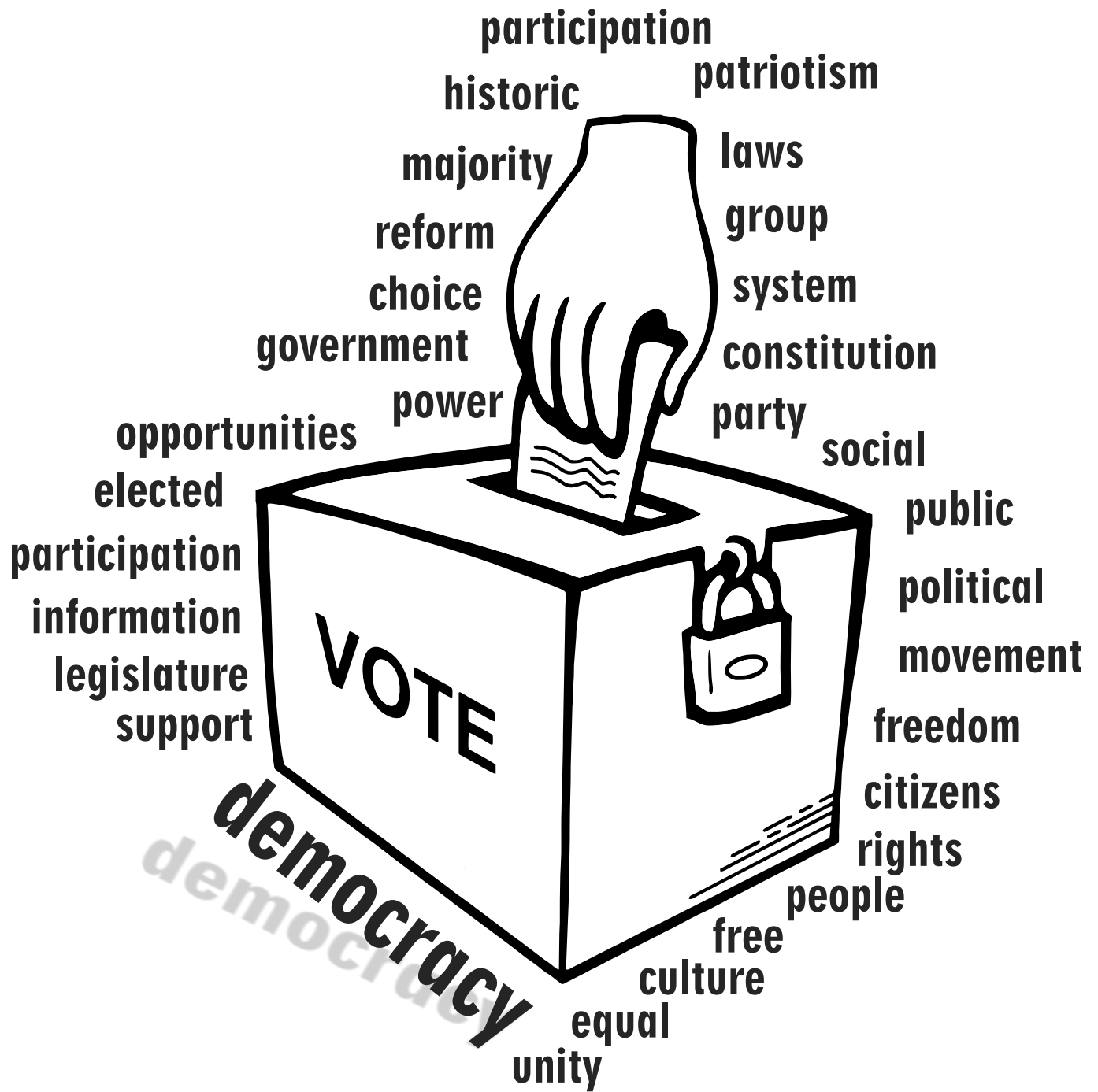


the
WeighBridge

NOVEMBER 2018 ISSUE 2: TWEAKING DEMOCRACY



WEIGHING IDEAS THAT BRIDGE CONTINENTS

Democracy is still a work-in-progress

The late great Peter Drucker once wrote that there are three kinds of change:

- *Improvement (Kaizen in Japanese)*
- *Exploitation*
- *Innovation*

Kaizen is continuous self-improvement. According to Drucker, “the aim of *kaizen* is to improve a product or service so that it becomes a truly different product or service in two or three years time”.

Exploitation work differently. The Japanese took an American invention – the tape recorder – and adapted it into many different products. Do you remember 8-tracks? Cassette tapes? This is a higher level of change that mere improvement (*kaizen*). New manifestations are emerging. But from the same basic invention.

The highest form of change is innovation. This is much more disruptive. It can cause cherished products to become obsolete. The innovation of the cassette tape made vinyl records redundant. But the video-cassette was just an exploitation of the tape recorder. Then along came innovation again – with the DVD.

Drucker writes:

“Equally disruptive is another fact of organizational life: the modern organization must be in a community but cannot be of it. An organization’s members live in a particular place, speak its language, send their children to its schools, vote, pay taxes, and need to feel at home there. Yet the organization cannot submerge itself in the community nor subordinate itself to the community’s ends. Its “culture” has to transcend community.

“It is the nature of the task, not the community in which the task is being performed, that determines the culture of an organization.

“If an organization’s culture and the values of its community clash, the organization must prevail – or else it will not make its social contribution.”

Democracy-building (a.k.a. Democratization) can be totally new, like it was to Despotism when Solon of Athens first experimented with it. It is a most welcome innovation in the governance of countries, tribal authorities, churches and homes.

In other settings, changing Democracy may mean, for example, changing from a first-past-the-post approach to proportional representation. New manifestations are emerging that old words like “populism” don't really capture. When a President can “tweet” directly to millions of voters every day of his whole term, the rules of engagement are changing.

Or we can simply apply *kaizen* and improve Democracy. For example, the Suffragettes expanded the electorate to include women. Counting votes is speeding up – it used to take days for election results to be announced, now it only takes hours.

Streamlining Democracy

No one disagrees that there is room for improvement. Democracy is cumbersome, awkward and confusing. But it is now the gold standard of governance, world-wide.

This issue of [The WeighBridge](#) tries to look at trending and to suggest ways that Democracy could be changed. This is not arrogant or presumptuous. Ultimately, it is about how to maximize citizen participation, and to avoid the hijacking of power by an Elite or one Ideology.

One thing Democracy is for sure is *inclusive*. We cannot let privilege or wealth dominate. We cannot let minority groups hold the Majority to ransom – that is like the tail wagging the dog.

Ironically, change is constant. In that spirit we explore how to adopt, refine, or just adapt Democracy – at the top and at the bottom of society. Not only on election day but every day. ■

Our Core Team

Each issue of The Weighbridge contains a debate format, trying to give equal time to different points of view. Our core team is composed of a conservative, a liberal, and a moderator.

Ken Godevenos

Ken is our house Conservative. He is an admirer of Donald Trump, and a skeptic about liberalism. He gets downright prickly at the mention of socialism.

Ken's career is in Mediation – whether at the family level, the work place, or even in industrial relations. So he appreciates the need for different views to be heard out, debated, and he knows that it is not always easy or even possible to find reconciliation. Sometimes we just have to agree to disagree.

John Deacon

John is our resident Contrarian. This stems from his belief that Christianity has more often than not been a “counter-culture”.

The WeighBridge exists to weigh up big ideas, that are important enough to bridge continents. Sometimes ideas like that prove to be unworthy and to require sanction. Although minorities are important in a democracy, the key is for the majority to rule. If the tail is wagging the dog, then democracy needs some streamlining.

Chuck Stephens

Chuck is our editor and moderator. The WeighBridge is more than a magazine, it is a think-tank. Chuck tries to hold up the African end of this ocean bridge. Democratizing Africa is only part of it – Africanizing democracy is also part of the mix.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

This month we are delighted to have a special guest from My Vote Counts in Capetown. Sheilan Clarke is the Communications officer there. She has her finger on the pulse in terms of youth issues and we welcomed her to write an article to encourage youth not to give up on Democracy yet. It is still early days for Democracy in South Africa and there will be on-going opportunities to re-jig it to make it work better.

Power to the People

by Sheilan Clarke

Democracy isn't dead. Some believe that democracy is moving away from “people power” when actually it is “people power” that is ruffling the golden feathers of some power-hungry elites. It's easy to be disillusioned in democracy or believe that it in itself is an illusion. Sure, there is no political system that will outright benefit all but when we realise the power we have, we start to realise that even when democracies shapeshift into different forms, it can still remain in the hands of the people.

Just recently and in the latest string of community uprisings in the country, residents from various communities on the Cape Flats embarked in a total shutdown. They protested against the rise of gang violence which claims the lives of many, both young and old, on a daily basis. There is

limited or no active policing in many of these gang-infested communities and funny enough, in response to residents demanding better policing, scores of riot police were present during the protests and even arrested 10 of them. Yet that did not stop them from taking to the streets and speaking to the media in a bid to actively change their situation.

After decades of entrusting political parties to put the needs of people first, citizens are now realising that putting an “X” on the ballot paper is simply not enough. I like to think of it this way: you wouldn't put a pot on the stove without regularly monitoring it, would you? This to me is like accountability. Accountability is something we are starting to embrace as citizens and quite frankly, it's an essential part of democracy. We are also demanding more transparency from our politicians. Transparency and accountability go hand in hand in a democracy. Together transparency and accountability can lead to

citizens being more inclusive in a working democracy and eventually society. The term democracy is not just political but also social. It defines how and where we live. It seems now more than ever before, people are realising this and realising how power has slowly been slipping from their hands. This is how power can be taken back to the more important custodians — the people who elect politicians.

I recently watched a TedTalk about this very issue. In it the founder of Citizen University, Eric Liu said that “power is never static”. He followed this with, “If you aren't taking action, you're being acted upon”.

Think about all the social movements we've witnessed that have brought about a kind of change that could not have been achieved otherwise. The Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street and MeToo comes to mind. How about here at home? Conversations around land ownership are looking to turn into something tangible all because there was a need in communities and this need was communicated to those in government.

Look, no political system is perfect and this includes all the different forms of democracy. There are eight different types of democracy namely: social democracy, direct democracy, representative democracy, presidential democracy, authoritarian democracy, participatory democracy and Islamic democracy. Not even democracy in itself is clear cut but at its core, the people have a significant role to play. So tell me again how democracy is dying?

As much as political representatives are key to democracy, it cannot be complete without the people's involvement. This rings especially true when thinking about the response I get from people when asked if they know who their ward councillor or representing Member of Parliament (MP) is. They almost always respond with, “I have no idea”. But what can we do when our leaders don't listen to us? Let's look at four quick actions we all can take in order to be a more engaged and informed citizen.

- 1) Regularly engage with your local leaders like your ward councillor or representing MP or Member of Provincial Legislature (MPL). Their contact information is public

record and it is our democratic right to make use of their contact information relating to matters of service delivery or if our rights are being violated. There are various resources online like People's Assembly (pa.org.za) for these details or these can be found on the IEC website or app.

- 2) Participate in policy discussions or make comment when a new draft bill or policy is gazetted. These draft bills and policies are published in national newspapers and on government and Parliament's websites. Being a part of these discussions or submitting your comments are so important as you have a say on matters that could directly affect your life and the lives of those close to you. Although civil society and others have brought it to the attention of policy-makers, that is not enough as many people still don't have access to this information or are illiterate. To remedy this, we could...
- 3) Petition for better access to information. It is enshrined in the Constitution that we all have the right to access to information. My Vote Counts for example has been fiercely advocating for the disclosure of private donor information of political parties and independent candidates. The lack of this crucial information prohibits citizens from making an informed vote at elections. It is a Constitutional right to not just vote in elections but to make an informed vote. Therefore, not having this information means that our right is being denied.
- 4) Lastly, go out and vote with your head, not your heart. Real change is practical, not theoretical.

At this point you may say to yourself, “But I'm still not convinced that we the people are gaining from this system.” You may even ask yourself, “We can go and vote but what difference would that make?” Every opinion matters and should matter to those we elect to represent us. The opinions of youth really matter. Almost half of the South African population is made up of youth (aged between 15 - 30) so why would your voice not

matter? Too much power can lead to destabilisation. I am sure there is no need to point out some examples of when and how societies became unstable due to authoritarianism or even totalitarianism. This is why it is essential to not forget that we have a hand in power too. It's not called people power for nothing.

Editor's note:

Thank you, Sheilan!

The WeighBridge is aimed primarily at citizens who have never voted before. We want to encourage them to register to vote, to think about how to cast their ballot, and then to get out and vote. Don't do it on automatic pilot! Don't ever sell your vote. Stand up and be counted.

THE GREAT DEBATE

Once again this month, Ken is taking the lead, then over to Contrarian John. This time, though, Chuck will then try to moderate a bit between Ken and John.

Weighing Up Three Kinds of Voting

by Ken Godevenos

Let's consider the three primary types of election or electoral systems in existence today. An "electoral system" is the method used to calculate the number of elected positions in government that individuals and/or parties will have after an election. *[The following ideas and material are taken primarily from a Georgetown University, US, website.]*

First, there is the **Plurality electoral system**. This is also known as "first-past-the-post" or "winner-take-all". The candidate that gets the most votes in a riding, gets the seat. A majority (50%) is not needed. He/she just needs to have more votes than any other candidate. Usually voters only get one vote. Advantages in this type of system include a relatively stable political climate dominated usually by two major parties. Disadvantages however may be that the outcome does not represent all voters, and sometimes not even the majority as sometimes winners are based on plurality where indeed the majority voted against the winner, but their votes were split among two or more other candidates in the same election. Thus, you have the third-party candidate that often operates as a spoiler. This system is used in parliaments (U.K. and Canada). In the U.S., the presidential election is a plurality system, but there it has the complicating feature of the Electoral College votes which turns it into a semi-majority system.

Second, there is the **Majority electoral system**. This is also known as a "second ballot" system. It requires the winning candidate to reach a majority (50% plus 1) of votes cast in his/her favour. If this does not happen on the first round, the candidate with the least votes is dropped off the slate for the next round, and so on, until one candidate wins the majority. This method is used in much of eastern Europe and Russia. And to become President in the U.S., the candidate must win a majority of the electoral votes across the country which are designated by the states' electoral college voters, usually picked by the parties.

Third, and making the most headlines these days, is the **Proportional representation approach**. This is also known as the PR system. Here the goal is to have the seats of office awarded in a way which represents most closely the way people voted. Some argue this is the most common approach globally. However, North America, with the exception of some city governments in the U.S., has so far stayed clear of it. In the most common version, a party is awarded the same percentage of seats in the legislature as the percentage of votes it got in the election. Sounds, at least on the surface, pretty sensible. Yet, there are problems: what is the minimum percentage of the vote that gets you a seat? What if the seats are not easily divided by the percentage of votes

gained? There have been efforts to get around these problems. Two solutions to these problems have been proposed – the **Party list system** (where voters vote for a party, not a candidate and the party picks the actual representatives based on their allotment win), and the **Single transferable vote (STV) system**. Both of these have their problems as the mathematics don't work out perfectly. [And both are described in detail at http://faculty.georgetown.edu/kingch/Electoral_Systems.htm.]

So, which system is the fairest? Perhaps first we should ask, “Fair to whom?” Are we concerned about fairness to the voters, or is it the candidates we care about, or the parties, or the jurisdiction? Good question.

May I suggest that we prioritize the fairness needs (putting people ahead of entities) as follows: voters first, candidates second, jurisdiction (city, province, state, country) third, and party last. With that in mind, we need a system that allows a voter to know that their vote counts the most. Next, we need a system that ensures the candidate that has poured much effort into running and has won, will indeed get his/her seat. Third, we need an approach that does not jeopardize the welfare of the jurisdiction the election is held in. And lastly, the system must make sense from the perspective of a political party. In that order and remembering that no option is perfect.

Taking these needs in order, one can easily eliminate a Proportional Representation approach. The reasons being that there is no guarantee that the votes of the majority in a given riding will ensure their candidate sits in the legislature at the end of the day. And a hard-working winning candidate is not guaranteed his or her seat as the appointment to seats is determined by the parties. Thirdly, as former Prime Minister of Canada, Jean Chretien, pointed out, the PR approach allows untalented officers (perhaps we'll just say not the big election winners) to enter parliament through the back door – the “favour of their party”. In fact, he is quoted as saying, “For all the professors who want to sit in Parliament but who can't even get themselves elected dogcatcher, sure, it (PR) is a good system.” Chretien added, “Going to the street corner, shaking hands and asking for a vote. That's democracy.” I tend to agree. A system that is not democratic and can also attribute to

cronyism must be avoided.

That leaves us with the Plurality and the Majority models. Of those, I believe the former is preferred. And here's why.

1. The system is simple. It only takes one “X” beside your preferred candidate. A candidate runs in their geographic area, wins the most votes and goes to the legislature representing their area, even those that didn't vote for them. The local voter keeps his/her links with their elected official.
2. It encourages the support of the jurisdiction's two main parties and only pays lip-service to upstart parties. (To really change things, as we are seeing in the U.S., a candidate has to run under a main party but be his own man.)
3. It facilitates “single party” governments for the most part with “single party” oppositions.
4. Extremist candidates are almost always excluded from being elected. Independent, non-extremist candidates on the other hand, have a chance of being elected.
5. Although I personally have never voted for an individual vs. a party (except for municipal elections), it allows such an opportunity to those who wish to do so.

But of course, the Plurality system has its opponents who argue against it for the following reasons:

1. Minority parties and minorities don't stand a fair chance to represent their adherents. But that argument assumes that the majority parties can't do that or won't do that. Or it assumes that minorities must be represented. Majority parties can morph to represent minorities and in fact, they run on the premise that they will be the party for all the people.
2. That many women are excluded used to be an argument, but that's no longer the case in the West. Capable women who want to run can get involved in their parties and stand for nomination.
3. The system, as I have seen it operate in the

West, discourages the development of ethnic parties. And so, it should. That's exactly what we don't need. Western countries should be "melting pots" wherever possible and not a "mosaic" (as is the case in Canada) when it comes to political goals and objectives.

4. The system leaves many "wasted votes" – perhaps even the majority of voters, as in the case of Hillary Clinton's loss to Donald Trump (because of the electoral college vote system which works in conjunction with the Plurality one). I contend those votes are not wasted at all. They certainly signal to a candidate that he/she needs to represent those people as well and be aware that what is a wasted vote this time, may come back to haunt him/her next time. Similarly, voters who feel their vote was "wasted" can use those opposing votes as leverage for fair representation from the winning candidate during his/her term.
5. Perhaps the best argument against a Plurality election system is the one that claims the system may be susceptible to boundary manipulation to achieve the desired election results. I have no good counter for that argument except to say that this is also true in a Majority election system and even a PR one.

But wait there are more reasons why I support the Plurality system. In addition to all the advantages I outlined above, there is also the matter of cost. One election day, one vote – the cost is still high, but no matter how one votes (electronically or manually) it is not as high as having a second or third ballot. And the decision is known relatively quickly. Finally, the reduction in costs can be carried over to when an elected official has to be replaced mid-term as a result of impeachment,

resignation, or retirement – one vote will refill the seat.

Still, with all those advantages, not all Plurality election systems are free and fair. Any jurisdiction that does not require a standardized form of agreed-to personal identification before one can vote, or even get on the voters' list, is subject to corruption. People can vote two times or more in various polls. Dogs can be entitled to vote through mail-in votes. So can dead people. This must be stopped. ID's for voting are a bare minimum. If India with its millions can require them, so can your country and mine.

Plurality systems for electing officials are also preferable because they are the best way of determining the general will of the public at minimal cost. In fact, they are akin to plebiscites where people vote on issues – but in this case, the issues can offer a number of choices of which the best one wins in accordance with the vote of the greatest number of supporters for it, over the other solutions to the issue. It's like a preferred choice 'referendum'. (It would, from a voters' perspective, be ideal if we could afford referendums on each and every issue separately. Still they have their place. In Canada, we had them over the separation of Quebec. In the U.K., over Brexit. There are other examples.) They should really be reserved for major issues that parliamentarians won't or can't solve. I often wonder if slavery could have been abolished in the United States without the Civil War that took thousands of lives. Is South Africa's issue of farming land belonging to whites being confiscated the next candidate for a referendum? Or how about the Border Wall in the U.S.? Perhaps it is something as simple as whether Canadians should adopt the American dollar as their currency (or vice-versa)?

*“Despotism may govern without faith,
but liberty cannot.”*

- Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America

CONTRARIAN JOHN'S RESPONSE

We the People

To be clear from the outset: I believe in democracy. Despite its flaws and inefficiencies, its aim that 'We the People' shall govern is a laudatory one, elusive as it is.

Ken Godevenos' overview of the three primary types of electoral systems in Western democracies is so thorough, it need not be repeated here. And Ken's support for the Plurality system is one I concur with, providing that three or more political parties are involved.

It can be argued that minority governments are more democratic than majority ones are, because bi-partisanship and consensus are key to their survival. A minority government is one where the ruling party has less than half the seats in parliament and therefore can't pass laws without the input and support of those members belonging to the non-ruling parties.

In Canadian history, from 1963 to 1967, two consecutive minority governments under the leadership of Prime Minister Lester Pearson brought in Medicare, the Canada Pension Plan, the Canada Assistance Plan for poorer provinces, as well as incorporating bilingualism and biculturalism as central to Canada's self-identity. These are policies which define Canadians to this day.

These fundamental platforms likely would not have passed had either the two leading parties of the time, the Progressive Conservatives or Liberals, had the majority of parliamentary seats at the time. Pearson's Liberal government had to collaborate with Canada's third federal party, the New Democratic Party (NDP) to remain in power and from that collaboration, Canada's social infrastructure of care took shape, covering all Canadians for their essential health expenses and providing pension income to all Canadians 65 years and older.

Which suggests I might prefer the Proportional Representation (PR) approach over the Plurality system, but I am not yet convinced that its benefits outweigh its weaknesses. To allow a diversity of parties to govern, with some parties representing single issue platforms only, can make for messy coalitions rendering PR governments unstable. Like Italy.

Also, the shift of member responsibility from the ridings they represent to the causes they represent, can mean voters feel they're without a government voice in addressing local concerns.

That said, the fact that 'progressive' countries such as Belgium, Finland, Denmark, Israel, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland all have PR electoral systems augurs well for its merit and should mean that in my political evolution, I get converted. We should never be so old that we can't change...

But here's the bone I have to pick with democracy for which I have no electoral system solution.

Democracy doesn't lead us into confronting global issues. And what's the good in addressing local issues if we're ignoring the global ones?!

According to those born between 1982 and 2004, 'Millennials', who represent the largest living generation in North America, these are our planet's top ten critical issues:

- Climate change
- Large scale conflicts and civil wars
- Income inequality
- Poverty
- Religious conflicts
- Government corruption
- Food and Water security
- Lack of education
- Safety / security / well-being
- Lack of economic opportunity and employment

(from <https://www.businessinsider.com/world-economic-forum-world-biggest-problems-concerning-millennials-2016-8>)

But these concerns are not reflected in our politics.

In U.S. politics presently under President Trump, only 2 of these issues (9 & 10) are being addressed with any urgency. The other 8 issues are either being ignored or in the throes of being made worse.

The US has pulled out of the Paris Climate Agreement and gutted its Environmental Protection Agency. It has lessened tensions in Korea, but added to them in the Middle East and Iran.

Income inequality continues unabated. As Philip Alston, the United Nations special rapporteur on poverty and human rights recently observed, the current U.S. government is attempting to turn the country into the world champion of extreme poverty.

(See: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/15/extreme-poverty-america-un-special-monitor-report>)

Trump's embrace of the Christian Right has not only fuelled a growing xenophobia against Muslims and LGBTI persons, it has closed US doors to people seeking refuge from war torn countries like Syria, Myanmar and Yemen. And with regard to government corruption, the FBI Investigation continues...

Not that things are much better here in Canada.

Trudeau's determination to pipe Alberta's dirty oil in all directions betrays his signature on the

Paris Climate Agreement. His government continues to sell military equipment to the Saudis, despite its notable protestations of Saudi Arabia's deplorable human rights record. Although promising to reduce both poverty and homelessness with his party's election in late 2015, both have worsened with funding commitments deferred on either until after the next federal election. Income inequality is not as exacerbated by unfair taxes as it is in the US, but the same folly of 'trickle down' economics is very much in vogue here with the rise of politicians like Doug Ford and Maxime Bernier.

All which get me to my bottom line which insists that although both the U.S. and Canada are 'democratic', very little which is good for 'We, the People' is being done. Otherwise our politics would be addressing the issues critical to our survival. But they don't.

Which leads me to the conclusion that democracies only work if they become something rooted not in Houses of Parliament or Congress, but in grassroots movements like Black Lives Matter, MeToo and Idle No More.

As we learned from the civil rights and the anti-war movements of the 50s and 60s, it is through peace marches and prayer vigils and victim advocacy groups that we find the courage and voice to confront the real issues of our time. Otherwise our politics dawdle in lazy metaphors like 'draining the swamp' and 'deep state' and 'fake news' and 'celebrity politics' - all which make for enticing headlines and speculations, but do little for the common good.

For democracy isn't all that it could be if it isn't working for the common good of 'We the People.'

“State capture, a counter-revolution, actively aimed to destroy our fledgling democracy for the benefit of a group of politically-connected organised criminals.”

- Pravin Gordhan

EDITOR'S FEEDBACK

All things in Moderation

By Chuck Stephens

Good work, team WeighBridge! For new voters you have opened up a Pandora's box of ideas about Democracy. Just like our parents, you can love them to bits and at the same time wish that they were a bit different.

I am aware that many democracies do use "the PR system", including South Africa. But the problem with "cadre deployment" as it is known here, is that it plays right into the hands of Patronage. That is, giving power to your favorites, not necessarily on the basis or merit, but on the basis of party loyalty. This creates a seedbed for other "bads" to grow – waste, corruption and nepotism.

Justin Trudeau campaigned on promises to adapt the Canadian electoral system from the traditional "constituency" system towards more proportional representation. Here is what another former Prime Minister, Jean Chretien, had to say about it - he called it a way for "apparatchiks" to "enter Parliament through the back door."

"For all the professors who want to sit in Parliament but who can't even get themselves elected dogcatcher, sure, it's a good system," the 84-year-old said in a French language interview with Le Devoir.

"Going to the street corner, shaking hands and asking for a vote. That's democracy."

The cautionary tale cited by Chretien is New Zealand. That democracy shifted towards proportional representation in the 1990s. He quoted his "friend" Jim Bolger, the country's then-prime minister, as saying "It's the worst mistake I ever made". Bolger's regret was that it brought instability to New Zealand, Chretien explained.

Since 1996, elections in New Zealand have been decided by using a system of "mixed member proportional representation". Voters cast one ballot for their local representative, and another for their preferred political party.

Parliament in New Zealand has since been composed of both local MPs and a "list" of MPs chosen by political parties in proportion to their vote share. It is this very approach that was recommended in the final report of the Slabbert Commission, for adoption in South Africa.

While the system is credited with increasing the number of women and of indigenous people, it is also true that every election since 1996 has resulted in a hung parliament, requiring a coalition to form government.

Being disappointed with Democracy is no reason to scrap it. It is far better that the majority reigns than the rich or the aristocracy, because they will only act in their own best interests. The truly "benevolent dictators" are few and far between. Leaders are human, and as such, imperfect. A system with adequate checks and balances is a must.

With the departure of Mugabe in Zimbabwe, Zuma in South Africa and Dos Santos in Angola, the winds of change are blowing again in South Africa.

We must be open not just to replacing people but to steamlining the way that Democracy works. Always, the centre of gravity is to find more power for the people. Not just in rhetoric, but in reality.

Only then will the issues addressed by the ones that are called "born-frees" in South Africa come to the fore. ■

My 2019 Election Shopping List - a Guide to Demand Side Voting

By Chuck Stephens

So far we have only been hearing from the Supply-side. All the politicians and parties are telling us what they will do. As if anyone still believes election promises anymore!

Voters need to turn this tendency around – and tell those in Governance what they want. Here are a few policies that many voters are demanding in the run-up to the 2019 elections.

First, we want a **solid Finance Minister** who can keep the economy growing and keep the Rand from slipping. We were rattled when Nene was sacked as Finance Minister and relieved when Pravin Gordhan returned. We were horrified when he was sacked in the midnight shuffle that was the beginning of Zuma's end. We welcomed Nene back, only to find out now that he was a regular visitor at that Gupta shabean in Saxonwold, not just once but many times.

Second, we want **sound fiscal management** not only in the Department of Finance but in the SOEs that became the last cash-cows of the ANC cronies. Now systems are being tightened up because Parliament has finally grown some adult teeth. And not a moment too soon.

This means that we want to find and weed out the corruption and the patronage networks. This means that institutions like SARS and the NPA must be cleansed. The Finance Minister needs to assure this, ultimately, no matter how many inquiries, commissions, investigations and cases there are at ground level. Nene has set the gold standard that others should emulate – we heard about it FROM HIM. He confessed, and asked to be relieved of his duties. This is a refreshing change from all the ducking and diving and blame-shifting up to now.

Third, we clearly need **Agrarian Land Reform**. Only a few years ago, the EFF had cornered the

market on these votes. But now just about every politician and party is engaging in the Great Debate. Different platforms are emerging – as to HOW each party would tackle this imperative. But this issue is now at centre stage for the 2019 election.

Fourth, we need to **amend the Constitution**. It is not a sacred document. It was never carved in stone, so to speak. In it are clauses that prescribe how to amend it, and it has been amended 27 times already! In America, it took 230 years for the Constitution to be amended 27 times! Amending the Constitution is no big deal.

Whether land expropriation without compensation can be adopted remains to be seen. To me, that is actually part of item #3 on my Election shopping list – Land Reform. Public hearings were held about it, including whether such an amendment is required, or not. The Great Debate is raging and that is a sign of a Participatory Democracy. Getting it passed through Parliament could be dicey – and the national and international furor that may then erupt could bog down progress for a long time.

Rather, this fourth item - about amending the Constitution - is with reference to the Slabbert Commission. Here are some key excerpts from its memorable Report:

4.5.4.1 Participatory Democracy: “The current system does not lend itself to participation by the electorate in the selection of candidates. That is an inherent weakness in all systems using closed candidate lists...”

4.5.4.2 Systematic Synergy: “In view of the consequences at provincial level, it is significant that there are presently three different electoral systems for the three spheres of government...”

Summary and conclusion

4.5.5.1 “The nub of the majority view is that it is worthwhile to make legislative provision for an electoral system that can evolve towards a larger multi-membership constituency system with a compensatory national list. In order to facilitate accessibility and responsiveness between voter and representative, multi-member constituencies... are envisaged...”

4.5.5.4 “If nothing else, this proposal, if accepted, will keep an essential debate alive on the ways and means by which political accountability can be strengthened...”

In the language of this Slabbert Commission, the fifth item on my 2019 Election shopping list is amending the Constitution **“for an electoral system that can evolve towards a larger multi-membership constituency system with a compensatory national list”**.

The genius of this proposal by the Slabbert Commission was that the existing systems would not be scrapped, but rather conjoined with Members of Parliament who represent constituencies. As there are 225 Local Municipalities, perhaps half the number of seats could be elected BY CONSTITUENCY? This would add a useful dynamic – in the language of the Slabbert Report **“by which political accountability can be strengthened”**.

Meanwhile, the total number of seats could be increased from 400 to 450. The other half of the seats could then remain in the existing system of closed candidate lists.

The ruling party still unpacks the original rationale for adopting the “PR system” (proportional representation). It argues that it benefits the smaller parties disproportionately, allowing Democracy to grow. This is deceiving because when it comes to critical votes in Parliament, the “vanguard party” methodology of the Liberation Movements of old kicks in, and MPs know that if they don't toe the party line, they will be victimized by their own party. We have seen this happening in recent memory.

Parliament should not just be a rubber stamp for party policies. When one party holds a majority

there, that basically can make Parliament redundant and throw Democracy under the bus.

Nor should MPs only vote by their conscience, although that is one important aspect. At least half of the MPs should vote as representatives. Through their constituency offices, they can determine the will of the people at local level. This is a different dynamic that could really enrich the decision-making of Parliament.

It is disgusting to see a Party President addressing the nation on television, in front of party flags. That is sheer electioneering. The fact that the public hearings about Land Reform were not yet over – which were mandated by Parliament – highlights the contradiction between his role as State President and as party leader. In fact, all other party leaders should have been granted equal time to announce their respective policies on Land Reform. We need to lose this “vanguardism” and move into what the Slabbert Commission Reports called **“a larger multi-membership constituency system with a compensatory national list”**.

The fifth item on my shopping list is a party platform that will **commit to non-violence**. It is appalling to see a party leader shooting off a machine gun from the stage at a rally. That is also disgusting. That is unlawful and goes way beyond electioneering to rabble-rousing and inciting violence. It is also counter-intuitive to threaten at public hearings to take up arms and fight for your beliefs against fellow citizens. What on earth will be gained by yet another civil war on this planet?

To sum up, I cannot see any party platform on the menu at this stage that offers all five of these items. This leads me to believe that we really do need an era of Coalitions. If not, the voters just become cannon-fodder for the politicians and populists. They simply validate what parties have adopted as their platforms. Democracy is bigger and better than that! Our Constitution, by the way, barely mentions parties. It focuses on the organs of the State – Legislature, Executive branch and the Judiciary.

Don't let any party fool you into thinking that it is more important than the State. That kind of arrogance we can do without in a constitutional democracy. ■

Book Review • Book Review • Book Review

The Contrarian's Guide to Leadership

Author: Steven B. Sample

Published by Jossey-Bass in 2003

Book review by John Deacon

One of the best books I have ever read on Leadership, let alone on life, is Steven Sample's book entitled *The Contrarian's Guide to Leadership*.

In this book, the argument is articulately made for a positive rendering of "Contrarian" as in one who does things differently, with chapter headings including the likes of:

- Thinking Gray and Free
- Artful Listening
- Know which hill you're willing to die on
- Being President Versus Doing President
- You are what you read
- The University of Southern California: A Case Study in Contrarian Leadership

Other than being the 10th President of USC, Semple is an electrical engineer, musician, outdoorsman, professor and inventor, any of which I would love to be someday.

Of all the descriptives characterizing President Trump - whether "Snake Oil Salesman" or the "Best US President Ever" - the one descriptor people on both sides of the political divide would likely agree on is "Contrarian".

The way Trump does politics is unlike any of his predecessors, which explains in part, why he is likely the most oft repeated headline since World War II.

When Trump speaks of "draining the swamp" he is speaking the language of a Contrarian. He is trying to change the Elite Establishment – on both sides of the partisan divide.

On the other side of the ocean, civil society groupings like Save South Africa, and internal party formations like The Stalwarts, were clearly Contrarian in nature.

I think there are some good things to be said about being Contrarian especially in a world swimming in conformity, complacency and complicity.

Aren't we as Christians to be Contrarian to the way the world thinks and operates - peacemakers among warmongering, loving our enemies when hate speech abounds, speaking up for the most vulnerable when society no longer cares, the voiceless, rebuilding what the world writes off as ruined.

"Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed, by the renewing of your mind..."
(Romans 12:2)

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Dummies' Guide to Voting on No-Confidence Motions

Typically, parliamentary votes are counted by calling the roll. Then the MPs call out “Aye” or “Nay” to indicate their vote.

But when it comes to no-confidence motions, the stakes are higher than usual. In South Africa, for example, 400 MPs have to decide on behalf of the 55 million people that they represent.

Here is a road map for the MPs, but remember – they ultimately represent the voters. This comes down to the deeper question – whether they sit in parliament to represent a constituency, or to vote as they are told to by their “Party Whip”.

When the stakes are so high that a secret vote is called for, then it raises some deeper questions.

In South Africa's Constitution, the 400 seats in the National Assembly are filled by MPs who are appointed by their party. So they are not elected by their own “riding” or constituency. But we citizens assume that these deployees are quality legislators, not just party stooges? So while we waited to hear the outcome of secret vote, we designed the triangle below:

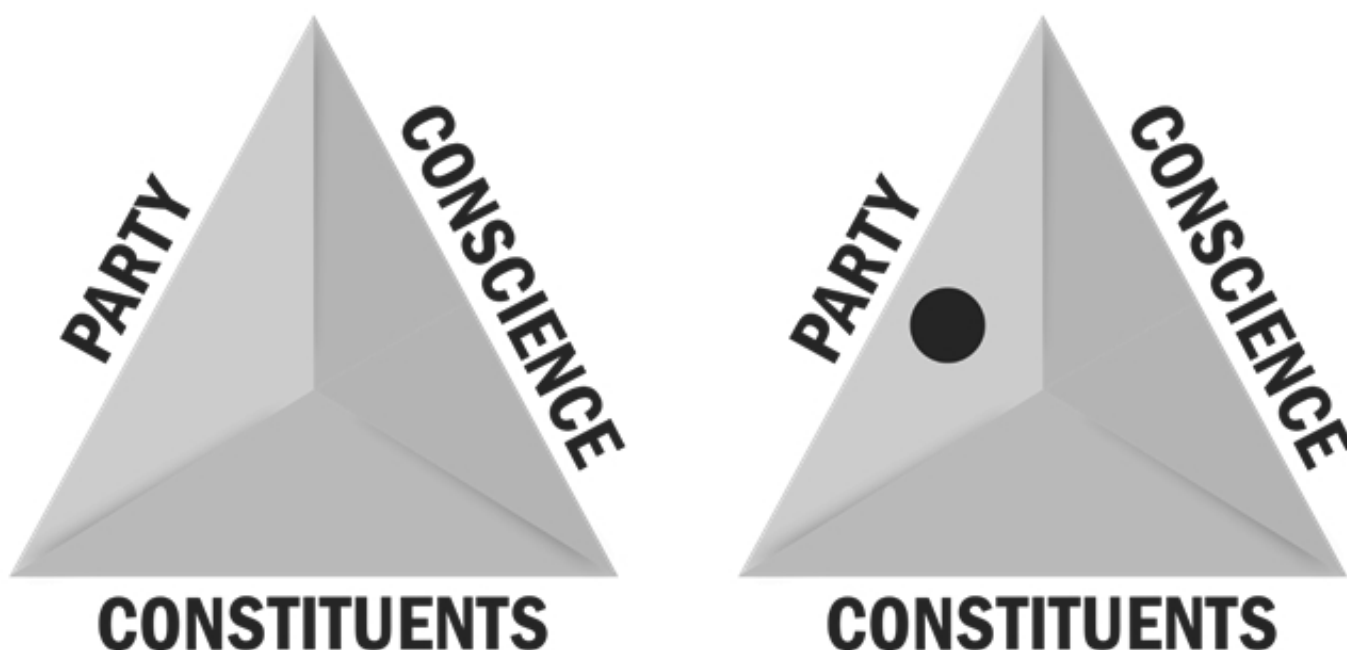
Do MPs have to toe the party line? Thabo Mbeki once weighed in saying that MPs should be capable of making up their own mind how to vote – assuming that their Party sent up good quality legislators to Parliament. In his view, the party is micro-managing to tell MPs how to vote.

Should MPs rather vote with their conscience? Part of being a good quality MP should surely be integrity? How else could Parliament be expected to provide ethical oversight of the Executive Branch?

Or should MPs poll their constituents, even though they are only indirectly connected to the Electorate? Should they canvas their community and vote on behalf of the voters that they serve?

Suicide bombers?

In that instance, the then-President wasted no time in promoting an open vote, only hours after the Constitutional Court announced that the House Speaker could hold a secret vote, but that it is up to her to decide. This was echoed by the ANC at its Consultative Conference. Here is the way they want it to work:



The problem is that we all know the amount of bullying that goes on in the ANC. The prevailing view is that it would even be political suicide for one of the 250 ANC MPs in Parliament to “break ranks” and vote with the Opposition.

But Parliament is composed of 400 MPs – 150 who are in the Loyal Opposition. To pass a No-confidence vote, only 201 votes are needed (out of 400). So only 51 of the 250 MPs deployed by the ANC needed to break ranks to bring down the Zuma government on that occasion. That is one out of five.

When the votes were counted, it was clear that some MPs from the ruling alliance had indeed broken ranks with the ANC and voted with their conscience instead. Even though these were few. As a result, heads started to roll!

Conscientious Objectors

It is not inconceivable - given the fragmentation that is going on inside the Ruling Alliance - that 1 out of 5 would break ranks with the party-line on certain occasions. Especially if they are listening to their personal and corporate consciences:

Personal conscience

There are people who were fed up with the bullying, the malpractice and the plundering that went on. Battered women may still love their husbands, even when they decide to bolt and move into a place of refuge. Of course their husbands will be angry and upset but there comes a point when enough is enough.

Some people call it that “still, small voice” speaking from inside of you. What was it saying to the MPs from the ANC in the light of State Capture and the trove of emails that had recently come to light? How could a pro-poor dairy project in the Free State pay for the costs of a wedding of a family that even the ANC admits has undue influence over government's Executive Branch? What about the culture of patronage and corruption that is well-documented? Can the MP continue to live with that with another election on the horizon in the near future?

Corporate conscience

The Stalwarts are a good example from inside the organization. The South Africa Council of Churches is a good example that is external. MPs were listening to voices such as these, reminding them of the ANC's founding values and guiding principles. If the Zuma government had wandered too far from these, then MPs would be well advised “to do the right thing”, even if it was not “doing things right”:



Within the ANC there are two views about the Stalwarts. President Zuma took a hard line, and wanted to ignore them. Whereas then-SG Mantashe articulated a softer approach – to keep talking to them. The Stalwarts were denied a 2-day pre-conference just before the Consultative Conference, so they scheduled their own conference three months later. The ANC was fragmenting under the Zuma government's constant rejection and bullying.

The South Africa Communist Party bloc was also a key factor. Its own conference had already been scheduled – before the No-confidence vote. There was talk of it contesting the 2019 election in its own right. Close to 20 votes of the 50 “swing-votes” needed to pass the No-confidence motion could have come from the SACP. It had defiantly

spoken out against corruption and waste. It tended to be the disciplinary voice in a ruling alliance that was rife with graft and patronage. Unions had also been leaving the ruling alliance in droves.

The Auditor General is another voice of conscience. His message has been repeatedly clear – that unless there are penalties, the prevailing modus operandi will not change. MPs were taking in all these signals, and no one can escape their conscience.

But soon after the President survived the No-confidence motion and realized that there had been some secret defections, heads started to roll. For example, the leader of the SACP lost his ministerial post. So there are reprisals to fear when you vote with your conscience, against the party line.

Representation

The Constitution adopted this peculiarity – that once the votes are counted, Parties are allocated seats in Parliament proportionally. Thus MPs are only indirectly connected to geographical constituencies – they are not sitting in the seat for a specific riding. But of course, they are real people with homes in a community somewhere, and their own children go to school down the street. So they can have their finger on the pulse, and bring that ear-to-the-ground dynamic to the National Assembly as well.

The so-called “PR system” plays into the party agenda. It is a genetic throwback to the Vanguard Parties of the soviet republics – usually deemed to be very un-democratic.

Countries like Canada and the USA elect “representatives” who may not get voted back in if their constituents are not pleased with their voting record.

To make matters worse, Party structures dominate Constitutional structures. For example, we hear so much about “the NEC”. But that National Executive Committee is never



mentioned in the Constitution, for it is a party structure. It has 105 members.

Whereas the ruling alliance's caucus of 250 members (all its MPs, not just the party elite) is the structure mentioned in the Constitution. To the extent that a “Head of Government Business in the House” is constituted as a senior post. (One of the “top three” posts according to the Constitution. Whereas we usually hear about the “top six” – but that is party language creeping in again.) Usually called the Parliamentary Whip, this MP's role is to make sure that attendance is up to the minimum level required to assure that Bills are passed.

Perhaps the cleverest end-run around this role - in the history of Parliaments world-wide - is the way that William Wilberforce, a British MP, got the Anti-Slavery Bill passed. It never would have happened in the context of good attendance. So he waited (intentionally) for the day of the favorite horse race of the upper class, knowing that it would depress attendance, and then rammed through his motion with the support of the Opposition, which had been secretly alerted what he was going to do. This was a “coalition” type manoeuvre, for Wilberforce was an MP from the ruling party. But his own party did not much support his Bill. So he waited for the opportune moment to mobilize those few within his own

party who were anti-slavery, and combine this with the Opposition vote, to get it passed.

Speaking of which, if 100 ANC MPs had just organized a stay-away at the time of the secret No-confidence votes, only 300 votes would have been cast, not 400. Half of this is 150 – and very possibly the No-confidence motion could have passed that way. So MPs don't necessarily need to break ranks, they can just stay away (and go to the horse races?!).

This strategy of stay-away could be back to haunt the ANC in 2019, if it does not take very visible corrective measures. For there are many party faithful who may not bring themselves to vote for another party, but who may decide in 2019 to adopt this stay-away approach on a grande scale. It was actually touted by some ANC stalwarts at the last election in 2014.

Sadly, it seems to be the strategy of choice of young people. From 18 – 25 years of age, only a small proportion of voters even register. It is lower-than-average from 25 – 35 as well. The truth is that the 2014 election results were basically determined by people older than 35 years of age. This is un-democratic. We need to re-ignite the fires of freedom and democracy to inspire youth to register and to vote. Starting with some candidates that they can relate to!

The Optimal Vote

The point of this overview is just to say that the right answer is... “all of the above”. But of course for MPs to vote this way, you either need different kinds of MPs (like they have in New Zealand) or a looser arrangement which gives MPs some leeway in their voting.

MPs do not have to ignore their conscience or defy the ruling alliance, for example if their SACP faction says to vote with the Opposition. After all, the Labour movement has been very vocal in calling for an end to State Capture. This pitted it against its own alliance for a period of time.

Nor should MPs be frightened of what will



happen if they “bring down the government”. It happens.

Remember that Presidents themselves start as an MP, deployed to Parliament by their party. It is in that forum that they are elected State President. Even though they were previously elected to be party president.

Also remember that at that point, constitutionally, Presidents must forfeit their seat in Parliament. Or there would be a conflict of interests in them heading the Executive Branch while still sitting in the Legislative Branch. Due to the separation of powers. So when a whole team, for example “the Zuma government” is brought down, Parliament can simply and promptly elect another President. The ANC has a mandate until 2019. So when Zuma was recalled by his party, the new President appointed a Deputy, a House Leader, and revised the Cabinet of Ministers.

Hopefully, ministerial appointments will be based on merit, not patronage. If a Minister like Health has been doing a good job, he can be re-appointed. But if someone has been failing – like at Communications – then she should be replaced. The truth is that this could have a very positive effect on government. Don't be fooled by this argument that chaos will ensue when a government is “brought down”. It happens.

MPs are encouraged to make a balanced decision and to vote not just as party stooges but as quality legislators.

It all goes back to the kind of Democracy

This article takes a look at different aspects of Democracy by looking at the way that decisions are made.

The legislative branch of government in South Africa came close to being overpowered by the executive branch. Until Parliament actually “took charge” and started to perform its oversight remit with some teeth, the state was almost captured.

Parliaments are the centre-piece of Democracy. Whether they are called “National Assembly” or “Congress” or “Senate” or “Legislature” or “Chamber” they must function optimally if Democracy is going to look out for the interests of the people, the voters, the citizenry, the masses, the hoi poloi (original Greek term). ■



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Sharpening and Synchronizing our Terminology

By Chuck Stephens

Maybe I am splitting hairs, but as electioneering draws nearer, I think we need to speak and write more accurately. I am particularly concerned about the “loose use” of three words: populism, nationalism (and its derivative Nazi), and fascism. We just have to look honestly and accurately at these terms.

First of all, **populism**. This is not to be confused with political ideology. For example, I think that Julius Malema is a Leftist, and that Donald Trump is not. But I regard them both as populists. As in the word “population”, the root “pop” is about People. Malema likes to speak straight to his followers. At rallies, or outside court houses, he does that well. He engages the people and what he says does not sound “scripted”. At least, it appears to be impromptu. His appeal is in talking to the people straight from the shoulder. Some politicians read their speeches, which is what is meant by “scripted”. This comes across differently – it sounds more like they speak on behalf of their Party. Their party has a platform, whereas Malema gets up and speaks seemingly extemporaneously – that’s populism. It’s that appeal that draws voters to Malema and his party. Donald Trump “tweets”. This was un-heard-of a decade or two ago. It seems almost unbecoming of a President not to speak through his spokesperson. But when that dairy farmer in Ohio wakes up early to milk the cows, and walks to the barn, he checks his mobile phone. And there it is – a personal message from the President. That is populism, and explains another “pop” word – popularity.

So when I see an article that says we have to counter fascism with Leftist populism, I get bewildered. How can we ever communicate if we don’t use vocabulary in the same way?

Second, let’s look at **Nationalism**. The Nazi’s were essentially Germans who wanted to “make Germany great again” (sound familiar)? They were humiliated by the terms of Versailles after World War I and Germany hit the skids. In the early 1930s, Hitler appealed to a sense of nationalism. He rode on this wave into power and onwards.

At first, his treatment of minorities – especially the Jews – but also the handicapped was somehow ignored. He used militarism to drive economic recovery. And he hated the Leftists. Perhaps this is how his militant nationalism came to be associated with right-of-centre ideology. In an article by Imran Buccus he wrote this sentence: *“When Jacob Zuma first came to power he was often presented as a left-wing populist. In hindsight that was clearly mistaken. His populism proved to be more typical of that of the right – a toxic mix of state looting, authoritarianism and chauvinism.”*

Let’s remember that before he resigned, Zuma bequeathed to us terms like “radical economic transformation” and set the stage for a discussion of “land expropriation without compensation”. Now the scuttlebutt is that he is behind a new party called the African Transformation Congress. Can you remember when Mosioua Lekota held a press conference saying that “divorce papers” were being prepared to sever ties with the ANC? These splinter parties do not have a great track record.

This is where the terminology gets really loose and confusing. It sounds like Leftists never loot or plunder the state, and that they are entirely democratic not despotic, and never dominated by males. Get serious! We have a very short memory. What about the Chavez catastrophe in

Venezuela? What about the “East Bloc”? Why have China and Russia abandoned communism in favour of a “new path”?

There are so many examples of “toxic” Leftist states that history is littered with Socialist debris.

The point is that being right or left, conservative or liberal, has nothing to do with State Capture.

Look, conservatives on the “right” generally like to “conserve”. That’s where they got their name. They tend to resist change. So how can Zuma be placed on the wrong side of the political spectrum?

Liberals are the ones who usually champion “transformation”. They push for human rights like gender and sexual orientation while our “conservers” are the Tribal Chiefs who champion virginity testing, *ukuthwala* and warn against expropriating their land base.

Historically, I would see Zuma as a Leftist. On the right are the traditionalists including Inkatha. The idea of a “broad church” is a congress that has room for diverse views under its roof. In this sense, Zuma’s new project would be much narrower – and thus factional. It is exactly that which David Mabuza’s “unity” bid was trying to avoid. He wants to keep the ANC from splitting.

Third and last, a few remarks about **Fascism**. This is a form of extremism, associated with dictators. Fascists scapegoat and demonize other groups, though those groups differ by country and time. That is why the German Nazi regime demonized Jews and others, while Mussolini’s Italian regime demonized Communists. So there is no love between them and Socialists.

Ironically, Socialism itself can also be despotic or democratic. The SACP is Leftist, but committed to Democracy. That might be hard to conceive for those who lived under Stalin or Mao. For one thing, Marxism tends to be intolerant of religion whereas Fascists made room for Christianity –

but not for Judaism. This is why people like Buccus use strong language like “a Muslim travel ban” to condemn Trump’s policy of trying to tighten up immigration. The jury is still out on whether that is extremism or simply nationalist protectionism - putting America first.

We have to admit that African governments have been equally intolerant at times of other races (e.g. Idi Amin expelled all Asians). Not to mention other tribes (vis. the Rwandan genocide).

Fascist governments’ purported goal was “autarky”, or national self-sufficiency. In the 1920s and 1930s, fascist leaders pitched this as an effective middle ground between bourgeois, profit-oriented capitalism and revolutionary Marxism that would dismantle many social institutions and persecute the bourgeoisie.

It is hard to imagine in today’s “wired world” that any country could become self-contained. Even protectionist moves like trade tariffs are not necessarily an early symptom of Fascism, but just a measure of nationalism. Donald Trump was elected on a platform of “making America great again”, after all.

To conclude, we need to understand the terms we use. Certainly not all Muslims are extremists. By the same token, not all nationalists are fascists. With any and all of these systems, there is a risk of plundering and waste – therefore we should treasure above all our constitutional democracy. It is a system that should hold leaders accountable, although we have been doing that very poorly. It is high time to stop the leaks and to punish the robber-barons.

On this note, both the Rule of Law and Non-racialism are non-negotiables. Frankly the use of “loose language” in electioneering will generate more heat than light. All views need to be heard and respected and where ever possible incorporated into the Way Forward. No one should be allowed to be a dictator – even if that is done by jeering and jealousy. ■

We are marching to Pretoria!

By Chuck Stephens

Last year, when I marched with Save South Africa in Pretoria, I was humming this tune. But I kept it to myself!

We don't hear much of this old martial song any more. For it is less than politically correct, with roots in colonialism that were then adapted to a song about the Boer War. Probably either side in that conflict could claim it, as the British won the war... but the Boers won the peace.

Perhaps the most memorable march in Pretoria was in August 1956 – *the Women's March* – to protest the pass-laws for black women under Grand Apartheid. The cracks in both racial and gender discrimination were starting to show.

In March 1960 there was an infamous march in Sharpeville. By the time it was over, 500 citizens had perished. It was also about pass-books.

In June 2018, on Youth Day, we remembered them marching in Soweto, in 1976. The photo-journalist who captured that iconic scene has just been laid to rest. RIP Sam Nzime.

The civil rights movement in the USA was also organizing many famous marches there, at the same time. The most memorable was a march on Washington in August 1963. Here is a paraphrase of a speech made on that day by the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. If he was marching in 2018 it would probably be to Pretoria – for the cause of Youth.

We come to our nation's rulers to cash a cheque.

When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution,

they were signing a promissory note to which every South African was to fall heir.

This note was a promise that all women and men

Yes, young as well as old

would be guaranteed paying work and sufficiency.

It is obvious today that the nation has defaulted on this promissory note

insofar as so many of her citizens are unemployed.

Instead of honoring this sacred obligation,

South Africa has given its youth a bad cheque, a cheque that has come back marked "insufficient funds."

But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt.

We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults

of resources and opportunity in this nation.

And so we've come to cash this cheque,

a cheque that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and security of justice.

We have also come to this hallowed indaba to remind South Africa of the fierce urgency

This is no time to engage in the luxury of fat-cat salaries

or to take the tranquilizing drug of patronage

Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy.

Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of corruption

to the sunlit path of honesty and transparency

Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of malpractice

to the solid rock of integrity

Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children. ■

the WeighBridge

Weighing pros and cons
Bridging partisanship
Bridging oceans
Seeking the Truth that emerges
From frank and open dialogue
In safe deliberation

Rules of Engagement

No demonizing allowed. You or I may be wrong, but we are equally human, equally loved, equally God's children, seeing some things more clearly than others and vice-versa, but in the main, we are in the dark, not seeing it all.

No one is ever dead wrong, except in issues where one's position means that someone other than he is denigrated to being something less than human, someone less to be loved and cared for than anyone else.

No name calling. It doesn't help. It derails the debate. It undermines the civility it takes to find the truth let alone live it.

If the debate is political, suspicions do creep in, if the party or politician one sides with can never be wrong. It is likely that person has lost their capacity for critical thinking, which true wisdom relies on.

We are all prone to coming under the spell of influential people, and when we do, the likelihood of being objective, let alone discerning, goes out the window. Our positions become parroted ones rather than those originating in us.

It helps to approach every person in leadership as though a member of their loyal opposition. Loyal when in your opinion the other is right and opposed when in your opinion the other is wrong. It helps keep populists and dictators in check and ensures the compasses we are relying on aren't skewed by bigger than life personalities.

Whatever our rank and status in life, we are no more nor any less than brothers and sisters. God has no grandchildren.

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