

Cheap Elections

Following is the third article on Election financing, this the most ghastly of interferences with the election process. If you have missed the previous two articles, please backtrack and read them, for they are constructive to the present one.

We are told that we enjoy free or inexpensive elections because mega-business pays the cost of elections by sponsoring politicians and political parties. Like we get free television and radio because, again, mega-business pays the bill for the media to inform and entertain us. These are absurdities, those who perpetrate them are in a class with perpetual motion machine inventors. Sorry, there is no free lunch, it is in the nature of things...

While a free lunch does not exist, overpriced lunch is commonplace. That is to say, while one cannot get something for nothing, one can easily get nothing for something, that is what a "swindle" is. In this instance, the establishment spent our money, (of late in partnership with the government as I will discuss later) and we get worse than nothing, we get cheap elections.

This results in an immeasurable cost to the society. The real price we are forced to pay is much larger than the cost of the elections, because the establishment has made elections much more expensive than they need be. Then there is the reduction in the well-being of the society due to being governed by politicians lesser than we deserve, by politicians whose first loyalty is the establishment. The consequences of this far outweigh the cost of the elections. I shall return to this later, for now I will dwell a bit on the direct cost of Elections.

Mega-business have turned elections to spending extravaganzas, they have unduly inflated the cost of elections beyond the reasonable. Unfortunately, more is not better, indeed, beyond the "optimum" more is worse than less. The Establishment has made elections obscenely expensive by pouring money into politicians' re-election purses and this has been destructive to the fairness of the process.

We get deficient elections, at a high price and as if this wasn't bad enough we are forced to endure much nonsense which is what politicians exude when they come in election heat. They treat us to cleverly worded promises, intended to fool as many people as possible, in the words of Abe Lincoln. Dixie Bands on flatbed trucks, circling the

Vancouver downtown during election campaign, paying to the accompaniment of the roar of diesel vehicles, are appropriate to heralding the arrival of the circus to town but do nothing constructive to democratic elections.

Significant is that we the people, are made to pay this inflated price of elections. We pay what the establishment spends, for they view the purchase of political influence as part of the cost of doing business. Their election contributions are usually tax-exempt and, in any event, their cost is reflected in the price we pay for the donor corporations' products. They do not give up part of their profits for democracy, instead, they make an investment that will generate corporate profits.

As I mentioned above, elections are no longer entirely "privatized", they have become a public-private partnership. In the past few years electioneering is partially financed by "private interests" and partially from the public purse, the latter in two ways: (a) parties receive direct contributions from the public treasury and, (b) contributors to political parties get generous tax exemptions for their contribution.

The Chretien electoral reform "legacy" became law on January 1st 2004. This put limits to all political contributions, bans corporate and union contributions and provides for a quarterly allowance to political parties to be paid from the public purse.

Appearances often deceive. Unfortunately, schemes like this public-private-financing of elections, are less fair and less benign than they appear to be. Chretien's legacy will no change much for the better, the establishment will continue to control elections as they did before, the people will remain as democratically disenfranchised as we were before Chretien made his legacy.

To begin with, "ordinary Canadians" would not contribute the allowable \$5,000 per year to political parties, most of us have got such spare cash. Executives of mega-business and their family members will contribute. Mega-business and mega-unions will reimburse their executives for this in the form of "Performance Bonuses" or something else equally innocuous sounding, legally correct, tax-exempt for the payeur and jail-safe for the payee.

The result is predictably awful. Mega-business and mega-unions no longer have to pay the entire shot for elections. The bulk of the cost is to be picked from the peoples' pockets. Yet, these "traditional sponsors", will continue to control the politicians by merely topping up

the large sums of money paid them from the public treasury. The cost of influence buying will be substantially deflated but the control will continue at the same level as was before Chretien made his legacy. It is they, the "contributors" who could make the difference between being elected and rejection at the polls. One may say that under this system mega-business and mega-unions will have their purchases at the Political Influence Bazaar subsidized heavily by the taxpayer. Splendid ...

There is no way that a "mixed system" , such as public-private partnership for financing elections, may be honest and fair. Democracy and all its component systems, including elections, are meant to be purely and exemplarily public enterprise.

Public financing of elections is not a new idea, it is an old one. Various systems exist, some of them have been tried in democratically advanced countries. I am sure we can find a good one among them or we can come up with a good one, tailored to our needs, if we put our minds to devising one. It is time to do it, it is time to take control over the entrance to the helm of the ship of state.

We need not let politicians dictate that the CA must not look at election financing. Instead let us ask Campbell, Gibson and Blaney the simple question: Why not?

Why do you not let us pay for our elections? Yes why, why do politicians defend the "right" of private interests to buy political influence? What sense does it make for us, "we the people", to be made to pay most of the election cost but be not allowed to pay the whole shot? On what account did the politicians decide that we the people want to pay most but not all the cost of our democracy? Why they defend that infamous influence bazaar, why they do not let us shut it down once and for all?

Please do ask politicians to answer.