

## None of the Above

*In the article following I discuss another facet of the electoral system in need of reform. I had scheduled it for a later day, but I advanced it because I was told that some CA managers are irked by a gentleman lobbying for it at the CA educational meetings. I do not know the lobbyist's manner and I do recognize that it may be irksome but if so one may not a priori deny him the defense of provocation.*

I am told of a gentleman lobbying the CA for the introduction of "None of the Above", or "NOTA", provision onto election ballots. I never met him, yet I am not enthralled by those who deem him a nuisance. For there is a fundamental principle of Democracy NOTA may address, and which is one of the facets of the Electoral System badly in need of reform.

Democracy is government with the consent of the citizens to be governed by a given system, for without such consent, democracy cannot be.

Consent to be governed without reference to a specific system is rather meaningless because it would amount to giving carte blanche to politicians and assorted despots. Indeed it is the system that decides the quality of the government.

Democracy is a system of government of many forms and shapes, not all being suitable for every society, for all times. Indeed, democracy is not a static system. Contrary to the pronouncements of the establishment, democracy is a dynamic system, ever evolving with time and civilization, if not held back. When democracy is held still its potency diminishes and a time comes when it can no longer serve well the society.

There is no system renewal mechanism embedded in our democracy. Nor is there a mechanism through which citizens may express and register their consent to be governed with the system in force or withdraw such consent, if and when the system becomes dated or corrupt. It is in their absence that our democracy degenerated into "elected tyranny" and that is why "we the people" can do no more than grin and bear it.

Unfortunately, ad-hoc opportunities would not do. Because democracy is a dynamic system, these mechanisms cannot be one shot deals, they need be ever-present and stay continuously activated.

The reactionaries are not alone, they have substantial public support. Because the citizens have seen politicians change things for the worse, they no longer trust them to tinker with the system. People have come to fear change and would rather live with the antiquated system we have than allow politicians to change it. It is by empowering the people to control change through giving and withdrawing consent to the system, that the fear of change may disperse for people to become perceptive to change, which, in turn, would let Democracy synchronize with current realities.

The establishment tell us that we consent to be government every time we cast a ballot. We are governed with our consent even if we do not know it, they say, because every election we have re-affirms our vows to the political system under which we are governed, in addition to selecting our representatives to the Legislature. This is not true.

Elections, as they are conducted, are hardly more than refereeing an electoral game, where teams of politicians, financed by the same sponsors, fight for power and access to the public trough. We vote the lesser evil in and that is all we are able to do.

One cannot make good chicken cacciatore in a toaster, one needs a pot for that. We have to attach a mechanism to our democracy, specifically designed to convey our consent to the political system for unless we do, our society will continue to be ruled by politicians who are less than we deserve. We need the right tool for the task.

This mechanism could be a referendum piggybacked in each general election or in every second or third election. It could be a referendum conducted on years ending with zero. It could be some other arrangement which I cannot now visualize. It could, at least for now, be the NOTA.

There is no denying that a NOTA vote may signify disapproval for all the candidates on the ballot rather than a denial of consent to be governed by the system. However, the two are not entirely separate, because the system determines, to a significant extent, who the candidates are. For example, a system that allows elections to be financed through influence bazaars, drives away from politics citizens unwilling to submit themselves to "sponsors". Voters unreceptive to being governed by politicians whose first loyalty is to those who finance their careers, may vote NOTA.

To reject all the candidates in the menu ballot is neither illegal nor immoral and the facility to do that should be available to citizens. I see no reason to compel citizens to disapprove of all the candidates but one; I see no reason to forbid citizens to disapprove of all the candidates.

There is indeed a need for citizens to express disdain for politicians, manifested in that people "spoil" their ballots, or abstain from the polls altogether. Regrettably these are no means for counting and interpreting abstentions or spoiled ballots and translating them into a legible message. That some crocodilian tears for "public apathy" are occasionally shed, is of no great use.

A NOTA on the ballot would enable citizens to comment both on the system and the candidates. A substantial vote for NOTA would manifest not merely dissatisfaction with the candidates, but disdain for the system that attracts such candidates and repels many good people from running.

Each NOTA win should be followed by a by-election and this should be as soon as feasible. All candidates who lost to NOTA should be disqualified for running in that by-election.

A NOTA victory in a substantial percentage of districts, would signify rot in the system. If NOTA wins a majority of the seats in the Legislature, it is certain that in the absence of NOTA the society would have been delivered by the system to tyranny. For tyranny is none other than the rule of a minority over the majority.

Were we to say it the way it is, objectors to NOTA as singularly motivated by a determination to keep undercover the imposition of the system upon the society. They know that NOTA would expose that the system is imposed upon the people which, euphemisms aside, manifest to that the political system is short of being democracy. In contrasts "we the people" want to know where we stand, for unless we know where we stand, we cannot navigate a course to where we want to be.

The mechanism of expressing and withdrawing consent to be governed is part and parcel of the electoral system. The Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform should take charge of the issue.

To those who sneer at the strange gentleman promoting NOTA at the CA meetings, I say: Welcome him! Listen and guide the members of

the CA to listen, for that is your calling, for he is a concerned citizen,  
for what he says should be said and should be heard.