

Nominations

This aspect of electoral system I had scheduled for later. Again, recent events and especially the Sheila Copps nomination saga, suggested I do the "nominations" article now. Here it is, then.

Ms. Sheila Copps, was pushed off the liberal ballot in "her" riding of 20 years. In the 1997 election, Jean Chretien ensured Ms. Sophia Leung was the candidate in the Vancouver-Kingsway riding. These are samples of a widespread phenomenon, they are not singularities. Many citizens suspect that it is not the well-being of the nation or the representation of the constituency the party or its leader strive to serve.

We also know of groups of people who come together and move like a flock of sheep into a riding to secure the nomination for whomever their shepherd supports. Again, the motives of such people is other than the well-being of society.

There are constituency associations controlled by cliques, and there are powerful individuals in the society, people with deep pockets, who dictate their wishes to some riding associations. And, of course, it is the party hierarchs and the Leader who retains the right to utter the last word. As a result, the primary function left to the riding association is to generate the "democratic optics" for such patently non-democratic "nominations".

Intensive machinations precede nominations. Especially nominations that are certain or likely to result in the election of the nominee. In party "safe seats" and in instances where the citizenry is determined to oust the governing party at any cost, nominations to the "alternative" party translate, virtually automatically, to election. In such instances, the "nominators" supplant the "electors", which results in the citizenry being rendered politically marginalized, The electorate is reduced to rubber-stamping the election of whoever the power-behind-the-scene put forward , thereby clothing in democratic attire the non-democratic election.

For all practical intents and purposes party nomination is an essential pre-requisite to being elected - one just cannot get elected without it. Failure to seek or obtain a party nomination, means one cannot be elected to Parliament. This makes the nomination system a major contributing factor to the corruption of Democracy into "Party-ocracy"

which, euphemisms aside, describes better than "democracy" the system under which we are governed.

To put it in plain words, the current system is a fake. If it is going to stay, let us call spade a spade, and vote directly for the parties for there is little meaning left to voting for peoples' representatives. If, however we want to repel Party-ocracy so that we may restore Democracy, we have to liberate the ballot from this system. We must now answer the basic questions: Could it be that we have the best there is? Could it be that we cannot do better? Could it be that we are so inept as to be incapable of selecting who is to represent us in Parliament and we need leave it to the party hawks, who know best?

The short answer is that we deserve better, that we can do better, that we must do better. We are grown up, we are a civilized society, we can determine for ourselves who we want to represent us in the Parliament of our society.

Indeed there are ways for democratizing the candidate-for-election nomination process and, most importantly, if we put our minds to it, we will come up with new and better ways than whatever may now be available. I will try my hand at devising the skeleton of a system for putting candidates on to ballots and here are a few suggestions.

For as long as political parties exist and are allowed to partake in the electoral process, we must make them "nominate" each and every citizen who applies for a nomination and who is supported by a petition signed by, let's say 250 voters, not necessarily party members, just voters. Often this would result, if not always, in more than one candidate for each party. The party who wins the support of a majority in any riding automatically wins the seat. The seat then goes, by right, to the candidate of that party who got the most votes.

Another way of going about it, perhaps better than the above, would be to exclude the parties from the election process altogether. Accordingly, the candidates would have no official party designation, they would be candidates at large. Candidates may be allowed, but not compelled, to divulge which party they would join if and when they are elected. With this approach, the party has no involvement at all in the election campaign, they would only come into play after the election.

A further refinement of the system would be to have the Chief Electoral Officers assemble a panel of, say, a dozen Political Scientists, and set them to define the "political Right, Center and Left" as it may

be relevant to the next election. Then, candidates in the election would have the facility to position themselves within that spectrum, if they so desire.

This last aspect would end the dominance of the ideological spectrum by the parties. That is to say, the "Middle of the Road, the Right and the Left would not longer be exclusive domain of the Liberals, the Conservatives and the NDP, the entire ideological spectrum will become again public domain. There will more than one candidates in each domain, so that voters who are ideologically minded would have a menu to chose from rather than be forced to vote the corresponding party's candidate.

Of course some deterrent to frivolousness is required when citizens no longer need be licenced by a political party to run in elections. Perhaps potential candidates should be required to have challenged the Public Service exam, which I outlined in Chapter 11 in this series, and elsewhere. Perhaps this and a nominal fee or bond should be required. Certainly a way can be found to discourage frivolous candidates. However, one may predict that for this and other reasons, a second election run may prove necessary. In other words, we may find that no matter how our political system shapes up, we need some sort of "preliminaries" to conclude elections. But that is not something to be feared, it is merely a minor inconvenience, one worth enduring. After all, our cousins to the South do preliminaries that last the best part of a year, and show no wear for it - surely we can survive a week long preliminary.

Would any of these suggestions liberate the election process? Would implementation suffice to exclude the "power brokers" and others who, at present, with various surreptitious means, prevail over the people? Yes, to a great extent, these measures will make things right. But, and this matters most, once we get going, we will get better at it and we will eventually develop a good system. Once the silicon chip CPU was invented, the Pentium IV was inevitable.

It is long overdue, it is time that we recognize that citizenship entitles us to more than judging a pageant of party candidates. Deciding the governance of a society is different from picking from a menu concocted by power-hungry individuals. It is time we stop the aberration of making citizens bow to party hierarchs, we are proud people, we have to reject Party-paternalism. We must liberate prospective candidates from being blackmailed into espousing the party package, we must protect decent individuals willing to serve the

society from being forced to surrender their minds and souls to parties, where they are converted into puppets.