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The trouble with voting [1]

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Amidst all the hoo-hah about the forthcoming referendum on the Alternative Vote, it is worth recalling the drawbacks of any kind of voting. Yes, Churchill famously said that democracy is the worst form of government except for all the others. To be fair to Churchill, my understanding is that he was quoting somebody else, but it was hardly a propitious remark at the time (1947) bearing in mind that some of the main enemies of the UK in World War II were democracies when their leaders came to power; Hitler and Mussolini come to mind, whilst one of the major allies of the UK was the dictator Stalin. More generally there is plenty of evidence that democracies are no better, indeed usually worse, in avoiding wars than are many other creeds.

Clearly, voting as a way of making group decisions can have advantages over the alternatives, but who decides what decisions come under the heading of group decisions? Few would argue that many entities like business corporations and other voluntary groups function better under votes (at AGM?s for example) but these groups are voluntary; those who have no interest can forget all about the governance of Tesco, say, even if they shop there every week. Furthermore the items in their trolley will be very different from other shoppers. Action beats voice every time; that way, everybody gets to choose what they want.

Any single vote has only a minuscule chance of making a difference. This means that, unlike personal decisions, be they the contents of a shopping trolley or a new motor car, there is no incentive to spend any time at all on a proper investigation into what the parties and candidates offer, even if you believed them. Thus the quality of decision-making is extremely poor. **[Continue reading]** [3]

The crucial issue is what activities need to be voted on? (Is it really sensible that government should decide on our behalf how policemen should ride bicycles and thus distributing a manual of 100 pages?) You know the sort of thing I mean. The problem is mission creep; full-time politicians decide on their own what their domains are to be, and with a handful of honourable exceptions these domains go forth and multiply over the years.

How many people know that in the USA neither the original Bill of Rights nor the original Constitution had the word ?democracy? in them at all? What does democracy actually give us when it is simply a method of deciding which handful of people are granted the sole right of micro-managing our behaviour to the *n*th degree? Our only redress is to vote for a different bunch of autocrats a few years later. A topical issue in the UK is the secret and deplorable behaviour of the family courts with regard to the competence of parents to look after their own children (the alternative being the removal by force to foster parents, local authority care, and so on). Another is the explosion of ?gagging orders? ? court injunctions that grant privacy to the rich and famous, which has reached the point at which Lib Dem MP John Hemming argues that they contravene the Magna Carta.

In fact it is much worse than that. Untrammelled democracy is a clear example of divide and rule. Aside from a few functions such as defence of the realm (led by a Ministry of Attack!) big government lives by pitting their subjects against each other. Every decision affects us all; you can?t opt out and move from Tesco to Waitrose. Big government feeds powerful interest groups (the first of which is itself) firstly by taking money from the rest of us and secondly by ordering us how to lead our lives to the point where we need a far more intrusive phrase than micro-management. The idea that democracy is synonymous with freedom is a sick joke. At its theoretical best it is two wolves and a lamb deciding on what to have for lunch, whilst in practice we have a handful of wolves and many millions of lambs. The wolves manage this by making promises to take money from one lot of lambs and give it to another (and then gaily ignore the second part anyway).

Yet here we are with nothing better to do than mess around debating how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. What is needed is a way to guard the guardians ? Quis Custodiet and all that. But that will not happen. Accordingly, as with all untrammelled democracies of this type, the dictators will eventually be defeated, and with any luck the means will be a tax-strike rather than a re-run of what we?re seeing in the Middle East. Meanwhile in the democracy of the Land of the Free, a Mr Bernard von NotHaus faces 25 years in gaol for providing what many Americans want ? namely to use silver as an alternative or addition to Greenbacks as a medium of exchange. No scams, no cheating, just providing a voluntary service.

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