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Treading Water: The Democracy Industry and Neglected Citizens

("Listen to the People")

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(Author: Power Shift: From Party Elites to Informed Citizens)

> If our knowledge of politics does not permit us to predict the success of a
> thoroughly democratic experiment, neither does it permit us to prophesy its failure.
> We have the right to be sceptical of any attempt to reduce political theory to a
> science of causes and effects. The success of a thoroughgoing democracy is not to
> be prophesied. It is to be created; and in the process of creation an
> uncompromising faith in the moral value of democracy is the essential thing.
>
> Herbert Croly

INTRODUCTION

Our formal political system "congealed" in the 19th century. That is when parties, engaged in adversarial competition, came to monopolize the formal representation of citizens and to control the governing of the nation. Since then, except for the expansion of the franchise, there have been only incremental changes in our political structures.

 "Revolutionary" social and economic developments, and changes in the size, importance and ubiquitousness of government, have occurred in the 20th and 21st centuries. These have not been matched by an enhancement of the power of citizens to control them through "their" government. The shift of power within the system has been to the Prime Minister. This reversion to a "monarchy" of sorts is not what might be expected after over a century of "democracy."

Citizens and their leaders, unsurprisingly, find the 19th century system dysfunctional in the rather different 21st. In particular, necessarily large and intrusive governments cannot muster the citizen support they need to govern effectively. That failure has tremendous costs in terms of lost opportunities to improve both the quality of the lives of Canadians and of other peoples struggling, even more than Canadians, with a party–based model of "democracy." Circumstances cry out for transformational change . . . it is scarcely considered.

This paper seeks to explain how the system of formal power distribution built into the political system now prevents vitally important democratic development. I start with a brief description of

where we are in terms of our "democracy." From that point, I shall explain why it is that citizens and, then, the political establishment resist change. In the final portion of the paper, the role political scientists have played in blocking change and whether we should now shift course is considered.

I conclude with an appeal to members of our profession to reverse course from system maintenance and respect the desire of the majority of Canadians for a different mode of representation: one that would replace the dysfunctional "we-they relationship" of citizen with party government with citizen "ownership" of government.

In the pages that follow, "democratic progress" means, in general, empowering citizens and, more particularly, empowering them through the mode of representation they strongly prefer -- constituency representation. Further, at the appropriate point in the discussion, I shall switch terms from "democracy" to calling the existing political system what it is, a "partyocracy."

THE ROAD TO DEMOCRATIC PARALYSIS

  Background

In the 19th century and early years of the 20th, Canadian elites distinguished the Canadian parliamentary system -- modelled on the British -- from American "democracy:" "mobocracy" according to our then leaders. Superiority was claimed for the Canadian system by the Fathers of Confederation because it *was* elitist and undemocratic.[1]

Canadian elites adopted "democracy" as a description of "their" system, only when they needed to harness popular support behind WWI. The democratic label stuck and provoked conflict as soon as the war was over. For reform-minded citizens, winning the war "for democracy" was a promise of change in Canada to a more open inclusive political system. "Democracy" was an inspirational concept promising, ultimately, "government by the people." For a time, the l920s elites were divided on the issue of whether institutional change, empowering citizens by such devices as the referendum, recall and initiative and by direct democracy/constituency representation, should be enacted to fulfill the implied promise of the changed rhetoric[2] Leaders of farm parties in the West supported these changes, at least rhetorically. But, in office in some provinces, they made only modest, short-lived changes in traditional party-based parliamentary government.[3]

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[1] Historian Bruce Hodgins summarizes the views of Sir John A. Macdonald and George Brown on democracy: "Like all conservative fathers of Confederation, Macdonald rejected both the word *democracy* and many of those attributes now considered essential for it. He rejected political equality, favoured privilege for the propertied and well off, and seemed more concerned about protecting the rights of the minority than providing for majority rule … .he rejected … the need and wisdom of popular appeals …. (87) George Brown, the Liberal leader, was as opposed to democratic values as Macdonald. Brown, Hodgins writes, "Saw democracy as illiberal, as a threat to individualism and free institutions, as promoting the tyranny of the unreasoning majority." "Democracy and the Ontario Fathers of Confederation," in *Profiles of a Province*, ed. Edith G. Firth (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, l967), 85.

[2] For a discussion of the impact of the changed wartime rhetoric, post–World War I, see David Laycock, *Populism and Democratic Thought in the Canadian Prairies, 1910 to 1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990)**.**

[3] See Denis Smith, "Politics and the Party System in the Three Prairie Provinces,1917–1958" (B. Litt. Thesis, Oxford University, 1959), 146.

By the 1930s, the reform-minded leaders and their followers were largely absorbed into the dominant establishment parties or into new parties – the CCF and Social Credit parties. Their primary focus was on coming to grips with the Depression rather than democratizing political structures. The values of the CCF were, however, clearly inspired by democracy and were reflected in Saskatchewan in more open parliamentary government and a more democratic party apparatus.[4] The CCF (from 1961 on the NDP), in the interest of citizen participation, pushed to the boundaries of the elitist parliamentary system, but no further.

Undoubtedly, few of the members of the dominant pre-war establishment had thought about how the war-time change in political terminology would affect post-war politics. They clung to the parliamentary system and adjusted to peacetime only by calling their system a "democracy" to legitimize it in the eyes of Canadians. The system's new "democracy" label was modified in different contexts by the words liberal, parliamentary, party, electoral, etc. which suggested that in this new version of "democracy" there were limits on popular sovereignty.

 Looking back, it is clear that the farm parties of the 1920's, the CCF, and the Reform Party, launched in 1987, endorsed democratic participatory values out of conviction and to enhance their electoral appeal. But neither the values, nor the voter appeal, were sufficient to lead the parties to challenge the fundamentals of the parliamentary system, i.e., the dependence on parties to represent and govern. The "pull" of traditional parliamentary government was too strong and the kind of organization and citizen preparation needed to make direct democracy functional had not even been considered. There was, however, a tiny democratic residue from the period in the form of some use of the devices of direct democracy – a crack in the wall of the parliamentary system and total control of policy by the governing party. The conflict in the values and institutions in parliamentary government and in democracy (citizen empowerment) were to be finessed in favour of the former. The altered rhetoric was enough to enable political elites to claim that "democracy," encased in traditional parliamentary institutions, already existed.

 Instead of a power shift to citizens resulting from the post WWI conflict where millions died fighting for democracy, and from WWII, again fought to save the world from the forces of oppression, citizens were to get a creeping loss of even the limited power allowed them in the parliamentary system through elections.

The loss occurred as government became a much larger element in economic and social life, particularly during the latter half of the 20th century. Organized interests and citizens found their limited formal participation in shaping public policy was a grossly inadequate way to advance and protect their political interests.   Informal means of influencing political policy makers proliferated outside the formal party-based system of representation. Thousands of "government influencers," with widely different political resources, entered the political contest to shape government policy.

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[4] S. M Lipset,. *Agrarian Socialism*. 1950. (New York: Doubleday, 1968); Evelyn Eager,. "The Paradox of Power in the Saskatchewan CCF, 1944–1961." In *ThePolitical Process in Canada*. J. H. Aitchison, ed.(Toronto: University of TorontoPress. 1963).

Collectively, in terms of power, the interest groups/lobbyists may be seen to constitute a second level of "government" structured and functioning very differently from the first.[5] Instead of a handful of parties seeking office, the second level featured many groups struggling to maximize their impact on policy makers in the first. Winners were not determined by voters but by the political and economic power they were able to muster and by the sympathies of the parties in office. The one person, one vote principle was deprived of the little substance it had in the first level of government by this development. The principle had no place in the second. In an (unsuccessful?) effort to increase the public's "comfort level" with this development, lobbyists were required to sign into a publicly accessible registry.

Party governments legitimated this second level of government by accepting its intrusion in their policy making. Given their own weak claim to legitimacy, they could hardly do otherwise. Further, they required advice from lobbyists (even if self-interested) on the needs of their clients and the probable impact of projected government policies. Individual party politicians required the support of some sympathetic organized interests to win election. The large role assumed by the second level of government sent a clear message: the 19th century representative system was seriously inadequate. Less clear, and largely unrecognized, was that in our "democracy," transformational change would have to invest citizens with countervailing power to these lobbies.   Without it, over time, those with powerful political resources would manipulate the politics of even large "democratic" nations to their advantage and the disadvantage of its citizenry. Look South.

As the interest group system grew, the exaggeration of citizen's powers derived from the formal system (voting) increased in a failing effort to suggest that this already provided citizens a countervailing power. By far the most significant of the exaggerated claims was that by its votes citizens mandate a party to govern, even if it has received a minority of the popular vote – an incredible claim based on little more than past practice and party convenience. Once firmly established, institutions can survive with a weak defence for a long period if reformers are not well organized around clear objectives.

 When legitimacy weakens, more citizens consider it quite alright – perhaps satisfying -- to cheat and evade government policy. Masses of regulations and policing are necessary to enforce public/party policy -- with only limited success. Desirable policy is delayed or abandoned until political circumstances favour the government acting. The cost of losing democratic legitimacy is very high.

The tiny membership wings of parties and millions of citizens were both big losers in the shift of power from the formal political apparatus to the confusing world of competing interests i.e. from formal to informal government. Party membership declined because, as the *Economist* suggested in a series on the "democratic deficit:" "Why should voters care about the broad sweep of policy promoted during elections by a party when other organizations will lobby all year round for their

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[5] Charles Lindblom makes a convincing case for the proposition that in a private enterprise market-oriented society the power of business makes it more than a "mere" interest group but, instead, a kind of second level of government. *Politics and Markets* (New York: Basic Books, 1977, 172.

special interest?"[6]   Interest in parties declined while the governing parties were responsible for ever-expanding public administrations.

It is difficult or impossible to measure the influence of interests and powerful individuals In the second level government. There is no place in the system for holding "string pullers" accountable, or for making their role in making policy transparent, beyond the registration of lobbyists and reports of the media. In short, organized interests gained a major, if not clearly defined, role in making public policy during the 20th century while citizens remained stuck with only the vote. The development was a serious set-back for citizens and the relatively weak interest groups that seek to represent them.

The developments just described have been a source of widespread disillusionment with the functioning of the system among politicians and citizens alike. "Partyism" on which the system is based is a particular target of critics. The remedies proposed by citizens and the political establishment to reduce or eliminate the democratic deficit and the related malfunctioning of party government are, as one would expect, significantly different. I will consider each.

CITIZENS AND CHANGE

Citizens are in a weak state to promote system change although they are not, as they feel, "powerless." This notion of powerlessness is strongly supported, however, as generation after generation sees their answer to the democratic deficit identified by them but ignored. Extensive public opinion polling shows that the support of early reformers for direct or constituency representation is shared by the vast majority of citizens today. And, equally significant, it also shows how extensively their preference is shared by prospective MPs. They are drawn from the citizenry and share their aspiration for constituency representation, until they enter the Commons and meet party whips.

This proposition was put to Canadians by pollsters: "We would have better laws if members of parliament were able to vote for what people in their riding thought was best rather than having to vote the same way as their party." A full 83 percent of respondents agreed.[7] In more recent polling, 89 percent of candidates for office "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with the proposition that MPs should be allowed to vote freely in the Commons.[8]   It is true that the views expressed by citizens and candidates for office in the polls cited were prompted by the questions asked but their "depth" and authenticity are clear. The views exist despite being mostly ignored or "written off" as unrealistic by the political establishment.

 David Docherty adds more relevant data to that cited and puts the significance of it all in some context:

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[6] *Economist,* "Empty vessels," (July 22, 1999).
[7] Paul Howe and David Northrup, "Strengthening Canadian Democracy: The Views of Canadians," IRPP [Institute for Research on Public Policy] *Policy Matters* 1, 5 (July 2000): 23.
[8] Jerome H. Black and Bruce M. Hicks, "Strengthening Canadian Democracy: The views of parliamentary candidates," IRPP *Policy Matters* 7, 2 (March 2006): 36. www.irpp.org.

When asked whose direction is more important to deciding how to vote on an issue in the House of Commons, their leader and party or their constituents, MPs from more recent parliaments tend to side with voters. A survey of MPs in the last Mulroney government found that only 30 percent of members would place district ahead of party and leader, compared to 59 percent of rookie MPs in the first Chrétien government. Yet … this change has not been reflected in parliamentary practices. Members of the public are just or more cynical about the motives and abilities of members to represent them today as they were fifteen or twenty years ago. Members of parliament, at their most basic level, believe they are providing as close to delegate style of representation as the Westminster system allows. The public, however, is not buying. If there is a gap between the public and the men and women whom the public elect, it is likely to be found in this area.[9]

Polling and other evidence is scarcely necessary, however, to validate the public's desire for constituency representation and the desire of candidates for office, drawn from that public, to want to provide it. In a country whose citizens are committed to democratic values, those citizens would naturally want their views reflected in the Commons without parties – an intensely disliked institution -- interfering. The issue for reformers is not the authenticity of the desire for direct representation but, rather, how it can be achieved in a polity where parties control politics and one significant, potentially independent voice is embedded with them (see below).

Citizens do show their concern about the malfunctioning of the system by giving support in – letters to the editor, poll responses, donations to reform NGOs, meetings with MPs, etc., i.e., for most incremental adjustments in the system. But, while they know the democratic reform they want, they are ill-prepared to push power holders to act on their concern for the weak linkage between themselves and "their" MPs. The strongest link of MPs is, of course, with the parties that sponsored them at the polls.

 It is humiliating and frustrating for citizens in our "democracy" to read of party government adopting policy "x" when opinion polls indicate that the majority of citizens oppose it. The government may be "right" and the policy may be in the public interest but our leaders, wherever practical, should, in a democracy, have to gain public support before they charge ahead with its implementation. Establishing public support should be easily done by consulting the House of Commons but, of course, the governing party normally controls the House. Its Members go through the ritual of supporting and opposing the actions of the government. But this process does not result in the views of the majority of the citizenry being informed, represented and fully considered.

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[9] David Docherty, "Citizens and Legislators: Different Views on Representation," in *Value Change and Governance in Canada*, ed. Neil Nevitte (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 174.

Further, MPs cannot represent their constituents even if they wish to do so because they have no way of knowing the informed majority view of their roughly 100,000 constituents. The parliamentary system was never intended to educate and bring citizens into the policy making process and it does not do so now. But that weakness is easily rectified with transformational change to a different mode of representation.[10]

It is a commonplace that citizens are, from the perspective of democrats who idealize government "of the people," politically apathetic and uninformed. This condition is largely a function of system that assigns a minimal role to them. The value of participation for the individual was famously stated by John Stuart Mill: "He is called upon, while so engaged, to weigh interests not his own; to be guided, in case of conflicting claims , by another rule than his own private partialities; to apply at every turn, principles and maxims which have for their reason of existence the common good: and he usually finds associated with him in the same work minds more familiarized than his own with these ideas and operations, whose study it will be to supply reasons to his understanding, and stimulate his feeling for the general interest."[11]

If, however, the participation is through parties, as is the case with our leaders and their followers, John Meisel observes: "Otherwise reasonable people can come close to losing their senses in the flush of extreme partisanship …. All partisanship reduces the openness of mind of the partisan, of course …. To the degree that parties contribute to this situation [extreme partisanship], they exert a negative influence on the political system and they make it harder for themselves to perform their tasks effectively."[12]

While the party establishment is "worried" about the politically apathetic and uninformed citizenry, it is not worried enough to take the needed the action to overcome it. To do so would limit its control of policy. The desire for constituency representation is studiously ignored: no models showing how it might be achieved are presented for public consideration.

The depth of the public's alienation and powerlessness has been illustrated in recent years. Following what was effectively a vote of non-confidence in our senior politician's leadership on constitutional matters, the Citizen's Forum on Canada's Future (the Spicer Commission) was appointed to consult widely with Canadians on the state of our politics. Its most significant finding was to confirm, yet again, that Canadians wanted constituency rather than rep-by-party representation.[13] That support for transformational change was almost entirely ignored by the party leaders able to act on it, by political scientists, and even by most citizens.

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[10] The first chapter of Vaughan Lyon, *Power Shift: from Party Elites to Informed Citizens* (Bloomington, iUniverse, 2011) outlines a simple, responsible model of constituency representation.
[11] John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, ed.,Jack Stillinger (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, l969), pp 103-4.
[12] John Meisel, "The Dysfunctions of Canadian Parties: An Exploratory Mapping," in *Democracy with Justice*, eds. Alain-G. Gagnon and A. Brian Tanguay (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1992), 415–16.
[13] "...since election campaigns do not constitute a vote by the people on these policies, and since elected representatives seem to have little or no influence or freedom to represent constituents' views, there is a perceived need for mechanisms which will (a) require members of parliament to consult their constituents on major issues; and, (b) either give them more freedom, or require them to vote according to their constituents' wishes." Canada, *Citizens' Forum on Canada's Future* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1991), 1 0 1 .

With this recognition of their common desire for constituency representation, Canadians might have been expected to pick up and run with the torch lit by the Commission. Similarly, they might have been expected to respond more enthusiastically to proposals for new electoral systems in the provinces when allowed to vote for them, even though these would not have been particularly citizen-empowering. But putting the responsibility for the lack of democratic progress on citizens "dumbed-down" and deprived of proper representation by partyocracy is to blame the victims.

Academic studies, and on the ground experience of politicians interacting with citizens, suggest most citizens have only a rudimentary base of political information and understanding.[14] This presents another important challenge that those trying to modernize our political institutions must face. Uninformed people are likely to resist political change even though they may support its objective. They can tolerate the political system more easily than they can face the uncertainties change inevitably brings with it. Better the devil you know …..etc.

Summarizing the impact the system has had on citizens, as opposed to what might have been expected from over a century of "democratic" politics, we find that: the system still "requires" people to relinquish their rights and responsibilities to parties which encourages their apathy and lack of information; formal citizen participation is still limited to voting occasionally for candidates virtually always selected by weak party constituency organizations; government is still deprived of the thoughtful engagement of most citizens in carrying out its policies and providing ideas for constructive national action; formal political power is dangerously concentrated in the hands of one office-holder depriving citizens of the benefits that come from a consideration of issues by several or many minds; parliament ("the people's forum") is brought into disrepute and dysfunction by its conversion into a party battle ground; the impact of parties divides people blocking the development of common goals that could unite them; the system self-protects itself so effectively that necessary and desired change is stifled; and, finally, that while the citizens' role in the system has remained static, a second level of informal government has grown up to provide representation to powerful interests. Quite a record, of "accomplishment" for a system that claims the honorific title of "democracy."

ESTABLISHMENT AND CHANGE

As one would expect, the political elite supports the fundamentals (party representation and governance) of "its" system. But, significantly, that support is mixed with criticism of its performance. The support is "wobbly." Members of the political establishment are more likely than not to ally themselves with critics of the system in their public utterances. Gone are the days when John Diefenbaker could bring a large crowd to its feet cheering his standard tribute to the British parliamentary system.

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[14] See, Elizabeth Gidengil, André Blais, Neil Nevitte, and Richard Nadeau, *Citizens* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 71. Also see Patrick Fournier, "The Uninformed Canadian Voter," in Joanna Everitt and Brenda O'Neill, eds. **Citizen Politics** (Don Mills, Ont.: Oxford University Press, 2002), 92–109.

Does this unwillingness to defend the system suggest that the establishment might, largely on its own initiative, recognize the dysfunctional aspects of the system and introduce significant, perhaps even transformational reforms? Liberal prime ministers Trudeau, Chrétien, Martin, new leader Trudeau, and leaders of the CCF/NDP have all indicated support for the impossible within the system, i.e., to give more freedom to MPs to respond to the views of constituents while maintaining party cohesion in an intensively competitive system. If a party PM or the party leaders collectively were to loosen the reins controlling MPs – threatening the existence of the system – some MPs, already restive, and directing their criticism toward party discipline, would be willing to take on a more active role in representing their constituents.

MPs are predominantly from the middle class and share its negative views of many aspects of the system – particularly the impact of party discipline on "their" Member's relationship with constituents, and on their ability to speak their minds. At the same time, the current "elites" cannot feel the same comfort in monopolizing power as elites of an earlier time who had a stronger claim to superiority – better educated and informed, etc.

From a "heroic"perspective, the freedom-to-represent/party-discipline dilemma is easily resolved. MPs could reject party control and adopt a well organized system of constituency representation. But that would involve a wrenching change in their careers and a general, if temporary, disruption of their political lives . . . and a courageous commitment to democratic values. Demonstrably, the establishment prefers to "manage" the representational dilemma rather take the risks that would accompany transformational change. In doing so, they forgo the tremendous opportunities for social accomplishment that await us at a higher level of real democracy.

I have too much respect for our neighbours serving in the Commons to think that they would make that choice to merely manage if there could be a clear assessment of the present system's social and economic costs. These are now passed off as a failure of our politicians when often it is the system that should be charged with them. An example: the delayed action on climate change of a number of different party governments is blamed on political leaders rather than where it belongs, i.e., on the political system that plays such a large role in determining their foot-dragging behaviour. Politicians anxious to tackle the challenges posed by global warming are at the same time anxious to win elections, and are uncertain about whether they would have the public's support. They know they can expect that whatever controversial action they take will be questioned/attacked by their Opposition.

After this brief review of the positions of the public and establishment on transformational change it is clear that neither is likely to push the ripe-for-fundamental change system into the actions that would enable it to meet the challenges of the 21st century in a timely, effective fashion. Political scientists, an "independent" and (potentially) influential force in our political life could act as the catalyst that could break the reform impasse and permit the democratization of Canada to proceed as citizens desire.

POLITICAL SCIENTISTS AND "DEMOCRACY"

In the last several decades there has been a bourgeoning interest in "democracy." Many governments – the national and provincial – have ministries charged with addressing democratic issues. Universities have set up institutes to do so as well. NGOs like Samara probe the entrails of the system and possibilities for reform. Political analysts in and outside the media write and talk non-stop about the democratic deficit. The political establishment, broadly construed, cannot be accused of overlooking the dysfunctional aspects of the current system. If all this study of the system has any impact on the apathetic and uninformed general public it must be to confirm the justification for their political alienation?[15]

Canadians who are attentive to political information, have had their understanding of the dysfunctional aspects of our party-based system enriched by all this critical study. As a result of knowledge gained and experience with the system, political practitioners are almost universally unwilling to defend "their" system when called on to discuss its performance. It is a sign of the terminal illness of politics as we-know-them when politicians engaged with the system won't come to its defence. The discipline's critical studies have set the stage for transformational change but have not ventured further.

 A disproportionate amount of the critical energy massed in this "democracy industry" is devoted to increasing the turnout of voters (the base of the system's legitimacy); to finding the non-existent ideal voting system. We have already lowered the voting age from 21 to 18. The NDP proposes to lower it further to16. Columnist, Chrystia Friedland, finds merit in the suggestion that a vote be given to a child at birth. [16] We are casting about for a system cure in elections when citizens already have had a suggestion for transformational change for at least the last century.

Political scientists have made a major contribution to our understanding of the political system but, in furthering democracy in Canada, our role has been problematic to say the least. The discipline expanded rapidly in the post-war period as part of the wide expansion of post-secondary education. As it did so, empirical studies became the dominant focus of the discipline and out of these came reality-based descriptions of our political system. Giovanni Sartori wrote, expressing the view of, perhaps, the majority of political scientists, that: "Political parties have indeed become such an essential element in the political process that in many instances we might legitimately call democracy not simply a party system but a'partyocracy' (partitocrazia)."[17] "Might" or "should"?

This fact-based description of our political system did not result in the profession adopting a change its terminology from "democracy" to "partyocracy" to align the description of the system

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[15] A report of the Library of Parliament is telling on the latter issue: "Public opinion polls suggest that upwards of twenty years of reform directed to "restoring the role of the private member, and thus the role of Parliament" have had little positive impact on public perceptions. Indeed, public perceptions of the effectiveness of members of Parliament in their fundamental task of representation appear to have continued to grow more negative, even as the successive cycles of parliamentary reform since the late 1960s have taken effect." Jack Stilborn (prepared by), "The Roles of the Member of Parliament in Canada: Are They Changing?" (Ottawa: The Library of Parliament, 2002), 13. www.parl.gc/ca/ information/library/PRBpubs/prb0204-e.htm

[16] Chrystia Freeland, "For a more equal society, empower the children," *The Globe and Mail,* March 8, 2013.

[17] Giovanni Sartori, *Democratic Theory* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), 120.

with the evidence of its character. "Democracy" remained the word used by political "scientists" to describe our undemocratic system in which citizens have little or no choice but to delegate their formal responsibilities as democratic citizens to parties.

Two system bolstering dogmas emerged based on the reality-based description of what was called "democracy." First, the existing partyocracy is the only form of "democracy" that is realistic for populous countries. Citizens must continue to delegate to parties. Second, following from the first, parties are essential if even our limited "democracy" (partyocracy) is to be maintained.[18]

With, possibly, a smile of regret, Lincoln's formulation of democracy, and the guidance provided by its ideal base, was shelved as naïve and unrealistic.[19] Generations of Canadians have been exposed to these dogmas in one way or another. Most seem to have passively accepted them: the authorities on such matters -- political scientists -- have spoken! At the same time that these dogmas were propagated, however, citizens remained committed to constituency representation and to the democratic ideals it would actualize.

(The current preoccupation with electoral reform is consistent with the dogma that we must rely on parties for even the limited democracy encased in partyocracy. It follows that party elections ought to reflect the party preferences of citizens as accurately as possible. But discarding that vision-limiting dogma, and adopting constituency representation, would make that electoral reform of little consequence. Regardless of how MPs were elected, they would be expected to represent the views of constituents.[20] Those views would be those arrived at in deliberations in an elected constituency assembly or (my preference) a "constituency parliament." Party governments now claim a short term mandate – general and, often, issue-specific – based only on voters having cast more "Xs" on ballots for it than for competing parties. Assemblies would give citizens a strong informed voice on public policies to replace the mostly mythological mandates claimed by party governments.)

The two dogmas permitted the political establishment to accept, in good conscience, partyocracy as the end-point of democratic development. The acceptance supported stability merging into inertia, at which point even the discussion of transformational change seemed to be idealistic dreaming.

Robert Dahl recognized how this elite legitimization of the status quo can, and in our case has, choked off political change: "As long as the professionals remain substantially legitimist in

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[18] The observation of Vernon Bogdanor, a reform-minded British political scientist, is typical. He leads off his book on political change with the comment: "Any contemporary discussion of the party system must begin from the realization that parties are essential to democracy . . . in every democracy in the world, political parties compete for the right to form a government. So any attack upon the party system which called for the abolition of parties would be entirely futile." Vernon Bogdanor, *The People and the Party* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 2. I do not call for the impossible abolition of parties but, rather, for competition for parties in representing citizens. See, Lyon, *Power Shift: from Party Elites to Informed Citizens.*

[19] "Government of the people, by the people, for the people."

[20] In my model of constituency representation, *Ch 1,* there is a process outlined for informing those whose views are to be represented. See Lyon, *Power Shift: from Party Elites to Informed Citizens.*

outlook…the critic is likely to make little headway. Indeed, the chances are that anyone who advocates extensive changes in the prevailing democratic norms is likely to be treated by the professionals, and even by a fair share of the political stratum, as an outsider, possibly even as a crackpot whose views need not be seriously debated."[21]

Some of the study, comment, and rationalizations of why democracy must mean partyocracy may have permeated through to the general public. Most do believe that representation unmediated by parties -- is impossible to achieve. [22] However, many factors other than the theorizing of political scientists may be responsible for this belief. To mention just one, no credible models of non-party representation have been presented to citizens. For them, "democratic" politics and parties have always been twinned. While the "parties are inevitable if we are to have democracy" dogma is believed, paradoxically, citizens in far greater numbers support constituency representation that would almost certainly side-line parties. Citizens who are politically apathetic and uninformed cannot be expected to hold consistent political views.

Political scientists "slid" into adopting the common usage of "democracy" meaning "partyocracy" and then rationalized doing so. For some time, the passive/reluctant acceptance of partyocracy by citizens as part of their political inheritance citizens helped 20th century elites to stave off demands for a larger voice in determining government policies. However, following a century of great social and economic change, citizens have become progressively more alienated, not from the democratic ideal, but from the limited way its values are organized into our politics. Modern communications technology, higher levels of education and income, have all weakened the argument that citizens cannot know enough to participate more directly in their governance. At the same time, the size and intrusiveness of modern government have strengthened the citizenry's felt need for more control over public policies. But formal policy making continues to be the exclusive prerogative of elected party politicians or, even more troubling, often of the fallible and/or unrepresentative party leader who occupies the PM's office. Misleading citizens about the true nature of the political system in the interest of stability is proving to be a poor substitute for a system grounded in genuine popular support.

An element of helplessness and hopelessness about democratic growth was fostered in citizens as its traditional leaders ignored the subject. A vacuum was created where forward thinking should have been. When the post-war contentment gradually gave way to alienation, prompted by the poor performance and unrepresentative character of partyocracy, restless citizens – particularly young people -- were denied the democratic ideal as a rallying point and as a source of legitimation that the democratic ideal might have given their efforts had it not been debased.

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[21] Robert Dahl, *Who Governs* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962) 320.

[22] Asked by pollsters to agree or disagree with the statement, "Without political parties there cannot be true democracy," 68.5 percent strongly or somewhat agreed while 23 percent somewhat or strongly disagreed." Source: "Survey conducted for the Institute for Research on Public Policy," April 2000. (Location: CORA Queen's University.) www.queensu.ca.cora/

For example, political activists in the "Occupy Movement" gave vent to the feelings of political alienation shared by many. But it was difficult for the involved Americans and Canadians to mobilize support for democratic empowerment. Citizens who, for all their lives in the US case, had been told they had a near perfect democracy found it virtually impossible to use the ideal of democracy for that purpose. In the US, significant democratic reform in the country's archaic constitution that shapes its dysfunctional politics could not be considered. Many of the restive settled on the gross disparities of income as the central issue facing the country. It was and is difficult for them to look behind this serious problem and see that the distribution of power in partyocracy is the basis of it. More democracy/citizen power in both countries, perhaps gained through constituency representation, would allow citizens to protect their interests against the upward shift of wealth brought about through the partnering capitalist and partyocracy systems.

Without the legitimation that the pursuit of the democratic ideal might provide, citizen dissent is too easily characterized as simply a rejection of accepted norms, often by unacceptable means. It is seen as something to be put down or contained rather than welcomed as a goad to democratic progress.

The dull response to the major conclusion of the Spicer Commission Report can also be attributed to the death of democracy as a source of inspiration. The appointment of the Commission to consult with Canadians, following what was effectively a vote of non-confidence in their leadership on constitutional matters, might have been expected to start the reform process. Its most significant finding was to confirm, yet again, that Canadians wanted constituency representation.[23] But that support for transformational change was almost entirely ignored by the party leaders able to act on it and by political scientists. This response continued the tradition of indifference of both to the views of citizens.

In summary: The citizenry does not have the inspiration of the democratic ideal to encourage them to press for the institutional change that would enable it to participate more fully in self - government. The forces for change that do exist, largely in civil society, are not close to having the clout needed to offset the ability of partyocracy to maintain itself.

In the political realm where, theoretically, elected politicians could with a "snap of their fingers" make the changes most citizens want them to have, i.e., the freedom to represent their constituents, the MPs are unable to break free of what have become traditional patterns of behaviour, i.e. acceptance of party control. They do, however, complain more than ever about this party restraint.

Today, then, the two main political actors, citizens and the party establishment, are unable or unwilling to move the system into the 21st century. As a result, the deficit in supportive citizen participation remains and so does its partner, i.e., government so weak that it must run after developments in the public sphere. Further delay in instituting transformational democratic (citizen empowering) change will be costly. Imagining what might have been accomplished with

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[23] See note 13.

the synergy of a citizen-government-bureaucracy team, is to feel overwhelming regret. A catalyst is urgently needed to help Canadians to break out of the reform impasse.

POLITICAL SCIENCE – A CATALYST FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

The Power of Words

We know the power of words in politics.[24] In many parts of the world today people are fighting, and some dying, for "democracy." That one word has been an extraordinarily powerful and progressive rallying cry in the political history of the world's peoples. When a word/concept has that power to benefit humankind it must be cherished. Its "depreciation" will have serious political costs.

Political scientists have defined the system of party rule (partyocracy) as "democracy" and suggested that, as practical matter, it can evolve no further. This at a time when at the "apex of power" we have a person sometimes referred to as an "elected dictator" by both academics and journalists. And, at the bottom of the pyramid, thirty-odd million citizens who are allowed only a minor say in what "their" government does. Those citizens have clearly stated their desire for constituency representation and an empowered role in the system. An admirable aspiration for citizens of a real democracy but for which there is no place in a partyocracy. In partyocracy, citizens have little choice but to defer their citizen powers and responsibilities to an institution for which they have little respect.[25]

When the system falls so far short of "rule by the people," the use of the term "democracy" to describe it by our truth-seeking discipline is, to be blunt, dishonest. Real democracy is, of course, based on the ideal of citizens assuming as much responsibility for their governance as is feasible. Empowered participation is key. Delegation is the basis of partyocracy. In the Canadian case, that "basis" remains intact long after more participation could be organized simply and responsibly. Once impractical, constituency representation is now essential if we are to have the citizen-responsive and supported government we need.

Our roles as "system mechanics" and "diagnosticians" should not exclude us balancing our work by venturing into that of "system designer." We owe that to the citizenry that supports us financially and, perhaps, trusts us. However, the pressure to emphasize the former roles at the expense of the latter are strong. The availability of research funds, promotion prospects, the generally accepted norms of the discipline and of the political elites with whom we interact, are all compelling.

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[24] Pierre Trudeau did, "...we are coming to realize that the image we hold of our future is itself an important element of that future. The expectations we arouse become a strong motivating force in realizing them." Thomas A. Hockin, ed., "Pierre Trudeau on the Prime Minister and the Participant Party," Apex of Power, ed. Thomas Hockin. (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1971) 100.
[25] Whatever the cause, there is little doubt that Canadian political parties are held in low public esteem, and that their standing has declined steadily over the past decade. They are under attack from citizens for failing to achieve a variety of goals deemed important by significant groups within society," Canada, *Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing*, Vol. 1 (Ottawa: Public Works and Government Services, 1991), 221.

But those pressures should be set aside now when the consequences of struggling on with a dysfunctional system are so serious. Dealing with the threats posed by the environmental and economic crises, globalization and the mass migrations of people searching for a better life, the clash of civilizations and the spread of nuclear weapons all place unprecedented challenges on governments. "Democratic" governments around the world are being tested and some are already in serious trouble. Those leaders who do not have a firm positive relationship with their citizens are likely to have to resort to authoritarianism to force acceptance of even essential policies. [26]

In Canada today, it is worrying that an administration can abuse parliament without a serious public outcry. In the crisis years of the Great Depression, one province (Alberta) turned to technocrats and, another, (Quebec) to neo-fascism. New parties appeared to challenge the two-party hegemony that had maintained national stability. "King or chaos" was the choice offered voters in 1936. War rescued the system. The future holds political and economic challenges that are far more difficult than those of the l930s. A strong democratic system should be in place to meet them.   Or, at the very least, there should be a democratic model extant to which people and politicians can turn in a crisis.

If political scientists want to help build a firm positive relationship of citizens and political leaders, breaking old relationships will be required. Over the years, the discipline has evolved as the handmaiden of the political/ party establishment. We are "embedded" with it -- not isolated in an ivory tower -- and work diligently, through constructive criticism and analysis of the system to help maintain it. In doing so, political scientists, too, have largely ignored the aspirations of the majority of our fellow citizens for transformative change.

CONCLUSION

The kept-silent majority needs our help to create that firm government-citizen relationship that would be the product of constituency representation. We can give it by delegitimizing partyocracy, by exposing how it is in fundamental conflict with democracy. "Partyocracy" should be the accurate descriptive term used whenever referring to the system. The integrity of the discipline demands it, as does the future of the country as a successful democratic state.

 Has any body of political scientists, anywhere, been given such an opportunity to serve their fellow citizens and advance the cause of democracy so simply? Courage will required for us to admit that our use of "democracy" in the past to mean "partyocracy" has been a significant error

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[26] Robert Heilbroner, warned: "Finally, and with great reluctance, I must advance one last implication of my argument. It is customary to recognize, but to deplore, the authoritarian tendencies within civil society, especially on the part of those who, like myself, are the beneficiaries of the freedoms of minimally authority-ridden rule. Yet, candour compels me to suggest that the passage through the gauntlet ahead may be possible only under government capable of rallying obedience far more effectively than would be possible in a democratic setting. If the issue for mankind is survival, such governments may be unavoidable , even necessary. Robert L. Heilbroner, *An Inquiry into the Human Prospect* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1975), 110.

on our part – an error that has impeded Canada's democratic progress. But we can correct and, perhaps, even earn plaudits for doing so.

Members of the discipline, active and retired, might:
■ Reject the current misapplication of "democracy" to the present political system and call it what it is, a "partyocracy." This would do much to end the current democratic stalemate in our politics by removing the discipline's legitimation of partyocracy. The positive vibes generated by associating "democracy" with the status quo (partyocracy) would be replaced by a negative association with parties.

Citizens, political scientists, and the political establishment generally would be stimulated to think anew about how democratic values might be integrated into new or existing institutions. The melange of incremental adjustments in the present system, including electoral reform and the public funding of parties, could each be assessed against the stern test of whether it significantly furthered government by the people before limited reform energies were invested in them.

■ Expand the focus of disciplinary concerns to include a heavy emphasis on considering the public's wish for greater inclusion, on its terms i.e., through citizen-empowering constituency representation. We must not be put off this focus by thoughts that come from our own socialization into partyocracy. Thoughts such as "it's a malfunctioning system, but we must put up with it," and, "where else is there a model of direct representative democracy," must not be allowed to retard our democratic growth. The latter thought is a progress-crippling remnant of our colonial past.

It is up to us, citizens and disciplinarians, blessed with living in a fortunate country, to rehabilitate the concept of democracy "as government by, of and for the people." The future of democratic government in Canada and, perhaps abroad, depends on it.