Midterm Follies – The Shortcomings of USA Democracy Exposed!

Well the midterm elections have come and gone. The Dems are bragging about “the blue wave”, the GOP is bragging about gaining a couple of US Senate seats. Here in Wisconsin the Dems won all the statewide elections, but failed to change the make-up of either branch of the state legislature. While most of the legislative districts experienced closer elections than in recent election cycles, Wisconsin’s new Governor Tony Evers, a Democrat, will have to deal with a hostile legislature. Wisconsinites can be happy to say good-bye to the deceitful outgoing Governor Scott Walker and a corporate stooge, pretending to be “tough on crime” attorney general. However, Wisconsinites cannot expect many significant changes in Wisconsin governance. Nationally, the House of Representatives fell into the control of the Dems, but the Senate has become more Republican, though many of the Senate races were closer than in recent years.

Overall, the midterms have demonstrated the weaknesses in US democracy. While the GOP has seemingly embraced Trump and his dangerous rhetoric, many in the old GOP feel disenfranchised. While the Dems seem to have gained strength, the party is more divided than ever. Working people (that is most of us regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual preferences or nationality) are the real losers in the elections.

Trump’s racist rhetoric has produced votes among mostly white small business interests and white workers, but his actions are that of the Big Bad Wolf of Little Red Riding Hood fame! The GOP leadership have adopted the practice of hiding in sheep skins. Trump’s actions whether it is in taxation, trade, immigration, health care have all been attacks of on working people. Many of the national media institutions have pointed out that the GOP has treated the weaknesses in US democracy. While the Dems have seemingly embraced Trump and his dangerous rhetoric, many in the old GOP feel disenfranchised. While the Dems seem to have gained strength, the party is more divided than ever. Working people (that is most of us regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual preferences or nationality) are the real losers in the elections.

The economic status quo continues! DS

**Strengths and Weaknesses of USA Democracy**

**Strengths:**
1. Regularly Scheduled elections that are fairly well monitored
2. Some elections provide real voters with real choices

**Weaknesses:**
1. Ballot access favors two major parties
2. The two-party system eliminates voter choices and the sounds of dissent.
3. Single member legislative districts discourage competition and voter choices, favoring the dominance of only two parties and often only one party.
4. Single member districts are easily gerrymandered to favor one party.
5. The dominance of only one or two parties makes it easier to suppress the votes of different groups of voters.
6. The presidential form of government gives too much power to one person. Parliamentary systems allow for more voices of dissent and greater distribution of power.
7. Money is too influential in political system:
   a. Campaign contributions become as important or more important than votes.
   b. It is easier for wealthy or those in management positions to run for office, than for working people.
   c. Lobbying government requires money. Lobbyists and economic leaders frequently hangout in the same social circles.
   d. Major media outlets dominated by wealthy interests.
8. In a society segregated by social class, race and ethnicity, wealthy interests easily dominate!

Words for thought

“The people of the United States of America, cannot give any room for fertilization or growth of white supremacy. That will lead us to a place that will lead to a world war.” Former New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu

“I don’t know what they have to say / It makes no difference anyway / Whatever it is, I’m against it!” Marx Brothers film “Horse Feathers”
Socialist Vanguard

Lame-Duck Politics in Wisconsin and Walker’s Next Employer?

As a follow-up to the midterm elections, the Wisconsin GOP (along with the dominant parties in other states), quickly proposed a number of changes in the powers of the executive branches of government.

This has become a partisan shouting match. Indeed, the GOP in Wisconsin which maintained control of the legislative branches because of the unfair gerrymandering are primarily motivated by a desire to keep power and to restrict the Democrats. The GOP actions seem more vengeful, than motivated to promote better governance.

The Democrat’s reaction (and their friends in the media) are motivated in their protests not by any high-minded principles of protecting democratic provisions in Wisconsin governance. There is no allegiance to the common good.

Many of the lame duck bill’s provisions restrict the power of the governor to use executive orders to bypass the legislative body. In theory the legislature is made up of members, who represent fewer voters, thus are closer to the people and be better able to represent the will of the people.

Some of the more vindictive and parts of the lame duck bill will curb the new governor’s ability to address issues within the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC). WEDC has been controversial through Walker’s tenure. It was supposed to create jobs, but has been plagued by mismanagement. Evers during his campaign said he would consider dismantling WEDC. The GOP has taken the WEDC out of the new Governor’s control until next September.

The GOP gave the legislature control over a lawsuit to overturn the Affordable Care Act. Both Evers and the newly elected Attorney General Josh Kaul both campaigned to remove Wisconsin from a lawsuit aimed at overturning ACA.

The bill would give legislators power over other litigation, instead of the AG. It makes it easier for legislators to hire outside attorney’s (at tax payer expense) to defend them instead of using the AG. This opens the door for a huge increase in legal fees.

Early voting would be standardized to two weeks across the state, currently local communities can determine the needs of their constituents and can have early voting span a much longer period of time and have longer hours when determined necessary. This amounts to an act of voter suppression. This has already been challenged in the courts, as a similar provision was thrown out by the courts several years ago.

If Evers is concerned about a disgruntled citizen, with a gun, entering the state capital. Evers must get permission from lawmakers to ban guns in the state capital. This seems to be a careless act that asks for a tragedy in the State Capital.

The bill prohibits judges from considering state agencies’ interpretations of laws when an action is challenged. This could make it more difficult to enforce environmental laws.

The Governor must get permission from the legislature when contacting the federal government on operations shared by both the state and federal governments.

Some changes that may have some merit are:

1) Lawmakers control (instead of the AG) over how court settlements are spent. This does give more control to the citizenry and removes some power from the AG.

2) Gives lawmakers more power to block executive orders and administrative guide lines for implementing laws. This spreads power around and prevents the abuse of executive privilege.

3) Requires the governor and his aids to report the pardon of people convicted of a crime or when releasing criminals from prison early.

While these safeguards were probably passed for the wrong reasons, they have merit in empowering the citizenry.

The day before Walker signed the lame duck bills into law, he announced a deal giving Kimberly-Clark $28 million to help keep a Fox Crossing plant open. This was a deal that the Wisconsin legislature had been dragging its feet on. If Walker had waited until he signed the new laws, he would have lost his ability to make the deal. There has been much speculation as to what Walker’s next job would be. In spite of rumors that he was headed to Washington, DC, Walker has said he will remain in Wisconsin. Given Walker’s lack of skills (other than deceiving the public and following orders of wealthy campaign contributors), Walker lacks educational credential and any other skills. While there may be some ethical (and perhaps legal) concerns, don’t be surprised if that $28 million helps him get a job! DS


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**Trump Assures Us We Are Safe From Those Terrorist Laden Caravans.**

*Actions Close To War!*

As a ploy to scare voters to come out and vote Republican in the Midterm election and hoping to boost his support, Trump kept talking about the dangerous caravans crossing Mexico to invade the USA with dangerous refugees. Trump described them as the worst kind of people any society may have. The refugees were mostly violent, vicious criminals. Murderers, drug dealers, thieves, rapists. All of them headed for the USA.

Trump hoped his images would scare people into voting Republican in the Midterms, but for Trump it was a hope that he would move public opinion to support his wall along the Mexican border.

Well his fear tactics did not seem to make much of a difference in the mid-term elections. Now Trump seems to running into stiff opposition for his wall.

Trump, the great deal-maker, seems to have failed again at pushing his wall through Congress. With another Government shutdown looming; as the federal government has reached it debt ceiling, Trump threatened to shut down the government until Congress authorized money for the wall! He sounded very sincere, much like some business tycoons sound when negotiating a labor contract. “If you don’t give me these concessions, I’m closing the plant!”

Trump, a self-declared successful businessman, thought he could get his way with such a threat. His threat demonstrated, once again, his ignorance. His promise to run government like a business is a stupid falsehood. Government is not a business. If it is shut down, everyone suffers, not just a few workers. People do not get benefits, services, like police and fire protection stops, roads and other means of essential transportation fall apart. In short everyone loses and Trump still fails to get his wall! While some of the automated services can be sent to other countries, the loss of business will hardly carryout Trump’s slogan, “Make America Great Again”.

Meanwhile, building up USA military forces along the Mexican border creates tension between the two countries and alienates a strong ally.

The stupid, stubborn behavior of Trump antagonizes the refugees. In one incident along the California border some of the refugees became angered at their treatment and allegedly threw rocks at the US troops on the other side of the border, this provoked retaliation from the US military in the form of tear gas being shot over the border to repel the crowd. Many wars in history have been provoked by such irresponsible behavior. **If you are not afraid of the mothers and children who appear to make up a majority of the refugee caravans, write to you congressional representatives and say no to the wall and the stupid bigotry of trump! DS**

**Who Stole The Color Red?**

Historically, socialists, communists and other groups representing working people have been referred to as “reds”. A hundred years ago, Eugene Debs, a Socialist leader and union advocate, frequently referred to himself as a red. Hollywood produced a movie, “Reds” that recognized the worker’s movements throughout the world. There have been numerous other movies of the early efforts of the labor movement, all referred to the color red to describe the worker’s struggle for a better life.

Which brings us to the question, in past couple of decades, how did the GOP earn the color “red”? The GOP represents the most archaic form of nobility, and would be best compared to the stupid reactionaries who wore white to identify themselves during the French Revolution. **Maybe the GOP wants to dupe their working lower-class followers? DS**

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Brexit, Other Referendums: Some Thoughts on Direct Democracy

Having witnessed the trauma that has pervaded the United Kingdom for the past couple of years after a referendum was passed to exit the European Union, one must have some thought on the virtues of direct democracy. In the USA we have different forms of direct democracy, advisory referenda, binding referenda and initiatives.

While the concept of direct democracy theoretically provides the best opportunity for citizens to control the actions of their government, the results can be catastrophic.

Direct democracy often results in a simplistic sales pitch to the citizenry. Too often the elections have low voter turnouts, resulting in a small number of fanatics being able to dictate to the rest of society. The results are too often the product of simplistic sound bites, not well thought out decisions.

The British Prime Minister, Theresa May, has been trying to negotiate with the European Union to get favorable terms for a British withdrawal. The EU officials for the most part are committed to European unity and integration, thus do not like the idea that a major European nation wants to withdraw. In Britain, there are many different opinions as well. The referendum passed by a rather slim majority in a relatively low-turnout election. Many in the UK would like to see the EU succeed as it promises to be a large economic force able to stand up to the other economic powers in the world. Some see the EU as an integrating force that insures peace on a continent that gave birth to two very deadly and destructive World Wars in the 20th Century. Of course, there are those fiercely patriotic types that do no like taking orders from foreigners, who may speak a different language, may be following a different religion, and may be allowing free migration through the EU and thus allowing “foreigners” to infiltrate England. (Right now, there is a virulent strain of patriotism around the world as some people do not like change, and sadly to say some are also bigots, who resent living with people of other races and cultures.

In the USA there have been many initiatives passed in elections that have been poorly understood and poorly thought out. One of the more notorious was Proposition 13 in California in the 1970s. It garnered the usual hostility to tax increases, especially property taxes. Prop 13 placed strict controls over the ability of local governments to raise money and fund services. Roads deteriorated, schools declined in quality, crime increased, and numerous other calamities beset the state. Forty some years later, California is still dealing with the consequences.

Direct democracy is one of the products of what is called the “Progressive Era” in USA history and was seen as a way for people to get control over their own governments, which were often corrupt and manipulative. As socialists the idea of increasing democracy and popular influence is important, but when elections turn into sound bites, are heavily influenced by money and usually experience low voter turnouts, the attempts at direct democracy are often short sighted and decisions are made by a small number of people, not by a well-informed populace.

In the spirit of maintaining the positive potential of direct democracy, while reducing the likelihood that the results are poorly thought-out laws, governments and advocates of a better democracy should demand that binding referenda and initiatives be voted on at least twice before becoming binding laws! DS

Missed a Month!

Sorry we missed last month. Computer problems made it impossible to print mailing labels and very difficult to produce the Vanguard. Please forgive us. This edition is a combined one with four pages instead of the usual two!