

InToWin Australia - “A Platform for Participation in Improved Political Performance”

Chapter 2 – The foundations are in place, but they’re rockin’ and rollin’

I ended my introduction with a call to act – “Vive la evolution!” Not quite the same rallying cry as it’s more passionate sibling – “Vive la révolution” – but it does have a certain modern day ring to it. A bit like “War on Waste” rather than World War III; or “Public enquiry into responsible drinking” rather than an all out Prohibition.

I don’t see a need to throw out our way of life and start over, but I do think it is time to take a fresh look at society’s building blocks and imagine their reconstruction. In this Chapter I will look at the core foundations of Democracy, Capitalism and Liberty – they are in place, but it is getting a little rocky.

2.1 Democracy

I am all for democracy – as Abraham Lincoln said *“government of the people, by the people, for the people.”* A place where all members of society can participate in the functioning of their government.

It works - not perfectly, but well enough. Having everyone involved in the day-to-day concerns of a modern, large and complex society just isn’t practical – in fact it is probably not even possible. So we have devolved a system of representative democratic government. We go to the polls on a regular basis to vote for politicians who will represent our interests.

Democracy has served us well – but we can all feel the tremors.

- Democratic rule supports the power of majority-based decision making, and this works well when support is overwhelming. It is not so straightforward when a majority can simply mean 51% in favour, 49 % against – and that’s the background to many key decisions now.
- The majority will, by definition, exert control over the minority. We attempt to limit the potential for domination of minorities by building in many protective rights and obligations. Some would argue that we have gone too far, as loud minorities fill the airwaves, establish the government agenda and set the ground rules for debate.
- At election time, we can only vote for those candidates who nominate, and the nomination process is increasingly controlled by political party machines. Elected representatives are obliged to subordinate their personal views to those of the party. The needs of their electorate may be forgone or forgotten.

- Good democracy requires a well-informed, educated and interested voting public. Australia's compulsory voting system, combined with misleading election campaigns and lazy or biased reporting, means knowledgeable voters sit in judgement alongside disinterested and potentially misinformed citizens. William Ralph Inge, a clergyman and scholar in the early 1900's described this challenge well when he said, *"Democracy is only an experiment in government, and it has the obvious disadvantage of merely counting votes instead of weighing them"*.