

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

CHAPTER 4 : We see the problems – what’s the solution?

It is not all that difficult to identify problems – we see them, hear them, read about them every day. I have identified a few. But now it’s time for solutions - otherwise all I have done to date is have a lengthy whinge.

I will call upon the support of some of history’s great philosophers to help me with this phase – and perhaps a few others who didn’t even realise they were political philosophers!

H.L.Mencken, an American journalist, satirist, cultural critic and scholar who thought and wrote plenty during the first half of the 20th century, explains one of the key challenges to simple solutions - *“Explanations exist; they have existed for all time; there is always a well-known solution to every human problem — neat, plausible, and wrong.”*

I agree, there will be no ONE simple solution to improved government and governance - but I do believe there are some actions that, well implemented, could take us in the right direction. First, it will be important to get to the source of the key issues, rather than spend too much time and effort responding to the noise. Second, there will be options, and those options must be prioritised. In the real world, we are always operating with finite resources - we can’t do everything, nor can we all have everything.

So, let’s hit the road to “Oztopia”.

Step 1: Tweek the rule book

Henry George, an American economist and reformer in the mid-19th century, had some ideas on what it takes to run a successful democracy. They would apply equally today. *“We cannot safely leave politics to politicians, or political economy to college professors. The people themselves must think, because the people alone can act”.*

Governments of all persuasion seem to think Australia’s Constitution is THEIR document to interpret and control – THEIR rulebook – THEIR compliance manual. They are wrong – very wrong. Whilst it is true that the Constitution provides the basic rules for government, it is, importantly, underpinned by the fundamental principle of representative government. At the end of the day, parliamentarians are elected by **us**, the voting public, to represent and serve **us**. They should therefore follow, and where necessary interpret, the Constitution with **us** in mind, not themselves.

Amending the Constitution is extremely difficult and time consuming, and is the prerogative of the government of the day. This is why we don't have many referenda for change, and when we do, they are not often successful.

But here is where the revolutionary evolutionary thinking comes in. We need to take control. We need to devolve the power of the Constitution, allowing citizens to recommend and initiate change. Actually, it turns out that this is not so revolutionary after all - Sweden has been doing it for ages. They have developed a way for the public to have a say on their own Constitution – on the way their society is built and maintained – and they call it “Participatory Democracy”. This provides citizens with the ability to initiate referenda on Constitutional change, and sets out some practical rules on how this can work. Switzerland similarly encourages public participation in key government decisions, and direct democracy helps many local governments and communities around the world to prioritise budgeting and control government spending and initiatives.

Solution 1: Amend the Australian Constitution to allow Australian's to initiate amendments to their Constitution.

I know this sounds like a circular argument, but think about it for a moment and it makes sense.