



Calum MacKenzie's View From The Shore:

Why Bother?

If you're heavy into reading op-ed pieces and political blogs, in no time at all you will be overwhelmed by the vast number of items dealing with problems. There is so much negativity and no hint of a solution in sight. It might even be enough to make you reach for the 'unsubscribe' button.

It's no use turning to the usual newspaper, radio or TV information programs because the bad news bears are out in force in those media too. "If it bleeds it leads" is an oft heard mantra. Bad news, especially if it is sensational and affects large numbers, trumps good news every time.

Truth no longer seems to set people free, it just makes them drowsy. When we meet overwhelming events there is a tendency to think that we can do nothing about them and we become resigned to looking after our own beeswax. To make things nice, comfortable and correct for all, facts don't seem to matter.

The American writers Mohkiber and Weissman¹ reckon our culture has changed to be a culture of impunity, meaning that those in charge can get away with anything and often do. The culture of impunity has arrived unannounced, creeping in day by day, and is led by a corporate agenda in which only the bottom line is important. They ask the question; "What in a culture of impunity replaces constitution, precedent, values, traditions, fairness, consensus, and debate that our civilization was previously based on?" Their answer is greed!

In Italy they call it the corporatist state, an economy in which government serves the interests of the multinational corporations, paying only lip service to the needs of electors. Is Canada a corporatist state yet? It certainly seems to be heading in that direction as we watch the business lobby rule the roost. Our social democratic traditions are giving way to the wreckage left in the wake of corporate trends.

We see the degradation of our environment, a call for greater incarceration (although not for white collar crime), creeping militarization euphemistically called national defense, dismantling of democratic watchdogs and processes, the commodification of culture, impunity for the powerful and a contempt for the weak. To fend off such a culture requires a courage that seems beyond us. We look at the wreckage with a sense of surrender.

We know what's not right and we know how to fix it. Town hall meetings haven't done it, expertise has failed, ineffectual laws are scoffed at, talking heads don't work, government bureaucracies dance with the problems and undermine solutions. Why speak truth to power if power doesn't listen? So why bother? Because we have no other choice!

¹ - <http://www.sfbg.com/focus/>

We need a new approach as happened in Sicily, the home of the Mafia. When 2 Sicilian judges were gunned down in Main Street, Palermo in broad daylight, the population rose up in disgust and all it took was one woman's courage to hang a white sheet outside her window. Written on the sheet was *Basta* (Enough!).² Her lead gave rise to others joining her protest until eventually virtually all houses had sheets hanging from their windows. This protest became known as "The Committee of Sheets" and showed the local Dons that their days were numbered. The only locals who did not join the protest were the local mafiosa. The police could then easily identify their homes and their code of secrecy was shot to smithereens.

To reverse the trend to the Canadian corporatist state we have to make our wishes known in the strongest terms without resorting to violence. As members of the grass roots of this country we can make a difference. So why bother? *If we don't do it, it will not be done.* There is no need to hang a white sheet outside our windows but we must make our concerns and wishes known in no uncertain terms.

Let's be thankful in Canada that we do not have voting machines, especially those which do not leave a paper trail and therefore can't be verified for accuracy. Let's be thankful that our elections can not yet be electronically programmed to deliver a result according to the wishes of the corporate agenda. Although the voting process is slow and laborious in providing full coverage of all voting rights to all individuals, it is transparent, verifiable and free from political party influence.

In answering the question *Why bother?* there is some glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel. All Canadian political parties are committed to electoral reform. As Canada is one of a very small group of democracies which still uses "the first past the post" electoral system, (based on the number seats won and not on the size of the popular vote), it will be really interesting to learn what Ottawa replaces it with. Proportional representation is practiced in some form in most modern democracies. Political parties in Canada would be weakened under such a system in which seats in parliament would be allocated in proportion to the popular vote. Although this would lead to more, or even permanent minority governments, it would force elected members to work together for the common good in a collegial atmosphere of consensual decision making. We all have a part to play in making things better and that is the answer to "Why bother?"

This would be a small start. Dismantling the influence of money from the equation will take a little longer.

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² - <http://www.caller2.com/1999/june/19/today/national/2135.html>