

WAITING

One of our dinner guests, a Parisian, discussing the politics of France, said something like “we feel like we are all waiting.” She explained that the economy is doing well by people with jobs, and the French safety net is strong enough to quell serious problems among the unemployed. But no one is inspired, and the various parties that have dominated French politics are moribund; they haven’t had a new idea in a long time. And so “we are waiting.” The conversation moved on, but that stuck with me. Waiting for what? I also feel like I’m waiting, at least for Trumpian Motion, that hurricane of corruption, lies and intentional cruelty, to subside. But that’s not what our guest was talking about, and it doesn’t explain my feelings either.

In context, I think the problem she described is a feeling of disgust for the French political parties. Francois Hollande, the previous president and a Socialist, was a profound disappointment and didn’t run for reelection. His successor finished a dismal fourth in the first round. The conservative, Francois Filon, was mired in a make-work scandal for his family and finished third. The two who survived to the second round were Marine Le Pen, the right-wing crazy, and Emmanuel Macron, a rich man who started his own party, La Republique En Marche (France On the March, shades of MAGA). Macron won in a landslide, and Le Pen’s party seems to have fallen to schism.

Macron is “business-friendly”, meaning neoliberalish in French terms. He has pushed reforms to the labor laws that are loathed by workers and the subject of massive resistance. Nobody except the rich thinks this will fix anything. The other parties seem irrelevant to our guest. That means there is little to look forward to on the part of the large French left. Something has to change, and she’s waiting.

I too think our party system is moribund. Neither legacy party commands 30% of the voters.

The last election was a contest between a competent Democrat and a corrupt cruel liar. We don't have majority rule here as they do in France, so the corrupt cruel liar was elected.

Oddly in a recent column in the New York Times, David Brooks seems to recognize that this is a problem, and argues for multi-member House districts and ranked-choice voting. Brooks thinks something needs to change, and so do I. We can't go on like this. I mean that in a broader sense than Brooks, of course. I think we can't keep going with a system that allows the minority to run the country, especially a racist minority, a misogynist minority, a fundamentalist minority, a cruel and stupid minority. Oops. I called them stupid. We aren't supposed to call them stupid. It's as bad as saying rat-fucker.

This is a huge problem. I'll just address two parts of the Constitution that are problematic. One is our voting rules, the other our worship of private property. Aside from Republican skill at voter suppression gerrymandering and maybe worse, there are Constitutional provisions. Every state has two senators. The 22 smallest states have a total population less than California using Census Bureau estimates for 2017. They have 44 senators. Using the filibuster, it only takes 21 States to stop any legislation. Even without the filibuster, it takes 26 states to stop any legislation. The smallest 26 states have a population of about 57 million, less than the population of California and the New York metro area. Under winner take all rules, the minority can control the country with say 20 million voters, about 6% of the population. How many people in the US are like the people who turn out for Trump's rallies?

Now consider the protection of property. One central feature of the Constitution is that it is designed to protect property rights. The most obvious parts relate to the protection of the interests of slavers, starting with the Three-Fifths Clause. Doubters should read this

article. It also makes a broader point about protection of property, and says that the slavers had a disproportionate effect on US public policy in its early years. On this view, we have always been governed by a minority.

The Fifth Amendment is another obvious property protection: the Takings Clause bars governments from taking property without “just compensation”. All the rights of the slavers and the thinly populated states are protected by the provisions regarding amendments to the Constitution which make it possible for the tiny states and slave states to kill any amendment.

This love of property has become an obsession with Americans. “You Can’t Tell Me What To Do With My Property” should be the National Motto. One tiny bit of evidence of this is the ugliness of most US cities and towns, because people have no interest in the way their communities look if it means they can’t hang ugly signs and pave the countryside to build a Walgreen’s on every corner not occupied by a Taco Bell.

Another manifestation is the idea that taxation is theft as libertarians and not a few others say. Not that it really matters what people think, because Congress is afraid to tax anyone ever. In fact, historically Congress does what the filthy rich want and little else. Because, after all, protecting property is the point of the Constitution.

To top all that off, a large part of the population despises the libtards. No one knows how big that group is, because no one polls the question in that form. In recent polling, the percentage identifying as conservative is trending down while the percentage identifying as liberal is trending up, but the former leads the latter by 9%; moderates are also slipping down. At the end of 2017, conservatives and moderates were each at 35%, while liberals were at 26%. Of course, the operational definitions of all three groups have badly slipped to the right over the years. It doesn’t much matter right now, the conservatives can block any

change.

Even if the Democrats start winning, which given their allegiance to neoliberalism is not a sure thing, the crazy right has made it clear that they will howl and throw feces at any action the Democrats might try and we have no reason to think the Democrats won't cave and do the very least possible as they have done for decades.

So, here we are. Stuck. Interesting question: How long will the majority consent to be governed by the minority? Famous quote from Herb Stein: "If something can't go on forever, it won't." I'm waiting to see how that happens.