

# Direct Democracy

## *A Good Idea Whose Time Has Come!*



Voters assemble in the Canton of Glarus, Switzerland, May 7, 2006.

**“Direct democracy (also known as pure democracy) is a form of democracy in which people vote on policy initiatives directly, as opposed to a representative democracy in which people vote for representatives who then vote on policy initiatives ... Most countries that are representative democracies allow for three forms of political action that provide limited direct democracy: referendum (plebiscite), initiative, and recall.”**

**– Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia**

# ***DIRECT DEMOCRACY ~ THE WAVE OF THE FUTURE***

BY IAN WOODS

December 26, 2011

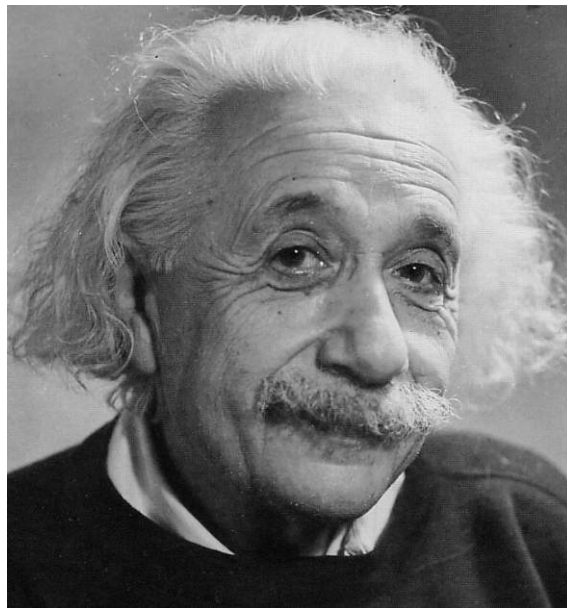
**H**ave you ever wondered what Albert Einstein meant when he said: “We can’t solve [today’s] problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them”? If we look at the major problems facing humankind right now (see partial list below<sup>1</sup>), Einstein’s theory could mean we can’t rely on politicians and corporations to fix the problems *they created in the first place* ... because their way of thinking isn’t going to help us solve them. Why? Because politicians make decisions based on whether or not it will get them re-elected – which means pleasing their corporate donors. And the corporate executives only think about delivering more profits to their shareholders – so they can get their multi-million dollar bonuses. We, the people, on the other hand are more interested in ‘survival’ – survival of ourselves, our families and friends, our nations and ultimately our species – i.e. the ‘big’ picture.

If you take any particular problem created by the corporate-run politicians, ask yourself: “Is that what we, the people, want or is that what they *secretly* want?” You’ll see there’s a huge difference between the two. For example, we want peace – the military-industrial-complex wants war. We want more jobs at home – the transnationals want to outsource our jobs overseas. We want an affordable healthcare system – big pharma wants to keep us sick and sell us expensive drugs.

On top of it all, are the ‘banksters’ who are the principle funders of all the major parties. If only people knew that the ‘banksters’ have, since 1913 in the US and since 1934 in Canada, successfully lobbied those in power in both our national governments for the secret privilege of ‘legally’ creating money out of thin air, and then loaning it out at interest. They loan out this new money, not only to ourselves, but to the very government that gave them the privilege of creating money – money our governments could have created for us in the first place and loaned to itself. No wonder they’ve become known as ‘banksters.’ That’s why we are seeing so much personal and national debt everywhere. The

rich keep getting richer, the poor poorer and the middle class are getting wiped out. It’s unsustainable!

The only way we are going to stop this nonsense is if we stop giving our power away to politicians at election time and instead insist on voting on all these important issues ourselves. We need to adopt a new self-governing model of government which does away with the old corrupt ‘representative’ model. That’s how I believe Einstein’s thinking can help us get unstuck from so many problems and move ahead.



**Professor Albert Einstein**  
**“We need a new way of thinking.”**

If you’re waiting for the right political party to come along to solve our problems, listen to what US author Lee Gottlieb says about that: “Politicians are the only people in the world who create problems and then campaign against them. Have you ever wondered, if both he Democrats and the Republicans are against deficits, *why* do we have deficits? Have you ever wondered, if all the politicians are against inflation and high taxes, *why* do we have inflation and high taxes? You and I don’t propose a federal budget. The President does. ... You and I don’t write the tax code. Congress does. You and I don’t set fiscal policy. Congress does. You and I don’t control monetary policy. The Federal Reserve Bank does.”<sup>2</sup>

If you don’t think we are smart enough to make the big important decisions then ask yourself, Are we smart enough to save ourselves from extinction? Or extreme poverty? Or a series of endless wars for the last remaining resources? Of course we are. But the corporations (and their political lackies) aren’t going to be able to help us. So we need to stop voting them into power. And instead start declining our ballots, insisting that we be given the right to vote on the issues that affect us.

If you don’t think direct democracy will work, please read the article that follows: “Direct Democracy in Canada ~ British Columbians Fight the HST” which describes how direct democracy was used in 2011 by the citizens of BC to reverse a sales tax that was imposed upon them by a government who thought they could do whatever the heck they wanted to pay for all their expensive programs. This is

how direct democracy works but yet we have very few who are willing to support it. Aren't you tired of being continually misrepresented by politicians, no matter what the party? Wouldn't you prefer a new model where politicians act as public servants should and actually do our bidding?

We need to take back control of our governments using direct democracy. We need to insist we have the right to vote on all the issues that affect us, because in most cases we know more, collectively, than the politicians. In all cases we can represent our own best interests better than any politician can. And now with the Internet, we have the technology to vote securely on the issues which affect us. So we no longer need representatives to twist our votes.

### WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

**THE PROBLEM** with the current system of representative democracy is how corrupt the political decision-making process has become. If we go back to its origin, it was developed out of necessity. We were too far away from the capital to voice our opinions on a regular basis, so we elected a volunteer (politician) to represent us. As well, we weren't knowledgeable enough on most of the issues being decided to make an informed decision. Nowadays, that's all changed with the new technology – the television has brought the issues being debated into our living rooms; the radio allows us to call in and voice our opinion and hear what others have to say; the Internet lets us sign petitions to support our common causes; the smart phone helps us organize local demonstrations.

Why do we need to send a representative to the capital to play a debating charade on the most important of issues, when we are perfectly capable of voting on the issues for ourselves? You see, we have the Internet. (We are able to vote right now on websites like [www.AVAAZ.ORG](http://www.AVAAZ.ORG) where, for example, you can vote on saving the Internet from censorship: [http://www.avaaz.org/en/save\\_the\\_internet/?vl](http://www.avaaz.org/en/save_the_internet/?vl) like 3.5 million of us already have.)

Have you ever wondered where your vote ends up when we cast it in one of today's elections? How many votes do we get? *One*. So who do you vote for with only one vote? The candidate? The party? The party leader? Or, in many cases, do you use your vote to vote *against* a certain candidate? Or *against* a certain party? Or *against* a certain party leader – so they don't get in? (Many of us do just that.)

Have you ever felt your vote was being compromised when selecting a party or candidate? After all they only offer a "basket of goods" that probably doesn't exactly coincide with what you want. Where does that leave you if you feel that they represent most of what you want, but not where you stand on other issues? By voting for a particular candidate or party which best represents your issues, you

may inadvertently be voting against one or two issues which you value. How good is that?

What if the person we vote for changes their tune once they get in? Have you ever heard of a politician walking across the floor to the opposition party? (Belinda Stronach comes to mind in Canada in 2005.)<sup>3</sup> Where does that leave you if you voted for her party? What if the party and/or party leader break one of their main election promises, say to *not* raise taxes, if elected, and then they do it anyway? Where does that leave you? Can you fire them? Recall them? No, in most cases, we simply accept the fact that politicians are some of the best (or worst?) doggone liars on the planet. Surely, accepting that fact, is a sign of us going along with a *very* dysfunctional system.

We've got to stop casting our votes to the wind and instead vote for direct democracy any way we know how. See the article which follows "Voting for None of the Above" for how to decline your ballot.

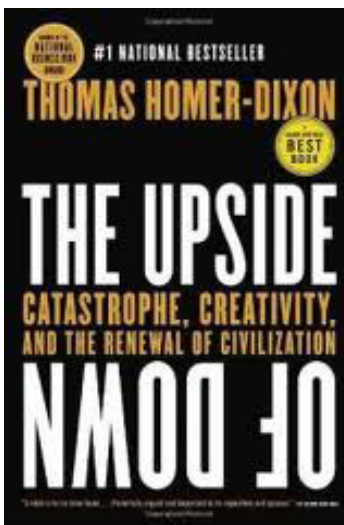
**THE SOLUTION** is simple. "Out with the old ... and in with the new." That is, out with *representative* democracy and in with *direct* democracy. It's time to get rid of the middleman. Enough of the old patriarchal system we've inherited. It's time for us to grow up and govern ourselves.

As Einstein said: "We can't solve [today's] problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them." We need to change our way of thinking about democracy. Representative democracy just doesn't cut it any more. We need a new form of democracy that eliminates the corruption that has crept in and crippled our political decision-making process.

Thomas Homer-Dixon, author of *The Upside of Down* put it this way: "New forms of democracy are essential, because we need as many heads as possible working together to solve our common problems, and because the larger the number of people involved in the decisions that affect everyone, the less likely that **narrow elite interests** will dominate. And only through much broader and deeper democratic practice will humankind likely develop the expansive 'moral commonwealth' essential to our collective survival."

### FOOTNOTES:

1. Some major problems looming ahead include: *extreme worldwide poverty* if we continue embracing the current economic model of unlimited growth but with dwindling resources; or *national bankruptcy* if we continue to accept Wall Street's scandalous Ponzi-scheme type behaviour; or *species extinction*, if we continue along the path of uncontrolled mega-pollution as a result of the quest for bigger and bigger corporate profits.
2. "The Democracy That Never Was" – FREE online book at: [www.Gottliebworld.com](http://www.Gottliebworld.com)
3. For several Canadian examples see: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/cdngovernment/crossing.html> ■



# *Direct Democracy in Canada ~ British Columbians Fight the HST*

BY IAN WOODS

June 14, 2011

**B**ritish Columbia is the only province in Canada with direct democracy. In 1996 the Michael Harcourt government passed the “Recall and Initiative Act” which gave the citizens of BC the right to recall an elected representative and/or force a referendum on popular issues. Since then, despite several attempts, no MLAs have been recalled (although MLA Paul Reitsma would have been recalled in 1998, if he hadn’t resigned first) and none of the four referendums so far offered to the people have passed ... that is, up until now.

In July 2010, the “Fight HST” campaign led by former Premier Bill Vander Zalm (1986-1991) had collected more than enough signatures (700,000) to force a referendum on whether or not to roll back the Harmonized Sales Tax (HST). According to *Wikipedia*, “the HST was introduced on July 1, 2010 in the provinces of Ontario and British Columbia. Polls show that 82% of British Columbians and 74% of Ontarians opposed it, before it was implemented.” According to a Vancouverite News Service poll, “90% in B.C. and Ontario say HST is a government tax grab.” In BC, the HST was implemented by Premier Gordon Campbell and his Liberal government despite election promises saying that, if elected, they wouldn’t raise taxes. Premier Campbell has since resigned due to a public uproar. Meanwhile, this summer (June/July 2011), the people of BC have a chance to rescind the HST ... which would be a dramatic slap-in-the-face for the Liberals.

The following is an email interview with former Premier Bill VanderZalm about his role in leading the popular struggle to “Fight the HST” in British Columbia. The interview was conducted by Ian Woods, Publisher of *Global Outlook* (<http://www.globaloutlook.ca/>) special to *Worldwide Direct Democracy News*.

**Question:** Mr. Vander Zalm, can you tell us how the people of BC were lucky enough to get direct democracy legislation in place when, in fact, no other provinces have it?

**Bill Vander Zalm:** Direct democracy was introduced during my term in the premier’s office because of the Meech Lake accord. After the accord, at first there was support and joy which later turned to opposition and denouncement. It was agreed that we should never again consider a constitutional amendment without first going to the electorate. We introduced Referendum legislation to provide for this. When Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, with support from all the premiers, introduced the Charlottown accord – Mr. Mulroney realized that he could not win a referendum on it in B.C. and therefore decided to have a national referendum, which he lost. It was after this that the Social Credit government put



**Bill Vander Zalm**

a question to the people asking them if they would support legislation for Initiative, Referenda and Recall. The B.C. Reform party had lobbied me to bring in legislation and I was most sympathetic to the idea.

The people voted overwhelmingly in favour. The government however was defeated and it was left for Mr. Harcourt to bring in the legislation and rules. It was written to make it extremely difficult but it worked for the HST.

**Question:** What were the requirements you had to meet to earn the vote? What were some of the obstacles you overcame to get all those 700,000 signatures? And now, what threshold must be reached for the referendum to be passed? Can you tell us if you think the hurdles are too high (compared to other jurisdictions) for the legislation to be effective?

**Vander Zalm:** The requirement was 10% of all the registered voters in each and every constituency. No one could be paid and no budget was given us. Chris Delaney and I brought a group of 6 people together to strategize and plan and then set out travel the province to seek out volunteers to collect signatures. The response was overwhelming and once we had a big volunteer base and sufficient in every constituency to begin the process, I applied to be the proponent for a Citizen’s Initiative petition. I do think the threshold for an Initiative petition are excessively difficult and should be made more reasonable but not easy.

**Question:** What do you say to people that criticize direct democracy as being ‘mob rule’ and that the public is ‘too ignorant’ to know what’s good for them.

**Vander Zalm:** No system is perfect but a system that best represents the will of the people will serve us best. Because of the Internet, direct democracy can be practiced much easier and much more effectively than it could in days gone by. The people collectively, will instinctively decide better than an elected dictatorship and its bureaucracy.

**Question:** If you do get 50% + 1 votes in favour of extinguishing the HST, what will happen? Will the Liberals follow through with the wishes of the people? Or add the PST to energy, food, etc. (which weren't taxed provincially before) to make up for the shortfall in revenue?

**Vander Zalm:** The revenue to government will be no less than what it was before the introduction of the HST. The HST we were told was revenue neutral but that turned out to be an untruth that even the economists did not pick up on. It was discovered by the, so called, independent, government appointed panel that there would be an excess of well over \$800 million per year. The excess has not been allocated anywhere in the budget. The government is legally bound by the referendum to re-institute the PST exactly as it was before July 1st, 2010 – the day the HST came into effect. If later they wish to change that they will need to come back to the people for approval.

**Question:** If you do win the fight, how will politics change in BC? Might there be a move to reduce the recall and initiative signature thresholds and extend the time for collecting signatures?

**Vander Zalm:** The government handled the introduction of the HST worse than anything preceding it in the history of the province, though exactly as they had planned it. It was introduced on a heavy news day, the Braidwood commission report on the tazing at the airport, and a very hot day in July of 2009. The government has lost much of its credibility and trust, it will long suffer for this. I doubt if the current

political parties in Victoria will touch the legislation for initiative, referenda and recall with a 10 foot pole.

**Question:** How do you think a success in BC would affect other provinces that have adopted the HST, especially Ontario?

**Vander Zalm:** I believe this will be the beginning for 'direct democracy' throughout the country.

**Question:** Do you think that there's a chance that Ontarians could see the same direct democracy questions on their ballots, as BC voters saw in 1992. If so how?

**Vander Zalm:** Governments and bureaucracies do not want direct democracy. If a good number of the populace in Ontario can convince one of the leading parties to include direct democracy in their platform, the party could get elected on that. (The governing Ontario Liberals will need to do something, although no government has ever been re-elected after introducing the HST.)

**Question:** Is there any other way in which you think Ontario citizens could get the right to have recall and initiative (the two main tools of direct democracy) by using the success of the your "Fight HST" campaign?

**Vander Zalm:** If in B.C. we successfully defeat the HST it will resonate throughout Canada. The government of B.C. will have spent \$10 million of taxpayers money and a similar amount will be spent by the Big Business pro-HST group (The Smart Tax Alliance) while we will spend no more than \$250 thousand.

**Question:** If over half a million Ontarians were to sign a petition like yours, and present it before the Ontario Legislature, would the Ontario politicians be able to ignore it?

**Vander Zalm:** They could not possibly ignore it, but the petition must be well thought out so that it commits the government or its possible successors. ■

## ***AFTER THE REFERENDUM***

**August 26, 2011**

Hello Mr. Vander Zalm,

CONGRATULATIONS! You have won the referendum!! According to the *CBC*, just now, it's the first time in history (in the entire British Empire) that a tax has been reversed by popular vote! This is indeed a HUGE victory for direct democracy! Can you give us your comments?

Thanks Ian, It was a well organized long lasting event but we had lots of help in the field from thousands of volunteers. The Referendum requires only a simple majority of those that voted, we had slightly short of 55% and the other side had slightly over 45%. The number voting by mail in ballot was 52+ % of registered voters but the mail-in ballot showed us what a mess the voters' list was in. Probably thousands were denied a vote in that they never received a ballot even after telephoning for one.

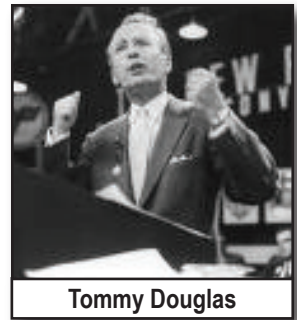
The government and big business alliance spent, our estimate, in the order of \$25 million and we had a budget of \$250,000 of which we had to pay \$25,000 in HST.

We were out advertised 100 to 1 and most of the advertising was misleading and false but the checks on this had been removed by government before it all started.

I do think someone in Ontario should start lobbying the party leaders for a commitment on direct democracy – Initiative, Referenda and Recall.

~ **Bill Vander Zalm**

# Mouseland



This graphic was inspired by Tommy Douglas' famous speech (see accompanying article next page) illustrating how, in this system, no matter who we vote for, the fat cats always get in.

## *Direct Democracy – An Idea Whose Time Has Come*

**Think of all the vital issues that should be addressed by all governments around the world. Yet despite the seriousness of these issues, very little is happening. Why? Because our current system of government thwarts the will of the people and that's not going to change until we, the citizens, take back control of our governments from our so-called elected representatives.**

*[This is the text of a speech first delivered at the Truth Now Tour in Sydney, Australia.]*

BY IAN WOODS

March 2008

**T**ake, for example, protecting our environment, which the environmental movement has been trying to do for years. Even though a clear majority of us wants decisive actions to be taken, governments around the world waffle by pushing emission targets way off into the future, as if the next generation can deal with it. What a put off! Just to think, our species, who is called 'homo sapiens' – man the wise – is so smart we can conquer space, but, at the same time, we are so stupid we can't even stop polluting the very air we breathe, the soil in which we grow our food and the water we drink. Other species have learned not to foul their own nests. What's the matter with us? Well, it's all to do with 'politics' my friends.

As someone once said: "If you don't deal with politics, politics will deal with you."

\* \* \*

One of Canada's best known politicians, Tommy Douglas (1904–1984), is known as the Father of Medicare. In 2004, he was voted "The Greatest Canadian" of all time in a nationally televised contest organized by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Tommy Douglas is famous for a story he once told about one of the main problems we have with our form of Western-style representative government. It's the story of a place called MOUSELAND which describes our current situation quite nicely.

*Mouseland was a place where all the little mice lived and played, were born and died. And they lived much the same as you and I do.*

*They even had a Parliament. And every four years they had an election. They used to walk to the polls and cast their ballots. Some of them even got a ride to the polls. And they got a ride for the next four years afterwards too. Just like you and me.*

*And every time on election day all the little mice used to go to the ballot box and they used to elect a government – a government made up of big, fat, black cats.*

*Now if you think it strange that mice should elect a government made up of cats, you just look at the history of Canada for last 90 years and maybe you'll see that they weren't any stupider than we are.*

*Now I'm not saying anything against the cats. They were nice fellows. They conducted their government with dignity. They passed good laws – that is, laws that were good for cats. But the laws that were good for cats weren't very good for mice.*

*One of the laws said that mouse holes had to be big enough so a cat could get his paw in. Another law said that mice could only travel at certain speeds – so that a cat could get his breakfast without too much effort.*

*All the laws were good laws. For cats. But, oh, they were hard on the mice. And life was getting harder and harder. And when the mice couldn't put up with it any more, they decided something had to be done about it. So they went en masse to the polls. They voted the black cats out. They put in the white cats.*

*Now the white cats had put up a terrific campaign. They said: "All that Mouseland needs is more vision."*

*They said: "The trouble with Mouseland is those round mouse holes we got. If you put us in, we'll establish square mouse holes." And they did. And the square mouse holes were twice as big as the round mouse holes, and now the cat could get both his paws in. And life was tougher than ever.*

*And when the mice couldn't take that anymore, they voted the white cats out and put the black ones in again. Then they went back to the white cats, then to the black cats. They even tried half black cats and half white cats. And they called that a 'coalition.' They even got one government made up of cats with spots on them – they were cats that tried to make a noise like a mouse but ate like a cat.*

*You see, my friends, the trouble wasn't with the color of the cat.*

*The trouble was that they were cats. And because they were cats, they naturally looked after cats, instead of mice.*

*Presently there came along one little mouse who had an idea. My friends, watch out for the little fellow with an idea. And he said to the other mice, "Look fellows, why do we keep on electing a government made up of cats? Why don't we elect a government made up of mice?"*

*"Oh," they said, "he's a Bolshevik [Communist]. Lock him up!" So they put him in jail.*

*But I want to remind you: that you can lock up a mouse or a man but you can't lock up an idea.*

That pretty well sums up the current political system which we call ‘representative democracy’ today. Tommy Douglas’ Mouseland story reveals the crux of the problem – and why we aren’t able to get many good things done.

### **SOMETHING’S WRONG WITH ‘DEMOCRACY’ TODAY**

Many of us in the *9/11 Truth movement* have been working on getting a new, thoroughly independent investigation into 9/11 ever since *The 9/11 Commission Report* came out in July 2004. That’s over four years now and we don’t seem to be any closer to getting it, in the United States, or elsewhere. Without the cooperation of our political leaders at the national level of our governments, all our good work exposing the truth and lies of 9/11 seems to be falling on deaf ears in Congresses and Parliaments around the world.

Unless there is a political revolution somehow, the governments of all our so-called democracies are going to prevent us from re-opening 9/11.

We seem to be blocked, ignored and stymied in all our efforts thus far, even though our grassroots’ campaigns have been quite successful around the world in raising 9/11 Truth awareness in the public’s mind.

For example, even in Jaipur, India, where I visited recently, I met some local engineering students who had heard about *9/11 Truth*, the mysterious collapse of a *third* skyscraper (Building 7) on 9/11 and Willie Rodriguez’ testimony of a huge explosion in the basement of the Twin Towers *before* the first plane hit. That is encouraging.

Fortunately, there have been some brave parliamentarians who have spoken up recently on 9/11, as in the case of Yukihisa Fujita, a member of the Japanese Parliament (in early 2008), and Guilietto Chiesa, a member of the European Parliament, who recently screened a new documentary film about 9/11 called *Zero* for his fellow parliamentarians. But these instances of 9/11 Truth breaking out in our various Congresses and Parliaments around the world are few and far between.

We know that it’s not that our fellow citizens don’t want a new inquiry into 9/11. The latest polls (at least in America) show that a majority of people polled want a new inquiry to get to the bottom of all the contradictions which we 9/11 Truthers have brought to the forefront. (See “There are Millions of Us Now,” *Global Outlook*, Issue #12, ps. 3-4.)

The problem lies with our various national governments who unilaterally have decided to avoid the 9/11 issue, so they can get on with the ‘BUSINESS’ of fighting the ‘war on terror’ and the ‘credit crunch’ among other things – both of which have largely evolved as a result of the blind support by the general public of the Bush administration’s version of events that day.

If only ONE of our so-called democracies in the world would listen to what the majority of people wanted, we’d have had a new investigation into 9/11 by now. But there seems to be a ‘disconnect’ between what our governments

want and what the people want – and for good reason, which I shall go into shortly.

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### **THERE’S A WORLDWIDE DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT**

9/11 Truth is not the only cause that is suffering from what you could call a ‘democratic deficit’; there are countless other issues and policies which activists around the world want fixed, funded or flung overboard. But our elected ‘representatives’ oppose our demands because they claim “they know better” and that they have a ‘mandate’ to do as they please, once elected.

#### **Example One**

Take just one basic example. How many of us want peace? 99.9% of us on the planet? And yet a handful of elected politicians around the globe (who supposedly represent us) keep sending us off to fight wars in which millions of us are needlessly killed, maimed or left homeless. I wonder why?!

If you ask most, if not all, of the citizens around the world if they want these wars, they would say, “No.” It’s only a tiny percentage that want it: the arms dealers, the ‘banksters,’ and warmongering politicians.

That perhaps is an oversimplified example of a very complex issue, but it does illustrate the basic point that representative democracy, as a method of governing ourselves, is for the most part BROKEN.

#### **Example Two**

We make speeches here and elsewhere about truth, justice and 9/11, thinking that our numbers are small and desperately hoping that more will join our movement. But many of us don’t realize that out there, in places like India, which is the largest democracy in the world, farmers are committing suicide at the rate of two an hour, for the last ten years, due to the effects of the Indian government signing agreements with transnational corporations who have brought economic globalization to the Third World.

Elsewhere in India, the survivors of one of the world’s largest industrial disasters in Bhopal in 1984 still have not received proper compensation or health care for themselves. The government of India based their quick settlement (with Union Carbide) on 3,800 deaths and yet doctors who provided medical assistance claim that within a month at least 15,000 people had died. What kind of justice is that?

The people of India are up against the same thing we are – a ‘disconnect’ between the government and the people. If you ask the Indian people, practically everyone agrees that there is massive government corruption blocking their demands for the truth and justice and protection from big business – and yet their government doesn’t seem to give a damn. So we have some allies out there in India – over one billion people – who are fighting the same battle on a different front. They too would benefit from what I am about to tell you about ... a powerful, yet peaceful, set of tools which are not talked about very much.



**WHAT IS MEANT BY THE WORD ‘DEMOCRACY’?**

Before going any further, let me define the various types of democracies, the way I see them.

The word democracy comes from the Greek: DEMOS = People, KRATOS = Rule – meaning RULE BY THE PEOPLE. There are essentially four different forms of democracy. There’s:

- 1. Direct Democracy** (otherwise known as Participatory Democracy or you could think of as: Pure, Real, Authentic, Genuine or True Democracy) which was discovered by the Greeks and is currently practiced by the Swiss people (which I will describe later in the article.)
- 2. Representative Democracy** – which you’ll find in nations where the people elect politicians to represent us in Parliament or Congress. (That is what we are told anyway.) This is practiced in the United States in which the Head of State is the President. It is often referred to as a ‘Republic’ to differentiate it from the third form of democracy:
- 3. Parliamentary Democracy** – which is practiced in such nations as Britain, Canada and Australia. In these instances, the Head of State is the Queen of England, and it is herself or her representative, the Governor General, who must give Royal Assent to all legislation before it becomes law. So it is not an ‘independent’ representative democracy, as such, but subservient to the Crown.

There is another form of democracy which is never mentioned, yet prevalent everywhere. It is what I call:

- 4. MIS-Representative Democracy** – where those elected don’t represent the people who voted for them, but rather bow to special interest groups such as their paymasters or their parties, where they must “toe the line,” otherwise they will get turfed out of their party and sit as an independent. This form of democracy is a sham and rightly shouldn’t even be called a democracy, as it is entirely the opposite of what democracy was meant to be – government OF the people, FOR the people, BY the people. Rather it is government OF the people, FOR special interests (like the corporations), BY puppet politicians (with hidden agendas).

As they say, “The proof of the pudding is in the eating.”

I ran for political office three times in the Canadian federal elections of 1997, 2000 and 2004. In one All Candidates Meeting, I asked the incumbent Aileen Carroll – a Liberal in the Paul Martin government – how she would vote if she were given a free vote on an issue. I gave her the three choices:

Along party lines? No.

According to the wishes of her constituents? No.

According to her own conscience? Yes.

Her answer stunned me and the audience. When I asked her why, she said, “Because I’m smarter than my constituents.”

That floored me and, I can honestly say I heard people in the audience gasp. I had suspected that is what she might say. But to say that right in front of 200 or so of her own

constituents was unbelievable. The funny thing was, she was re-elected – but I don’t think it was thanks to any of those in the audience that evening.

\* \* \*

I see most of our current forms of democracy around the world as being MIS-representative – with the exception of Switzerland (which I will come to later).

**THE OXCART ANALOGY**

Most democracies are similar to a cart being pulled by an ox that is going around in circles. The two wheels represent the people on the one hand and the elected politicians on the other. The cart represents the government of the day. If you look closely, you’ll see that the reason why the ox and cart are going around in circles is because one wheel is bigger than the other ... and so both wheels are out of balance. The elected politicians have become the BIG Wheel. And the people have been reduced to a small wheel which keeps the cart upright. But no matter how much we encourage the ox to go forward, we just go round and round in circles. It’s obvious we need to balance things out. We have given too much power to our elected representatives. And, as history shows, too much power in the hands of a few tends to corrupt the whole process.

**Example One**

Here’s a good example of what I mean by a MIS-representative democracy. Only 23% of eligible voters in Canada voted in the last election for the new party-in-power – the Conservatives. As many know, the Conservatives in Canada are bound and determined to keep us fighting in Afghanistan. And yet, the majority of Canadians (52% according to an October 2007 Angus Reid poll) want us OUT. What kind of representation is that?

**Example Two**

In the US election of 2004, 60.7% of the eligible voters actually voted. Of that, allegedly 50.7% (according to Wikipedia) voted for George W. Bush. That means then that only 30.7% of Americans (who were eligible to vote) voted for President Bush and that’s not taking into consideration the probable swing vote manipulation by the electronic voting machines.

This means that approximately 70% of Americans DIDN’T vote for ‘W.’ And their so-called President has turned the country upside down – economically, ruined its once good reputation, and trashed its civil liberties, not to mention the tragic consequences of Bush’s righteous ‘war on terror’ for all those caught in the crossfire. What kind of representation is that? Only 30%! And that ‘mandate’ has been responsible for carrying out all sorts of devastating policies, in which the other 70% of Americans can do nothing but bite their tongue, or get arrested protesting on Capitol Hill.

**Example Three**

Here’s a good example from the recent past. Remember when ‘Tricky Dick’ – Richard Nixon promised he’d pull US troops out of Vietnam? Well that turned out to be a whopper.

And millions voted for him on that one promise alone. When he became President, he did the very OPPOSITE! He never intended to keep that promise. He just wanted to get elected. Talk about *MIS*-Representation!

When I worked in real estate we, as agents, were warned about *MIS*-representation; it was illegal. Why do the politicians get away with it? I guess it's because they are the ones who make the laws. Obviously it's not us.

Let's look at some of the things people want but can't get because our 'know-it-all' politicians don't want them:

- Real protection of our environment
- Fair Trade, as opposed to Free Trade
- Monetary Reform to fix the corrupt debt-based national money systems
- Stopping corporate globalization of our nation-states
- Stopping the privatization of the welfare state and the commons
- Stopping the North America Union and Asia Pacific Economic Union from creating regional currencies
- Stopping the erosion of the independence of each sovereign nation
- Stopping the ongoing occupation and war in Afghanistan and Iraq

And, of course, what all 9/11 Truthers want:

- Getting a new independent international investigation into 9/11.

These are all popular issues that a majority of us, if adequately educated on the various subjects, would surely want. But we'll be lucky if we get any one of them. Why? Because the current system we call democracy is BROKEN. It's literally based on a series of 'broken' promises.

\* \* \*

Here are 3 more reasons why the current system fails us:

#### **Reason One**

Every time you vote, you have to make a series of compromises. With only one vote, how do you cast it? For a particular party or against a certain party? For the best leader or for the best candidate? For a party who supports an important new policy you agree with, or against a party who has a policy you oppose? Does one vote do us justice in this kind of system?

#### **Reason Two**

Once in power, there's very little the average person can do about influencing the government's course of actions, even if their platform upon which they are elected is trashed and a new one which is 180° different is brought forward. The newly-elected Prime Minister Stephen Harper did an about-face flip-flop on taxing Income Trusts in Canada in 2006. It upset a lot of people who voted for him on that issue, but 'too bad' – there's nothing the voters can do about it – except wait until the next election to vote him out. And then they go through the same process all over again.

#### **Reason Three**

Some have said that we have a system that is based on ONE DOLLAR – ONE VOTE rather than ONE PERSON –

ONE VOTE. If you think of it, that's a pretty good description of the corruption within our current system. As they say: "Those who pay the piper call the tune." In other words, whoever funds the mainstream political parties gets their policies put in place by 'their' elected politicians. No wonder our governments keep borrowing money (unnecessarily) from the private bankers, because the 'banksters' (as I call them) are major donors to BOTH of the mainstream political parties.

#### **WHO BEST REPRESENTS US?**

Our current system is based on the need to send representatives to the nation's capital to represent us. That was necessary back in the day of the horse and buggy, but nowadays we have the means to represent ourselves.

The days of our reliance on the radio and telegraph for the news are long gone. We now know just as much about what's going on in the world today as our politicians. In fact, regarding the issues which affect us personally, in many cases, we probably know MORE!

But when our elected representatives get there, they are surrounded by lobbyists. Some say lobbyists are the THIRD and BIGGEST party of all ... hidden in plain sight. Our representatives are twisted and turned to suit the party, who in turn bow to their corporate masters. So those elected fast become, as I say – *MIS*-representatives.

The minute they get to our respective nation's capitals they become the slaves of the party system and lose their independence. (Lou Dobbs political commentator for CNN TV apparently agrees. He has just come out with a book called *Independents Day* to make that point. He advocates that all members of Congress in the US be independents.)

When you eventually arrive at that understanding, you will realize why substantive change benefitting us (we, the people) will rarely happen.

That's when I began to look for something better.

\* \* \*

#### **WHAT'S THE SOLUTION?**

In 2000, I went to Greece on a little holiday with my fiancée. We decided to visit the Oracle of Delphi just outside Athens and we ended up taking a guided walking tour.

Way back in the Fifth Century BC, Athenian leaders often consulted the priests at the Oracle of Delphi when they had to make any major decisions such as when to go to war, how to defend Athens during an invasion, or other such important matters. The voices of the Oracle have been silent for over 2,500 years, but I wondered what I would ask the Oracle given the chance.

As we walked around the ruins, in the middle of the birthplace of democracy, I thought about what the Oracle would say about the current state of democracy around the world today – and how it could be fixed. Just for fun, I asked Stefanos, our guide, what he thought the Oracle would say about that. He'd been showing people around those ruins for decades and knew them inside out.

I remember Stefanos pausing with us under an olive tree below the ruins, as we waited for the rest of the tour to catch up. The sun was beating down on those ancient ruins as we stood there enjoying the shade. He scratched his head for a few moments, and appeared to be deep in thought. Then he looked up, and said: "I think I have your answer. It's as simple as this: 'participation'." "Participation?" I asked. "Yes, indeed, the Oracle would have told you that all that is needed is 'more participation.' After all, how can you have a real democracy if the citizens don't participate in the process?" "Well we do vote," I replied. "Yes, but only one vote once every few years? Can you honestly call that 'participation'?" I had to agree.

Stefanos, or should I say, the Oracle of Delphi, was absolutely right. We, the people of this modern day world, have become spectators rather than participants in the most important game of all – the political process. We, the citizens, have to get more involved, in order to revitalize democracy. Otherwise, the decisions are going to continue to be made for us by a few self-selected 'others,' which means we'll continue to get what we're already getting: blatant corruption. We have a choice: either we really get involved in the political decision-making process at all levels or we are going to continue to be ruled by a plutocracy, or worse, a 'corporatocracy' – composed of an unelected board of directors.

### **WE NEED A BETTER MODEL**

As the late great inventor of the geodesic dome, Buckminster Fuller, once said: "You never change things by fighting the existing reality ... To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete."

Is there a better model for democracy? Well, how about a model which encourages people to participate in the process – more than once every 2 to 4 years?

How about a new way of policy making that involves us – so we can vote on all the important issues. For example, one that will let the majority veto proposed legislation or repeal existing laws we don't like?

One in which we, the people, are NOT subjected to laws that a majority of us doesn't want.

Or a system which allows us, as activists, to propose new laws that might appeal to a majority of our fellow citizens?

How about a new form of democracy where we get to govern ourselves? Now wouldn't that be a novel idea?!

A form of democracy which is "Government OF the people, FOR the people and BY the people" ... As opposed to: "Government of the PEOPLE, for the CORPORATIONS, by the PARTIES."

Sound like a dream? Not at all. This form of government actually already exists in various parts of the world. Not on a grand scale mind you. But it's a well kept secret. You won't hear its name mentioned very often by our elected representatives. Oh no. As long as we go along with the current system, they will never mention the alternative, because if it were introduced, it would strip those in office of

most of their powers which, of course, would be a conflict of interest as far as they are concerned.

One of our problems has been not realizing that there is a better model – another alternative – A WAY OUT of the current political quagmire we are stuck in. Rather than putting our energy into fighting the current INDIRECT form of democracy, we need to build a new DIRECT form of democracy and thereby cut out the middle man which is totally messing up the decision-making process.

\* \* \*

What I'm talking about is the SWISS SYSTEM – which is: DIRECT DEMOCRACY – sometimes called PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY.

### **DIRECT DEMOCRACY (DD)**

Direct or Participatory Democracy – a.k.a. 'pure', 'real' or 'true' democracy – is defined as one in which people get to vote on the issues (as opposed to voting on politicians) in what are called Referendums (or Referenda) and/or they are able to UN-elect a politician from office by 'recalling' him or her.

### **HOW DOES DD WORK?**

The tools of Direct Democracy are: Referendum – Initiative – and Recall.

**The Referendum** – is a tool which people can use to vote on the issues. Referenda are policy questions referred to the people by the government asking voters to APPROVE or VETO current or proposed legislation.

(N.B. In Canada, if the results of the referendum are binding then it is properly called a 'referendum.' If it is not binding upon the government, then it is referred to as a 'plebiscite' which means that the government doesn't have to enact it, even if a majority vote in favor of it.)

Referenda only work if the question on the ballot is fair and balanced, and determined with citizen input and presented to an informed population. Here's an example of the outcome of an unfair referendum question: The 1999 referendum put to the people of Australia by PM Howard (about whether or not they wanted to become a Republic or not) was written in such a way as to keep the Parliamentary system they have in place. As a result, Australians were forced to keep their current system, much to the disappointment of many. So there has to be a system of checks and balances to make sure the question is unbiased.

Also the people must be able to understand an issue thoroughly before voting. A good example of that was the 2007 Ontario provincial referendum on Proportional Representation which failed because there was a total lack of public outreach to explain the issue.

**Initiative** – a.k.a. Citizen Initiated Referendum (CIR or binding CIR) whereby the people can put forward proposals for new laws, provided they can get enough signatures of support from their fellow citizens and thereby force a referendum question be put to their fellow citizens. This will

only work if the requirements (or hurdles) are set correctly (meaning not too high and not too low). For example, in British Columbia, Canada, 10% of eligible voters must sign a petition in each of 75 districts, within 90 days (!) which is such a huge requirement that it has squelched any and all attempts to put an initiative on a ballot. On the other hand, other jurisdictions only require 5% of their constituents to sign a petition, within 12 months or so, and consequently have had reasonable success in having referendum questions on their ballots.

**Recall** – Here the voters can recall an elected representative who has clearly *MIS*-represented them. One good example from Canada: Jag Badhuria, a Liberal, ran and got elected in a Toronto riding. When he got to Ottawa, a reporter questioned him about his credentials. He'd stated on his resumé that he had a law degree – LLB.int. The reporter asked him what the 'int' meant. He said that it meant 'interim', meaning he hadn't quite got his degree, but was almost there. Well, when the news broke about that little deception, the Liberal government forced Mr. Badhuria out of the Liberal Party. But with the way the system is set up in Canada (and most so-called democracies around the world), they couldn't force him out of office. So he sat there as an independent (and disgraced politician) in the Canadian Parliament for the next FOUR YEARS. Talk about 'broken'!

### GLOBAL PROGRESS

In the United States, about HALF of all states have initiative process and roughly a QUARTER have the right to recall. (You can get all the details of the American use of direct democracy in Thomas Cronin's book, *Direct Democracy*.)

In Canada there is only one province that has these tools: British Columbia. (To find out more on the Canadian experience, get either of Patrick Boyer's books, *The People's Mandate* or *Direct Democracy*.)

But neither country has these tools at the federal level!

Several other countries have made advances in Direct Democracy: Germany, Russia, Uruguay, Italy and Cuba.

IN BRITAIN – thanks to the Labour government in 1975, referendums have been held on whether or not to join the European Union, the devolution for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and on the Good Friday Peace Agreement in Ulster in 1998.

IN AUSTRALIA – an expert on Direct Democracy by the name of Professor Geoffrey Walker (former Dean of Law at the University of Queensland in Brisbane) has written a book: *Initiative and Referendum: THE PEOPLE'S LAW* (1987) available from The Center for Independent Studies.

He is also author of the recent paper – The Advance of Direct Democracy (DD) – which was presented to the Samuel Griffith Society at a conference in 2003 entitled: Upholding the Australian Constitution. In it, Professor Walker says, "It is clearly incongruous that the people are sovereign, but are unable to repeal the laws that govern them."

### WILL THE ADVANCES IN DD CONTINUE?

According to Professor Walker, there is no reason to think not. The factors that have contributed to the rise in popularity of Direct Democracy are still at play.

Not only that, but advances in technology have presented us with a new opportunity to advance the form of democracy we have inherited.

### DECENTRALIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE

Thanks to the Internet, we now have the ability to take the decision-making power back from the middlemen.

According to Professor Walker, an estimated 30 percent of Australians (and probably North Americans and Europeans) rely on the Internet "for news and current affairs, enabling anyone to bypass the official media and discover a mass of information and opinion that the elite would prefer we did not know about."

### REAL DEMOCRACY IS KEY TO OUR SURVIVAL

Political globalization is sweeping the world resulting in a growing 'democratic deficit.'

National governments around the globe are being squeezed by transnational corporations (TNCs) into submitting to 'free trade' practices that benefit the elites. And political parties (which are heavily influenced by the TNCs) relax laws that the citizens dearly cherish, such as foreign ownership of natural resources.

Canberra, Ottawa and even Washington are under more and more pressure to cede power over to international institutions in the form of treaties. The result is a contraction of national sovereignty.

As Professor Walker warns: "More and more power is being concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. The people wielding these powers are elected by no one, and in practical terms are accountable to no one."

Semi-secret organizations, like the CFR, the Trilateral Commission and the Bilderberg Group, formulate world policies behind closed doors. The influence of these semi-secret organizations further weakens government's accountability to the people and strengthens the case for DD.

Professor Walker suggests that introducing DD at the national level in Australia, Canada and the U.S., would:

1. Offer another line of defense of our national sovereignty.
2. Showcase the principle of self-government to other countries.
3. Tap into the creative potential of the people and encourage more people to get involved in the decision-making process.

As Professor Walker says, "Politics and lawmaking should be something that is done by us, not to us."

**IN SWITZERLAND**

The Swiss system of government, which is the prime example of direct democracy, has proven to be one of the most successful and stable forms of government over a long period of time.

It all began in 1874 (and in 1891 when it was strengthened) when the cantons of Switzerland decided that they would like to have a Citizen-Initiated Referendum system.

The big difference between Switzerland and other democracies is that Parliament does not create new laws, but only submits them to the people who decide for themselves whether or not to implement them.

The Swiss vote, on average, on more than two dozen issues a year.

In Switzerland, politics is not directly determined by the parties, but rather by the will of the people.

By its very nature, the outcome of the Swiss system of self-government – in which all important political decisions are made by the citizens – depends on the will of the people and NOT on the will of the politicians.

So a political promise, during election time, to reduce taxation would be laughed at, as it's the people that decide how much they will be taxed, not the politicians!

Switzerland has had fewer strikes than most other industrialized countries. It has resolved difficult internal problems such as those arising from their three different ethnic groups. It is one of the most stable countries in Western Europe with low taxation and low inflation.

The Swiss system reduces the power of pressure groups on politicians. It breaks down party divisions and unifies a diverse population.

It may not be perfect, but Switzerland has, in my opinion, the most advanced form of democracy on the planet.

**MAHATMA GANDHI**

While visiting India, I had a chance to visit Gandhi's house which is now a museum in Mumbai (Bombay). I asked the curator there, Meghshyama, what Gandhi would do if he were alive today about the situation in India and around the world regarding the total lack of democracy. We discussed it and he agreed that Gandhi would probably start another SATYA-GRAHA (which when translated means 'truth force') or peaceful protest against all the corruption and MIS-representation and abuse of power. Gandhi held 16 of these throughout his lifetime. The last one, being the QUIT INDIA movement, resulted in India's Independence in 1947.

So it wouldn't be unlike Gandhi to start a national STRIKE *on voting day* to demand that the people have more of a say in their affairs. By using non-violent non-cooperation, he might have started the "QUIT MIS-REPRESENTING US" campaign to clean up government corruption. The father of Indian Independence would demand that the people not only vote on the various personalities to carry out their bidding, BUT ALSO be given the right to vote on all important issues affecting them.

Just imagine, if fewer than 10% of the people voted that day of the strike, the government would be forced to hold another election that included important referendum questions of the day, thereby reviving the right of people to govern themselves.

\* \* \*

If the majority of the public were sufficiently well-informed and if we had the tools of Direct Democracy at our disposal, we could have forced, by now, a referendum on whether or not to reject *The 9/11 Commission Report*. If a majority of us rejected that report, it would force the creation of a new independent inquiry into 9/11 – one of our main objectives.

If we had Direct Democracy right now, we could also end the unjustified wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and prevent a pre-emptive strike on Iran. We could stop the 'Security and Prosperity Partnership,' the North American Union and the Amero from destroying our nationhood. We could abolish the Federal Reserve and institute a sane and sustainable debt-free money system. We could rein in the powers of monopoly capitalism and the transnational corporations. We could have recalled and impeached Bush for his opportunistic war crimes and put him, once and for all, behind bars, where he belongs. That's the power of Direct Democracy. Now that's what you call 'real' democracy!

\* \* \*

*This article is based on a speech given at the TruthNowTour in Australia, March 16, 2008. Ian Woods is the Publisher of Global Outlook. For more information please visit us at [www.GlobalOutlook.ca](http://www.GlobalOutlook.ca). To find out more about "Direct Democracy" Google it on-line, or visit: [www.swissworld.org/dvd\\_rom/direct\\_democracy\\_2005/index.html](http://www.swissworld.org/dvd_rom/direct_democracy_2005/index.html) which is an interactive computer session describing the Swiss system. Feedback about this article is welcome. Send yours to: [editor@GlobalOutlook.ca](mailto:editor@GlobalOutlook.ca). Copyright belongs to the author. All rights reserved.* ■

"When the people fear the government, you have tyranny.  
When the government fears the people, you have democracy." – **Thomas Jefferson**

# Voting For None of the Above

BY JON DYKSTRA

NOV. 8, 2007

Russ Vroege was all ready to vote, but had no one to vote for. He was pro-life; all the candidates were pro-abortion. Yes, there were other issues in the election, and many of them were important issues, but Russ didn't want to vote for a candidate who supported the murder of the unborn, no matter how nice his other position might be. To top it all off, Russ was going to be away on business the day of the election. He didn't even know where he could vote ahead of time. You'd probably understand if Russ felt a bit apathetic and didn't vote at all.

But this story doesn't end with Russ giving up on his democratic responsibility. A quick phone call allowed him to find out where his advance poll was. There was a line-up at the poll but Russ can be a patient guy, so he waited. Once he got to the front he was told he wasn't on the voters' list so he had to fill in some paperwork and provide some identification. After this paperwork was done he went back to the same line-up and waited again. His patience was rewarded with yet more paperwork, this time to explain why he was using the advance poll. Finally, with all his paperwork complete, Russ was handed a ballot and pointed toward the voting booth.

"Is there some way I can officially decline to vote?" he asked.

After all that trouble Russ didn't vote for any of the candidates – he declined his ballot and left the building.

## What Is It?

In most provinces, when voters are dissatisfied with their slate of candidates, they have few options. They can either not vote or they can spoil their ballot in protest. The problem is, many lazy people also don't vote, so voter dissatisfaction can be mistaken for laziness. Spoiled ballots too, are a very confusing way of sending a message. Ballots are often spoiled by mistake, so no one will be able to tell if a voter spoiled their ballot on purpose or not.

But in Alberta, Ontario and Manitoba, voters have another option – they can officially decline their ballots. This means going down to the polling station and then asking to decline your ballot (in Manitoba you can do it secretly, by writing the word 'Declined' anywhere on the front of the ballot). These declined ballots are then counted up in a separate category\* and that number is published. In Alberta, for example, Russ was one of 303 people to officially decline their ballot in the last provincial election. These 303 people weren't lazy or stupid. No, they actually took the time to go down to their polling station and to inquire into how they could decline. They expressed their dissatisfaction in a clear unmistakable manner.

## Few Do It

Very few people know about this option, so very few take advantage of it. In the last three Alberta elections combined only 790 people have declined their ballots. In 1990, more

than 20,000 voters declined their ballots in Ontario, but that was still only half a percent of all votes cast. In Manitoba, only a quarter of one percent of all voters declined their ballots in the last election. As small as these numbers are, they could quickly grow if more voters find out about this option.

This is particularly true among Christian voters as it becomes harder and harder to find politicians worth voting for. For example, did you have any pro-life candidates in your riding last election? If so, you were among the lucky few. Most of us were faced with choosing one of the many pro-abortion types. As a citizen living in a democratic country it is your right and your responsibility to vote, but how do you choose between different murderous politicians? (You could, of course, run yourself, and those that are able should seriously consider this option. This would give others in your riding the chance to finally have someone to vote for.) Do you choose the least evil of these evil types? Or do you simply not vote at all?

Apathy is a natural reaction in the face of choices like this, but voters in Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario have another choice. We can decline.

## Why Bother?

When people find out about this option they seem to have one of two reactions. They either think it is a great idea and are amazed they've never heard of it before, or they wonder why anyone would go through the bother of declining. Well, there are at least four reasons why it is worth bothering with.

It sends a clear message to the candidates who ran, condemning them. Voters who decline their ballot desperately want to vote for a candidate, but still don't. This lets the candidates who have run know that they are so bad, some people view voting for none of the above as a better option than voting for them. That's certainly a message I would enjoy sending to most politicians.

It sends a message to people who would consider running. Though there are still many Christians and pro-lifers, very few of them are willing to run for political office. They might be encouraged to do so, if it became apparent just how unsatisfied we are with evil, murderous candidates. Declining lets potential politicians know that there are people out there who aren't being represented, but who are eager for representation.

It fulfils your democratic responsibility. It can be a bit of bother to go through the hassle of declining your ballot, but it is a bother that occurs only once every four or five years. Living in a democratic country is a blessing we should not overlook. The least we can do is get off our butt and go express our opinion at the ballot box.

It can spur some very serious, and very edifying conversations. When I declined my ballot I did so in front

of a line-up of ten people. That gave me an opportunity to explain why I was doing what I was doing. "Life matters more than money," I said, "and none of these candidates care about the unborn's life so I just can't vote for them." My next-door neighbor, who is Catholic, happened to be the poll clerk, so this spurred a conversation later. And during the election campaign, when people were discussing who to vote for, my plan to decline my ballot gave me a great way to steer the conversation towards the very important topic of abortion.

### **Conclusion**

Declining your ballot is a last option, but it is still a good one. Unfortunately this option is only available in three of Canada's provinces. Liberal MP Charles Caccia recently

introduced legislation to make it possible to decline in federal elections, but his bill, Bill C-319, didn't get enough support and failed. If you would like to have this option federally or provincially, you'll have to let your elected representatives know. This is the sort of issue that politicians aren't likely to have strong feelings about, so it is very possible they will listen to your wishes.

\* Other provinces will allow you to decline your ballot, but they count these declined ballots as spoiled ballots, or don't count them at all.

\* \* \*

*This article first appeared in the March 2002 issue of Reformed Perspective* ■

## ***AUGUST 24, 2011 ~ NEWS RELEASE***

### ***Elections Ontario continues to fail to inform voters of their full voting rights – Information and ads during election campaign must have key messages to encourage voter turnout.***

**OTTAWA** – Today, Democracy Watch called on Elections Ontario to correct its website because, as it has since 1990, it continues to fail to inform Ontario voters of their full voting rights. Democracy Watch is also very concerned that Elections Ontario will misinform voters in printed materials sent to them, and will have yet another ineffective voter turnout advertising campaign for the upcoming provincial election.

On the main pages of its *We Make Voting Easy* website, Elections Ontario does not mention that Ontario voters have the right to decline their ballot and have it counted separately from a vote for a candidate or a spoiled ballot. The sub-pages on the website, including the page entitled "Voting in Person", also fail to inform voters of this right.

Elections Ontario's civics education program "Voting Rules Fact Sheet" is likely also incorrect, and as a result is misleading young voters on their voting rights.

Chief Electoral Officer Greg Essensa's message on the Elections Ontario website says "We are on a mission to make voting easy, and that means putting the needs of the elector first."

"Elections Ontario claims to put the needs of voters first, but isn't even providing voters with information about all their voting rights. This is negligent and undemocratic, and the information must be added to their website immediately," said Duff Conacher, Founding Board member of Democracy Watch.

"Some voters may not support any party that has a candidate in their riding, and they need to know that they have the right to vote for 'none of the above' by declining their ballot."

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:**

Duff Conacher, Founding Board member

**Democracy Watch**

By email is best to: [dwatch@web.net](mailto:dwatch@web.net)

Tel: 613-241-5179

*Section 53 of Ontario's Election Act states as follows:*

**“Declined ballot 53. An elector who has received a ballot and returns it to the deputy returning officer declining to vote, forfeits the right to vote and the deputy returning officer shall immediately write the word “declined” upon the back of the ballot and preserve it to be returned to the returning officer and shall cause an entry to be made in the poll record that the elector declined to vote. R.S.O. 1990, c. E.6, s. 53.”**

Democracy Watch is also very concerned that, as in past elections since 1990, Elections Ontario's printed material sent to voters, and TV and radio advertisements about voting will also mislead voters by failing to mention the right to decline your ballot and have it counted as a declined ballot. ...

"If Elections Ontario again spends hundreds of thousands of dollars on an ad campaign that has the wrong messages as it has in past elections, and again negligently fails to inform voters of their right to decline their ballot, no one should expect voter turnout to increase significantly in the October provincial election," said Conacher.

\* \* \*

*TO SEE this news release with links to key documents, go to: <http://www.dwatch.ca/camp/RelsAug2411.html>.* ■

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# DIRECT DEMOCRACY ~ An Overview

BY IAN WOODS      May 1, 2013

As Buckminster Fuller once said, “You never change things by fighting the existing reality. ... To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.”

Under the current form of representative democracy, there will never be the political will to bring about the necessary changes to bring about any real social reforms.

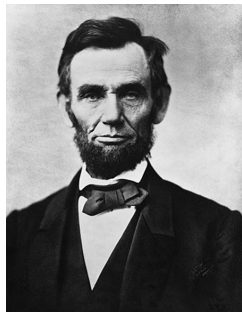
The problem is that no matter what party the people vote for, the lobbyists twist and turn them to their own bidding. Politicians are known to lie, to switch positions 180 degrees, even switch parties ... and with impunity!

There are many more lobbyists in our capitals than there are politicians. And they represent the lion's share of political contributions and favors received by the main political parties. So, in the US, whether they belong to the Democrats or Republicans, it's the same party ... just different colors. In Canada, it is no better. Canadians are known for voting against the party they want to see turfed.

Clearly the majority of Canadians and Americans want to stop the outsourcing of jobs. They want out of wars. They want to stop manufacturing polluting gas guzzling automobiles. They want jobs, peace and electric cars.

The only way to replace the current antiquated 'representative' system of democracy (that 'mis-represents' the people, time after time) is with a new form of 'direct' democracy which truly represents the will of the people.

It's called direct or pure democracy and it isn't new. It's been around for decades. But it has been avoided by countries like the United States, Canada and Britain like the plague ... because those who benefit from the current system would lose all their power and control over the people.



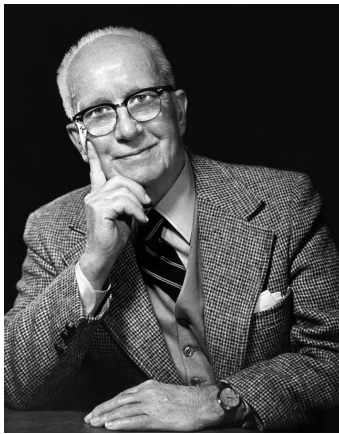
**Abraham Lincoln**

As Abraham Lincoln said “You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time.”

Direct democracy would make it difficult for lobbyists to get their way, because it is much harder, if not impossible, for them to fool ('bribe') a nation, than it is a handful of politicians.

For example, the tobacco lobbyists fooled the people about the health effects of smoking, but not for long.

Direct democracy is practiced in a limited way in half of the United States, but not at the federal level. Half of the



**Buckminster Fuller**

United States have initiative powers which can force a referendum on an issue of the people's choosing and half have recall which can force a sleazy politician back to the polls.

Canada has only one province that can decide to hold a vote on an issue – British Columbia. Voters there can also vote to 'recall' an elected representative if there is enough support.

Switzerland is the best example of a country that uses direct democracy on a federal level with a great deal of success since 1874. In Switzerland, their president is virtually an unknown, and only remains in power for one year.

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It all boils down to the decision making process. Do we want a corrupt one or an honest one?

As Lord Acton said in 1887: “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men.”

Distributing the power among all the people of a nation, or the planet for that matter, resolves that problem and taps into the collective wisdom of the human race.

Those that disagree may either be greedy elitists with a hidden agenda or short-sighted capitalists who are very happy, thank you very much, with the status quo.

With direct democracy at all levels of government, the decision-making process can be transformed from one of complete and utter corruption, as we are witnessing today, to a process which is completely transparent and 'democratic' in the true sense of the word.



**Johann Wolfgang Goethe**

Goethe had the answer: “The best government is that which teaches us to govern ourselves.”

Unfortunately, it seems, the people will do nothing to earn the privilege of having a system of direct democracy until they are hurting enough to want it ... hurting so bad that they will demand it.

That time, I fear, is coming soon. But will it be too late? ■