

A RADICAL IDEA FOR POLITICIANS

Cooperation, concensus, compliment and concern

I've watched many a political debate, hoping for something different, something radical that would inspire and lift the spirits.

They're all the same, though. The incumbent President/Prime Minister/Premier is harangued from every side, in the hopes of making him stumble and make him look very uncomfortable, and the opposition tries to look very leaderish and confident by comparison. Commentators, as usual, waffle on afterwards about the "knock-out blow." They talk as if the debate was a fight, staged for our entertainment. I cringe at their childishness. We're adults, for Pete's sake.

But let's take this stupid, childish idea of seeking a knock-out blow and imagine what could blow everyone's socks off in a political debate. What if, for instance, the leader of the Opposition actually complimented the Prime Minister for the good he has done, for trying his best to patch up past mistakes, for the improvements he's made in his years of being Prime Minister, and for truly making an effort to meet the needs and care for people.

And what if the Prime Minister in return thanked the other party leaders for keeping him sharp, bringing him up short when needed, for contributing a different perspective on issues and especially for standing firm when they truly believed in something? And what if all the Party leaders agreed that whoever was voted in the others who weren't voted in would still do their utmost to support him to keep the momentum going on the programs that are clearly working well, to help the country function at its best for everyone's benefit?

And, what's more, how about they all get together for coffee every week or so, to talk things over so that cooperation, concensus and concern for the greater good are the fuel that fires the next government?

Talk about a knock-out blow. It would be the talk of the town for years to come, politicians actually stepping out of character, rejecting the usual drivel expected of them in public debates, and acting instead like mature adults.

But wouldn't that approach work better? Isn't that how families get along, marriages flourish and companies function at their best, when all those involved seek to be friends, cooperate and encourage one another? So, why have we come to expect and accept our political leaders acting more like bratty children on a playground, spitting, interrupting, putting each other down and being rude, argumentative and downright nasty to each other? I wish someone would deliver a knock-out blow - to all of them!

So, why do politicians act this way? And why do we sit and watch them too, hoping for that perfect put-down that shatters a leader's composure, knocks his ego for a loop and reduces him to a stuttering, embarrassed mess?

But if politicians were nice to each other, would we watch? Of course we wouldn't, there's no excitement in that, is there? And why not? Because there's something in us that loves a fight. We naturally cheer the leader with the best sarcastic remark, replay it on TV again and again, soaking up the deliciousness of it all, reveling in the victim's demise. No wonder politicians act the way they do, they're playing to an appreciative audience of people who are just like them!

And so every time elections come up, the same old game is played. Nothing changes. The faces are maybe different but the script and tactics are always the same.

One wonders, therefore, what children are picking up from all this.

What about the child, for instance, who's just returned home from hockey practice where he's been smacked into the boards, tripped, shoved and treated like a hated enemy in the all-important, life and death quest for winning, and he collapses on the sofa for an emotional cooldown watching TV, and on come our noble leaders for their political debate?

As the child watches their antics, he can't help noticing the striking similarity between the political debate going on and the hockey practice he was just at. It's the same spiteful, snarly attitude, the same relentless drive to score points and cause injury. The boy is surprised, too, listening to the leaders talk in lofty tones of the importance they place on education, when education clearly hasn't done the politicians themselves much good, has it, as years later here they are still whacking away at each other like 13 year old hockey brats?

Maybe this has already crossed the minds of our leaders as they roll the tapes for review. Perhaps a crease has furrowed a noble brow as one of them submits to his own troubled thoughts that, yes, he was a silly fool in that debate, spouting all the usual tripe in his politically pompous way, hoping to score points and setting a lousy example for children.

Maybe, he thinks to himself, there's another way of going about this, other than always spoiling for a fight. Forget the knock-out blow; why not try something different next time, like complimenting a fellow leader for good work done?

It would be radical, even inspiring perhaps.

Better still, it would teach children that when you're a leader in a civilized country, it helps greatly if you're civilized yourself.