

FREEDOM IS A MIXED BLESSING

Contributed by Jim Jordal
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By Jim
Jordal

Tearing a

people free from the bonds of empire and creating a new nation is a dangerous all-consuming job for the innovators and revolutionaries involved. Ask revolutionary hero Ben Franklin, who, in calling for renewed unity among his fellow nation-builders, is said to have quipped: "We must indeed all hang together, or we shall most assuredly all hang separately."

Maintaining

freedom is often even worse because of the messy process involved in attempting to identify and elect political candidates, fund their campaigns, and keep the whole thing in some sort of control to prevent fraud or other election chicanery. If you doubt this, just look at the present debacle being played out between 17 or more candidates for the Republican presidential race of 2016. They argue, attack each other with great glee, obscure the real issues, anger the public, and turn the entire process into a circus.

Then there

is the electorate, laughing at their antics and often wishing for something more simple and civilized. But does the public really deserve anything better? We don't educate ourselves on the true issues, don't insist on honesty and integrity among the candidates, don't seem to care how campaigns are funded, and in many cases don't even vote. Do we have a right to complain?

And above

all, we refuse to accept any responsibility for the whole political mess. But the price of freedom is, and always has been, sacrifice and responsibility. For example, we complain of big government, but at the same time revel in gifts (tax breaks, subsidies, favorable regulations, and various forms of welfare) given us by that government. We do things like fly personal drones on aircraft approach patterns, but then claim that governmental action is either oppressive or will lead to bigger government. In other words, we demand freedom but will not act responsibly enough for it to continue.

So what are the alternatives? Some candidates offer us a toned-down version of libertarianism, which is just a simple way of doing whatever we like and resisting any organized attempt to interrupt our pleasure. Then there's anarchy, or no government at all. Were that to happen, we could count on powerful people forming new political groups aimed at forcing us into a dictatorship of the elite and wealthy. Another alternative is dictatorship, with one party and one autocrat making all decisions. That form of government is streamlined and efficient, but often leads to oppression and virtual slavery for the people. Several African dictatorships are current examples of this.

According to many political theorists, benevolent dictatorship is the best overall form of government. The dictator makes all laws and rules, but does so for the benefit of the people, not the enriching of himself and his party. In his series on The Wisdom of History, Professor Rufus Fears (whom I've referred to before) makes the point that freedom is not a universal value because many people prefer order and security over freedom. He cites Russia and Germany in the period between the two world wars, and the Chinese experience following the Second World War as societies that had opportunity to install freedom, but did not. In fact China has never had freedom over its 6,000-year history.

Kings, dictators, and autocrats are quick to claim God's favor upon their rule. The idea is called "The Divine Right of Kings," that reaches back thousands of years. They claim the support of whatever deities are in favor during their reign, and call upon the people to accept their decisions however burdensome. The idea is that the dictator provides protection for the religious establishment in return for religious authorities conferring legitimacy upon the often-cruel rule of the dictator. It's a powerful combination and has wrought disaster among indigenous peoples for centuries.

Messy as it is, what we have seems to be the best government available up to now. In support of democracy, Winston Churchill once said: "Democracy is the worst form of government there is, except for all the others." So that's what we've got.