



One Man's Opinion

It is news when the head of a major polling firm declares that Congressmen are "excessively influenced by dozens of polls which they could ignore at little or no risk to their political future." That is what the British-born president of Louis Harris and Associates, Humphrey Taylor, writes in *The Public Perspective* (Jan.-Feb. 1990).

While they might not be rash enough to say so, virtually all British MPs would agree with Edmund Burke that "your representative owes you not his industry only but his judgment; and he betrays you, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion." In other words, "we the leaders are right to do what we think best, regardless of public opinion—provided, of course, that we'll be re-elected at the next election."

No American politician can afford to be so cavalier. Things are very different here. I was stunned when I arrived here in 1976 to hear Jimmy Carter win great applause when he said that this country deserved a president "as good and as wise as the American people." In Europe we hope we can find leaders who are much better and wiser than the people—much better at governing, if not better in their personal morality (which seems more important here). Why is the United States so different? Part of the explanation is historical and cultural. One can argue about how "democratic" different countries are, but there is no argument that the US is a much more populist country. There is more respect here for public opinion. Americans believe government should not just be of the people and for the people. It should be by the people.

Snake Eyes for State Lotteries

"Redefining 'Success' in the State Lottery Business" by Charles T. Clotfelter and Philip J. Cook, in *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* (Winter 1990), 605 Third Ave., New York, N.Y. 10158, and "State Lotteries and Crime" by John Mikesell and Maureen A. Pirog-Good, in *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* (Jan. 1990), 41 E. 72nd St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

Since New Hampshire inaugurated the first modern state lottery in 1964, 31 other states have followed suit. By 1988, ticket sales reached \$17 billion annually—about \$250 per household in the lottery states—and supplied about four percent of state revenues.

Clotfelter and Cook, both economists at Duke, believe that lotteries are here to stay—much as they hint that they wouldn't mind turning back the clock. But, they say, there are lotteries and then there are lotteries. Until the mid-1970s, most state op-

erations were old-fashioned raffles, "conducted in much the same fashion as in Colonial times." But revenues were disappointing. In an effort to boost sales, the states invented exciting new contests—"instant winner" games, computerized numbers games, and lotto contests with huge jackpots. Now under development are games that "bear an uncanny resemblance to slot machines." At the same time, the states began using razzle-dazzle print and television advertising to promote gambling as a way of getting rich quick.

The director of New Jersey's lottery put it plainly in 1985: "We're taking an infrequent user and trying to convert him into a more frequent user."

Is that what government ought to be doing? The authors think not. They favor a return to the days of lotteries in plain brown wrappers. In fact, Virginia and Wisconsin have taken this approach in their recently launched lotteries.

But suppose that lotteries encourage behavior that is not just undesirable but criminal. That is what Mikesell and Pirog-Good, both of Indiana University, found in

their statistical study of lottery states between 1970 and 1984. Their conclusion: "It appears that adoption of a state lottery is associated with a three percent increase in the state [property] crime rate." That increase is comparable to what is produced by a two percentage point increase in the unemployment rate. Why do lotteries increase crime? Mikesell and Pirog-Good speculate that they may stimulate a taste for risk-taking or feelings of envy. They don't really know. But they do believe that when it comes to legalized gambling, the only sure bet is increased crime.

Presidents and Parliaments

"The Perils of Presidentialism" by Juan J. Linz, in *Journal of Democracy* (Jan. 1990), 1101 15th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.

The democratic revolution of the past decade has confronted many countries with an enviable dilemma: What works best, parliamentary democracy or presidential democracy?

Increasingly, notes Linz, a Yale political scientist, parliamentary government is turning up as the favorite. Even in Latin America, where presidentialism remains the norm, academics and politicians are gaining a new appreciation of parliamentarism—in no small measure because of the crucial role it played in easing Spain's transition to democracy during the 1970s. None of this should come as a surprise, says Linz. Presidentialism's historical track record is poor. Only the United States and Chile have enjoyed long spells of stability under presidential rule—and Chile's century and a half of relative tranquility ended in 1973. (Democracy was restored earlier this year when Augusto Pinochet surrendered the presidency to Patricio Aylwin.)

Paradoxically, the great advantage of parliamentarism is the apparent instability and uncertainty inherent in the system. A prime minister is seldom tempted to overreach, since he "knows himself to be but the spokesman for a temporary governing coalition rather than the voice of the nation or the tribune of the people." His opponents can bide their time, knowing that

he may fall from power at any time.

By contrast, presidential systems create many winner-take-all situations that promote conflict. For example, coalition governments are common in parliamentary systems, but only one candidate can win the presidency. And the president's fixed term aggravates matters. For four, five, or six frustrating years, the opposition is shut out of power. Furthermore, the ticking of the clock (most presidents are limited to one or two terms) incites many presidents to rash action. "A president who is desperate to build his Brasilia or implement his program of nationalization or land reform before he becomes ineligible for reelection is likely to spend money unwisely or risk polarizing the country for the sake of seeing his agenda become reality."

The fact that both the executive and the legislature can claim to represent "the people" sets the stage for political deadlock. The military may be tempted to step in, especially if the country faces a political or economic crisis.

As the American case makes clear, presidentialism can work well in countries that practice the politics of the Center almost exclusively. The problem is that the United States has a virtual monopoly on that style of politics, but not on the presidential style of government.