

COUNTERPOINTS – SS11 NOTES

THE CITIZEN AND GOVERNMENT CH. 10

Choosing the Government

- *Elections*
 - If you are over 18 and a Canadian citizen you are eligible to cast a ballot.
 - Elections are held at least every 5 years for federal and provincial parliaments.
 - In B.C. municipal elections are held on the same day every 3 years.
 - Those who choose not to vote make the votes of others more influential.
- *Election Campaigns*
 - A candidate needs money and plenty of volunteers to run an election campaign.
 - Political parties usually solicit donations from individuals and businesses to pay for their campaigns.
- *Public Opinion Polls*
 - Parties typically spend 15% of their election budget on polling.
 - Polling companies contact a cross-section of the population that is believed to represent the views and opinions of Canadians in general.
 - Public opinion polls showing the level of voter support for parties are not allowed to be published in the 24 hours immediately prior to an election.
 - On election day, voting takes place in private, behind a small screen, and no campaign signs or literature are allowed at or around the polling station.

The Electoral System

- *First-past-the-post system* – the winner does not necessarily have to win a majority of the votes cast; he/she simply has to win more votes than any of the other candidates.
- *Proportional representation (PR) system* (used in Israel, Holland, Italy) – the number of seats a party wins in the legislature is based on the total number of votes it receives. Usually does not give one party a majority, so parties often have to create coalitions, or alliances to form a government.
- Some countries (e.g. Germany, New Zealand) have developed systems that combine elements of PR and first-past-the-post.
- The first-past-the-post system accentuates regionalism in Canada.

Political Parties

- Members of a political party share a common set of beliefs or *ideology*.
- The political spectrum is generally left wing, centre, or right wing.
- 1867 – 1988 Progressive Conservative Party and the Liberal Party were dominant.
- Reform Party became the Canadian Alliance in 2000 – grew out of feelings of western alienation – that the federal government in Ottawa favoured the central provinces of Ontario and Quebec, and that western voices were not being heard.
- The Bloc Quebecois became the official opposition after the election of 1993; support comes entirely from Quebec.

- Joining a Political Party
 - You need to be 18 years old.
 - Some wish to improve the quality of life in their community, region, or nation.
 - Others believe strongly in the ideology of the political party and act on their beliefs.
 - Still others are attracted to the power and influence of politics.
 - More individuals seek change by participating in a special-interest group or *non-governmental organization (NGO)* than by joining a party. E.g. United Way, the Canadian Red Cross, Doctors without Borders, Oxfam, the Western Canada Wilderness Committee.

Influencing Government

- Pressure Groups and Lobbyists
 - *Institutionalized pressure groups* – well established and formal organizations
 - *Issue-oriented groups* – less permanent, formed to accomplish limited aims and disbanded after the aim is accomplished.
 - Have persuaded government to write new legislation, move airports and industries, establish parks and wildlife reserves, reduce taxes for certain industries, control or not control pollution, provide more government funding for research and development of certain products and services.
- Free the Children: Young People in Action
 - Started in 1995 by Craig Kielburger when he was 12; to end child labour around the world.
 - Began by writing letters, circulating a petition, and speaking out in their school and community about the issue.
 - Has raised awareness of children's rights, and has grown from a small group of friends to an international organization operating in over 20 countries.
 - Have built schools, created alternative sources of income for poor families, led campaigns against sweatshop and child labor, convinced governments to stiffen laws to charge tourists who sexually exploit children, are raising funds to build a peace centre and have created an international network of children helping
- Applying Pressure
 - One way to influence government is by providing research, polls, reports, and advice to government ministries.
 - *Lobbyists* – people paid to represent the interests of a particular group to key decision makers, such as high-level bureaucrats in the public service or politicians.
 - The danger with lobbying is that people with special influence can persuade governments to put in place policies that favour their group but are not necessarily in the public interest.
 - Courts, such as the Supreme Court, can make governments aware that a law may be needed.

Role of the Mass Media

- Include television, radio, newspapers, magazines.

- Journalists are free to criticize government actions, or to question the decisions made by elected representatives and officials.
- Report on public opinion polls
- Issues that receive large amounts of media coverage often get more attention from government.
- Media Concentration
 - News read by significant numbers of Canadians is from limited sources rather than from a variety of sources.
 - Media owned by a small group will come into conflict with the public interest while promoting its own interests.

Civil Disobedience

- The act of intentionally breaking, or refusing to keep, laws one considers unjust.
- Term was first used by U.S. writer Henry Thoreau – he felt that the basic democratic principle of majority rule existed not because the majority was always right but because it was more powerful and could force the minority to comply.
- Used by U.S. civil rights activist Martin Luther King and Indian politician Mohandas Gandhi – embraced non-violent civil disobedience in their quest for justice, and died for their cause.
- *Clayoquot Sound* – blocking logging roads in B.C. brought the issue of clear-cut logging to public attention in 1993; largest example of civil disobedience in Canadian history, resulting in over 800 arrests, warnings, fines up to \$500, or jail sentences. The issue of logging practices in the area has been monitored, and all decisions regarding the clear-cutting of old-growth forest are closely examined.