The Internet Makes Crazy Politics

These are not easy times for those cherishing political sanity. Barely a day passes without some stupidity drawing the "What can these idiots be thinking?" response. How is one to respond to demands that drag queens be allowed to read to toddlers at public libraries or that boys must be permitted to compete in girls' sports? Where's my Prozac, please.

How can such inanities regularly occur? Well, in today's political landscape the cost of entry into the political arena is minimal—at most an hour a two a day plus the cost of hosting a website. Any crackpot idea, regardless of ideological parentage, regardless of feasibility, regardless of financial costs, and regardless of its possible negative impact on society or the planet, can be presented for public consumption. Computer access and competency with some software gets you access to an immense political audience. This is light years from the era when a pamphleteer like Thomas Paine struggled to reach an audience of a few thousand.

Today's periodic political freak show reflects the increased role of social media in venting screwball ideas that once died a quiet death a few minutes before closing time at Casey's Irish Pub. Now, however, they are easily accessible to those who share an affliction for quackery. In this way, *voilà*, a political movement is born.

Consider, for example, the recent effort of a few social activists whose social media campaign forced the Israeli licensee of Ben & Jerry's ice-cream to stop selling its brand in a tiny part of Israel. Were these activists convinced this boycott would push the Jewish nation into the sea thanks to a handful of Jews and Arabs being forced to eat a rival brand of ice cream? We have vastly underestimated the power of being

deprived of Chunky Monkey!

What was Unilever—corporate parent of Ben & Jerry's—thinking when this movement was gaining strength? They surely knew that 35 American states legally prohibit their states from investing or otherwise doing business with firms boycotting Israeli products, and that the federal government has considered similar legislation. Surely they must also know millions of people worldwide will now boycott Ben & Jerry's? In other words, these social media activists exhibited hall-of-fame idiocy.

Nor do these purveyors of nonsense need to worry about lawsuits or legal action based upon their toxic stupidity. Web-based advocacy is irresponsibility *über alles*. Black Lives Matter (BLM) began as a Twitter hashtag and has resulted in millions of dollars of destruction. BLM has millions of adherents, but their inflammatory web-based idiocy is immune from litigation.

Do not be misled by talk of web censorship. While a few taboo topics exist, often associated with race and religion, censorship can be circumvented if even a tiny market exists for one's screwy ideas. Unlike America's highly regulated economic marketplace, no equivalent of the Securities and Exchange Commission exists to deter fraudulent ideas, and no Consumer Protection Agency warn suckers of ideological scams. Joining a Facebook group is profoundly different from investing real money in a crackpot venture. When it comes to separating good ideas from bad ones, today's web is "buyer beware" in the extreme.

The cyberworld is highly atomized andno one is forced to solicit wise counsel. Everybody can decide for themselves, so gullibility rules. At least your bleary-eyed drinking buddies at Casey's Pub will likely restore your sanity when you explain your scheme to get rich by selling chicken-flavored soda. But, if you have nobody to pound some sanity into your

brain, an email explaining why third graders should master the intricacies of systemic racism may make perfect sense.

There are immense political consequences arising from today's low cost of entry in the battle of ideas. The mob rule dreaded by the Founding Fathers now inches closer as people are no longer required to publicly defend their views from criticism. Complex ideas are boiled down to childish slogans to fit Twitter while sophisticated arguments are dismissed for being too difficult to read on a screen. Political discourse by bumper sticker.

By contrast, imagine a New England town meeting where the local nutcase arrives and demands schools replace the teaching of advanced math with "racial justice." Howls of outrage would follow, detailed counterarguments would be offered, and sanity would prevail. After ample face-to-face discussion, the village lunatic retreats to his basement computer where he is unfettered by naysayers.

Political craziness proliferates when the normal democratic political process wilts. Despite its flaws, democratic forums help provide the give-and-take that usually culls madness. Congress with its tedious committee hearings is profoundly different than "debates" via dueling websites where adherents can ignore the others and live in their bubbles.

—

Dear Readers,

Big Tech is suppressing our reach, refusing to let us advertise and squelching our ability to serve up a steady diet of truth and ideas. Help us fight back by becoming a member for just $5 a month and then join the discussion on Parler @CharlemagneInstitute and Gab @CharlemagneInstitute!

Image Credit:

Pixabay