

Lysander Spooner Quote #21

Majorities, as such, afford no guarantees for justice. They are men of the same nature as minorities. They have the same passions for fame, power, and money, as minorities; and are liable and likely to be equally — perhaps more than equally, because more boldly — rapacious, tyrannical and unprincipled, if intrusted with power. There is no more reason, then, why a man should either sustain, or submit to, the rule of the majority, than of a minority.

— Lysander Spooner

We are bound head to toe in the snares of democratic politics. We have elected a horrendous POTUS with only 1-of-5 votes from the American population. (I count the entire population because every man, woman, boy, or girl alive in the US today is affected by the current inadequacy of the office and the person of POTUS).

I am certainly not a fan of the Orange POTUS, but please be assured that my estimation of all occupants of the Oval Office is 0-good, 45-bad. Even estimable occupants, such as Thomas Jefferson, were sorry excuses for governmental administrators.

If one is not a reader of Lysander Spooner, one should be. Here is a link to electronic versions of most of Spooner's work.

Now, we should be sure that Spooner is not advocating either majority elections or minority elections. He is only pointing out the abject failure of such an innumerate idea. Majority rule was a byproduct of democracy as founded by Cleisthenes in Athens. Vote-counting on up-or-down issues was a pragmatic tool for crystalizing decision-making. It was ingenious, as a method for converting indecision to a binary determinant. Any question that could be couched so as to be answerable with a "yes" or a "no" could be converted to a unary action. But this was on a very small scale, and those who did the voting were directly interested in the outcome. They also had the ability to change a vote, restate the matter under consideration, argue a position, explain a position, and a practically unlimited scope of considerations. This idea, however, is not scaleable. Today, we often claim that we have a democratic system here in America, but technically we are a republic, where representation replaces direct accountability for the running of a community. With 300 million people, we cannot give each interested party a vote. I suspect that Spooner would

advise us to scale back to something we could handle. That would be my recommendation, humbly, as well. If one bites off more than one can chew, handle it! Make the next bite right-sized.

Individual A must deal with Individual B — there is no practical means for A interacting with B when it can only be done through Individual C. The first failing point is that either Individual C would have to declare herself superior to A and B, to make anything stick, or C would have to be empowered by Entity D to rule over A and B. Any working arrangement that involves more than two individuals has too many moving parts, too many points of friction, too many points of failure.

For a 3-way relationship to work, unit C must be totally indifferent to the outcomes of matters between A and B. Yet C must devote its very existence to the watching of A and B. What could go wrong? One has to wonder how C could be bound to the oversight of A and B, if C had no interest in the doings of A and/or B. What if it is not beneficial to C to make a decision that is acceptable to A and B. Shall C be indifferent? Worse yet, what if other relations of C, say E and F and so forth had their very lives dependent on C making a decision that would make A and/or B very unhappy?

I have taken a great deal of interest lately in international practices of partition or inclusion. A very hot case right now would be where there is sentiment in Catalonia, a province of Spain, to secede from Spain, to become an independent sovereign. My sympathies go with Catalonia, as they would with any other secession that is initiated within the territory of the would-be seceder. But then, I run into the problem of how exactly is determined the true inclination of the territory? If there is a vote initiative, what percentage of the voters would indicate a fair consensus for or against secession? Would a simple majority of registered voters do the trick? I say no, since voter registration laws always work to the reduction of the population who are even qualified to express an opinion. Therefore a majority of registered voters is not automatically a majority of the whole population.

To solve that problem, might we (and who is “we?”) require a super majority like 60% or two-thirds of the voter base, or a majority, greater than half, of the population? Then, what of the people in the minority? Is there any justification for changing the statehood status for a whole block of people based on an arbitrary part of the whole?

To take a current example, I am assured in saying that there is some remnant of Northern Ireland who are vitally interested in staying loyal to the British Crown, just as certainly as there is a block who wish to become loyal to the Republic of Ireland. This should not be to exclude those who would opt for independence of Ulster.

In the British Isles, there have been two recent plebescites that have left many unhappy

excluded people in their wake. Scotland narrowly decided to stay in the Commonwealth, disappointing the slightly smaller contingent who wanted separation. Then the UK voted in BREXIT to leave the European Union (EU). Since we know that vote was very close, we know that either way there is no method for figuring out how a true majority of the total population would have chosen. We do know that BREXIT may have been viewed differently in Northern Ireland, where perhaps a majority wished to remain in the same politico/market basket with the rest of the Irish Island.

Another problem in Catalonia was that the people there were contemplating secession in a relatively peaceful manner, demonstrating and voting. But then Spain, in the embodiment of central government from Madrid, tried to prevent a peaceful vote by intervention, ousting officials and usurping police powers. Spain went so far as to close down polling places by force, as I understand it. Let me state another principle here. The retention of a former state or the formation of a new state should not be as a result of intervention from beyond the territory in question.

While we see that the Catalonia story is hanging from coercive, authoritarian, statist action, we know that in other parts of the world self-determination is being forestalled or advanced through military action, plainly, warfare, such as invasion, bombing, embargo, and sanctions. Whichever contingent is pursuing territory by violence is in the wrong. But two wrongs don't make a right. Partitioning by third parties — as in the Iraq coalition thinking about dividing Iraq into Kurdistan, Sunnistan, and Shi'istan — has little chance of being satisfactory. One need look no further than Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh — an unsettlement created as a parting shot by the British as they were escorted from the Indian subcontinent.

I am not sure what is the right course, going forward, but I am a strong proponent of Spooner's sentiment that subjugation of any territory by any statist construct is wholly objectionable — to the extent that such should be resisted to the *nth*-degree, with one's last dying breath. There are no cases in this world where a corralled people were better off than if they had not been corralled. It would be much simpler if we had established principles of non-imperialism two centuries ago.