

Thinking government:
conservatism,
liberalism and
socialism in post
world war ii ...



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Even in some of the prosperous nations of the world where its citizens enjoy a high standard of living, it is difficult to find people that are generally pleased with the way their politicians governed their nation. This is attributed to the complexity of the problems that political leaders have to deal with as well as the inevitable consequences of trying to manage diverse groups of people with different beliefs, interests and ideas on how to run things.

But there is another reason for the differences in opinion when it comes to governance and state presence; it can be understood through the ideologies that people use to interpret the world around them. Three of the most basic ideologies are: conservatism, socialism and liberalism. In the case of Canada its political leaders and its citizens hope to have a middle-ground and not to sway to extremes.

Conservatism is a strong belief in the capability of the individual. Those who adhere to this ideology believe that the individual is the driving force of social progress (Johnson, p. 72). Although others would generally agree to this idea, conservatism is distinguished even further on the basis of how a conservative tend to view the role of the state in his or her life.

In this way of thinking the individual does not only have the right to be free this political ideology also stresses the principle that “ every individual should be free to ‘ ride to the top of life’; to acquire wealth, prestige, and personal power; and to make use of these acquisitions as he or she deems fit” (Johnson, p. 72). At first glance this may seem to be a selfish view of life. Furthermore, it is a highly competitive way to live.

Much is given on individual liberties but when it comes to governance conservatism creates two major implications. First of all there is a disdain for big governments or more specifically the power of the government to interfere in the lives of the citizens.

This leads to the second implication which was summarized by political scientists in the following statement: “ nothing can be guaranteed in life and that all individuals are also free to fail, to stumble to the bottom, to find poverty and insignificance if they fail to make the best of the opportunities presented to them” (Johnson, p. 72). In other words those who had fallen on hard times should not expect any assistance from the government.

Socialism on the other hand is the belief that society and not the individual should be the center of human interaction (Johnson, p. 79). This does not mean that socialists do not value liberty and human rights but in the context of the community. Everyone must work together to attain the common good.

There must also be an equal distribution of wealth and power. It also means that society must allow a central government to coordinate and regulate everything. This means greater role for the state to make an impact in the lives of people. However, this can also mean an over-reliance for government help.

In the case of Canada, the citizens are fortunate to have leaders who were able to steer the nation towards the middle-ground. It is labeled as modern liberalism. According to one commentary modern liberalism is the striving to blend the best of both worlds of conservatism and socialism.

The main goal of liberals is to create a “ coherent, balanced, pragmatic, yet principled understanding of socio-economic life and the purpose of government” (Johnson, p. 90). When conservatism and socialism were blended together to form modern liberalism it greatly benefited Canada. The positive transformation was evident after the Second World War.

David Johnson made a good point when he questioned the lack of enthusiasm with regards to the discussion of Canadian politics when in fact Canadians enjoy a high standard of living compared to the rest of the world.

The said author even expounded on this statement by asserting that, “ While we may have more in common with Americans than we usually like to admit, it is generally true that few of use actually desire to live in the United States or believe that the overall living standard in that country is superior to ours” (Johnson, p. 28). There is a basis for this conclusion.

Canadians take pride in their health care system – it is a system that is publicly administered and funded (Johnson, p. 28). This ensures that all Canadians can have access to top-quality health care regardless if the individual can actually pay for the said medical services.

There are only a few nations in the world that can boast of the same service from the government. Even Canada’s neighbor in the South is currently embroiled in a polarizing debate regarding their health care system. Many Americans are extremely frustrated and dissatisfied with the kind of medical assistance they are receiving from the government. This is especially true for the poor citizens of that country.

Healthcare is just the beginning, many Canadians take for granted the fact that their children have access to an effective and efficient education system that allows for primary and secondary education. All of these are financed by the provincial and federal government (Johnson, p. 28).

There is more that Canadians can be proud of when it comes to quality education available for Canadian citizens. Consider for instance that a college student that meets the requirements of admission can immediately gain access to a life-enhancing education “ with the majority of its costs borne by the state” (Johnson, p. 28). There are only a few nations in the world that can make the same claim.

The icing on the cake when it comes to the government funded service is none other than the Canadian welfare system wherein the state contributes to the financial security of its senior citizens. For the working people on the other hand the government has a federal employment insurance programs that takes care of them in the event that they are unemployed.

At the same time the government has established a system wherein that does not only assure of income support but also the creation of job-related initiatives to help the unemployed get back to work.

Furthermore, there is the provincial worker’s compensation system that takes care of employees who were injured while doing their jobs. They can expect to receive compensation for income lost as well as injuries sustained (Johnson, p. 28). Canadian citizens who fell on hard times, cannot get a job and do not have a network of support that can help them get back on their feet should be relieved that they can receive basic food, clothing, and shelter <https://assignbuster.com/thinking-government-conservatism-liberalism-and-socialism-in-post-world-war-ii-canada-essay/>

so that they would never have to die from hunger and suffer the fate of homeless people.

It is important to stay in the middle. The Canadian government and its citizens cannot afford to swing to both extremes. If the government swings towards conservatism then the poor are left to fend for themselves.

However, if it swings towards an extreme form of socialism then people are not held responsible for their actions and would demand more assistance from the government without doing their share to become a productive citizen.

Yet even if politicians and their constituents would love to be in the middle, it is clear that in the past decades the government has played a bigger role in Canada. In addition, one can argue that the policies and steps taken by the government seem to lean towards socialism. Consider for instance gun control, human rights legislation, multiculturalism policy, environmental regulation, health and safety regulation, regional equalization, and support for Canadian arts and culture.

These policies and activities point towards the idea that the government is using its resources and its influence to try to bring all citizens towards a better life instead of simply watching on the sidelines and wait for them to develop the means to increase wealth and standard of living.

The government does not turn a blind eye when people suffer and in fact the government has taken steps to ensure that most of the people are living comfortable lives.

According to another commentary “ the state presence is substantial in this country because, in the past, most Canadians have been supportive of a significant development and growth of the state to meet certain needs and wants through the political and governmental process” (Johnson, p. 29).

Nevertheless, the heightened participation of the government in Canadian society is something that is not considered to be praiseworthy for many Canadians.

There are those who are not yet satisfied with the improvements made in post World War II Canada. According to political analysts, “ The irony here is that, while many Canadians value a wide range of the specific policies and programs provided by Canadian governments and hold high expectations of what the state should be doing to protect and promote the quality of life for themselves and others, these same citizens are critical of ... the actual institutions of the state from which they receive these services” (Johnson, p. 29).

This however, is a clear indication that Canada is not going towards conservatism or socialism but firmly planted in the middle.

The issue regarding political ideologies was brought to the fore recently because the Conservatives have won a majority for the first time in 23 years (Coyne, p. 1). There are even political scientists who are concerned that the liberal party could no longer mount a decent challenge against the onslaught of conservatism (Whitaker, p. 1). It is therefore understandable why people are questioning as to the direction that the country is heading to.

The fear that Canada is going to shift towards conservatism is unsubstantiated. The argument seems to be based on one thing only and that is on the result of the recent triumph of the Conservatives in Parliament. But if one utilizes the usual method to gauge what type of political ideology is being used to run the nation and develop policies in the process then it will reveal that Canada is still in the middle-ground not shifting towards conservatism or socialism.

This can be seen in evaluating what has been done in recent years. This does not require a great deal of work because it is easy to see that the government continues to be the central power in Canadian society. The government continues to play a vital role in the economy and security of this nation. The average Canadian citizen wakes up to the realization that the state has provided basic services that is expensive to maintain and yet the services continue up to this day because the government is still doing its responsibilities.

The health care and education system is still in place and with a generous contribution from the government to ensure that all people are safe, secure and can be assured of assistance if needed. An overview of Canada's budget for 2011 is also a major confirmation that this country is not yet controlled by elitists and powerful individuals that may see their advantage to prevent the government from establishing regulations for banking and finance.

Going back to the overview of the 2011 budget one can see that the government still plays a dominant role. Consider for instance that there is a proposed low-tax plan to ensure growth. This means that the Canadian

government is taking a more pro-active role in reviving the economy. There are also steps made to support job creation (Government of Canada, p. 1).

If the political climate has shifted to conservatism then the government would not spend precious resources to help struggling citizens to get back on their feet. On the contrary the Canadian government is busy spending money to enhance the guaranteed income supplement (Government of Canada, p. 1). In addition the government continues to invest heavily in innovation, education and training so that Canadians have the necessary skills needed to compete in the marketplace.

The overwhelming success of the conservatives in Parliament was a cause for concern for those who believe that the Canadian government must continue to stay in the middle and to bring the best of both worlds and sustain a liberal form of government. The reason for doing so is that there is overwhelming evidence that Canadians are better off if the government continues to provide basic services and actively investing in things that help the average Canadian enjoy a high standard of living.

The shift towards conservatism would mean a significant decrease in spending and less participation of the government when it comes to financing and development of programs that could help those who are struggling from the effects of an economic downturn.

However, there is no substantial proof that the political system has indeed shifted towards the right. Canada continues to benefit from a strong state presence. There seems to be indication that the status quo is about to change.

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The recent report regarding the national budget confirms that the government is willing to continue to spend to sustain an enviable health care and education system. Nevertheless, one has to agree that the success of the conservatives in recent years is suggestive that someday they would make their move and change core policies of government but that time has not yet come.

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