Democracy and You – Part Four

In the previous essay of this series, the curious reader was invited to take a short quiz to learn how his or her views on public issues might reveal any ideological leanings to the left or right. Such quizzes, as scientific as they might try to be, certainly cannot precisely pigeonhole the individual; the world is too complex. But the result can be helpful in gaining an understanding of differences in political thought and how politics works in what has, in this country, evolved into a *two-party system*. Sort of.

If you register to vote, you can register with one of the two *major* political parties, being either the Democratic Party or the Republican Party; or you can register with one of the *minor* parties(more on that below), or you can choose to register to vote but without identifying with any of the parties. This is known as being *unaffiliated*. Got it? Being unaffiliated means you can vote, but do not participate in the political process of choosing candidates in any of those individual political parties. You can vote in general elections "independent" of an identifying party but, depending on election laws, do not participate in *primaries*, which are elections held by individual parties to select candidates prior to the general election.

But you should know that using the word *independent* can sometimes confuse people. That is because there are other established political parties that have the word *Independent* (capital "I"), in them. For example, there is The American Independent Party (AIP), which is a nationally organized political party having far-right political leanings (The AIP supported the candidacy of white supremacist George Wallace in 1968). Connecticut has its own Independent Party of Connecticut, as does the State of Oregon. As independent-minded as you may be, it's best to call yourself unaffiliated, unless you are actually registered with one of the parties that include the "I" word.

If you find your ideology aligns closely with a political party, major or minor, you may decide to become affiliated and participate more fully in the political process that democracy affords. In Connecticut there is also the Green Party, the Libertarian Party, and a party called the Working Families of Connecticut, all of which provide interested registered voters with a choice, if they decide that they adhere close to the ideals of that party, typically described in the party *platform*. This metaphorical "platform" is made from individual "planks", which are specific positions that the party may take on things like economics or social issues or, as with the Green Party for example, environmental issues.

As you might expect, the platforms of so many parties can overlap or be similar. This is why in some elections a candidate will be listed on an election ballot under two parties whose ideological positions are nearly the same. Only one vote counts for the candidate, but the parties both recognize the same goals will be achieved through mutual support.

If you are intrigued by the idea of working with a group to find and promote individuals for representative government—or perhaps are even interested in becoming one of those representatives—you can contact the Sprague Democratic Town Committee and become more involved. We're still a democracy. Be a part of it.