

SCIENCE

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EDITORIAL

A Scientific Approach to Governing

Science. Dr. Noitall, you are one of the great political scientists of all time, the man who engineered Harry Truman's comeback, the man who wrote Winston Churchill's speeches, the man who got Arthur elected King of the Round Table.

Noitall. A vast understatement of my true worth.

Science. Have you come up with any new ideas on the political scene?

Noitall. Of course. I have a brilliant new idea which avoids the vicious dictatorships of the right and the left and the impotence and gridlock of democracy and will solve the problems of automation, diversity, and overpopulation.

Science. And what brilliant new device could possibly do that?

Noitall. It is called a "benevolent dictatorship."

Science. Could anyone ever find a benevolent dictator one could trust?

Noitall. I have just spent the weekend at Monticello going into the background and career of Thomas Jefferson, statesman, scientist, diplomat, inventor, activist, revolutionary, and member of the establishment.

Science. What was his attitude toward science?

Noitall. He was always a great supporter of science and considered that the three greatest men in the world at the time (whose pictures he hung on the walls of his house) were Newton, Locke, and Bacon. He not only supported science funding but believed science was the mechanism for improving the standard of living, and he was himself an inventor and innovator.

Science. But could he perform the role of a dictator?

Noitall. Not only was he able to push most of his proposals through an extremely balky and fractionated legislature, but he founded the University of Virginia, designed its architecture, and then supervised its construction by observing it through a telescope from his plantation. He selected all the initial professors for the university.

Science. Was Jefferson environmentally sound?

Noitall. He voluntarily gave up growing tobacco a century ahead of the first surgeon general's report.

Science. Isn't there one small problem, namely, that Jefferson is dead?

Noitall. Quite the contrary. Today presidents are surrounded by image-makers, and the candidate's image turns out to be far more important than what he really does. If you are dead you can't make mistakes, and your image-makers can develop a consistent reputation without any new changes of mind that would be confusing to the voters and disastrous for legislative success. Most people believe that a secret Machiavellian group is governing any president or prime minister anyway, and therefore it would not be surprising to them that the leader is actually dead instead of just sleeping. Confirmation of their deepest conspiratorial suspicions should make them happy. The minor campaigning disadvantages are easily offset by the fact that there are already busts and statues of Jefferson all over the country, and there is no problem of name recognition.

Science. What was his approach to social security and health care?

Noitall. Jefferson was particularly solicitous of his slaves' welfare, educating them to help increase their skills and providing for security and the best health care that era could offer.

Science. Slaves! How could you even suggest a man who kept slaves?

Noitall. Jefferson called the whole system of slavery an "abomination" and worked to abolish it. This type of ambiguity is a political advantage because the public who sees a person on both sides of an issue always assumes the candidate's heart is on their side, but that his words to the opposition are campaign oratory. Individuals of high principles who stick to one viewpoint rarely get elected.

Science. Dr. Noitall, are there any other political devices that you are inventing to strengthen modern leaders?

Noitall. I have been looking into (i) "ruling by decree" as an alternative to legislative gridlock, (ii) "divine right of kings" as an alternative to lengthy and costly campaigns, and (iii) "off with their heads" as a more effective way of dealing with the opposition than negative campaigning.

Daniel E. Koshland, Jr.