

POLITICS AS USUAL: Cutting off your nose to spite your face

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

Respect.

It's a value laden word that is oft misunderstood in the political realm, at least in my opinion.

There is an expectation of respect when one gets elected to office. That is, when you hold the title of Mayor or MP or Premier, you have earned the right to be respected. And that expectation is not misplaced ? to a point. Election to public office does warrant respect. You as a member of the electorate have chosen someone ? through your hard won right to vote ? to occupy an office to represent you, to make decisions for you, to govern you.

You must afford that office at least some level of respect or the entire premise falls in on itself.

However, as I have argued both publicly and privately, that does not mean that the person in the office is automatically granted respect by virtue of their election.

Respect is earned, not granted, and is most definitely not legislated. You cannot force the electorate to respect the Mayor or the Premier if they don't deserve it. No, respect is for the office the person holds, not the person occupying it. And therein lies the problem. There are far too many leaders who do not respect the office they hold.

To borrow an oft-used phrase, ?they feel entitled to their entitlements,? and what the public gets instead of service to the public is ethics violations, \$20 orange juices, bogus travel claims and backroom deal making driven by craven self-interest.

There is a loud lament ? and following the Brexit vote that lament is fast becoming wailing ? from a wide variety of talking heads of every political stripe about the lack of respect the ?public? has for elected office and the institutions they represent.

The rise of Trump and other demagogues of his ilk has been met with horrified surprise. Personally, I am surprised that they're surprised.

The disgust of the average Joe with those that occupy offices of power, position or prestige has been coming for some time now. It is part and parcel of the current state of affairs where folks have lost faith in virtually every institution that they'd held in such esteem a mere decade or perhaps decades ago.

It's entirely to be expected though, is it not, when daily we are bombarded with the salacious details of yet another public figure embroiled in some sordid imbroglio or another? The pastor that's stealing money from church coffers. The Family Values politician that's spending campaign money on prostitutes. The tech giant with pirated software. The doctor pushing the new wonder drug is in the pocket of big pharma.

Even our sports heroes aren't heroes anymore. We find out soon enough that their golden crowns are made of pyrite: doped up Olympians, rigged games, goons not players, state sponsored cheating at a national scale, and on it goes.

Joe public can see that those at the top didn't get there fairly. They have their thumbs on the scale, and folks are fed up with not getting a fair shake. What is there to respect about that? Respect is about belief. Belief in something.

If there's nothing left for people to believe in, then you can't be surprised when resentment drives decision-making, regardless of how many noseless faces result.