



Dis Democracy?

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Starting the new year and awaiting a new administration, do we deserve to ‘get it good and hard’?

In the winter issue of Cato Institute’s *Regulation*, economist Pierre Lemieux [acknowledges](#) H.L. Mencken’s famous line—“Democracy is the theory that the common people know what they want, and deserve to get it good and hard”—and sympathizes with “disappointed voters” following last November’s election.

“The common person does know what he wants,” argues Lemieux, explaining that “he succeeds so well in his private life.”

Of course, our economic marketplace and our political marketplace are markedly different.

“The electoral choices presented to voters are typically a confused mix of unreliable promises and obscure policies,” Lemieux writes.

“Contrast that with the clarity and variety of market choices.”

He notes the ways regular folks are being politically disempowered: “The value of lying as an electoral asset seems to be on the rise. The public education system appears to have not had much success in encouraging the quest for truth. And the common people have been infantilized by their own governments ...”

Lemieux worries that “when the common person is given the power to decide what his fellow humans should want ... things can go very wrong.”

He’s correct, of course. But it isn’t a problem unique to democracy or the participation of regular folks. When any government has such enormous power over “fellow humans,” yes, things go wrong. Enormously wrong.

Yet, in democracies, the problem of political tyranny is far less pronounced than in anti-democratic regimes, and more effectively remedied. Democratic government is messy, woefully imperfect and can lead to awful policies and real tyranny. Still, it lacks a superior alternative.

Until then, give me democracy.

Good and hard? Preferably good.

This is Common Sense. I’m Paul Jacob.