

TRIMMING THE RIGGING ON THE AMERICAN SHIP OF STATE

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President-elect Donald Trump was right. The election was rigged. The candidate that got the most votes lost. As of this writing, the Associated Press reports that with 99 per cent of the vote counted Hillary Clinton has 59,814,018 votes and Donald Trump 59,611,678, a difference of 202,340 votes in her favour. That's 47.7 per cent of the vote for her and 47.5 per cent for him. Moreover, many of the votes still to be counted—getting on two days after the election!—are in states that voted Democratic, so her lead may actually widen, though it's a widening lead in a race that's over.

The election was rigged, of course, two centuries ago, when America's Founding Persons invented an Electoral College to choose their president. They did so because they didn't trust the people with direct democracy. The idea was that voters would elect electors and electors—elites?—would then elect a president. Formally, that's what still happens though everything now is driven by direct democracy within each state. Sometimes when you see the

people voters do elect directly—not mentioning any names here—you concluded the founders were pretty shrewd folk.

Needless to say, if the Electoral College didn't exist, it probably wouldn't be invented. But, another wise founders' move, the U.S.

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Constitution is hard to change, which is actually what you want in a successful constitution. (In unsuccessful ones, easy change is better, though some that had easy change failed because of it.) So the Electoral College likely won't be done away with soon.

I don't raise this point out of sour grapes because I don't like Donald Trump. Rather, simply to say that while everybody's head is spinning

trying to figure out the implications of the Trump Revolution, it's probably best to remember he didn't actually persuade a plurality of Americans, let alone a majority, of whatever it is he stands for or (if you don't think he stands for anything) represents. As a general rule, the supposed sea changes resulting from historic votes of one kind or another aren't really revolutionary but represent changes at the margins. If just one in 20 voters had switched from Trump to Clinton on Tuesday, she'd be ahead 52.7 to 42.5, a landslide that really would be of historic proportions.

It's a big country. One in 20 people is 11 million voters, if you count everybody eligible. To get them to come over to you is a big job. But one in 20 people is just that, one in 20. Let's not read too much into it.

In large part, in fact almost entirely, the election was about rigging of a different kind: groups going to Washington and fixing the political system to benefit themselves. For Trump, the culprits were donors, who have rigged Congress, and China, which has rigged trade, supposedly by rigging its exchange rate. For Bernie Sanders, the culprit is big business, which makes up the major donor class and which has rigged the rules against "working people." For ordinary Republicans, they're different groups, stirred up by activists, who get Congress and the



executive to bend to their interests.

I may be naive but to me it's encouraging that just about everybody in

the U.S. seems to feel this kind of rigging has to be trimmed. The obvious complication is that they disagree on exactly how to de-rig it and who are the worst riggers. But there's a consensus that when people write the rules to represent their interests and not the national interest that's unfair. Good! That's what the consensus should be.

We who like markets as a solution to many—maybe even most—of society's problems like them for that very reason: They're fair. People compete. Customers and clients decide the results. The better good or service wins. That's the ideal that I bet a big majority, not just plurality of Americans (Canadians, too) believes fair.

So, to echo Longfellow,

Sail on, O (US) ship of state! Sail on, O Union, strong and great!

But with your rigging considerably trimmed. 



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