

A Yankee businessman in the White House

Those who have the most to fear from Trump may well be the media and celebrity elites

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I'm a child of the Westminster system.' For decades living in Boston this was my defence when American reporters asked for a comment on US politics. Impeach Nixon? Well, in Australia we just schedule an election. All straightforward – or it used to be. Today, it seems Westminster parliamentary sovereignty and the American system's division into three powers are merging, in a tawdry triumph of media, money, and celebrity.

One may start with McMahon's knifing of Gorton. Then Thatcher's removal by Major and Keating's assault on Hawke (two star PMs shot from the sky). Even American journalists and academics caught up to the new reality with the Rudd-Gillard revolving door. Still, Turnbull's swift silent replacement of Abbot was barely noted.

All these sharp leadership changes occurred in the party room; electors were never consulted. So a child of Westminster must stop boasting of parliamentary sovereignty and learn patience with American primaries, fixed presidential terms, and judges-as-gods. However, I cannot accept the absurd length of American campaigns or the mind-boggling role in them of money-bags.

Today we see a culmination of the merging process in Trump-versus-Clinton. You would think the Republican nominee is already an Oval Office failure, to read the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. It's a monstrous jumping of the gun by left-wing media, joined inscrutably by fragile flowers on the right who cower at Trump's candor. The same geniuses who said Trump could not be nominated now, with nary a blink, declare his presidency a failure.

Yet a person elected to the White House seldom does much of what was promised during the campaign. This is sometimes necessary and goes deeper than 'broken promises'.

What endures from campaign trail to White House are simple ideas and the will to stick with them. Reagan had a few basic principles plus the courage to give

them effect. Carter did not. Trump has some. Clinton does too, though most are vacuous ('Are You With Her?' 'Better Together'). Presidential leadership does not resemble cooking, arranging policy ingredients in a pan and lighting the gas. Rather it is bus-driving, as traffic surprises, roads are uneven, and half the job is not to get hit.

One pities both Clinton and Trump, as a nearly two-year campaign requires the media to place a microscope over their existence 24/7. Hillary is called 'inauthentic'. Trump is 'a buffoon'. But those two propositions aren't on the ballot. FDR and Churchill would never be elected in 2016. Nor LBJ (too crude) and Kennedy (a philanderer). More worrisome, voters are diminished when journalists and plutocrats adjudicate an election months before the vote. James Fallows (on the left) and Ross Douthard (on the right) said flat-out that Trump could not be the Republican nominee. It is not just that these bright bulbs were wrong, but such *ex cathedra*, advance pronouncements short-circuit democracy.

The Left is up the wrong tree in its horror at Trump's rude thrusts against academics and news folk. Pew surveys show both circles are largely despised by the American people. Trump lives and breathes from the barbs against him by reporters, professors and legal gods. As the Chinese would say, Trump's critics pick up a stone only to drop it on their own foot. Conservative foreign policy gurus have announced they will not serve under Trump. Who invited them to? These cultural gate-keepers in think tanks and the magazines *Weekly Standard* and *National Review* have done more damage to themselves with their negativism about the Republican nominee than Trump has done to the RNC and Republicans in Congress.

The same folk who jumped on Trump last year for not ruling out a third party run, should he lose the Republican primaries, now, with Trump the winner by historic margins, themselves cry out for a

third-party. They need a John Howard to say, 'Don't slit your own throats, guys.'

Trump fails to treat the Washington think tank intellectuals like Ming Dynasty vases in a Met showcase. They are in shock at his lack of esteem for their glitter. Not being in awe of think tank intellectuals is Trump's sin and his wisdom.

Any innocent can see, for instance, that US North Korea policy has failed. Most foreign policy gurus insist Kim Jong-un must choose between his nuke program and survival of his regime. But Kim chooses both and laughs at Washington. Year after year the foreign policy gurus beg Beijing to 'help', and they urge more talks - to talk about more talks. Many Americans might favor the risk of a new NK policy from outsider Trump.

The cultural gate-keepers think banner ideas like 'China Cheats' are simple-minded. Guess what? Ordinary Americans, not awed by a Ming vase, understand and like banner ideas. Wise men say Mexico will explode in American faces if Trump stops illegal Hispanic immigration, and China will start a war if Trump re-negotiates economic deals with Beijing. It is far more likely that Mexico and China will compromise with Trump to US benefit. 'Make America Great Again' is not aggressive. It's a bargaining stance.

Take a deep breath, let the process continue, wait for the voters to speak. Paul Sheehan more than a decade ago claimed newspapers and TV were competing against our democratic system. He was correct and before his time. The media have eroded the Westminster system and bored the American public into disrespect. In this fresh era, give me the local, the original; give me Trump's bluntness over Clinton's well-oiled political machine. In private Trump is calm, not angry. His chief, novel weapon is to thumb his nose at Political Correctness.

'In political activity,' the British philosopher Michael Oakshott said, 'men sail a boundless and bottomless sea; there is neither harbour for shelter nor floor for anchorage, neither starting-place nor appointed destination.'

Let's eschew panic and see limits, as well as hope, in presidential and also prime ministerial leadership. Oakshott was correct to prescribe a mild dose of apathy. If most Americans cared passionately about politics, the nation would be torn apart before and after elections. Much the same goes for Australia. Happily, both peoples prefer sports, family, work, arts, and religion, to politics as entertainment. This is a conservative view of politics, quite consonant with a businessman in the White House.

Ross Terrill's next book will be 'Mao as a Boy'