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What Happens Politically to a Good Idea

If you have an idea that really works well, but it doesn't always "fit" with the government's status-quo expectations, will your idea perish? Everett W. Gross offers his thoughts on how people respond to thinking that seeks fundamental change.

by Everett W. Gross

This country was founded on a majority vote concept, and the people mostly do not elect to public office anyone who does not mainly agree with the majority, or at least profess to do so. If we have a social problem (farm, old age poverty, unemployment, war, or some other kind of poverty), and if most people don't know what to do about it, we have only the remotest chance of electing even a small fraction of public officials who know what to do about it. Even such a thing as a march on Washington will be futile.

All too recently, the frequent misfortunes of women and minorities were blamed on their lack of permission to vote. It was supposed that they might elect people more responsive to their needs. I would guess their plight has not been eased by their acquiring the permission to vote.

Notice that I did not say they acquired the right to vote. I am a believer in natural rights and I assert that they have had the right to vote for thousands of years before any country gave them permission to vote. (Note the difference between right and permission.) But it doesn't really help if majorities shoot themselves in the foot by electing people who are as mistaken as they themselves are.

I venture the dangerous statement that if we were to choose at random one tenth of the people to do the voting, we would put into public office exactly the same people whom we actually put there now. Public office holders would still believe and act on the ideas held by the majority.

I am frequently told that if my ideas on taxation are any good, I should get into public office and put those ideas into effect and test them. (I could do it alone? Ha, Ha.) The ideas are already tested in a number of places. Most people simply don't bother to look at the way other localities tax, and to observe the results. Of course it is not always easy to trace all of the causes when some locality reduces its improvement tax a teensy bit and increases its bare land tax a corresponding teensy bit, and within a year or two, building permits shoot for new record highs while all of the rest of the country slogs along. It is not a rare coincidence. All seventeen cities in Pennsylvania that have tried it have had the same result. [The Progress Report adds -- now it's 22 cities and counting!] The real mystery is why our own university has not one faculty member or graduate student who can be induced to look into the subject. They can only complain that the

legislature is not solving the problem for them. Why cannot the university be the source of learning for the legislature?

Should the universities be the discoverers? Or should they be the feet-draggers? I have a book by Patrick Edward Dove which explains why the social sciences can be among the last to make discoveries. It is because the pocketbook is involved. Speculation in bare and underdeveloped lots can be very profitable. It is a heavy drag on the total economy. Its lobby is stronger than most people realize.

I see no way that I could be voted into public office with ideas like mine so far from majority opinion. But when you catch on, you can pass it on to the next voter. Many of our public problems are not natural at all. Tell me why we send the highest tax bills to the people whose main activity benefits other people the most.