

Democracy demands that we speak up for ourselves

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As one of the most powerful groups on the planet, the middle class is likely the most sheepish and self-centred. As we all know, we're mired in election rhetoric and one of the party leaders said the other two leaders pretend to speak for the mid-



le class.

I'm not sure when the change occurred, but aren't politicians supposed to speak on our behalf, and not speak for us? Perhaps it was a bad choice of words, or perhaps not.

The reality is, the majority of eligible voters don't exercise their rights and simply allow the rest of us to make the decisions each time we have an election.

While we outpace our American neighbours to the south in terms of voter turnout, it's still less than impressive. Voter turnout for federal elections generally hovers around 70%, but dropped to 61.4% in 2011, the third-lowest in Canadian history.

When low turnout is a reflection of disenchantment or indifference, the election may not be an accurate reflection of the will of the people. Low turnouts can lead to unequal representation among various parts of the population. In a country like Canada, non-voters tend to be concentrated in particular demographic and socioeconomic groups, especially the young and the poor.

The provincial election of 2014 saw a 52.1% voter turnout, while our own municipal election in King hovered around 40%.

While our system is fair and reasonable, the only drawback or flaw is that the minority make the decisions for the majority. There is talk about implementing ranked ballots, where candidates are ranked in order of votes received. It also won't give the victory unless the top contender achieves 50% plus 1. This may make it a bit more representative of the public's wishes, but it still doesn't address the issue of voter apathy.

One of the biggest complaints we hear from irregular voters is that they can't change anything; that their one vote doesn't matter. That couldn't be further from the truth.

If you follow the example of that 50% plus 1, then yes, one vote can make a heck of a difference.

The problem is many people don't feel this way, hence the lower-than-ideal voter turnout.

Another issue is trust, broken promises and the fact the government is run by ivory tower bureaucrats and law-makers who are out of touch with average Canadians.

We all have to work on trust issues. But the latter is likely true.

All federal party leaders are definitely not 'middle class' by the true definition of the term. So for them to speak on our behalf is a bit of a stretch.

That's not to say they don't understand and appreciate the plight of average Canadians. But the further you're removed from the situation, the less in touch you are.

Senior bureaucrats keep politicians informed about economic changes and job stats, but to them they are just figures to be analyzed.

The announcement that car manufacturers may pull out of Oshawa in 2016 may be a glitch in the overall automotive landscape, but to those thousands of workers and several communities who rely on this for their livelihood, it's potentially devastating.

All the tax breaks in the world won't help them.

While the auto workers benefit from some very vocal union activists, the average Canadians aren't so assertive when it comes to their role in society.

Politicians, and the governments they form, work for us, on our behalf. For that very reason, we can exert a great deal of power. We can affect change.

As consumers, the ball is on our court. We have the economic might to change any landscape ??manufacturing, service, imports and exports ??simply by altering our buying habits en masse.

But the problem lies with our current habits.?Our spending, like our current debt load, is out of control. We're very much a generation of must-have instant gratification, regardless of the cost or impact to our world.

And let's be honest. If we all wanted green energy, solar power, wind power and electric cars, we'd have them all by now. The technology for all of these have been around for decades. But the will has not.

That will is changing, albeit slowly.

Economic realities have hindered our advancement. Since the middle class is experiencing record debt, high taxes and a high cost of living, our ability to rear our collective heads and make noise has diminished. We're caught up in keeping a roof over our heads and food on the table.

And that fact hasn't escaped the movers and shakers in our world.

We're fed a carefully concocted diet of what to buy, how much to save, how to eat healthy and how to enjoy our down time.

We escape into reality TV, rooting for the underdog.

We cheer when our sports teams are winning, and abandon them when they're not.

But we have freedom of choice, do we not?

Sometimes, I wonder whether our system is the better way, especially when you compare it to the lifestyle of those in Cuba or those living under the Nordic social democracy.

But I?do believe that as tough as things get, we should never abandon our faith in democracy. We should never turn our backs on the system, but rather learn more, become more involved, ask more questions and make noise when it's appropriate.

This Oct. 19, it's appropriate.