[Lesson 530]

[1060L]

[627 words]

The Two-Party System: Freedom at Work

Every day, a major news headline will pit one of the country's major two majors parties—Democrats and Republicans—against each other. In a two-party system, when voters show **allegiance** with a particular political party's ideology, they are supporting certain public policies and values. Most democracies, such as the United States, operate as a two-party system. As news headlines remind us, Democrats and Republicans alternate power in our country.

In fact, nothing in the Constitution requires political parties. When founding the new nation, leaders of the American Revolution, such as Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson, intentionally avoided them. The Founders worried that these parties would divide the country. Thomas Jefferson declared in 1789, "If I could not go to heaven but with a party, I would not go there at all." In something of a twist, Hamilton's and Jefferson's philosophies formed the basis of the two political parties that emerged. Those who supported Hamilton were in favor of a strong, centralized government that would act to protect the new country's industries. On the other hand, Jefferson and his supporters believed that state and local governments should have more influence.

By the 1900s, the modern two parties had emerged as the dominant political parties. During the 1930s, the Great Depression resulted in economic collapse and ruin for many Americans. Democratic President Franklin D. Roosevelt created several programs to help the country recover. These programs, **collectively** known as the New Deal, were federal programs. Republican opponents, who became known as social conservatives, argued that New Deal policies gave the government too much power; they would interfere with business. The Democrats who believed the New Deal was the answer to the nation's problems became known as social liberals.

Today, these characteristics still apply to each party. Republicans believe the federal government should play a limited role; private business should be given freedom, which in turn allows them to operate more effectively. As a result, the country will have more jobs and a stronger economy. In their view, money earned from taxes is best appropriated for military and defense spending. With a strong military, this thinking goes, the United States is positioned to be a strong presence in the world.

As for Democrats, they consider it the federal government's role to use tax money primarily to provide access to social services like health care, unemployment benefits, and public assistance. From the Democratic point of view, government should have oversight over business in order to ensure workers' rights and to limit the effects of business on the environment.

Under a two-party system, nearly all elected officials are members of one of the two dominant parties. One party—the majority—typically will maintain a large share of the legislature, while the minority party **comprises** the remainder. It is expected that majority rule will rotate between each, resulting in balanced rule.

Consider the example of the presidency's political affiliation since 1980. From 1980-1988, Republican Ronald Reagan held that office. For the next four years, Republican George Bush was president. Democrat Bill Clinton led the U.S. from 1992-2000. From 2000-2008, George W. Bush, a Republican, held office. Currently, from 2008-present, Democrat Barack Obama occupies the Oval Office. Each presidential term lasts for four years. Based on this, Republicans held office for five of the nine terms during this period, while Democrats held four of the nine terms. As you can see, the balance of power was evenly distributed.

Although these two political parties dominate, some voters choose not to identify with either group. Known as independents, they typically vote based on issues or a candidate's character, instead of political ideology. Although their influence in the outcome of elections is debatable, candidates for office are wise to factor independents into their campaign strategy if a political race is particularly close.

allegiance *n*. loyalty to a belief or thing

Tadashi's allegiance to his hometown caused him sadness when he moved to a new state.

comprises *v.* consists of

What type of food comprises a well-balanced, healthful meal?

collectively *adv.* referring to all of the items in a group

When she saw her friends collectively smiling and waving, Niesha's courage returned, and she delivered her speech.

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