

TRUST
THE TRUST THING IN AMERICAN NATIONAL POLITICS TODAY

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Is Clinton to be trusted? A poll yesterday said only 19% of us the electorate believe he can be. Bush can't be, I think: for one thing, he lacks what he himself calls "the vision thing." Me, I'm uneasy enough to write this Thinksheet in the hope of calming myself, or something.

1 Why are trustables so rare in politics? Because success in politics requires so much more **courage** than character that character seems almost optional. Further, character has other competitors: (1) **ambition** so great that one is willing to accept blows of fortune beyond what other mortals suffer, & (2) political **savvy**, the seat-of-the-pants pragmatic sense to negotiate the human rapids without ripping out your bottom & foundering.

Am I being cynical? No, realistic. But sometimes character is not an impediment to political success: Washington, Lincoln, Wilson, Carter....

2 It's implicit ("natural") divine law that **credibility** depends on character: one who lacks character smells, gives off odors warning others to beware, to be suspicious, to be incredulous, unbelieving, untrusting.... Two facts complicating the picture without undermining my basic assertion are (1) that some untrustables, the conners, seem trustable, & (2) some trustables strike the public as untrustable. File that in the category of "Personality, mysteries of."

3 Political philosopher-mechanics suggest structural changes that might prove less corrosive of character & more promotive of rational-compassionate action. More competitive campaign-funding. Term limits on Congress, parallel with the current term-limit on the Presidency. Better ways to resolve the President/Congress gridlock when the two are of opposing parties. But first we need accurate situation-definition. One aspect of that, the only aspect this Thinksheet is about, is the spelling out of the distrust factor in the present paralysis or deadlock between the legislative & the executive branches. What got me into this was Sen. Warren Rudman's announcement today that he'll not be rerunning come November: "There is so much politics [illusion], & I enjoy substance [reality]." His "Gramm-Rudman," designed to stop deficit-deepening by ending entitlements-porkbarreling, failed: neither Congress nor the President had the stomach to stop buying votes with "social welfare" dollars.

4 **Candidness**, the open calling of it "like it is" (ie as one sees it), exists, as the two-way communication ideal exists, only where trust prevails. (The candidness of one-way communication exists where trust does not exist but the speaker's power is secure. But that's a political pathology not in view in this Thinksheet.)

5 Let's sketch the situation **E** (electorate), **C** (Congress), **P** (President):

....Why doesn't **E** trust **C**? Trust to do what? To deal with realities beyond the politics of personal survival--to "get real" about the uncomfortable issues. To trust the public to be mature enough to face painful facts. By hoodwinking, half-truthing, lying, Congress has educated the electorate to distrust, to a low view of the legislature.

....Why doesn't **C** trust **E**? Because (Hobbes' LEVIATHAN) "the people are a great beast" of irrational instinct. (Some truth to that, not enough to sustain royalists.) Because in accusing Congress of self-interest, the people are hypocritical: fail to play up to their self-interest, & out you go. They can't take much reality. (Who can?)

....Why don't **E** trust **P**? Because the President is an unprincipled pragmatist, no rudder but only a weathervane.

....Why doesn't **P** trust **E**? Because the people punish the President for speaking the truth. Carter was right but unpolitical in his "spiritual malaise" diagnosis.

....Why doesn't **P** trust **C**? Because partisanship is the reigning reality in C, as Wilson discovered vis-a-vis the League of Nations.

....Why doesn't **C** trust **P**? Because partisanship reigns in the White House.

