

Ending Government Rule of the Elites, by the Elites, for the Elites

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By now it is nearly commonplace that the specific American system of capitalist governance has resulted in a hollowing-out of U.S. democracy, which now serves the interests of economic elites rather than the people. One of the primary examples of this is how the Obama administration is handling the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP): a top-secret process that will affect the lives of each individual living in the countries which agree to it, yet the negotiators are a few government officials (i.e. the Office of the United States Trade Representative) and 600 corporations, excluding Congress, and with no voice from or for the people themselves, nor any concern involving the citizens (see Paul Craig Roberts, "TTIP: The Corporate Empowerment Act").

One of the sad but important consequences for our system of government, in the face of such a process, is that not only do the economic elites now control the system, but more importantly, our elitist-backed politicians have no vision beyond the self-interestedness of catering to the money the elites use to support them. The people are out; the future is irrelevant; the leaders are now co-participants in servicing an institution that lives by a single infallible rule: the degree to which they seek to increase their power is in direct proportion to their size. The result is that the U.S. government has now become an authoritarian state. It is the structure of the authoritarian state that requires as its sole mandate its ever-increasing power over its citizens, the very people it was originally designed to serve, with no limit to its ends or means. Thus, those who run for office from within the system all are necessarily supporters of this authoritarian-corporate-military-state, even if they advocate tinkering with its internal mechanisms a bit. A politician with a vision, and thus a true leader, will by necessity have to alienate themselves from the system, even if they attempt to function within it. Such is the intrinsic contradiction of the capitalist democracy we have today.

Related to that, the main method of consolidating power in a governing structure is to keep the masses in servitude to the corporate state and its interests. This is why such institutions are prone to ignore or reject the demands of justice. Thus, although it is fairly clear that nearly every person individually has a sense of ethical right and wrong, when politicians immerse themselves in a distinctly corporate-government institution and thus seek to ensure social structures and practices that do not engage primary ethical values such as equality or fairness—i.e. practices that are frequently directly inimical to their citizens—they surrender their ethics, sometimes consciously, sometimes not, in favor of taking on a public role as caretakers of their special-interest groups: the elites.

That is why true progressives understand that the voice of conscience, of value, of what is right (and wrong), must come from outside of the institutions. Even President Obama, a voice of the institution of capitalist government and its values par excellence, stated that change must come from outside of government. Voices that are raised from within are soon swallowed up in acquiescence to institutional demands or alienated from the culture of which they are a functioning agent (e.g. Edward Snowden). Socrates understood that fact long ago, when he said at his trial that agents of justice must operate from outside government institutions, or they would die young. Institutional acolytes simply do not concern themselves with issues of justice, fairness, or equity: only the appearance of being just counts, as Machiavelli observed in the 16th century. This idea was stated

most succinctly by the classical defender of Realpolitik (i.e. politics is only about power), Hans Morgenthau, who argued that “loyalty to the nation requires the individual to disregard universal moral rules of conduct” (Politics Among Nations, Chapter XVI).

Another way to put the Socratic wisdom is this: if the normative standard one uses to assess institutional actions is objective (i.e. standards that apply to everyone for the purpose of fair and just governance), and if the choice one has to make is between being an agent of the institution or an advocate of justice, then one must stand outside of the institution and advocate justice. The choice has become an exclusive disjunction in our fading American democracy. It is what the participants of the Occupy Movement knew, and what many college students today intuitively know.

The mistake made by supporters of standard “insider” party politics is to believe that their candidate could be an “agent of change” in office. Obama, for example, never was—and never would be—such an agent, because he was a full participant in the capitalist-governmental institutional processes that brought him to power. So are most elected individuals on Capitol Hill today, Democrat or Republican. True rebels from within are rare, as we can see today: the Elizabeth Warrens, Bernie Sanders, and Alan Graysons compare with 532 other members of Congress.

The problems of creating change from within are illustrated by the Bernie Sanders candidacy for President. Mr. Sanders has some interesting ideas in his 12-point program (such as rebuilding our infrastructure, reducing our reliance on fossil fuels, and raising the minimum wage, etc.), but in order to get them heard and get the support of the economic elite, he has had to co-opt with the corporate-based Democratic Party. This makes him susceptible to a move by front-runner Hillary Clinton to neutralize him by agreeing “in principle” with his ideas, and then changing the subject. If this happens, Sanders will be the proverbial “runner-up” in a party that became a corporation in its own right a long time ago.

Thus, the only solution is to create the change we seek for ourselves. But the key question now is: “How?”

First, we have to re-learn how to form alliances with other progressives in order to support visionaries running for office. Even if we do not agree with every position someone might take, if they have a progressive vision that is based on equality and fairness, we need to put aside any minor differences and support those visionaries, particularly if they have a track record of acting on the basis of their vision. That is something that many progressives have forgotten how to do, succumbing as they have to the myth of American capitalist individualism, and forgetting that change at this time in our political system will be incremental and slow, and not a quick revolution. But only by creating unified groups with unified goals can we the people once again become significant enough to replace the finance-government ministers with (small-d) democrats.

Second, engage in acts of civil disobedience and prepare for the consequences. For example, anti-war voices, no matter how loud and large in number, will never drown out the sound of cash-registers ringing for the military state agents who continue to make a financial killing by getting nations and peoples to kill each other. Just like the 1960’s civil rights struggles, the state will not hesitate to use its massive violent mechanisms of violence to put an end to counter-movements and dissent. Since the Patriot Act was put into play in 2001, all the government has to do is to brand civil disobedience as “terrorism,” and any act they take against dissent after that would be legally justified. Such is the state of the State we live under today. Further, with the critical importance of geo-political control and access to now limited natural resources such as water and oil that can be turned into a profit for the corporate elites that run the state, and with American political leaders drunk on the hubris that they can actually militarily govern the world, it is unlikely that we can

expect much change to the institution unless this economic-military-government marriage is broken apart by a divorce.

Third, we need to think outside the current financial-governmental-military institutional complex to a new government order. But how far must we go, and in which direction? And what kind of system? One proposal for a first step toward a solution of the current governmental-financial institutional situation in America is that business ownership needs to change, and the workers need to become the owners of the places in which they work. Those in control of capital control the Capitol, and a new worker ownership movement, which could be done in conjunction with the “raise the minimum wage” movement, will go very far in creating the change that is past due to the current political system.

Finally, we need to increase our awareness of the populist rhetoric politicians use to jockey into positions of power. In this day and age, with politicians on both sides of the aisle using the motto “take back power” in order to secure their own interests in being added to the current power structure, we the people need to redefine what “take back power” means—i.e. to take money and governing power away from big business and thus reduce its powerful role in government by engaging in worker-owned business.

The vision we need from our leaders must be one of equity, fairness, and elimination of the current rule of the rich. Without such a unified vision, at least with these basic values, the institutional rule of ongoing power-consolidation and economic elite self-interest will continue unabated. Although true leaders are hard to find today within the system, it nonetheless remains true, as the Book of Proverbs said so long ago: “When there is no vision, the people perish.”

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