

America in Crisis. What Now?

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How do we deal with the demise of the two-party electoral system in the U.S.? With U.S./corporate wars occurring throughout the world, deficit and defense spending, a faltering economic system, increasing environmental catastrophes, and the shipping of jobs overseas, the task seems monumental. But, it isn't. Changes can come. Changes will come. The question is: How do we take advantage of the changes taking place and how do we influence them for the good of all the people?

First, what are we facing?

1) The wealth of the nation has been consolidated into the hands of a clique of corporate executives that dominate both political parties and determine who the American people will "elect." These corporations, described by many authors as "The Oligarchs," are run and owned by CEOs in the following industries: oil; insurance; pharmaceuticals; agri-business; Wall Street and the banking industry, and the military/security complex. These oligarchs are accountable to no democratic forces in this or any other country.

2) The democratic, organized union movement and working class unity, are long gone. By sending jobs and manufacturing off-shore to other countries, the oligarchs have undermined and destroyed the traditional vehicles for mass opposition to corporate greed and manipulation. This has been accomplished within a legal anti-union framework and the depoliticalization of the working class. There are currently no voices or forces capable of opposing the oligarchs at this time.

3) The oligarchs have seized control of all branches of the U.S. government. The Congress is composed of millionaires accountable to monied interests. The judiciary is no longer chosen by any conceivable democratic process, and consists of the most right-wing zealots that the religious right and prosecutorial machines can envisage. Decisions emanating from the highest courts of both the state and federal governments are so shockingly oppressive as to harken back to the opportunistic courts so aptly described in Robert Mueller's "Hitler's Justice,"

The Executive Branch speaks in terms of bi-partisanship, which really means "obey your corporate handlers." The differences between the policies of the Bush vs. the Obama administration are simply insignificant.

4) The media is controlled and dominated by the oligarchs to the point that any attempts at transparency concerning what is occurring nationally or internationally are met with prosecutions and violence. Whistleblowers, or independent media, publish under threat of serious retaliation.

5) The Oligarchy is so powerful that it is able to halt all attempts at regulation or limitation on their power or wealth. Wall Street and the banking industry continue to pillage at will, and many Americans have lost their life savings, their housing, passable public education, health care, and social services. The super-rich have stolen the wealth of the nation, and the oligarchs have made it impossible for us to take the money back.

6) The rapacious imperialism we see in the Middle East, and throughout the world is no longer controlled and defined by the U.S. government, or the Pentagon, but by mercenary armies outfitted, financed and directed by private corporate interests. It is questionable whether the President of the U.S. or the Pentagon even have the authority to hire or fire these mercenary forces.

Given this pessimistic, but realistic, assessment of the current situation, what are the alternatives available to the American people to regain control over the wealth and politics of the country?

1) PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

People can attempt to organize within the two-party political system dominated by the oligarchs in hopes that the democratic process will allow change to come peacefully and fairly through the electoral process, i.e. that the door is still open for organizing within this forum. If anyone believes such change is possible through the electoral process, and that it will happen soon enough to stop the disastrous course this country is headed in, then we urge them to turn on Fox News, circle the wagons, buy gold, and wait for the military, either ours or the enemy's, to arrive at your doorstep.

Some people feel that organized labor, now less than 9% of the voting public, could have a significant impact on electoral politics. We don't share their optimism in this regard.

2) BUILDING ALTERNATIVE INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS

People can attempt to organize locally, and in communities in ways that avoid contact with corporations and institutions associated with the oligarchs, and strive to build "alternative institutions" and communities and economic systems outside of corporate control. The Green Movement, *Yes Magazine*, Global Exchange and a variety of groups throughout the nation have embraced this perspective, and hope to build a resistance and world-view separate and distinct from the empire. While such efforts have had notable success in many communities, the ability of such groups to form any meaningful counter-force to the oligarchs is marginal, at best. Perhaps, if these movements were to spread nationally to encompass an ever-growing portion of the disenfranchised population, there could be a new player on the block that could unseat the oligarchs. The idea that such a "revolution" could be accomplished non-violently, or with the cooperation of the oligarchs themselves, seems like a pipe dream to the authors. Nevertheless, hope springs eternal.

3) SUPPORTING INTERNATIONAL OPPOSITION

People might also look to international forces that stand opposed to U.S. hegemony throughout the world. Opposition to the manipulations of the dollar by U.S. banks and capital, contempt for US military forays throughout the Middle East and the World; hatred of

U.S. corporate and mercenary interventions into the democratic processes of governments throughout the world (coupled with QE2), have all combined to render the U.S. one of the most despised nations in the world. Americans seeking to unseat the oligarchy could support whatever countries stand in opposition to Empire and lend whatever form of legal support is possible for these opposing forces. The successes of the 60s were in many ways attributable to the leadership provided internationally by the Vietnamese, the Cubans, and the other revolutionary struggles that inspired Americans at home.

4) CREATING COMMUNITIES FOR SELF-PROTECTION AND DEFENSE

In many areas of the country, people are forming self-help groups that share resources, teach each other self-defense, engage in joint health-giving techniques, provide collective necessities (food, shelter, nursing assistance), etc., outside of the governmental agencies traditionally responsible for providing a safety net. Because the oligarchs have decided to keep all of the wealth for themselves, they have actively sought to destroy the systems that Americans fought and worked for, including unemployment, medicare, social security, public education, medical services, retirement and other benefits. While there is little formal communication among the sets of communities described above, the potential for establishing such networks is certainly there. In the movie *Battle of Algiers*, the resistance movement created its own legal/social/cultural alternative to the colonial government dominated by the French. In those areas where disenfranchised people can unite and support each other, this approach might be most efficacious.

All of these alternatives are possible and plausible. We must continue to reject the tendencies toward depression/rage and immobilization, and seek new solutions — a new society that has viable economic and environmental alternatives.

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