

When the Public Rises, We'll Want an Ally in Congress

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For the majority of people in the United States — a majority does not vote, a majority believes the government is broken, a majority thinks our public policy is headed in the wrong direction — the fact that we call this place a democracy is apparently outweighed by the fact that our national government almost never does what a majority of us want done. Some of the things we don't want done include the destruction of the planet's environment, the mass slaughter of war, the spreading of violence, and the concentration of wealth in the hands of a tiny aristocracy while millions at home and billions abroad suffer horrifically for lack of readily available resources.

When the people of Egypt decided earlier this year to rise up and resist their government's abuses, it would have been helpful for them to have more real allies already in positions of partial power within that government. The same applies to us, should we ever determine that we are not going to take it anymore. Perhaps that moment will come in October: <http://october2011.org> Perhaps, as momentum builds around the country for real resistance, it will come ahead of schedule this summer. Perhaps it will come a few years down the road.

When such a moment comes, we will have to face violence without employing it. We will have to counter the crimes of war makers and robber barons with the impoliteness of uncompromising refusal to allow their operations to continue. We will have to make sacrifices and steadfastly advance the struggle while resisting innumerable temptations to compromise with the unconscionable. But we will also have to lead the way forward, negotiate, unite, and synthesize.

I'm not suggesting the rather silly critique that we know what we are against but not what we are for. Those questions answer themselves. We are against making war on the world. We are for making friendship with the world. We are against coal, oil, nuclear, and gas. We are for solar, wind, tides, and all renewables. We are against legalized bribery. We are for clean elections, free media time, verified vote counting, and automatic registration. We are against ignorance. We are for investment in education and journalism. We are against secrecy. We are for transparency. We are against corporate health coverage. We are for single payer. We are against plutocracy and corporate power. We are for taxing billionaires, imposing the law equally on all, and providing human rights to all and only humans.

If we make it impossible for the banksters to fund crimes in our name with impunity, we will also need to make it possible for working people to borrow money, diplomats to negotiate alliances and trade agreements, and criminals — including the biggest and most powerful of them — to be given fair trials. It will be helpful to us if we have some friends already in

official positions of governance. But who will they be?

The very idea of aligning ourselves with allies in Congress has been given a bad name. And it damn well deserves it. Allies in Congress should align themselves with us, not the other way around. But even when they do so in large numbers, they are consistently outnumbered by their colleagues and by the power of the two parties to which they answer. We don't seem capable of electing 218 principled House members, much less 60 uncorrupted Senators. And yet, we are better off with some minority in Congress speaking — even if, for now, it is only speaking — for the majority outside of Congress. I would even say we are better off with members in Congress who sometimes represent us and sometimes cave in to corrupting influences, as compared with those who never represent us at all.

Look at the people we idolize as whistleblowers. They are usually people who have been cooperative cogs in a machine of death and destruction, often for many years, who finally decided to expose a particular abuse. We don't reject their good deeds on the grounds that they aren't angels. I think Congress members' actions should be treated the same way. They stand or fall on their own merits, not the personality of the member, much less the imagined holy or hellish nature of the member's political party.

And yet, goddamn it, wouldn't it be nice to really have one of us in Congress? Wouldn't that be useful if the tide began to turn, whether slowly or in an immediate upheaval?

As I write this, Republicans in Ohio are working on eliminating Congressman Dennis Kucinich's district. They're not trying to vote him out, but to erase his district from the map so that he has nowhere to run for reelection, at least not in Ohio. Also, as I write this, Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey, longtime chair of the Progressive Caucus and ally of the peace movement, is announcing her intention not to run for reelection.

Yet a possibility is opening up of replacing Woolsey with someone who clearly has the potential to be even better than Kucinich has been thus far.

No matter how Woolsey's district is redrawn in California, it will remain a very progressive district. This means that nationally those who pay attention to and work on elections, as well as those who want their children to have a decent world to live in, ought to take some interest in replacing Woolsey with a real progressive leader, not just someone who will vote the right way most of the time, not just someone who will say the right things, not even just someone who will stick their neck out and take the lead on matters that are deemed controversial within the Beltway, but someone who will educate, encourage activism, and organize within the government.

Luckily, that candidate is available and running, and he's running against one — possibly two — Obama followers. No Republican or independent is going to be elected to Congress from Marin County. The representative is either going to be a robotic Democratic drone who votes as the President instructs, thus inverting and perverting our system of checks and balances. Or the representative is going to be the person that progressives turn to for support from around the nation in the years to come: Norman Solomon.

If you don't know who Norman is, read his [Wikipedia page](#). Norman is one of the best activists I know, and one of the best book authors, possibly the very best columnist, and undoubtedly one of the easiest colleagues to work with whether we agree on something or not (we're working together on <http://rootsaction.org>). Norman may not agree with

everything in this column. But I'm not looking for someone identical to myself to elect to Congress. I think Norman Solomon would make a better Congress member than I would, and than most of us would. I think he is ideally suited for it. I expect him to stay connected to the activist world, to make ideal use of independent and corporate media, and to build a caucus of Congress members that doesn't just add members to its ranks but actually takes actions that impact our public policy. When I say I expect these things, I don't mean that I am making these demands of Norman (though I am); I mean that we can safely predict that he will conduct himself in this manner if elected.

That's always a big if. The forces of mediocrity are always gathering strength against the exceptional. Let's nip in the bud the notion that California's Sixth District should be "represented" by a run of the mill hack. We can do that by pumping thousands of small donations from ordinary people all over the country into Solomon's campaign this week before the totals raised thus far are counted and announced at the end of June. Solomon has already raised over \$100,000. If Rahm hadn't left for Chicago, the national machine to stop Solomon would be in full gear already. But people who stand for nothing are easily intimidated. I'm doing my bit to help scare them off right now. Won't you? Please give at least the price of a fancy coffee for the sake of having a people's leader in Washington when we need one: <http://www.ActBlue.com/page/Supportathon>

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