



Our Menace Isn't Insane Right-Wingers, It's Unrivaled Corporate Power and the Decay of Our Democratic Institutions

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There are no longer any major institutions in American society, including the press, the educational system, the financial sector, labor unions, the arts, religious institutions and our dysfunctional political parties, which can be considered democratic. The intent, design and function of these institutions, controlled by corporate money, are to bolster the hierarchical and anti-democratic power of the corporate state. These institutions, often mouthing liberal values, abet and perpetuate mounting inequality. They operate increasingly in secrecy. They ignore suffering or sacrifice human lives for profit. They control and manipulate all levers of power and mass communication. They have muzzled the voices and concerns of citizens. They use entertainment, celebrity gossip and emotionally laden public-relations lies to seduce us into believing in a Disneyworld fantasy of democracy.

The menace we face does not come from the insane wing of the Republican Party, which may make huge inroads in the coming elections, but the institutions tasked with protecting democratic participation. Do not fear Glenn Beck or Sarah Palin. Do not fear the tea party movement, the birthers, the legions of conspiracy theorists or the militias. Fear the underlying corporate power structure, which no one, from Barack Obama to the right-wing nut cases who pollute the airwaves, can alter. If the hegemony of the corporate state is not soon broken we will descend into a technologically enhanced age of barbarism.

Investing emotional and intellectual energy in electoral politics is a waste of time. Resistance means a radical break with the formal structures of American society. We must cut as many ties with consumer society and corporations as possible. We must build a new political and economic consciousness centered on the tangible issues of sustainable agriculture, self-sufficiency and radical environmental reform. The democratic system, and the liberal institutions that once made piecemeal reform possible, is dead. It exists only in name. It is no longer a viable mechanism for change. And the longer we play our scripted and absurd role in this charade the worse it will get. Do not pity Barack Obama and the Democratic Party. They will get what they deserve. They sold the citizens out for cash and power. They lied. They manipulated and deceived the public, from the bailouts to the abandonment of universal health care, to serve corporate interests. They refused to halt the wanton corporate destruction of the ecosystem on which all life depends. They betrayed the

most basic ideals of democracy. And they, as much as the Republicans, are the problem.

“It is like being in a pit,” Ralph Nader told me when we spoke on Saturday. “If you are four feet in the pit you have a chance to grab the top and hoist yourself up. If you are 30 feet in the pit you have to start on a different scale.”

All resistance will take place outside the arena of electoral politics. The more we expand community credit unions, community health clinics and food cooperatives and build alternative energy systems, the more empowered we will become.

“To the extent that these organizations expand and get into communities where they do not exist, we will weaken the multinational goliath, from the banks to the agribusinesses to the HMO giants and hospital chains,” Nader said.

The failure of liberals to defend the interests of working men and women as our manufacturing sector was dismantled, labor unions were destroyed and social services were slashed has proved to be a disastrous and fatal misjudgment. Liberals, who betrayed the working class, have no credibility. This is one of the principle reasons the anti-war movement cannot attract the families whose sons and daughters are fighting and dying in Iraq and Afghanistan. And liberal hypocrisy has opened the door for a virulent right wing. If we are to reconnect with the working class we will have to begin from zero. We will have to rebuild the ties with the poor and the working class which the liberal establishment severed. We will have to condemn the liberal class as vociferously as we condemn the right wing. And we will have to remain true to the moral imperative to foster the common good and the tangible needs of housing, health care, jobs, education and food.

We will, once again, be bombarded in this election cycle with messages of fear from the Democratic Party—designed, in the end, to serve corporate interests. “Better Barack Obama than Sarah Palin,” we will be told. Better the sane technocrats like Larry Summers than half-wits like John Bolton. But this time we must resist. If we express the legitimate rage of the dispossessed working class as our own, if we denounce and refuse to cooperate with the Democratic Party, we can begin to impede the march of the right-wing trolls who seem destined to inherit power. If we again prove compliant we will discredit the socialism we should be offering as an alternative to a perverted Christian and corporate fascism.

The tea party movement is, as Nader points out, “a conviction revolt.” Most of the participants in the tea party rallies are not poor. They are small-business people and professionals. They feel that something is wrong. They see that the two parties are equally responsible for the subsidies and bailouts, the wars and the deficits. They know these parties must be replaced. The corporate state, whose interests are being championed by tea party leaders such as Palin and Dick Armey, is working hard to make sure the anger of the movement is directed toward government rather than corporations and Wall Street. And if these corporate apologists succeed, a more overt form of corporate fascism will emerge without a socialist counterweight.

“Poor people do not organize,” Nader lamented. “They never have. It has always been people who have fairly good jobs. You don’t see Wal-Mart workers massing anywhere. The people who are the most militant are the people who had the best

blue-collar jobs. Their expectation level was high. When they felt their jobs were being jeopardized they got really angry. But when you are at \$7.25 an hour you want to hang on to \$7.25 an hour. It is a strange thing.”

“People have institutionalized oppressive power in the form of surrender,” Nader said. “It is not that they like it. But what are you going to do about it? You make the best of it. The system of control is staggeringly dictatorial. It breaks new ground and innovates in ways no one in human history has ever innovated. You start in American history where these corporations have influence. Then they have lobbyists. Then they run candidates. Then they put their appointments in top government positions. Now, they are actually operating the government. Look at Halliburton and Blackwater. Yesterday someone in our office called the Office of Pipeline Safety apropos the San Bruno explosion in California. The press woman answered. The guy in our office saw on the screen that she had CTR next to her name. He said, ‘What is CTR?’ She said, ‘I am a contractor.’ He said, ‘This is the press office at the Department of Transportation. They contracted out the press office?’ ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘but that’s OK, I come to work here every day.’ ”

“The corporate state is the ultimate maturation of American-type fascism,” Nader said. “They leave wide areas of personal freedom so that people can confuse personal freedom with civic freedom—the freedom to go where you want, eat where you want, associate with who you want, buy what you want, work where you want, sleep when you want, play when you want. If people have given up on any civic or political role for themselves there is a sufficient amount of elbow room to get through the day. They do not have the freedom to participate in the decisions about war, foreign policy, domestic health and safety issues, taxes or transportation. That is its genius. But one of its Achilles’ heels is that the price of the corporate state is a deteriorating political economy. They can’t stop their greed from getting the next morsel. The question is, at what point are enough people going to have a breaking point in terms of their own economic plight? At what point will they say enough is enough? When that happens, is a tea party type enough or [Sen. Robert M.] [La Follette](#) or [Eugene Debs](#) type of enough?”

It is anti-corporate movements as exemplified by the Scandinavian energy firm [Kraft&Kultur](#) that we must emulate. Kraft&Kultur sells electricity exclusively from solar and water power. It has begun to merge clean energy with cultural events, bookstores and a political consciousness that actively defies corporate hegemony.

The failure by the Obama administration to use the bailout and stimulus money to build public works such as schools, libraries, roads, clinics, highways, public transit and reclaiming dams, as well as create green jobs, has snuffed out any hope of serious economic, political or environmental reform coming from the centralized bureaucracy of the corporate state. And since the government did not hire enough auditors and examiners to monitor how the hundreds of billions in taxpayer funds funneled to Wall Street are being spent, we will soon see reports of widespread mismanagement and corruption. The rot and corruption at the top levels of our financial and political systems, coupled with the increasing deprivation felt by tens of millions of Americans, are volatile tinder for a horrific right-wing backlash in the absence of a committed socialist alternative.

“If you took a day off and did nothing but listen to Hannity, Beck and Limbaugh and

realized that this goes on 260 days a year, you would see that it is overwhelming,” Nader said. “You have to almost have a genetic resistance in your mind and body not to be affected by it. These guys are very good. They are clever. They are funny. They are emotional. It beats me how Air America didn’t make it, except it went after [it criticized] corporations, and corporations advertise. These right-wingers go after government, and government doesn’t advertise. And that is the difference. It isn’t that their message appeals more. Air America starved because it could not get ads.”

We do not have much time left. And the longer we refuse to confront corporate power the more impotent we become as society breaks down. The game of electoral politics, which is given legitimacy by the right and the so-called left on the cable news shows, is just that—a game. It diverts us from what should be our daily task—dismantling, piece by piece, the iron grip that corporations hold over our lives. *Hope* is a word that is applicable only to those who grasp reality, however bleak, and do something meaningful to fight back—which does not include the farce of elections and involvement in mainstream political parties. Hope is about fighting against the real forces of destruction, not chanting “Yes We Can!” in rallies orchestrated by marketing experts, television crews, pollsters and propagandists or begging Obama to be Obama. Hope, in the hands of realists, spreads fear into the black heart of the corporate elite. But hope, real hope, remains thwarted by our collective self-delusion.

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