

The American dream so extolled by the flim-flammers appeared flawed and fatally cracked during the Depression's early years and radical reformers tried to dismantle the doomed structure. Most Americans, however, did not believe their system was mortally ill. Its decline was far more astonishing than its subsequent recovery.

In 1933, when Franklin Delano Roosevelt became President, he said at his inauguration that there was nothing for Americans to fear but the fear of fear itself, and he set off on the busiest first one hundred days of a Presidency bringing in as he had promised in his campaign for office a "new deal for the American people." Roosevelt perceived that democratic capitalism could only survive and prosper if the basic principles of democracy were applied to achieve economic and social justice as well as civil and political freedom. (Mikhail Gorbachev might have the same perception about the basic principles of communism; he turns to democratic reforms to preserve the fundamentals of state socialism in somewhat the same manner as FDR utilized what his enemies called "socialist" reforms to save democracy in the United States.)

Democracy, which is a pragmatic compromise between the longing for freedom and the urge to subjugate, is incomplete in its concentration on political rights without enough attention placed upon economic or social rights. At the heart of radical myth is the claim there are no neutrals in the great struggle to eliminate tyranny and poverty (or to maintain them) but in real life most people prefer to be neutral. They would rather work to improve their lot within a familiar structure than risk the imponderables of a new one. As the Longview Daily News put it recently, garbage disposal, safe drinking water, radioactive wastes, ground-water contamination, sewage problems and toxic wastes are more on people's minds than overthrowing the government. It is not so much poverty, inequality or repression that bring out public clamor for change but more usually the fear of losing comforts already attained.

Underneath the plethora of serious problems battering the nation is the most important of all: the growing inequality of class in a society that smugly and blindly claims to be classless. The nation's stagnating productivity is the major cause of the economic decline that has backlashed in domestic xenophobia against the poor and racial minorities who are both economically and politically crippled by the downturn and who are expected to pay for the deficit caused by the irresponsible avarice of those who manage the economy. In the meantime the working class is reduced to what might be considered post-industrial serfdom — as jobs disappear welfare and unemployment insurance is ripped away from the laid-off workers, and those who do work are increasingly denied living wages or union protection.

George Bush reflects the post-industrial move toward becoming the world's administrative center. Intensive technological production is giving way to administrative and social services to international industries and trade. Highly skilled workers who once commanded large salaries are rotting in unemployment, welfare or lowpaying unskilled jobs and are among the increasingly homeless. Their skills are obsolete, their knowledge and experience of lessening value in a society increasingly preoccupied with relatively unskilled clerical and service work. Unions are broken because the plutocrats are aware that profit margins in a service economy demand a low-wage workforce with few of the medical or retirement benefits that were hardwon by unions in the smokestack industries. Both the value of work and the worker has eroded.

As the importance of wealth, no matter how acquired, assumes greater influence, the social inequities between the wealthy and the less wealthy are accentuated. Usually, except under remarkable circumstances the disadvantaged seek protection and become clients of the wealthy and place themselves under their authority, surrendering in the process their personal and political liberties along with their economic rights. At the present time the wealthiest ten percent of the population owns sixty-five percent of the nation's net worth while the bottom half has only a mere four percent. In the meantime legalized deceptions allow wealthy individuals and the richest corporations to escape with little or no tax payments while the middle class and the poor pay punitive taxes to make up the deficit. The rich keep power by purchasing candidates and elections and by voting. The poor drop out but they do not disappear. They lead ruined lives, increasingly deprived and violent, and their hopeless depravity requires more police and prisons.

It is time for a revolution. The nation's economic structure needs massive and real change to transfer money and power to the dispossessed millions of citizens. The large and growing underclass must be organized to capture power instead of subsisting on charity or dying from neglect. It is time to realize that the heart of our liberty is disappearing in the despair of the deprived and disenfranchised. Jesse Jackson proved that minorities have little chance in the existing status quo,



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yet the potential of real power lies within these disillusioned masses. They can affect a revolution as inspiring and sweeping as the original revolt against Mother England, and they do not have to go armed into the bush or mountains.

This revolution is underwritten in the fundamentals of the nation itself, which are much more binding than the right to remove emporers in old China. This revolution is within the law, it is supported by the law, in essence at least though seldom in practice; and the law not only provides its mechanics, the law in a sense depends on popular uprisings to maintain its legitimacy.

It is time to continue what Jesse Jackson intuitively understands to be the only practical method short of civil war to wrest power from the adherents of plutocracy and preserve our failing democracy. We must open up the system to the other half of America by bringing them back into it through registering them for the vote and organizing them into a third political party as the vehicle for revolution.

It might seem early to think about the next elections but this month we start a Presidency that like its predecessor represents the worst of our system. Learning from 1988 can cut two ways — adopt the low-blow strategy of meanness or go for the other lesson; that a vast, discontented mass has been cheated of its heritage and wishes it be returned. There are more grassroots organizations than at any time in the nation's history, all waiting for a real voice to coalesce their concerns, issues and visions, but only the wealthy or those who serve them can afford to campaign for national public office, and in most cases, for state or local office. Yet the recent example in Oregon of a congressional candidate who rang doorbells instead of advertising and lost by hardly more than ten votes to a PAC-backed incumbent might inspire some reappraisals about how to conduct a campaign not to mention form a third party. While the trend seems to favor high-pressure political professionals backed by large amounts of money who increasingly fragment the electorate, they are vulnerable to the populism of grassroots organizing and campaigning.

Another sector of discontent was revealed in 1988 when liberal and leftist Democrats refuted the party's chosen candidates, and disaffected, made much noise about forming a third party. Traditionally the party of working people and minorities, the Democrats' mainline managers have moved it to the right but they have left behind a large number of bitter party members who are turning against it.



The word revolution causes tremors through the political culture (except when it is used huckster some new commercial product). It was through revolution that the nation came into being — actually a painful splitting off of a colony from its mother government. The reason was an angry response to the same kind of repressive impotence that is present today. Change disrupts and the changes necessary to redistribute the power and control of the nation's wealth to a majority of the people will be dramatic and unsettling. There will not be an instant transfer of power nor will it ever be complete. America has seldom been kind or generous to its minorities and poor. Each time an outcast population struggles for equality the powerful and others who hate or fear diversity or do not wish to share wealth or power attempt to squash the individuals and movements responsible, usually in the names of law and order and/or national security. Yet forcing the poor and minorities to remain in poverty and despair is ultimately calamitous to the nation. The real best and brightest are kept out and all of us in the long run suffer for it.

There are rewards to adversity suffered in service to a cause, primarily an almost exalted sense of purpose. Win or lose, that feeling is itself an important victory over mulish suffering under repression. Initially, and in the long term despite the current racial backlash, the civil rights movement was almost joyous in its determined and spirited assault for racial and cultural equality. But proud and glorious as it was, the celebrated struggle toward civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s was only an early stage, its victories only temporary in an interminable war. White supremacists rise to define in their extremity the subtle, never completely disguised racism that shunts aside if it cannot shut out the participatory and economic equality of racial minorities.

The history of an age is not about solutions to problems but of the struggle between several possible solutions and of the manner in which seekers for certain solutions are deflected by others working for other solutions. Capitalism, communism, fascism, any and all isms, are constantly forming and reforming, overlapping and separating, and inherent within all of them are the human factors of power, avarice, violence and asininity. No system is foolproof, and like every other organism each moves toward decay. The farther in time a form of rule or ideology moves from its founders the less recognizable its foundations. Murray Kempton once wrote that the bearers of political myth of every era seem to carry in their hands the axe and the spade to execute and enter the myth of every previous era.

Human beings cannot escape history is the Marxian idea; but human beings make their own history. Freedom and equality, like love, begin at home.

— MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER

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