

# TO ALL THE PEOPLE

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 10% of the population owns or controls at least 70% of the nation's net worth while the bottom half has only a mere 4%. In the meantime legalized deceptions allow wealthy individuals and the richest corporations to escape with little or no tax payments (and are as well reimbursed for taxes they did not pay) 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 don't 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 political/ 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. Minorities have little chance in the existing status quo, 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 don't have to go armed into the bush or mountains or build bombs in tenement basements.

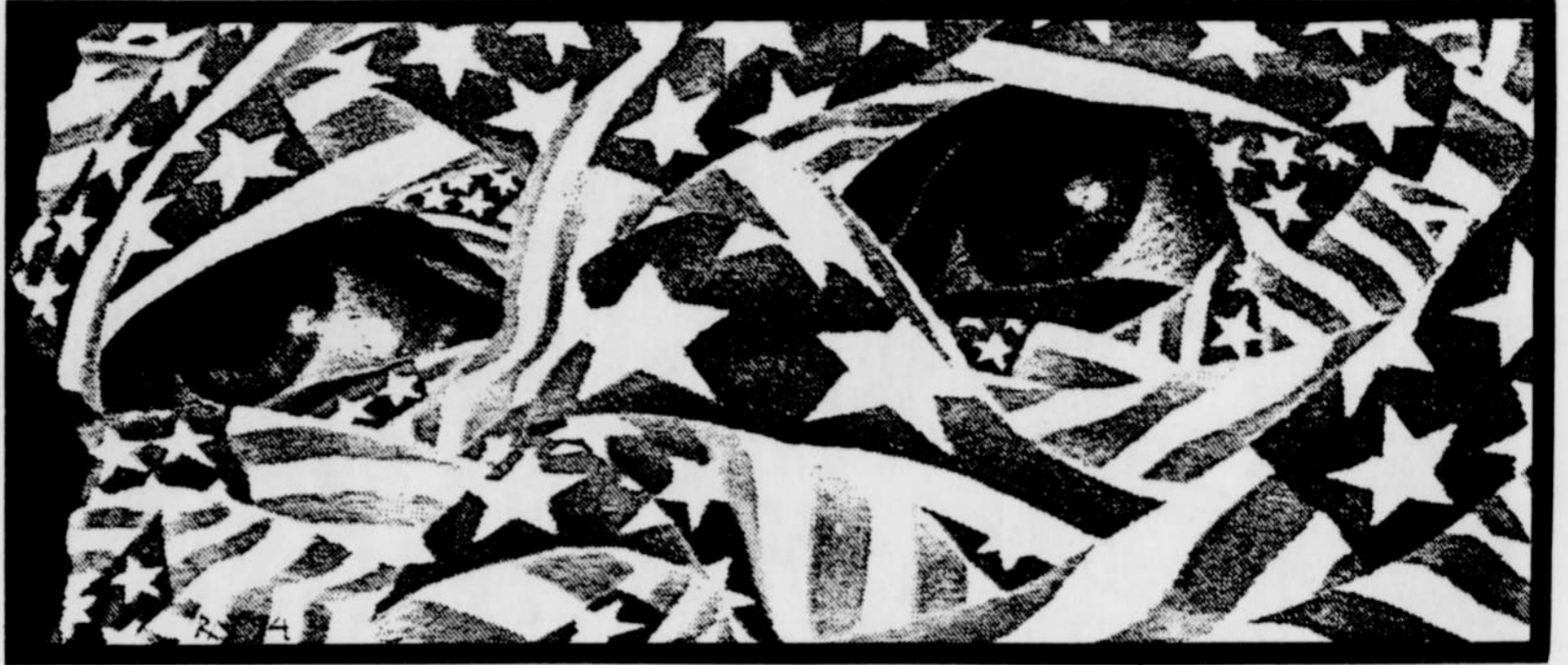
This revolution is underwritten in the fundamentals of the nation itself, which are more binding than the right to remove emperors in old China. This revolution is within the law, it is supported by the law, in essence at least though seldom in practice and despite the mockery that has been made of it by the wealthy who purchase it at whim; and the law not only provides its mechanics, the law in a sense depends on popular uprisings to maintain its legitimacy.

The imperative to uphold and reinvigorate the only practical method short of civil war to wrest power from the adherents of plutocracy and preserve our failing democracy is critical. We must reopen the system to the other half of America by registering them for the vote and organizing them into a politically independent party as the vehicle for revolution.

It might seem early to think about next year's election but the two parties are already staking out their ground. Learning from previous elections can cut two ways — adopt the low-blow strategies 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. Yet all politics is local; while the trend seems to favor high-pressure political professionals backed by large amounts of money who increasingly fragment the electorate with nasty advertising and PAC-backed candidates bought and sold, they are vulnerable to the populism of grassroots organizing and campaigning that must be organized at the community level in every community in the USA.

Another sector of discontent revealed in the last few elections are liberal/centrist Republicans who distrust the right-wing tilt of the party and of liberal and leftist Democrats who are disaffected that their party has abandoned them and followed the GOP topdogs to the right. Traditionally the party of working people and minorities, the Democrats' mainline managers have moved it to the right and left behind a large number of bitter party members who are turning against it.

With only two parties through which to realize their ambitions mainstream politicians show little interest in responding to minority interests or, in fact, to registering into the parties the millions of blacks, Hispanics or Caucasian poor who seldom participate in political activity. Although their involvement would



RAY BARTKUS

swell party ranks, it would also broaden the base of each party and threaten the *status quo*. Entrenched incumbents count on fewer people voting to maintain power and on ever larger contributions from wealthy and corporate sponsors who use their money to turn campaigns into public trials of fear and loathing.

On average, less than 50% of eligible voters in this country vote (the ominous consequence of such low turnout in 2000 is an unelected President who has literally usurped power). The nonvoters are generally economically handicapped and suffer most from inequities and corruption. Disgust and powerlessness, not apathy, alienates citizens from the polls and are a major source of a great public discontent expressed in the movement to limit terms of political office at all levels, a sign that even those who do vote are discouraged and fed up.

That discontent might be tapped more pertinently by concentrating on registering to vote the many millions who have either dropped out of the political process or have never been given the chance to be involved in it. If these millions were to rise from their bitter cynicism and lethargy and use nothing more than their constitutional right to register and vote they could begin a revolution as sweeping in its effects and change as the original revolt against English rule, which was as corrupt and shortsighted as the current American government. This revolution is underwritten in the nation's basic principles and is more binding than the ancient right to remove emperors in old China or revolt against kings in medieval Europe. This revolution is within the law, it is supported by the law, in design if seldom in practice; and the law not only provides its mechanics, the law in a vital sense depends upon electoral uprisings to maintain its legitimacy.

The word *revolution* causes tremors through the political culture (except when it is used to huckster a 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.

We have allowed the vote to be trivialized and made much less than its real potency. Money has been substituted — the cash candidates receive supersedes the vote (and insures their continuance in power), which is itself a commodity to be purchased. Paradoxically, almost as direct cause and effect, fewer and fewer Americans vote which ultimately cheapens the vote as well as makes it cheaper. (In a sense it is cheaper to

purchase apathy than to buy votes — corrupting politicians acts as a disillusioning factor that causes voters to drop out of the electoral process, eliminating the need to buy them out.)

The creation of a new political party or a spawn of parties might have disruptive effects, a worst case scenario being a civil war such as occurred when the Republicans replaced the moribund Whig Party and happened in Russia's 'New Republics' whose multiple births ripped apart the Soviet womb. The risks here at home are tremendous, yet the American political apparatus needs real change which is not being provided by an antiquated two party system that represents only a privileged minority.

It has generally been common knowledge that Big Business corrupts politicians in order to grasp the resources and process of government for its own ends; that Big Business combines and illegally conspires to wipe out competition; that industries establish monopolies to control supply, service, quality, price; yet the great majority of the people only mildly condemn these practices, considering them manifestations of the great American genius for capitalism that made America "number one," and for all the gross inequities these practices have made people seem somewhat perversely proud.

The ambivalence of the USA, as well as most other societies, is that it preaches one ideology but actually practices various others, no few at odds with the official polity.

It is a sad fact that many people in this country would like to see it become a complete police state. It is even more unfortunate that the greater population would accommodate itself to one, if reluctantly. A great public pride among the bulk of our citizenry is that they are "law abiding" — hardly questioning whom or for what reasons those laws generated from.

The Bushies are instructive in that they are showing us the weaknesses of democracy. We are being confronted with the paradoxes of freedom and power. The most persistent political question is the accommodation of liberty to order, which has vexed American civilization since its beginning.

The nature of authority demands that no one grow up. Governments encourage an immature citizenry which must be told what to do and whose only freedom is the freedom to obey.

Freedom implies a mature citizenry. To be free and remain that way is a large responsibility and many people don't want it. Freedom is an abstract. We are never far from fear or the possibility of death or injury. We must work to feed, clothe and shelter ourselves and our families, and always there is the dread that it will all be taken away. Freedom insists upon the value of the individual but the ever increasing complexity of our society is constructed upon aggregates and masses and makes less valuable the usefulness and contributions of each of us. Our thinking and self-worth are negatively affected; an individual and ultimately aggregate sense of personal and political helplessness sets in.

We are still emerging from the half century Cold War with the Soviet Union and the chaos and fissures resulting from the collapse of communism are taking off in at least one extreme direction, the growth of an overweeningly ambitious capitalism exemplified by the Bush administration which is as reckless, arrogant and corrupt as the old robber barons that rose in the North after the Civil War and created the "Gilded Age" of the late 19th century.

It might be useful to think of the Bush administration as a "criminal conspiracy to take over and use the federal government for their own conspiratorial purposes," as Clarence Darrow once said of a group of railroad CEOs that implanted stooges into the U.S. Attorney General's office to make and enforce laws (such as no strike orders) for their benefit and profit.

"From top to bottom the whole system is a fraud and all of us know it, laborers and capitalists alike, and all of us are consenting parties to it," Henry Adams wrote.

The essential issue is whether we are going to uphold what our ancestors started or if we are going to undo two and a half centuries of hardwon and often bloody struggles for liberty and give it all away to a small clique of frantically ambitious imperialists who manipulate our history as well as our passions and fears for their own aggrandizement. The paradox is that our Bill of Rights are not for us alone, nor is the manifest destiny our leaders wish to export in a rather twisted and malevolent form.

Perhaps the seminal question of American democracy at the beginning of the 21st century is this: Should anyone be arrested or quarantined for speaking, writing or for some other expression of opinion about democracy? If the answer is yes, obviously democracy has deteriorated to a point where there can be no discussion. If the answer is no, a more troubling prospect yet exists that the 'no' answer is not a guarantee that democracy remains in a recognizable form.

And what is freedom? The answer has appeared in this space before. It is the right to not be recognized by gender, race or class but by the simple fact of a person's existence. It is the right to be counted on and respected for personal and independent expression of belief and opinion. It is the right to be the only person on the planet who believes in something no one else does.

## SONS & DAUGHTERS OF LIBERTY

"I have blamed the German people for Hitler and the Second World War until now. I didn't realize how helpless they could be to stop Hitler until Bush became President."

~JOSEPHINE McCUSKER (AGE 90)

The USA Patriot Act represents nothing less than an arrogant attempt to take over the U.S. government by a very ambitious cabal who wish supreme power domestically and globally.

To do this they intend to abrogate the very Constitution and Bill of Rights that are the foundation of this nation's democracy and which gave them the power to be the threat they are.

They are the very people our ancestors warned us about when they conceived the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and made the people supreme rather than the government.

There can be no better way to commemorate the meaning of July 4th, our celebration of liberty and independence, than by refusing to acquiesce to the treachery against democracy the so-called Patriot Act represents.

Our ancestors had the courage to create this nation. It is up to its citizens to preserve it. Throughout the country nearly 150 cities and counties have acted to do just that, successfully petitioning their local governments to defy the harshly undemocratic implications of the Patriot Act. Unfortunately other cities have rejected their citizens' call to oppose the current attempt to annul the Bill of Rights — Astoria is among them.

By what might charitably be called a flagrant act of legerdemain, the Astoria City Council trivialized the concerns of at least 400 of its local citizens who beseeched the council to certify the Patriot Act as unconstitutional. Instead the Council crafted its own proposal to defer the local Bill of Rights Committee to Oregon's federal representatives, a shabby patronizing gesture at the very least, certainly a craven method of ducking a fundamental issue at the very core of the rights and liberties

guaranteed by the Constitution as well as a condescending display of disrespect for their constituents.

The cop-out among the council was that as elected officials they had "sworn an oath to the Constitution" and therefore could not vote in favor of the resolution which called upon city staff to refuse cooperation with federal application of the Patriot Act within city boundaries. The irony is that if they really had respect for their oath they would have stood up for the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, says Lee Miller who attended the council meeting June 23.

"If you list the grievances our ancestors had against the British crown, you will see that the Patriot Act enables our government to do those things on that list," Miller says. "Our last refuge is local government which affects 90% of our lives. Where do we go from there — violence and revolution? I would prefer my revolutions to be peaceful but what are the alternatives?"

One Councilman suggested that the passionate hostility to the Patriot Act by the assemblage in the council chambers was based on fear. He was right — aside from the council's own dread it might actually have to do something, the real fear among the 200 persons at the meeting was that they are going to lose what is left of our democracy without having any meaningful opportunity to defend their basic Constitutional rights. After all, the Patriot Act purports to amend the Constitution without having gone through the amending process prescribed by the Constitution, and also obstructs the customary method of revision or repeal acted against it.

The Astoria City Council will not get off as easy as it might hope. The Bill of Rights Committee intends to return with the resolution, perhaps modified to address some of the criticisms by the council, but it will definitely be on the docket again soon. And the council chambers will once again be packed to overflowing.

~MICHAEL McCUSKER  
(with thanks to LEE MILLER)