

# NORTH COAST



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*'In a dark time the eye begins to see'*

~THEODORE ROETHKE

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# WHOSE DEMOCRACY IS IT?

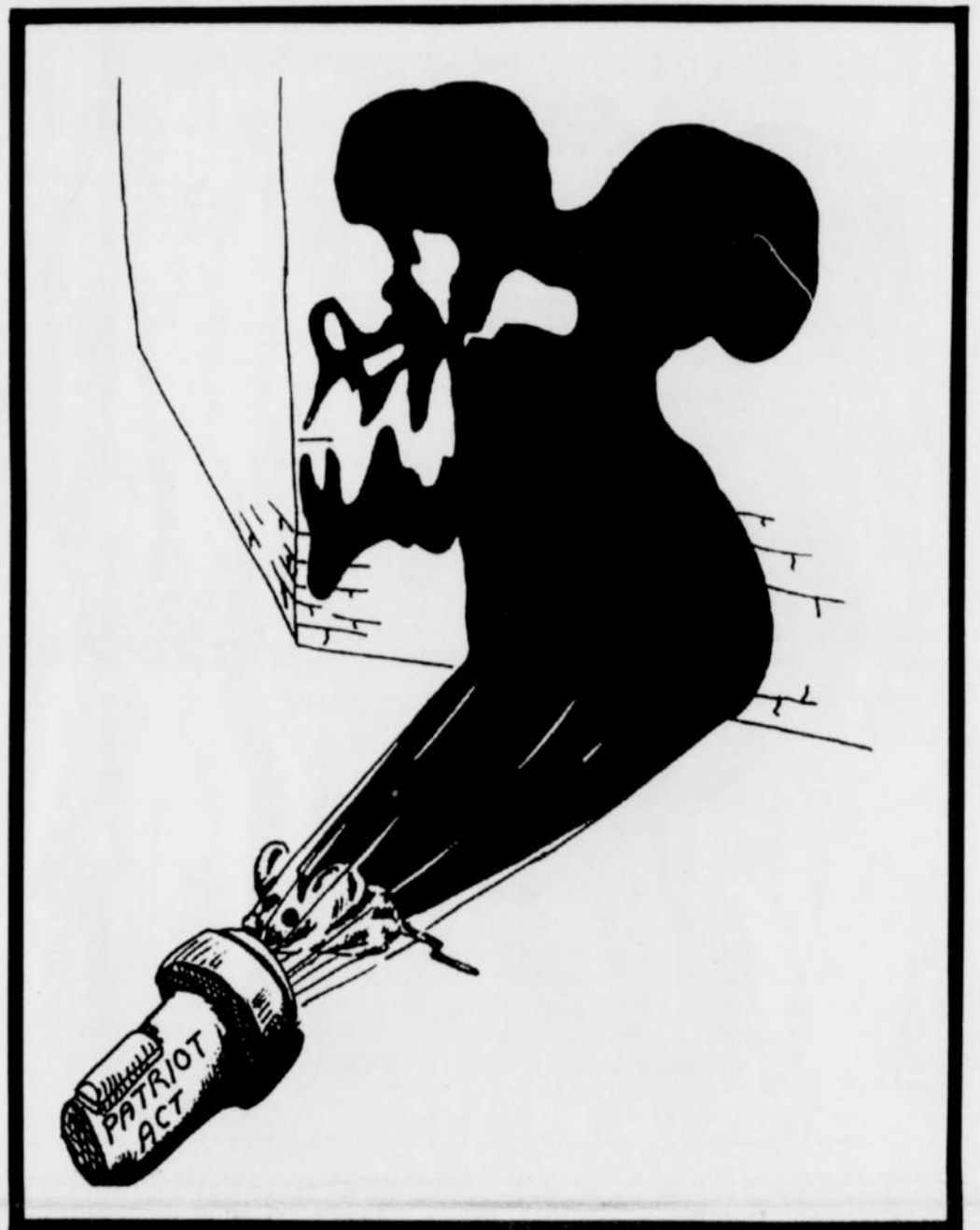
BY MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER

*"The terrible truth emerged that religion, art, scholarship and politics only disguised conflicts worse than those of animals."*

~PETER VANISTART

*"Democracy might simply be a labyrinth of apparent choice leading to a dead end."*

~JOHN BURDETT



DALE FLOWERS (SEE PAGE 10)

Very few of humanity's billions will ever be remembered for very long or be recorded for more than village histories, and the names who momentarily preoccupy our age will as surely vanish. Of our rapidly fluid era perhaps only Hitler or Gandhi might remain for the future, perhaps as icons of its darkness and light.

Only recently have women's claims to history been taken seriously and in Western society it is still difficult to entertain any other than a Caucasian cosmology. The epic human struggle is usually portrayed as East against West; of Yellow Peril against White is Right; of Crescent against Cross; and for half a century of Communism against BankAmeriCard. The only real significance of the eternal conflicts is the epic flow of blood, the slaughter of millions at each turn of history's pages for reasons as brief as their lives. The names of the multitudes are lost, only their numbers are marked, aggregates of immense folly and depravity.

History's dark glare shines now upon a struggle for worldly empire by a single superpower that claims an inherent right to dominate the planet because it has right on its side. The current President who piously proclaims other nations, religions and peoples as evil sees no evil in his own dominion or among his friends, sermonizing about freedom and human rights to the exasperation of most of the world.

The Bush administration has in fact been among the most culturally and politically repressive in the short history of the American republic. A few white men of wealth have made an intolerable grab for power and ordination of a country club apartheid that has severely eroded much of the basic fiber of democracy. They have looted the public treasury of billions while increasing poverty, joblessness as well as legal and political savagery, and their shortsighted avarice has burdened generations with a crippling debt that will further limit options and freedoms for millions of yet unborn citizens.

In the meantime the Russian people who were long our opponents for world supremacy are slowly emerging from under a long history of oppression toward political freedoms tortuously struggled for in the West for centuries. At the very moment the Russian people start to throw off the heavy yoke of their history the Western democracies seem in contrast to fritter away their hardwon freedoms, perhaps because our liberty has so long been taken for granted that we are unaware of what life is without it and therefore cannot imagine we could ever lose it, especially by our own indifference and indolence. Yet within our society are groups and individuals (and arguably an entire gender) who have seldom been accorded the freedoms or opportunities the President boasts about. We don't have to look at Russia to witness oppression nor should we hold the Russian people in contempt for seeming to wait so long before tasting the first wines of freedom. Perhaps as they struggle through the long process toward freedom we will at some point meet them halfway in our unfortunate trajectory of democratic decline.

The current political climate in the United States is one of incendiary reversion, which is reflected by political parties that attempt to placate extreme rightwing ideologues who manipulate the democratic process to ultimately destroy it. The party in power apes the reactionary agenda so far as to echo its clarion call for a religious war upon anyone or anything that is different or opposes a grim and vengeful vision of apocalyptic govern-

ance that excludes diversity, intelligence and imagination, and which blames the nation's problems on such interesting and rather progressive people as feminists, gays and lesbians, blacks, Hispanics and recently arrived third world immigrants — in particular Muslims — who hope for the future rather than cling to noxious images of the past.

The proto-fascists (or "neo-cons") who are determined to wrest power in the United States vent with words (though violent and extra-legal exceptions are common) and utilize old leftist/liberal tactics of popular initiatives to promote laws that deny anyone disagreeable or threatening to them any rights as citizens, and though common sense briefly prevails over their vindictive ambitions, they will not quit in their attempts to subvert the remains of our wracked democracy. They intend that those who have never enjoyed the fruits of democracy shall never reach its tree, and though it might be argued that these reactionary ideas are built on fear, the fear they inculcate should not be dismissed. Terror begets terror.

The United States is perilously close to losing its most basic fundamental, one which underlies and sustains free thought and open debate, the public agreement to disagree.

We are losing our civility, replacing it with intolerance, hysteria and threatened fratricide. It seems that we are more fractious and divisive than since the beginning of the first American Civil War. Our argument is still the same; race and gender, framed now in terms of wealth. Rich against poor, white male CEOs versus ghetto blacks, working men and women and single mothers.

## CORPORATOCRACY

When corporations in large measure control our political agenda, and indeed the political process, true democracy and life affirming issues will rank low on the national priority list.

A corporate dominated landscape will produce inequality, injustice, corruption, abuse of the body politic, abuse of our environment, exploitation of resources and degradation of life support systems.

An informed observer need not look far to notice the above claims to be true. Reining in corporate influence upon governance is a daunting, if not impossible task. Creating a true and living democracy is probably an even larger task. If it can be done at all, it will come from public activism.

~RICHARD JOHNSON

Richard Johnson lives in Astoria

The real issue is the disparity of wealth, which complicates and corrupts every other issue. The religious rightwing is determined to begin a second civil war, but their obsessive conservatism is fueled by the wealthy who support from the shadows every attack against libertarian leftist ideas and persons.

It is the wealthy, whose affluence is to a large degree based on public money paid by the poor and middle class they incessantly impoverish, who are the real revolutionaries because they are the source of the dissolution of the society that indulges their insatiable and arrogant avarice.

Politicians who are supposed to be representatives of the people are just political real estate, for rent or lease. The plutocrats getting richer on the upward flow of money due to continual tax breaks and government contracts divert the world's wealth to offshore bank accounts and like old Romans exploit the New World Order that rises on the ruins of Soviet communism. They are the world's real rulers now. They have divided nations into corporate colonies, buying and selling public governments for private capital like Wall Street stocks. Their megacorporations act toward each other as irresponsibly aggressive and avariciously jealous as nations used to do.

During the Cold War with Russia capitalism was espoused as indistinguishable from democracy but since the collapse of communism the ancient antipathy of class has accelerated until the only real political parties in the country are the Rich Party and the Poor Party; the New World Order the nation's plutocrats are currently designing in the name of democracy is a direct schism between the affluent and the impoverished domestically and globally.

So whose democracy is it?

A week long national radio forum of public stations will attempt to answer that question in November. A collaboration between NPR, PRI, Pacifica and local independent stations such as Astoria's KMUN-FM and Portland's KBOO, a variety of programs will be devoted November 3-6 to addressing this essential and fundamental liberty vs. vassalage quarrel.

Bernard Sanders, Vermont's lone member of the U.S. House of Representatives, an independent and a socialist, has an answer. "If democracy is going to survive in this country, tens of millions of poor and working people are going to have to see the connection between their economic condition and the political process," he writes. "They must vote not for the lesser of two evils, but for jobs, income, health care and the dignity to which they, as human beings, are entitled. Only when that occurs will American democracy become revitalized."

The Poor Party must be organized to reenfranchise the millions who generally are left out of the democratic process. Just getting them to vote would be a real revolution.

In other words, the only way to save democracy is with more democracy, and by keeping a balance between conflicting factions to allow none of them to attain such power as to be capable of suppressing or persecuting the rest.

Stay tuned.

For more information about "Whose Democracy Is It?" call KMUN at 325-0010 or drop by the station at 1445 Exchange Street, Astoria.