

Asia and other parts of what until recently was regarded as the Third World.

The Democratic Party leadership chased its fleeing whites into the conservative vice of the Republicans and left behind the mass majority of its rank and file. As a result the two parties appear to converge into a single interest group with a symbiotic sameness and respond to an ever narrower affluent and conservative constituency. The real question is not about a third party but creating a truly second party.

A kinder assessment of the Democratic Party might be that it is moribund, that it must acknowledge it has failed as an alternative to the GOP since Nixon transfigured southern Democrats into Republicans. The response of Democrats has been to imitate the Republicans, which characterized the Clinton years. The Democrats, like the Whigs of the 1850s (who reformed into the Republican Party), are a dying party — yet hopes that a vigorous new party will reborn is exceedingly dismal.

The degeneration of the Democratic Party leaves a black hole at the center of American politics. The Party's own center has fallen out, deserted to the Republican Superparty, leaving disenfranchised minorities clinging to a disintegrated corona. Perhaps its ruins should be abandoned, the surviving fragments reformed into a multitude of parties that might at least reflect the disparate new majorities that have moved into the American electorate but so far have not gained real or even representative power.

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.

Indeed, we must have international political parties if we are to challenge a global economy dominated by amalgamated megacorporations which are fundamentally interlocking commercial empires that command vast wealth, capacity and political influence. Parochial politics are inadequate to the global power structures that are forming beyond the shores of the USA yet are dominated by its economic and military power. In a world community, grassroots political parties as well as labor unions, medical/health and environmental organizations must think and act globally for the globalization of political power, in particular for the representation of the vast and rapidly expanding global underclass being created by capitalization and consolidation of corporations.

The paradox is that the USA simultaneously acts worldwide as the New Rome, intruding incessantly into global political, economic, and military affairs while arrogantly (and belligerently) rejecting global influence in its own internal affairs. One opinion originating in Europe but perhaps held all over the world is that American Presidential elections in particular should be a worldwide suffrage.

Republican ads are once again calling their Democrat opponents traitors, a vile form of campaigning. The people who have hijacked the Republican Party the past six years have seized the low ground and intend to keep it, accusing anyone who opposes them as betraying the country. If indeed the word traitor is to be used, it would more likely be on target to accuse those who are dismantling the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, and desecrating the culture of democracy through deceit and fear, forcing their dictatorial agenda over the dead bodies of American soldiers and Afghani and Iraqi civilians.

It should seem odd the political party that is determinedly rolling back democracy and contemptuously overruling the Constitution in its double-goal of dictatorializing the Presidency and instituting one-party rule, is amassing majority votes on computer voting machines that are not only contracted by pro-Republican corporations, but do not allow verification because of so-called "proprietary" concerns, and have no paper backup. This begs the question: how many more shams of elections do Americans have to endure before they demand the legitimacy of their votes, or will they, as the GOP must certainly desire, give up and stop voting?

There is strong evidence that the country is indeed conservative, slow to change and in constant reaction to it. The problem is that blacks and the poor (which includes all other racial minorities in the U.S. as well as a significant number of women) are shoved out by the rightward politicians and party hacks and they drop away, either too disillusioned or too angry to register a vote (or are cheated of their votes when they do vote). So a radically neoconservative minority rules in its claim to be the majority.

Democrats have allowed themselves to be bullied and weaseled every time the Constitution is assaulted by being accused of being "soft on terrorism," and "coddling terrorists" when they resist, and instead of defending the fundamentals of American democracy they too often submit to the cynical hypocrisy that endeavors to neuter them.

A regime that makes war on the basis of lies, that terror bombs civilians and tortures captives is capable of nearly anything, even subverting the rights and liberties of its own people from whom it conceals information, deceives incessantly, and spies upon with extra-legal powers it demands for itself.

The sinister paradox about the upcoming election is that Republicans are desperate to win and probably must attempt to steal it to prevent investigations into their stealing the previous elections — as well as other chicaneries such as virtually purging the Constitution, deceiving the nation into invading another nation, secretly subverting the very governmental organization they have sworn to uphold. Their premise that one political party can take complete power and shut out every other political option in the belief that only one ideology is right is the most dangerous aspect of current politics in the United States.

Our ancestors who wrote the Constitution following their revolution two centuries ago were personally aware that governments swallow the rights of their citizens and that the natural inclination of authority is to concentrate and perpetuate its power by any means. Reflexively, government subverts the rights of all but its ruling classes, even if the system originated to provide rights and liberties to the governed. The intent of the Constitution simply makes it more difficult for the leaders of government to make the rest of us so completely their subjects.

The natural tendency of government is to rule in its own interest, usually to the detriment of the people who live under its control. Our government is like every other in that it is opposed to the freedom of its subjects and wishes for them to serve and obey. The men (and women) who founded this government recognized this aspiration of government and more remarkably restrained their own ambitions by setting up a form of government that had as its primary authority the subjects it governed. The contradiction has worked imperfectly, but it has worked for the most part. Even at present, with people in power who want it



TERRY LABAN

all, the system's checks frustrate them. It is the responsibility of the people to always contain the power of their government, which without that restraint will continue to take power away from the people. The government has taken much power for itself these past two centuries and 30; some of it for the betterment of the people, such as civil rights laws; but much of it against the people, such as the rule of fear, secrecy and doubt that has permeated our society from the beginning.

The precept of government is to rule, and it is a parasite. It must by the very nature of implied authority feed upon and subtract the political freedoms and rights of those it rules. The Bush administration has been the most persistently virulent in its contempt for political and religious freedom and in withholding information to weaken the participation of the nation's population in decisions that affect everyone. It has denied political respect or support to any ideas in general that are not in agreement with its dangerously narrow and aggressive view of the world. It is also the most secretive administration in our history.

Censorship of opinion and expression did not begin with the administration of George W. Bush, nor will it end when Bush and his rat-pack cabal are gone and considered a dangerous episode in our history. This administration is the product of advertising, or adheres to its principles, that truth is not necessary, only the appearance of truth — or more pertinently, that a lie told often enough and by enough people is accepted as truth; the agreed upon fiction that masquerades as reality to distort and manipulate circumstances and people, and eventually history.

The assumption of political and personal freedom is that the average human being is intelligent and inspired by compassion and that most people will think and act reasonably most of the time. That belief is in general conflict with the assumption of government that the citizenry is unintelligent, primitive and brutal and must be shielded from its own prevaricating nature. The nature of authority demands that no one grow up. Governments encourage an immature citizenry that 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 do not 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 fear that it will 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 sense of self-worth are profoundly affected. An individual and ultimately aggregate sense of personal and political helplessness sets in.

Our current government perpetuates political and Constitutional paralysis. It attempts to make itself seemingly omnipotent to such a degree that any dissent to its policies, actions or decrees is treated as treachery, or at least as unpatriotic. If someone disagrees with our bellicose and insensitive President or tries to curb the power of the Pentagon, that person is treated as a terrorist; such is the noxious decline of our national dialogue. These policies are rapidly changing our nation into an autocracy. The renaissance of the military is especially ominous, not entirely for the threat of perpetual war or the increased possibility of nuclear holocaust but for the obliteration of civil law and the assumption of military rule which considers citizens only as utilitarian and economic objects of no personal worth, independence or democratic rights.

We are a democracy because it is necessary. The few basic rights and liberties we have inherited have been sought by the mass of humanity for millennia. Citizen sovereignty, independence and equitable justice do not come easily and

never stay very long without constant nurturing. Our freedoms are in essence our obligations as well — to preserve them for our descendants by not allowing the avaricious among us to get their hands on our political rights and liberties.

It is exactly that which our ancestors attempted to break away from, though of course some of them wanted only to substitute themselves as the local authority in the absence of the king's power.

The rule of law is a recognition that some of us will cheat, rob, murder and otherwise make life uncomfortable for the rest. A majority desires protection from the psychopathy of a malicious minority. For exactly the same purpose, to protect us from predatory or cruel government, political freedom has been the law of this nation. A government of the people is assumed to also be a government for the people. So it is entrusted to act in the people's behalf, to correct the excesses of despotic and unprincipled private interests, in contrast to the current administration's avowed principle of corporate rule and privilege. Bush is wrong when he says that a free government must be free from government. In his dismantling of government protections he has simply switched it from acting as a benefactor and protector of civil rights and liberties to its more ominous nature as military policeman.

Freedom and dominance are in direct conflict. To dominate outside an area of its authority a government must first begin subjugation within its rule in the Homeland, and any opinion or movement that challenges the views or purposes of those in power is generally isolated and suppressed.

The war in Iraq is an example of cities and communities all over America that are denied any measurable voice in decisions that directly affect them.

The "war on terror" sets up American citizens as possible targets and casualties even though we go about our daily lives hardly involved in a war except that we are as guilty and innocent, and as vulnerable, as the "collateral casualties" inflicted in our name with or without our consent or approval.

Periods of national crisis reveal the real impotency of average citizens who have very little input other than through petitioning as supplicants rather than as the true "deciders" — we are relegated to letters or e-mail to elected representatives whose interests are at the very least distracted by powerfully unselected elites who more often than not initiated the crises.

9/11 precipitated a crisis of democracy that might well be more momentous and prolonged than the so-called war on terrorism. Civil liberties are dramatically threatened and average citizens have little to say about it. Ordinary people are rendered impotent. Most citizens are at the bottom of the crisis and are affected every day by the consequences — social services are withdrawn as well as public health because tax money is being diverted toward war, and of course to the corporations of the military/industrial mafia that unabashedly profit from making war possible and continuous. The USA Patriot Act that was rapidly cobbled together in the wake of 9/11 with hardly a whimper in protest by Congress circumvents and erodes Constitutional rights and liberties that are essential to democracy.

The societal ceiling is cracking over our heads and it is up to us — common ordinary citizens who live in neighborhoods and communities who are ultimately responsible to prevent the sky from falling down around us. Individual voices are not nearly enough; they are lost, diluted, neglected — certainly diffused. Only through groups, associations and political parties is there any sense of personal influence, yet with each successive level even that is diluted and essentially marginalized to evaporation. A level to reflect the personal voice must be closer to home, a community voice.

Cities and communities are not simply parochial entities concerned only with schools, sewers, streets and strip malls. They are also integral parts of a political whole and represent the American citizen at home and work.

Cities and communities must be actively engaged in the critical and urgent national dialogue of terrorism, war and the dangerous abrogation of civil liberties in the name of national emergency. Every city and community certainly has a myriad of local issues and problems that demand attention and resolution, but they are secondary to the current assault upon the nation's fundamental freedoms and Constitutional rights by avaricious national leaders transgressing their sworn duty to uphold them. It is crucial that cities and small communities question and influence state and national policies that ultimately affect the lives, liberties and fortunes of their citizens.

As everybody knows, "All politics are local."

HOPE L. HARRIS

LICENSED
MASSAGE
THERAPIST

503/325-2523

