Peter Gelderloos
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to create greater flexibility and adaptation to local conditions, and to protect against state repression and infiltration.

10.

To envision one utopian model for the entire world would be unrealistic and culturally biased, not to mention authoritarian. Everyone should do their own research and come to their own conclusions about what lifestyle would be best for them. The minimum demand is that we should tolerate no system that enforces one "correct" model over many people, regardless of their willingness. History is full of (partially suppressed) examples of other forms of organization that we can use in determining what organization is best suited and most realistic to fulfilling our current needs.

Each community should decide matters of social and economic organization for itself, and join other communities in voluntary associations for fulfilling needs that cannot be met by one community alone. In the meantime, we all have much in common, and should fight together against the globally generalized system of exploitation and control. Only by destroying the system of oppression, in whatever form and name it takes, and ending the continuum, *can we clear the way for another struggle*: building societies that provide protection and subsistence *without* using coercion or creating new systems of oppression.

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members don't waste any effort on organizational maintenance, and can spend more time meeting local needs. However, since Food Not Bombs is largely a product of privileged, middle-class white activist circles, many chapters become stuck in a pattern of providing the token weekly free meal and taking the struggle against hunger no further. Most Food Not Bombs members are not personally acquainted with hunger, and it seems that at least some of them have the idea that by providing a service to poorer and oppressed people in the community, they will "radicalize" them, create alliances and trigger critical mass, and then everyone will rise up in revolution, in a vague and magical sort of way. If, instead of sub-consciously faulting the oppressed (whom they have been trained since birth to regard as ignorant) for not enlisting in the struggle against "militarism" and "capitalism," they decided to continuously up the ante in the struggle against hunger, beyond the one meal a week, they may perhaps find that there was no more effective way at fighting capitalism, and in the meantime alleviating the symptoms for those most hurt by capitalism, because capitalism simply cannot function unless hunger looms as an imminent threat to motivate people to slave away for another's gain.

People who fight against oppression continue to face many problems shortcomings in their methods. Obviously, we need to remain flexible and responsive to our specific situation; there is no twelve step program to revolution. But some mistakes are common enough that we can establish patterns, and avoid them. To be effective, an organization or movement needs to take several basic steps:

Challenging internalized oppressive and privileged behaviors, and acting inclusively, without kowtowing to mainstream (and ultimately elitist) opinions.

Identifying the fundamental nature of oppression within the system, and providing a radical criticism or set of goals.

Basing the struggle in less privileged, more oppressed segments of society, rather than trying to connect to a mainstream, middle-class setting.

Organizing in a localized, non-hierarchical, decentralized, autonomist manner, to promote equality and self-actualization within the group,

demonstrated a more resilient anti-authoritarian streak than its contemporaries, which now do little more than provide rubber stamps for the Democratic Party.

Recently, many activists fighting oppression do not affiliate themselves with a single organization but work to expose and alleviate oppression wherever it is felt the hardest. Often, privileged radicals wary of reformism are reluctant to work for any cause without clearly articulated, long-term, revolutionary goals, so they join more abstract organizations that are nationally or globally, rather than locally, oriented. However, poorer people and people of color do not have to go outside their own communities to find brutalities and depravations that need to be overcome. Accordingly, radicals from privileged groups will be segregated from radicals of groups targeted by oppression. Middle class, white male activists need to realize that reading programs, AIDS clinics, soup kitchens, homeless shelters, battered women shelters, copwatch programs and prisoner support groups, and other "first aid" programs can be revolutionary, and more importantly, they are necessary for the health and survival of oppressed communities.

Some national organizations, such as Food Not Bombs or Homes Not Jails, combine efforts to directly treat symptoms of oppression with a radical indictment of the power structures that cause these symptoms. Food Not Bombs serves free meals in public places, inviting awareness of problems like hunger and poverty, and questioning the causes of these problems. Homes Not Jails squats and fixes up abandoned, condemned, or vacant apartments, in violation of the "property rights" of the owners, to provide homeless families with a place to live. By using illegal direct action and civil disobedience, they illustrate how the legal system protects the property owners at the expense of the poor, and highlight the role of government and capitalism in creating and maintaining poverty. A noteworthy detail is that these groups are organized in a decentralized, non-hierarchical manner. Food Not Bombs, for instance, is more an idea than an institution. Anyone, anywhere, can start a Food Not Bombs chapter, without getting permission from the national headquarters (there is none) or paying membership dues. Accordingly, members at each chapter can adapt the Food Not Bombs model to local needs and conditions, and without any institutional politics or national conferences,

1.

We are told we live in the richest and most democratic country in the world. Our rights include freedom of speech and religion, and freedom to vote for our leaders. Our country possesses more wealth than any other — more wealth in fact than much of the rest of the world combined. On TV and in real life, we see Americans with huge houses, expensive cars, plenty of state-of-the-art gadgets, and memberships to golf courses or ski resorts.

But we all know that this is not the whole picture. It is more like an advertisement. Though our neighborhoods are segregated, rich from poor; white from black, latino, and Native American, few people are unaware that most Americans do not live like the people on televised sitcoms. People living in wealthy suburbs often encounter poverty in the cities where they work for various corporations and government bureaus. People living in impoverished areas are often forced to travel out to the suburbs to work serving coffee to rich, white people.

Whether the economy is doing "good" or "bad," millions of people are unemployed, and unable to sell themselves for money to buy the things they need. Many of the people who are employed work forty, sixty, eighty hours a week, in grueling, dangerous, unhealthy, demeaning jobs just to pay for a place to live, clothes to wear, food to eat, and medicine, for themselves and their family. Meanwhile, their bosses, whose jobs are easier and safer, make twice as much money, and the people who sit on the boards of the corporations do no work and make millions. People are turned away from hospitals even in emergencies, denied medical care because they cannot afford insurance, even while insurance companies make hundreds of millions of dollars, overcharging people and trying to weasel out of paying for medical procedures they deem "non-essential."

In this country of plenty, people sleep on the streets, dying in the winter cold or the summer heat, while landlords hold onto vacant units, waiting for the price to go up. And the police clearly have no problem with beating or jailing homeless people who squat in vacant apartments. Why does a large portion of the United States live in poverty, while others have more money than they could ever use?

Poverty is not our only problem. Every day, racist police beat or shoot people of color, and millions of people, especially blacks and latinos, are rotting in prison, subjected to extremely long sentences and horrible conditions for minor crimes that are often harmless. Women are discriminated against, and often face violence and rape. Lesbians, gays, queer and transgendered people also face exclusion, harassment, and violence. Children are treated like sub-humans, without any rights and forced to go to educational factories ("schools") where they are indoctrinated with many of the harmful myths of our society and taught to accept the problems of our world as "natural." Corporations are cutting down our forests, driving plants and animals to extinction, poisoning the soil, the rivers, the air, and poisoning people too, all in the interest of profit. Our government starts wars that many people oppose, and wins obedience from everyone else by using the media to tell lies that lead to thousands of deaths.

But more certain than our awareness of all these problems is our knowledge that *we live in a democracy*, and we can use our rights, and our powers as citizens to *make things right.*

2.

But what does it mean to live in a democracy? We are told that democracy is different from a "dictatorship" in that the citizens of a democracy take part in decision-making, whereas in a dictatorship all decisions are made by a ruler or small group of rulers. However, in democratic societies, most people are not members of the government, and they do not have direct control over the decisions that affect their lives, but still must abide by those decisions. The justifying rationalization is that advanced human societies cannot function without government, and therefore citizens enter into a "contract of the governed." They assent to follow the rules and honor the decisions of the government, and the government in turn is obligated to protect its citizens and uphold the common good.

Therefore, in a democracy, people who cannot become members of the government because of limited governmental positions can instead

their increasingly comfortable positions of power. Radical unionists who could not be bought out were jailed, or otherwise neutralized.

Another major weakness of most unions was their dismissal of race and gender issues that were inseparable from economic issues. By refusing to challenge racism, sexism, and xenophobia, and maintaining instead a privileged, narrowly economic critique of capitalism, labor unions became organizations for white men, losing the vital support of women garment workers and domestic workers, black sharecroppers, and immigrant factory workers. Their inability to criticize the white supremacist aspects of capitalism allowed the bosses to maintain power by dividing and disempowering the workers, scapegoating foreigners and emancipated blacks for their poverty.

It was in part the desire of the major labor unions to be respectable that led them to perpetuate the racist, sexist, elitist behaviours of the power structure they originally sought to defeat. Their positions of authority, and government negotiators, dangled the promise of power — of comfort, dignity, and respect — before the union leaders, who eventually forgot the causes of the social ills they protested, and instead relied on the gratification of being accepted by society (high society) to numb the symptoms. By disavowing compromise, using radical or militant tactics, or challenging the racial and gender status quo, they knew they would be ostracized by the government and villified by the media. So the labor unions endeavored to become respectable in the eyes of the mainstream, and because what is mainstream is determined by the media, this meant appealing to the white middle and upper classes. In doing so, the unions had to relinquish their greatest source of strength, the determination of the oppressed to win their freedom, which often manifests as a rage that is unseemly to those who have much to lose by malcontents rocking the boat.

Despite the historical failings of labor unions, as long as wage work is prevalent, across society and in the life of the individual, the relationship between worker and boss will be an important nexus for agitation. The Industrial Workers of the World, a union that seeks worker control of the means of production and the ultimate abolition of capitalism, has

9.

The phrase: "easier said than done" is a gross understatement. Perhaps the reason so many people continue to believe in the efficacy of petty reforms, in the face of overwhelmingly contradictory evidence, is because the enormous responsibility we face upon realizing that the problems of our society are fundamental, not superficial, seems impossible to fulfill. But we never know if something is possible until we succeed. In the meantime, our concern is to find the most effective strategies of resistance and organization.

Fortunately, the history of resistance is as long as the history of oppression, so we have many examples to learn from. To improve our own efforts at achieving revolution, we should examine how activists throughout history have been effective in confronting power and producing change and how they have been ineffective, while keeping aware of their specific context.

In U.S. history, the labor union holds a traditional place as a vehicle for revolutionary activity. In the early twentieth century, labor unions offered a radical critique of social inequalities, and gave the nation's wage slaves the promise for a better life. Labor unions became a powerful political force, gaining millions of members, organizing strikes and protests, and also creating defense committees when police began massacring striking workers. But though they succeeded in diminishing several of the brutalities which workers faced, the labor unions failed to fix the underlying social inequalities, and ultimately betrayed the workers. Nowadays, most labor unions are small-minded rackets with little real clout. One important factor in their failure was the hierarchical structure of most labor unions. Hierarchy developed so that elite groups could control larger populations. Accordingly, hierarchical organizations are easily hijacked by the governments they challenge. The unions were infiltrated and their leaders were co-opted. The union leadership easily confused the interests of their organization with the interests of the social struggle the unions had been created to serve. Since radical union activities were severely repressed, union leadership developed a more cooperative relationship with the politicians and the bosses to ensure the survival of their union, and to secure the continuation of

vote for their leaders, who are known as "representatives" because they must represent the interests of their constituents or they will not be reelected. Voting is thus the fundamental right within a democratic state, and the state can only be considered democratic if the majority of its citizens are afforded this right. The second most important right is that everyone must have the opportunity to be elected to a governmental position, to prevent the existence of a permanent or hereditary elite. The perceived impossibility of allowing everyone to participate equally in the functions of government is overcome by the mechanism of the vote, whereby citizens can *exercise their control over government but minimize their participation*, by choosing leaders who, being dependent on election, must "serve" those they "lead."

The elected representatives also vote on proposed decisions, with a majority vote deciding the issue at hand. The purpose of majoritarian decision-making, at least according to the mythologies of democratic societies, is that rule by the majority solves the earlier injustices of rule by an elite. On the other hand, majoritarian rule threatens the rights of minority populations, especially within pluralistic societies. To prevent mob rule, democratic societies also provide legal guarantees, or "rights," to that smallest of minorities, the individual. Thus, a minority group may frequently have to accept decisions it does not support, but at least the members of such a group will always enjoy a guaranteed set of rights, such as freedom of speech, religion, and property, to sustain their basic dignity and well-being. If anyone's rights are infringed upon, they have the additional right to file suit in a court of law and demand their rights be upheld.

To prevent government from becoming dictatorial, the different functions of government are separated, and structural balances are created to ensure that no branch of government accumulates a disproportionate share of power. In a democracy, a police force is needed to protect individual's rights, particularly the rights to life and property, and (in conjunction with the judicial branch) to punish those who do not respect the decisions of the majority (laws) as expressed by the legislative branch. To protect the sovereignty of the population, and to defend their property rights in foreign countries, a military is needed, though to prevent military dictatorship it is excluded from governmental decision-making

and enforcement (in articulating the liberal mythology, we must utter a few outright falsehoods, ignoring the many domestic breaches of *posse comitatus* throughout U.S. history, and the constant use of the military to enforce government policy outside our borders).

The final issue is one of economics. Many matters of importance reside not in the political sphere, but in the economic sphere. Accordingly, democratic states exist hand in hand with free-market economies. In a free market economy, everyone has the right (legally guaranteed by the government) to own property, to sell their labor, to buy and sell commodities, and to enjoy the profits of their labor and enterprises. Legally speaking, everyone has an *equal opportunity* to succeed, and wealth will therefore be distributed to those who earn it, rather than hoarded in the hands of an elite.

This, at least, is how democracy is said to work, almost exactly as such in the mass-produced textbooks school children are forced to read, and in occasionally more eloquent tautologies and clichés when regurgitated by the learned commentators of news media and academia. Anything beyond token analysis of how our democratic system actually works contradicts the explanations of liberal mythology.

3.

Of course, to many people, the democratic ideal is meaningless. American democracy in particular goes hand in hand with the "free market," which means that the rich, white politicians in Congress and the White House do not pass any law or take any action that would restrict the freedom of the rich, white men in corporate boardrooms and on Wall Street (the politicians of yesterday and tomorrow) to make billions of dollars exploiting their workers. And it is those workers who make up the majority of the population. They certainly don't have the opportunity to vote for their bosses or to collectively decide the policy of the company they enrich with their labor. If they did, they might vote to give themselves a living wage instead of giving the CEO another $100 million raise.

ourselves are self-reliance and abolition of the present social, political, and economic relationships.

We simply cannot keep waiting for other people to save us. It is our reliance on Big Brother that perpetuates the wrongs of the system. Like an unused muscle, our ability to take care of ourselves, make our own decisions, govern our relationships with others, create voluntary associations and build communities, solve our disputes, and above all trust ourselves, has atrophied, but we must hone these abilities to break free of the authoritarian domination that has ruled us for millennia.

Secondly, *we cannot continue to view equality — true equality — as an extreme measure.* It is the current system that is extreme, and we must destroy every vestige of it to break free and prevent it from evolving into a new disguised form. Government, in whatever form, is authoritarian. Similarly, the counterpart of democratic government — the "free-market" economic system, which never arose from or came in contact with the mythical "level playing field" liberal economists envision to justify their system, is another governing structure (relating to the means of production and consumption, rather than the political apparatus) that allows a certain amount of competition and participation that has the appearance of fairness and openness but in reality is designed to increase the efficiency of control over the means of production while retaining that control in the hands of a group that may be somewhat fluid in its membership but is still clearly an elite group. In this free-market system, a very few people control the means of production (the factories, the land, et cetera), making self-sufficiency impossible. To procure the necessities for survival, and the commodities for a culturally normal existence, everyone else must sell their activity for a wage. The only way to correct the situation is to take back what is stolen from us.

Production and decision-making need to be decentralized, and wealth and power must be shared at the level of the community from which they spring. State structures need to be dismantled, wealth and the means of production must be seized from the few who control them, prisons broken open, militaries destroyed. More intimate forms of oppression like patriarchy and white supremacy must be exposed and challenged wherever they persist.

Ask the protestors in Genoa, who were lined up against a wall and beaten until their blood and teeth decorated the concrete, what they think of a parliamentary system. Other progressives favour what they consider to be structural changes, such as Constitutional amendments, not realizing that power does not exist on paper. Perhaps these reformists believe that racial equality in the U.S. was achieved in 1868, with the passage of the 14th Amendment, or that the Civil Rights movement ended in 1964, with the Civil Rights Act. To correct their naïveté, they need only spend some time in a prison or jail, and research how much protection the 4th Amendment has afforded this country's drug prisoners.

In the few instances when the democratic process has "worked," the system as a whole demonstrates no hesitation in ignoring reform laws that contradict the interests of the powerful. Jimmy Carter, the most liberal president the U.S. has ever seen (but hardly a saint, if the experiences of the Cambodians, Indonesians, Haitians or others are to be considered), banned by executive order several Vietnam-era counter-intelligence programs that included torture and assassination. Thanks to a conscientious officer at the U.S. Army's School of the Americas, we know that the military simply ignored Carter's order, and continued to teach these tactics. How many similar instances remain secret?

In a society where power is so concentrated in the hands of a few, *power will defend itself.* Do we really believe that if we elected a "decent" president or Congress, all the self-perpetuating institutions of the elite would simply acquiesce, and surrender their wealth? In countries where the elected bodies of government ceased to represent the interests of the powerful, the military and their corporate backers (the coalition of the elite) conspired to overthrow the wayward portions of government (in Chile, Venezuela, Spain, Congo, et cetera). Are the corporations and militaries of Europe and North America somehow more pure? After all, it is the Pentagon (or Exxon) that has sponsored many of these elitist (often fascist or ultra-right nationalist) coups across the world.

The citizens of modern democracies are so paralyzed with an ingrained fear of autonomous, direct action — taking the initiative to do things ourselves and solve our own problems — that advocating revolutionary overthrow of the present order seems tantamount to advocating the apocalypse; however, the two essential actions we must take to free

Unless we belong to the richest 1% of the population with enough money to buy land, a factory, or some other means of production, and to hire less fortunate people to work for us and make us rich, our only real option is to sell a significant portion of our lives to work making somebody else rich. We are certainly free to choose, from a limited range of options relating to our economic class and education, which corporation to work for, but they are all very similar, because ultimately the boss holds power over the worker, and the corporations can exploit the workers for profit, but every practical way the workers have to win a little fairness from the corporations has been criminalized. Everything in this country has an owner, and everywhere we go, for everything we use, we have to pay rent. All the activities necessary to sustain life are taxed, so our survival is dependent on serving the wealthy people who have the money to pay us. That is what is meant by wage slavery. How absurd is it to talk about freedom and democracy to someone who was born in a ghetto, or someone who just immigrated to escape poverty or persecution, someone who never got the opportunity for a good education and works eighty hours a week in grueling, dangerous job with no dignity or respect just to afford payments on a cheap hovel and a meager diet?

And what does democracy mean to people of color, who face profiling, harassment, and violence from police, higher rates of poverty and bleaker opportunities for education and employment? Are they truly supposed to believe that the rich white politicians care about representing their interests? And society is so used to seeing women as second class human beings that problems like rape, harassment, discrimination on the job, and socially enforced ideals of beauty that lead to serious health problems, are not viewed as injustices relevant to our democracy so much as natural aspects of human existence. In reality, bosses and workers are not equal, rich people and poor people are not equal, white people and people of color are not equal, men and women are not equal, yet our expectations of democracy are so low that few people consider these "social problems" as being relevant to the affairs of our government. All we expect out of our democracy is the right to vote and the right for middle class white people to be able complain without being persecuted. Expecting anything more

is unrealistically idealistic, precisely because our government has rarely delivered more than those few token rights.

So, our ultimate experience with democracy is this: once every few years, we are given the opportunity to cast a vote for one of two rich, white, Christian males, each beholden to corporate interests, and we know our vote doesn't really matter, but if we do participate it is generally because we think one candidate won't sell us out as quickly as the other one. And the rest of the time, the fact that we live in a democracy doesn't really mean anything. We're allowed to criticize the politicians, but complaining doesn't seem to change the fact that the same mob is in power. And we are also free to complain about the most prominent facet of our lives, our jobs, but of course if the bosses hear us, they are free to fire us. Everyone knows we live in a democracy, but in the face of racism and economic inequality, few people can say how we are actually empowered under this system of government.

4.

It is easy, however, to dismiss these claims of powerlessness and recurring injustice by simply blaming the victims for being too lazy to drag themselves out of poverty, or to make the democratic process work for them, through petitioning, voting, letter-writing, and all the other readily available methods, to cure the alleged injustice. Of course, it would be more than a little ludicrous for the privileged, white pundits who guide the nation's opinions from their talk shows and opinion columns to blame people born in ghettos for not overcoming racism and poverty if they didn't have at least a few historical examples of how democracy can actually work to help people in need. But our history books are full of examples of oppressed groups of people winning their equality through the democratic process. Everybody knows the story of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights movement, and as any grade-schooler can tell you, this story has a happy ending, because black people won their rights. In the face of age-old prejudices, the democratic process prevailed. Or did it?

daily, too frequently to name every instance. Let these serve as just a few examples. The rest you'll have to research on your own.

Some liberals who want to believe that the violence of the U.S. government is only the result of corrupt police departments and not a fundamental and necessary part of the system often idealize other countries, particularly the social democracies of Europe, using their ignorance of authoritarian violence in those countries as evidence of the absence of such violence. With a little research, we find that the democratic governments of Canada, Germany, Great Britain, Mexico, Japan, Italy, and other countries also use regular violence against dissidents.

8.

The question remains: What is to be done? Unfortunately, too many people adhere to the artificial constraints of the system, always choosing the lesser of two evils, motivated only by a fear of the greater evil, as though they were powerless to challenge the social framework and create new alternatives (this realization of powerlessness within the democratic system should be enough cause for people to revolt!). Newsflash: there is nothing in the physical laws of the universe, nor any rule governing human behaviour, that requires the world to be dominated by a plutocratic elite exercising authoritarian and exploitative control over everyone else. In fact, the majority of human societies have organized themselves quite differently, often in egalitarian forms, until European and American imperialism interrupted every other cultural experiment and replaced them with our own, such that nearly every country in the world practices representative democracy and industrial capitalism, which are highly peculiar, entirely Eurocentric, and largely maladaptive (except in terms of maintaining control and exploiting value) forms of socio-economic organization.

Many progressives' idea of envisioning new alternatives consists of supporting Third Parties, as though the existence of third and fourth parties has made European states any less oppressive. Ask the Roma if the Green Party made any difference when they were deported wholesale from Germany, more than forty years after the end of the Third Reich.

(much of which was tampered with by police) suggested that the cop was killed by friendly fire. More important than whether the cop was killed by one of his own or shot in self-defense by MOVE members is the question of why exactly police staged an armed assault on the MOVE house.

The American Indian Movement received similar treatment. Their members were subject to harassment, assassination, and false imprisonment (their most famous political prisoner being Leonard Peltier, who is serving a life sentence for killing an FBI agent in a raid even when the prosecution admitted they could never be sure who fired the fatal shot).

The use of violence by our democratic government against dissidents continues into the present day. At the World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle, 1999, when more protestors than authorities were expecting mobilized and blockaded the summit, police responded violently, beating, tear-gassing, and shooting rubber bullets at protestors and bystanders. To disperse protestors who were locked down, they forced their heads back, and swabbed pepper spray under their eyelids, and used other torture-compliance techniques. All of this was caught on video, though the national media ignored the police brutality and instead played clips of protestors smashing windows, presenting this as the reason for the massive police response, though the true chronology was reversed.

In summer 2002, DC police raided the Olive Branch Community, a collective of politically active pacifists and anarchists, and evicted the residents at gunpoint. In 2003 a man was arrested at the Atlanta airport for holding a sign to protest the arrival of President GW Bush. He was charged with endangering the president. A little later the same year, anarchist Sherman Austin, webmaster of a successful website that focused on the struggles of people of color, was sentenced to a year in prison after *another person* posted a link to instructions on building Molotov cocktails[4] on his website. For this crime, federal agents with automatic weapons surrounded his house, broke down his door and dragged him out of bed. Authoritarian violence and repression occur

[4] Alcohol in a glass bottle with a rag plugging the opening, light rag and throw.

In fact, the democratic process had already succeeded in officially defeating racism way back in the 19th century, when our government granted full legal rights regardless of race, on paper at least. And in 1954, a full decade before the Civil Rights movement was at its strongest, the Supreme Court ordered the recognition of those legal rights, in response to the tireless work, within legal democratic channels, of the NAACP and other organizations. But still, there was no real change in the race relations of America. All the reforms won through the democratic process were symbolic. It was not until black people took to the streets, often illegally, outside the democratic process, that what we now know as the Civil Rights movement came into full form. The Civil Rights movement used illegal activism ("civil disobedience") in tandem with legal pressure on the democratic process to bring about change, and even then it was not until race riots occurred in nearly every major city and more militant black organizations formed that the white political apparatus started cooperating with pacifist, middle-class elements of the movement, like Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

And what was the outcome of that political compromise? People of color in America still face higher unemployment, lower wages, less access to good housing and health care, higher infant mortality, lower life expectancy, higher rates of incarceration and police brutality, disproportionately lower representation in government, corporate leadership, and the media (except as villains in Hollywood or culprits on the TV-show COPS). In fact, Dr. Kenneth Clark, whose work on the psychological effects of segregation on black school children was instrumental to the *Brown v. Board of Education* victory in 1954, stated in 1994 that American schools were more segregated than they had been forty years earlier. White supremacy still exists in every arena of American life.

What exactly did the Civil Rights movement achieve? Advancement into the white-dominated institutions has been opened up for a very small number of blacks, Latinos, and Asians, particularly those who embrace the conservative ideology of the white-supremacist status quo, like Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, who opposes affirmative action or other legal measures that alleviate racial inequality, or General Colin Powell, who is willing to bomb people of color in foreign countries with a total disregard for their lives. So, Martin Luther King is dead,

but his dream lives on in the disproportionately small handful of black and Latino congresspeople, the one or two CEOs of color in the Fortune 500, and the occasional television show that depicts well-off, middle class black families like the Cosby's, untroubled by police brutality or economic exploitation.

The government has retained its white supremacist character, and more importantly, it is *more powerful now* than it was before the Civil Rights movement, because it has largely removed the threat of racial strife and oppression-motivated uprising; a few token people of color rise to positions of power, providing the illusion of equality, but populations of color on the whole remain a cheap pool of surplus labor to be used and abused by the system as needed. So when we consider how the government actually responded to the Civil Rights movement, and what sorts of changes have occurred in our society as a result, it becomes apparent that the democratic process was more effective at rescuing those in power from a potential emergency than at granting any real relief or meaningful liberation to an oppressed group of people.

And it is not only minority groups who are ignored by the government. Even in historical situations where the majority of the population desires a change, it is the interests of the wealthy and powerful that make the decision. Before the Reagan era, a majority of citizens were in favor of government-provided welfare *to help ensure that everyone had access to a minimum of food, housing, and medical care.* Then, over a period of several years there was a concerted campaign by politicians and the media (owned by the same corporations that were getting the politicians elected through massive campaign donations), using sloganeering, advertisements, manipulated statistics, and selective coverage, to depict welfare-recipients as lazy drug-users taking a free ride.

After this large scale propaganda campaign, a majority of Americans polled said they opposed "welfare," but curiously, they still reported being in favor of a government-provided safety net *to help ensure that everyone had access to a minimum of food, housing, and medical care.* The media had programmed them to associate the word "welfare" with a number of bad things, even though they supported the idea of welfare. The politicians could claim they were doing the people's bidding when they dismantled welfare in favor of corporate profits, but in actuality, the elite

the time is solidly documented as being stark and pervasive, and many organizations formed to overcome this racial oppression. The Black Panthers, for one, demanded more than opportunities for middle-class advancement. They wanted black liberation, a total social transformation that would remove white supremacy from all aspects of life. In response to police brutality, they also began advocating black self-defense. How did the controllers of the democratic process react? In the late 1960s, J. Edgar Hoover, head of the FBI, called them "the greatest threat to the internal security of the United States." Largely through an FBI program called COINTELPRO, Black Panthers were harassed, slandered, beaten, bullied, their communications were intercepted and tampered with to cause factional splits. Their efforts, including food programs for school children, were sabotaged; the FBI and local police bought informers and placed provocateurs in their ranks, or repeatedly arrested Panther organizers on baseless charges to make them place bail, harassing them and draining their resources. Panthers were arrested and convicted on fabricated cases. In one instance, a Black Panther was imprisoned for over twenty years for murders he could not have committed, having been hundreds of miles away in another city at the time. He defended his alibi in court saying the FBI had bugs in the Panther office he was working at, and the FBI tapes would prove his whereabouts. In court, FBI agents lied on the stand and denied they were conducting such surveillance, though they were later forced to release records that showed the contrary. They had conveniently "lost" the tapes for the days in question.

And when imprisonment was not enough, Black Panther activists were simply assassinated. Over a two year period, twenty-eight Panthers were killed (some of them shot in their sleep) by police and FBI. Even if the Panthers were as violent and impurely motivated as the most rabid, uninformed of their critics allege, why was the government's treatment (on local, state, and national levels) of a far more violent organization, the Ku Klux Klan, so tolerant (and in many cases collaborative)?

MOVE, another black liberation organization, based in Philadelphia, was bombed by a police helicopter during a massive stand-off which resulted in the death of a cop. Several of the MOVE members pulled out of their house after the raid were beaten nearly to death by police. Eight MOVE members were imprisoned, even though forensics evidence

7.

Our closer analysis of this system we call "democracy" has led us to the following hypothesis: at its base, democracy is an authoritarian, elitist system of government designed to craft an effective ruling coalition while creating the illusion that the subjects are in fact equal members of society, thus in control of, or at least benevolently represented by, government policy. The fundamental purpose of a democracy, same as any other government, is to maintain the wealth and power of the ruling class. Democracy is innovative in that it allows a greater diversity of ruling class voices to advocate various strategies of control, and "progressive" in that it allows for adaptation to maintain control under changing circumstances.

The surest way to test this hypothesis is to observe historical examples in which oppressed or underprivileged citizens of a democracy have advocated their own interests, in contradiction to the interests of the wealthy and powerful. If the liberal mythology concerning democracy is correct, the oppressed will be fairly represented, political representatives will advocate their cause, and some equitable compromise will be reached between the privileged and the oppressed. If progressives and other reformists are correct in their belief that the system is fundamentally sound but corrupted through various causes that can be solved with the appropriate legislation, then the wealthy and powerful will receive unfair advantages in the legislative and judicial processes set in motion to achieve justice. If our hypothesis positing the authoritarian, elitist nature of democracy is correct, then the many institutions of power will collaborate to divide the opposition, win over reformist elements, and crush the remaining opposition to retain control with whatever means necessary, including propaganda, slander, harassment, assault, imprisonment on false charges, and assassination.

The more militant or radical elements of the 1960s struggle against racial oppression provide an excellent example[3]. The racial inequality at

[3] It should be noted that in addition to going after radical elements, the FBI targeted even such pacifist reformers as Martin Luther King, with harassment and libel, using cooperative elements in the media.

establishment worked very hard to make sure the people believed what they wanted them to believe. The democratic consent was manufactured from above.

5.

The people with power and money decide which politicians get elected. A person cannot be nominated as candidate to either of the two major parties without having strong alliances within the party; therefore even before a person can be considered as a possible candidate for election, he (or sometimes she) has to appeal to those who are already in power. And after a person has received the party's nomination, being elected to Congress or the White House is impossible without a huge advertising campaign, which costs millions of dollars. Corporations and wealthy individuals provide the majority of these donations, and they will only donate to the campaigns of candidates who promise to serve the interests of the wealthy. A politician who betrays her or his corporate backers, for instance by supporting a law that would make employers pay their workers a living wage, will not be reelected.

But even more integral is the fact that the media companies, which inform every person's opinions and decisions, are not public institutions, but huge, conglomerated, private, for-profit entertainment corporations, which own or are owned by corporations in other industries. The corporations that make the products you buy in stores, that make the weapons used in wars, the cars you drive, the gas you use; the corporations that underpay their workers, destroy the environment, pollute your air, buy off your political "representatives." The corporation you work for.

Furthermore, news corporations get their money from other corporations buying advertisements, and they will represent the interests of those corporations, and their rich, white CEOs, before they represent your interests. What are the news corporations selling when they sell advertising space? They're selling you. So you buy what you're told, vote how you're told, and exercise only the limited range of choices they deem acceptable. Because they are not directly connected to the government, this network of corporations (which provide you with almost all

of your information about the world) comprise the most effective and credible propaganda machine in the history of the world.

One final, important fact is that the people who control the government, the media, and the corporations are the same group of people. Higher level politicians often come into office straight from careers in powerful corporations, and after successful careers in elected office, "serving their country," they usually return to corporate life, making even more money as corporate consultants, lobbyists, and executives. The government doesn't need to directly control the media, and the corporations do not need to directly control the government, because they are all in the same boat, and they are all serving the same interests: namely, their own. After all, the politicians work for the same people as the newscasters. They went to their ivy-league schools together, they live in the same rich suburbs and gated communities, and between sessions of Congress or before the filming of the nightly news, they go play golf together.

6.

Why is it that the rich and powerful are taken care of, while everyone else gets token reforms that do not solve their underlying problems? When exactly did our democratic government become so corrupted? The answer is actually quite simple. It never became corrupted, because democratic government has always existed to protect the interests of the rich and powerful. Going beyond what is preached from the pages of public school textbooks, and looking at the actual evolution of democracy, we find that it is just another form of government on the historical continuum from feudal kingdoms and constitutional monarchies. Democracy is not a new product of popular struggle and demand for equality in the face of tyranny. It is a *direct evolution of earlier elite institutions*, created for, by, and of liberal elites in Europe and America.

Throughout the history of post-Roman Europe, the move towards constitutional and electoral forms was not the result of popular struggle for liberation. On the contrary, democratic government was formulated to appease the aristocracy and bourgeoisie, who desired a *coalition that*

and generals, is a ruling coalition among the elite. Freedom of speech was and continues to be the freedom of members of the elite to criticize governmental policy in order to formulate more effective ruling strategies. Incidentally, free speech also allows any common citizen to mutter what they will, though American history consistently shows that people are not free from the threat of arrest and imprisonment for unpopular speech if the authorities are afraid such speech may have an actual effect, beyond that of breath wasted in idle conversation.

In the liberal mythology, democracy is based on the idea that people band together under the protection of a government, and enter into a "contract of the governed." But this is a contract which we may not negotiate or decline. We are all born as subjects to one or another state, "democratic" or otherwise, and should we object to our subjugation, there is nothing we can do about it. Even if we have the financial means to leave our country of origin (never mind the question of making the government leave our homes), we have no other options: "No Man's Land" does not exist. *If we do not have a practical choice to refuse, our acquiescence is not consent, it is submission.*

The fact is, the democratic process is designed to craft and maintain an effective ruling coalition from among the elite; to win the loyalty of the middle class by dispensing token rights and privileges; to prevent discontent by creating the illusion of fairness and equality; and to squelch rebellion by establishing an elaborate array of official channels for sanctioned dissent, exhausting the energies of law-abiding dissidents who jump through hoop after hoop — possibly winning some minor concession, and denying legitimacy to those who step outside the "democratic process" to directly cause the change they seek, rather than partaking in the elaborate courting ritual designed to display their loyalty in asking the government to consider their pleas. Once such rebels can be portrayed as "illegitimate," "reckless," "impatient," "inconsiderate," or "lacking respect for the democratic process," the government can safely deal with them much more harshly than they could deal with those who still honored the "contract of the governed" through their docility and submission.

who do come from lower middle-class backgrounds generally go on to high-paying positions as corporate consultants after successful terms in Congress, and no politicians at the national level come from the lower class, who make up the solid majority of the total population.

This is by no means a recent devolution in American government. Some of the founding fathers envisioned the role of president as that of king, and suggested various majestic titles. Because at the time the majority of people were illiterate, the elite could be much more straightforward, and their comments are most illuminating. The Father of the Constitution, James Madison, wrote that: "The minority of the opulent [the wealthy minority] must be protected from the majority." His friend and fellow influential federalist, John Jay, said more plainly that "the people who own the country ought to rule it." The democratic revolution in America was the successful attempt by the American economic elite to seize political power from the British. The complaints about unfair British taxation were the complaints of businessmen. When American farmers, disappointed that their difficult economic situation did not improve after the revolution, marched against the new American elite in the state capitals in a number of rebellions, the Founding Fathers (who were northern merchants, bankers, and lawyers, and the slaveholding landowners of the south) reassembled to create a stronger, centralized government that would protect the minority interests — that is, the interests of the ruling elite.

The new Constitution created a number of structures and rights, rights being the codified privileges of the elite[2]. An electoral system allowed those who owned the land, the banks, and the factories to decide which politicians would better represent their interests. As voting rights expanded, elections also took on the function of testing which candidate had the better populist rhetoric, the better strategy for retaining the submission and loyalty of the general population. The famed American balance of powers, a balance between judges, senators, presidents

[2] The police regularly violate the "rights" of common citizens. Only those who can afford expensive lawyers can correct the violation after the fact. A simple evaluation of Supreme Court rulings, taking into account the economic class of the plaintiff, demonstrates how partial the Bill of Rights is.

would include the entire economic elite in the political leadership, not just the monarch and subordinate bureaucracy. Democracy, after all, is not a concept of the Enlightenment. The very term those enlightened European and American statesmen chose to describe their desired political system was borrowed from the ancient Greek city-states, in which all property-owning male citizens had a voice to influence the leadership. Of course, the lower classes were slaves and not citizens, so only about 10% of the population could vote. In the early city-states, there was little or no distinction between political power and economic power, because the economic elite were, of course, the beneficiaries of the power consolidated by the new political structures they had created. As empires grew, large portions of the economic elite — the aristocratic landowners — were frequently excluded to some degree from the elite group holding power over and from the centralized political apparatus. It was the struggle of the aristocracy, and later of bourgeois merchants, bankers, and factory owners, to reincorporate themselves into the political elite, that is the root of the evolution of that political process we call democracy.

Now we see more clearly the evolution of democracy in the European nation-states, often cited to have begun with the Magna Carta. That famed document, and the legal rights and guarantees it established, was created when King John of England, faced with the prospect of being militarily deposed by the aristocracy, saw the wisdom in extending political power to a broader section of the economic elite than had been previously included, by guaranteeing *rights* to the major landholders, and creating the precedent of a council of barons, or their representatives, to advise and negotiate with the King.

Chancellor Bismarck, who unified Germany into a constitutional democracy, was no populist. On the contrary, his reign was characterized by harsh repression of progressive and radical elements, and a single-minded, Machiavellian desire to strengthen the German state, a task in which he succeeded to such a degree that within decades Germany excelled from a collection of backward and disunited provinces to a uniform nation-state that could single-handedly threaten the rest of the continent. *Bismarck knew that granting elections and constitutional rights would only solidify the power of the German ruling elite*, by winning the loyalty of the bourgeoisie and aristocracy; exhausting or

co-opting the efforts of progressives who sought social change through the electoral process; and marginalizing the radicals who rejected the "democratic process," thus eliminating the specter of resistance or non-cooperation that marred the efficiency of many other European states who were constantly trying to win the obedience of their oppressed subjects. Furthermore, political and economic *power*, never being redistributed, *was already consolidated in the hands of the elite*, who could ensure that only their candidates were elected and only favourable laws were passed, through a variety of legal or illegal means (legality being a farcical issue here, as the police, historically part and parcel of the monarchical apparatus, were not about to arrest their own masters).

The sporadic evolution of democracy in Russia followed a path similar to that of England and Germany, the main difference being that most of the liberal reforms were repealed by a jealous tsar, unused to sharing his power. The existence of a Russian parliament temporarily alleviated popular unrest, but upon its dissolution, the subversive currents that eventually led to the Bolshevik revolution resumed at force. The Russian parliament, currently referred to as the Duma, in the 19th century was called, with a little more candor, the "Boyarskoe[1] Duma" ("Duma" means "thought." The "Boyars" were the Russian aristocracy). Leading up to this, the Russian serfs were "freed" as a necessary step in the democratic evolution. Of course they were not given the *land* they had worked and on which they lived (and depended for survival); this land stayed in the hands of the aristocracy, though the serfs would be allowed to purchase about a third of it. Having been unwaged workers with no money to buy the land, some of the "freed" serfs had to move to the cities and engage in wage work in the new factories (coincidentally a very convenient arrangement for the factory owners and the Russian political elite, who required industrialization to remain a competitive European power), while the other ex-serfs stayed in the country to work as share-croppers for their former masters.

The early representative bodies in government, the forerunners of the modern Congress or Parliament, from their beginning were meant to represent the aristocracy, the property owners, the bankers, and all other

[1] The stem of this word is "Boyar," the suffix is a possessive ending.

wealthy people who controlled the economic life of the nation. Representation for the economic elite ensured that the political leadership (formerly the monarch) that controlled the military, the police, taxation, and other bureaucracies, would protect and serve the interests of the wealthy. The singularity of the monarch was replaced with a coalition of the elite, divided into political parties and competing for influence, but above all collaborating at the fundamental level *to maintain control.* The vote functioned to ensure that the party with the most popular strategy for control could implement that strategy, whereas previously the conservatism and obstinacy of a single, unchallenged ruler might be less flexible in adapting to changing circumstances.

As the vote gradually extended to all adult citizens (in step, not coincidentally, with the rise of corporate-controlled mass media), the vote also functioned to provide the illusion of equality, create a release valve for popular discontent, and most importantly it *maintained the effectiveness of government control* by favoring the political parties that were most successful at duping the population, and winning their obedience. The lack of true participation by the general population is made most obvious by the fact that voters' choices are informed primarily by name recognition, party affiliation, and the bombardment of superficial slogans conducted through advertising media, as well as the fact that *few voters can even articulate a factual difference between the platforms of opposing candidates,* much less a critical analysis of their policies.

Bicameral legislature, a feature of U.S. and other democracies, redeveloped in England, where the two parliamentary houses were named with more straightforward honesty than would be permissible in modern times. The House of Lords was quite plainly created for the representatives of the aristocracy, and the House of Commons for those without noble title — more specifically, for representatives of the bourgeoisie, or upper-middle class. The exclusion of the majority of the population, even from this lowliest house of parliament, becomes apparent when one tries to find poor, working-class commoners among the Members of Parliament, through the history of the House of Commons to the present day. The exact same point can be made for U.S. Congress members, whose average income prior to their election has never come close the lowly average of the entire American population. Those few representatives