

While Canadians Slept

While Canadians are lulled to sleep by CanWest Global media, the rich and powerful right-wing plutocracy is displacing our democratic institutions, little by little.

Democracy isn't a description of a kind of government but rather an ideal that arises from suffering and oppression- "from the wars against disorder, from the sirens night and day, from the fires of the homeless, from the ashes of the gay." . (Hey Thms my son - Google this Leonard Cohen song *Democracy*.)

If ideals manifest themselves through human action, then democracy manifests itself in the ongoing struggle by the many to reclaim the economic and political power hoarded by the few. That is democracy.

Whenever we abandon the struggle, we betray the ideal. C. Wright Mills put it more eloquently than I can: "Regardless of the motive, to attempt withdrawal is to become subservient to existing authorities and to allow other men to determine the meaning and worth of one's work".

Bad things happen when democracy is betrayed, as I fear it's being betrayed in Canada. The consequences of this betrayal are described in Murray Dobbin's *The Myth of the Good Corporate Citizen: Democracy Under the Rule of Big Business* (1998)

Dobbin shows that for a long time young Canada's political system was totally controlled by powerful corporations and individuals. This only changed in response to escalating civil disobedience (e.g. Winnipeg Postal Strike), labour militancy and grassroots political organizing (e.g.

Tommy Douglas- medicare), that is the ideal of democracy. While their victories were limited they were successful in forcing elected governments to implement some policies befitting all Canadians, rather than just the powerful and the wealthy. The early 1970's marked the culmination of these efforts. After that, things began to change.

Canada's major policies are no longer designed by Parliamentarians and their bureaucracies. Dobbin writes that since the late 1970's, "the most important policy directions taken by Western governments have been discussed refined and agreed upon not in the established democratic forums but in closed, exclusive clubs established for this purpose." These "clubs" include international organizations like the Trilateral Commission, the World Economic Forum, and the Bilderberg Group, as well as local organizations like the Canadian Council of Chief Executives.

Such groups have an abiding contempt for democracy. Consider the Trilateral Commission, one of the most important forums for the world's economic and political pawnbrokers. In one of its first commissioned studies, published under the name *The Crisis of Democracy* (1975), author Samuel Huntington wrote that Western societies were suffering from too much democracy. For government to function, Huntington argued, marginalized groups had to remain apathetic and uninvolved in politics, the traditional acceptance of "hierarchy, coercion, discipline, secrecy and deception" in government had to be restored and the public needed to once again feel compelled "to obey those whom they had previously considered superior to themselves in age, rank, status, expertise, character or talents."

This contempt isn't confined to international power-brokers. If their support for the Fraser Institute (one of the most vile right-wing think tanks in Canada), is any indication, Canada's elites feel the same way. The Institute was established with the explicit purpose of changing Canada's "ideological fabric" and reducing public support for the welfare state. It is generously funded by corporate donors, wealthy patrons, and right wing "charities" such as the John Dobson Foundation. The Institute has developed close ties with both the Liberals and Conservatives. Despite the shoddiness of the research it produces, it's work is guaranteed to receive widespread coverage in Canada's corporate media. Witness it's annual trashing of public schools. On the basis of this evidence, it's safe to say the Fraser Institute represents the views of the wealthiest sector of Canadian society.

Walter Block the Fraser Institute's senior economist from 1979 until 1991, articulated these views at the Institute's 1986 symposium on democracy: "Why does it follow that we have an equal right to vote in the political process? Voting in a political process is not a negative freedom, it is a positive freedom and it is an aspect of wealth. We don't say that everyone has an equal right to vote in IBM... . It depends on how many IBM shares they bought. If we look upon the polity as a voluntary organization we must recognize the legitimacy for unequal votes." This is the clearest endorsement of plutocracy imaginable.

Besides being the most class-conscious and politically active segment of Canadian society, Canada's elites also have vast resources with which to push their plutocratic agenda. Through networks of powerful friends, lobbying groups like the Canadian Council of Chief Executives,

and the National Citizen's Coalition, think-tanks like the CD Howe Institute and the Fraser Institute, media empires like CanWest Global and their financing of Canada's ruling parties, they've transformed our ideological and political landscape, reversing nearly all the gains made by working people since the 1950s.

According to Dobin, our elites have the same objective as their international counterparts. They want the world's money, technology and markets to be controlled and managed by trans-national corporations. They want to replace local cultures with a global consumer culture dedicated to the quest for material gratification and to thereby eliminate loyalties to compete for the chance to offer their services to investors at the most advantageous terms. They want corporations to have freedom to act solely on the basis of profitability without any concern for national or local consequences. The only way to achieve these ends is by eliminating the ability of governments to challenge corporate power. This would and is turning elections into meaningless pageants and our elected representatives into impotent pawns.

These goals are radically opposed to those shared by most Canadians, who know that unrestrained corporate greed is destroying our communities, encouraging psychopathic values and laying waste to our environment. Global warming (perhaps better termed "frying"), is the most terrible consequence of this avarice. Unless our corporations are restricted by local and international law, their activities will disrupt our climate to the point where our economies and perhaps our very civilization will be shattered by storms and flooding, drought and famine, desertification and disease. That's why right-wing institutes like the National Post

and the Fraser Institute refuse to acknowledge global warming despite the unprecedented scientific consensus on the issue. They know that if global warming is real, then the only way to address it is by legislating constraints on corporate greed and that the only thing that could bring this about is a resurgence of democracy throughout the developed world. They deny climate change because they despise democracy.

What about the rest of us? Too many of us think that democracy and the struggle it entails, is an ethically neutral “lifestyle choice”, much like a hobby. This is a dire

mistake. Democracy makes a claim upon us, one backed up by all the suffering tyranny has ever inflicted upon the human spirit. To dismiss the ideal is to dismiss the suffering and to dismiss the suffering is to show hatred for the sufferers. Conversely, by embracing the ideal, we stand in solidarity with them; like all worthwhile ideals, democracy, in the end, is a form of love not just for all our fellows but our lonely planet as well.

Lance Read – Canadian Teacher

“If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten we all belong to each other” - Mother Teresa