

THE SYSTEM AIN'T THE SYSTEM

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One political question cuts through all others: Who benefits?

Who, for instance, benefits from the following?

“Half the jobs in the nation pay less than \$34,000 a year ... A quarter pay below the poverty line for a family of four, less than \$23,000 annually. ... Wages for those who work on jobs in the bottom half have been stuck since 1973” (*The New York Times* online, July 28).

Let's see. Since 1973, we've had eight presidents – five Republicans and three Democrats (one of those Democrats deregulated the finance industry). Democrats pretty much controlled Congress from 1973 to 1995 and it's been pretty much a Republican show since. It's hasn't been in the interest of either party to address the stagnation of buying-power that traps the lower half of the American work force. One administration gives some benefits, another administration takes some away, but the basic situation of half the American workforce does not change.

So who benefits? Duh. A powerless workforce with no real representation in government is global capitalism's wet dream.

For instance, in California's Inland Empire, “where unemployment reaches above 15 percent in several cities,” a “local economist” named John Husing says, “You can have people [he means corporations] come in here and find a robust blue-color work force eager for employment” (*The New York Times* online, July 22).

“Robust” is a funny word for people desperate for any work at all, under any conditions.

Who benefits from the lawful bribery we call “elections”?

“The average member of the House of Representatives has to raise \$367 for every hour they're supposedly serving their constituents to pay for their re-election campaigns. The average senator needs to wrangle \$819 an hour” (*Mother Jones*, quoted in *The Week*, June 29, p.20). Crunch those numbers. Unless you've got an awful lot of money, your representatives are not representing you. Which leads one to believe that these days Congress may be doing exactly what it's paid to do: nothing.

A pretty cute set-up, when you think about it. Oligarchs finance both sides to fight and stymie each other so that the United States can keep up the appearance of a republic while, in function, it is nothing like a republic.

Say this for the “loose affiliation of millionaires and billionaires” that make up our oligarchy: They're crafty.

Oligarchs finance both parties because it serves their interests when neither Republicans nor Democrats can dominate.

Unlike fascists and totalitarians, oligarchs don't want a strong central government. Oligarchs want to reduce government to the role of an accomplice, and not a very organized accomplice. The more confused, hysterical, and contradictory the better. Make it damn near impossible to accomplish anything solid. You don't want Republicans to win all out, because their drastic budgets will drive the workforce into frenzy and frenzy is dangerous. Bad for business. You don't want Democrats to win all-out – not because you're afraid of what the Democrats might do (there's not much to fear in that regard) but

because Democratic domination would demoralize a lot of dangerous people – frenzy again, bad for business.

Oligarchs want our pathetic political theater to continue so that they may remain backstage, unmolested.

Occupy Wall Street outed them last year -- a big accomplishment, never to be underestimated. But outing is not nearly enough.

President Obama “staffed his White House with former Wall Street executives. During his term in office, the gap between rich and poor has widened to unprecedented levels” (*NYMag.com*, quoted in *The Week*, Aug. 3, p.6).

“Wall Street firms made \$83 billion in profit during the first two years of the Obama administration – more than the \$77 billion in profit these firms made over the entire eight years of the George W. Bush presidency” (*The Washington Post*, quoted in *The Week*, Nov. 18, 2011, p.16).

At the same time, “[t]he average American family’s net worth dropped almost 40 percent ... between 2007 and 2010” (*CNNMoney.com*, quoted in *The Week*, June 22, p.34)

“The richest 1% of Americans gained 93% of the additional income created in 2010 (*The Economist*, June 23, p.84).”

“Since 2008, when the biggest banks caused a crisis that ‘decimated the middle class,’ these banks have actually gotten bigger, with just five banks controlling \$8.5 trillion in assets – equal to 56 percent of the nation’s economy.” (*TheAtlantic.com*, quoted in *The Week*, May 25, p.2).

The goal of oligarchy is to utterly disempower the workforce. For that, the oligarchs’ best operatives are Republicans on the state level.

Texas Gov. Rick Perry and “[a]t least five other Republican governors ... [have announced] that they will not expand their Medicaid aid program for the poor even though the federal government would pay for almost all of it. ... [I]n Pennsylvania ... 61,000 residents – almost all of whom are disabled and poor – were told they would abruptly lose their \$200 monthly general assistance payments, all to save \$150 million a year. Our hands are tied by a tightening budget, welfare officials told astonished recipients, though Gov. Tom Corbett’s hands didn’t seem restrained when he handed out \$300 million in business tax cuts earlier this month (*The New York Times* online, July 17).”

This is nothing less than a war of terror against the working class.

Who benefits from a terrorized working class? Any employer who wants to maximize profit no matter the human cost, making labor, and life, ever cheaper.

That works best if the workforce is not only frightened but ignorant. That’s why you read things like these:

“[T]he Texas GOP platform proudly declares: ‘We oppose the teaching of Higher Order thinking skills, critical-thinking skills, and similar programs’” (*Newsweek*, July 16, p. 18).

On a global level, the U.S. education system ranks 26th (*Time*, Nov. 14, 2011, p.44).

“Less than half of all Americans who start college ever graduate, putting the U.S. ‘dead last’ among industrialized countries” (*TheAtlantic.com*, quoted in *The Week*, June 29, p.42).

Who benefits from a mal-educated workforce? Oligarchs who can pump billions into propaganda that the mal-educated haven't the means to question.

So here come two grandiose infomercials called "political conventions," Republican and Democrat. But the political system they advertise ain't the system that is.

Reporters will report, commentators will comment, and, across the political spectrum, they'll mouth a vocabulary obsolete and inaccurate because they analyze as though the United States is a functioning republic. But the facts says that the system they speak of ain't the system we got.

Power is always more fragile than it seems. We can get out of this mess, but it would help if our speech caught up to our reality.

Occupy Wall Street was a good beginning. The 1% has been identified. Next, the 1% must be confronted in many (nonviolent) ways and from all sides.

What will it take to make that happen?

Something. Something stirring out there somewhere.

Can you feel it? I can.

Something unexpected.