

OLIGARCHY BLUES

By Michael Ventura

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The Left: does not exist in the United States – not as a meaningful force. To state the stunningly obvious: Without a serious critique of capitalism, you're not to the left of anything. If what's left of your leftness is an earnest wish for reform, you are that most maligned of political entities: a liberal. Liberals of today are nice. They do some good. But liberals of old had lefty visions that changed society's structure -- FDR's New Deal, Harry Truman's GI Bill, and LBJ's War on Poverty. Liberals today believe in social access for all, and beyond that, what? The status quo. No structural political vision. As Proverbs teaches: "Where there is no vision, the people perish."

Political Commentators: Conservative and liberal, highbrow and lowdown, political commentators huff and puff on cue. Excited by each new issue, crisis, and outrage, they parrot the spectrum of views they (or their employers) have staked out. How often do they surprise you? Almost never? Shrill with opinions but bereft of ideas, they mistake political theatre for a political process. Not one in a hundred has seriously asked: What is power?

Congress: Oligarchy has defeated the very idea of a legislative process. The Republican Party is the blunt tool of Oligarchy, Oligarchy's hammer, but not for the purpose of achieving Republican goals. Oligarchy's goal is to deadlock federal lawmaking bodies into permanent dysfunction and create a power vacuum that only Oligarchy can fill. Its method has proved foolproof: Bankroll the GOP's extremists and ignoramuses; count on them to freeze the political process. Also, count on Democrats and the media to obsess about the so-called issues and ignore the fundamental shift in power-structure that Oligarchy has, in large part, achieved. Absent a surge of public participation (not likely, but not impossible), the collapse of our national legislative process has probably reached the point of no return: the point at which our national problems can no longer be redressed through traditional politics.

Gerrymandering: Election coverage concentrates on personalities, hot-button issues, and polls, but the basic electoral fact today is gerrymandering. Gerrymandered extremists now hogtie the House. Ruthless gerrymandering in Republican states makes fair, county-level elections near to impossible, decimating health care, education, women's rights, and the right to vote. In return for funding extremists on issues that Oligarchy couldn't care less about, Oligarchy buys state legislatures and its lobbyists write their commerce laws. A gerrymandered election is a rigged election. News outlets have failed to put gerrymandering front and center and keep it there.

Education: In states controlled through gerrymandering, Oligarchy's Republicans defund schools and dumb down education for one reason: People who cannot communicate beyond their class and ethnicity cannot fight back. (And a fight it is: Here in Lubbock, Texas, this year a highly successful charter school had its budget slashed 20%. No reason given. Its success seems to have displeased those who fail to grasp a central human fact: All the children are our children.)

Obamacare: Health care should be free for all; Obamacare goes a distance toward that. But there's a price liberals ignore, and it may prove exorbitant: Obamacare makes the insurance industry indispensable to the federal government, vastly increasing Wall

Street's leverage. That was the goal all along, when Oligarchy's Heritage Foundation first proposed this health care system. Also, the Affordable Care Act is an insurance bill, not a health bill. For instance, it does not address the 440,000 yearly deaths caused by preventable hospital error (Forbes.com, Sept. 23, 2013). That's right: 440,000 a year. (And you're more worried about terrorists?)

Guns: In the eyes of the world, senseless slaughters have become a signature of America (as they are a signature of Central Africa). The argument for guns is that they protect us from an overbearing government. Proponents of that argument apply 18th century tactics to 21st century reality. Wear your camouflage, speechify, amass arsenals – if you're ever seen as a genuine threat, drones the size of hummingbirds will watch your every move until a drone that you won't see or hear launches the missile that kills you in mid-sentence. No messy publicity. Just – boom. They can call it a gas explosion or a faulty something. But they don't have to call it anything.

Because now a president can legally condemn you without trial and order your execution without oversight, even if you are a U.S. citizen on U.S. soil – and the lawyer who wrote that legal brief is now a federal judge appointed by a Democratic president and anointed by a Democratic Senate.

Meanwhile, ranting on all sides of the gun issue serves Oligarchy because it distracts the mouthy and furthers legislative dysfunction.

Police: However, gun adherents do have a point. “During the Obama administration, according to Pentagon data, police departments have received tens of thousands of machine guns; nearly 200,000 ammunition magazines; thousands of pieces of camouflage and night-vision equipment; and hundreds of silencers, armored cars, and aircraft” (*The New York Times*, June 8). It isn't paranoia to wonder, “What the fuck?”

Non-violent “terrorists”?: “Pentagon preparing for mass civil breakdown,” headlined *The Guardian* on June 12. “The project explicitly sets out to study non-violent activists.” As the Southern Christian Leadership Conference proved a half-century ago, nonviolent activism gets radical results. So now the Pentagon calls nonviolence “political violence,” a verbal trick that puts nonviolence squarely in the sights of the Patriot Act.

The 1%: “Since 2009, 95 percent of U.S. economic gains have gone to the wealthiest 1 percent of the population (*The Week*, Feb. 7).”

Defense: Defense of what? America's massive military outlay bosses trade routes, bosses far-off resources, and bosses the dollar's rule. (Think the dollar could be the world's currency otherwise?) This arrangement pleased Americans immensely while it benefited them personally. But now the 1% gobbles 95% of the benefits of our “defense,” while the rest of us pay taxes to support it. That, fellow citizens, is the essence of Oligarchy.

The 1% revisited: Once more with feeling: “Since 2009, 95 percent of U.S. economic gains have gone to the wealthiest 1 percent of the population.” The second-biggest question: Are there liberal or conservative proposals that: a) address this fact and b) have a chance of enactment through our present political process? If the answer is yes, show me. If the answer is no, Oligarchy is not coming, Oligarchy has come and won.

So what comes next?

Question of the Era: Are you trapped in your vocabulary?: You don't know how to speak of the United States in any way other than what you've been taught? So you speak of the present as though it is the past and your answers are as antique as your questions.

Thomas Pynchon: “If they can get you asking the wrong questions, they don’t have to worry about the answers.”

Hold this truth to be self-evident: Without fair elections and a viable legislative process at federal and state levels, the republic no longer exists.

Votes for Democrats or Republicans may serve your ends in the short run, and good for you, good for you – but are your ends enough? Are you free?

Oh, let’s suppose you’re free, just so long as you stay in the little box you’ve created for yourself – but what do you bequeath if you can’t or won’t recognize or admit what has happened to you as a citizen of the republic that no longer exists?

Want to be free? I don’t know the second step, but I know the first:

Stop speaking in terms that describe a previous generation’s country.

If you want to change what is, speak of what is.

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