

Democratic Capitalism

Towards the end of the last little ice age, as the migration from Europe to the New World filled the east coast of North America, new cultures evolved to adapt to new environments. The primary refinement of culture was in the personality types that would choose to make the long and dangerous voyage into the unknown, mostly in search of freedom, adventure, and material wealth. There was a brief period of severe survival of the fittest or the smartest or the luckiest or the most cunning, but, equipped with European tools and a vast, well kept, and untapped resource base, they quickly recovered, and, unfettered by the complexities of population density, evolved a culture of ambitious consumption that spread across the continent, rebounded off the west coast, spread around the world, and endures to this day as the most comfortable and entertaining moment in human history. Clever us to build such marvelous tools and toys. Energetic would be a more accurate description. The energy of abundant farmland to fuel our bodies. The energy of abundant forests to shelter us and keep us warm. The energy of wood, coal, oil, gas, and uranium to haul the freight and power our factories and cities. The energy that lets us play.

Now we come to a time when very soon we will no longer have abundant water and topsoil for our farmland, abundant forests, or abundant coal, oil, gas, and uranium, but we still have a culture of consumption that most people seem to regard as an unquestionable entitlement. It's the American Way, and most of the rest of the world wants it too. This is not sustainable and things will soon change. Our participation in these changes will have a lot to do with our survival as a coherent civilization and perhaps as a species. First it was the American Dream, then it was the American Way and, if we don't move on to a new dream, it will soon become the American Nightmare.

Capitalism is predicated on the consumption of resources and energy for the production of the goods and services that sustain and entertain us. It evolved in the places with the most concentrated untapped energy and resources. In the United States, we call ourselves a democracy, but we refer to our way of life as democratic capitalism and our people as consumers. With uncommon exception, economic growth [increasing consumption] is unquestionably seen as good. As our appetite for energy and resources increases and our energy and resource reserves decrease, capitalism, in its current form, is eating us alive.

The work ethic that evolved in the age of plentiful energy and resources is no longer sustaining us. The concept that everyone should have a job is becoming ever more counterproductive as the machines do the work that provides us our material possessions and we find ourselves awash in jobs that create little or nothing but wasted energy and a bigger landfill. There's a lot of work to be done to retool our economy to survive the end of oil, and we haven't got time and energy to waste on unemployment and obsolete, non-productive jobs.

As we convert from a carbon-based economy, democracy can no longer be asleep at the wheel. Capitalism has been a basic tool for enabling the

complexities of civilization, but without a driver who's awake and aware, a crash is imminent. Currently, unfettered capitalism and incompetent government are concentrating the operating capital of civilization into the hands of fewer and fewer individuals, most of whom are making poor choices that don't help and often hinder and endanger the community that their application of power influences. This has happened numerous times in the past. Capitalism and government both tend to concentrate the community cash flow into the control of a very small group of people who often lack the wisdom to oversee the power they wield until they mess it up for the rest of us.

The military-industrial complex is consuming vast amounts of energy and resources. On the military side, they're trying to stop war with war. Prosperity brings peace. War destroys prosperity. On the industrial side, the motive is profit, and it's imperative that, in order for profit to continue, war must continue. The sole result of the military industrial complex is the destruction of wealth.

Stock and money market racketeers are funneling immense amounts of money into the gluttony of financial pirates who are using it to consume the energy of the community and are not investing it in the production of new wealth.

The oil and coal companies are investing huge amounts of the community's money into looking for more oil and coal to consume, when we need to be investing in sustainable alternatives and conserving our precious fossil fuel reserves.

In the case of the very capitalistic drug prohibition industry, so much American money is funding the drug cartels, that the power of the cartels is beginning to rival the government of Mexico. Prohibition finances the bad guys.

The fate of humanity should not be left to the whims of corporate executives whose mandated objective is to increase cash flow thereby increasing energy and resource consumption and its concurrent pollution, dictators who rule by cunning instead of wisdom, prohibition industry barons who rule by savage violence, and elected officials who pander to the whims and desires of an ignorant electorate or the lure of money. The human community's cash flow is currently being channeled into a consumption of energy and resources that is immensely wasteful and gluttonous, does little to provide for future sustenance, and is not sustainable. We have an immediate need to change our spending priorities. This can be achieved.

We can tax the people who have the money, but are not using it to effectively help society. For the worst of them, we can strip them of their financial power completely.

We can eliminate the drug cartels by eliminating their funding. Gradually legalize most drugs and tax them enough to fund a serious education and rehab program. The negative effects of drug use on society are minor compared to the negative effects of the prohibition industry. This won't be easy, as just about no one involved in the industry, neither the cartels, nor the growers, nor the smugglers, nor the dealers, nor the border patrol, nor law enforcement, nor the prison industry, wants to lose their paycheck. We need to find them more

productive work. We'll need to overcome a lot of ignorance and superstition about drug use and abuse as well.

We can demand much higher social accountability for corporations. Corporations differ from individuals in that they tend to have much less conscience and personal accountability, and their motivations tend to be much less socially responsible. Just as a bunch of individually nice dogs can turn into a vicious dog pack, so it is with corporations.

We can separate money from politics at all levels in order to move away from the financial oligarchies that presently pervade government. Advertising has become a pathetic failure as a source of accurate information about candidates as it becomes ever more devious, dishonest, angry, and pandering. Let's fund full-time media access for the candidates themselves, and hear what they have to say. Let's have discussions instead of devious sales pitches and debates. Individual voters cast their ballot according to their perception of the cultural similarity of the candidate. Political advertising is just the attempt to motivate a bigger gang than the other guy and it works best on those least qualified to make intelligent choices.

While we're at it, let's make it law that anyone aspiring to federal office must be able to ride Greyhound for a week with nothing but a backpack and a hundred bucks.

We can tax resource and energy consumption and its concurrent pollution with a consumption tax instead of an income tax. Current systems of income tax collection concentrate the money into one big pile and rely on government to guard it and see that it's well spent. In the ensuing free for all, much, and often most of it, is wasted and stolen. In both the collection and distribution of tax money, income tax is very clumsy, unjust, corrupt, and inefficient.

Since just about everything we consume now has a bar code, a consumption tax could channel the money directly to where it's needed with much greater efficiency and much less potential for large scale waste and corruption. The tax rate could easily be variable, according to the impact a given product has on the community. A progressive luxury tax would allow us to tax the gluttonously wealthy without hindering the ability of the responsibly wealthy to invest in industrious endeavors. We could accept the responsibilities of the right to consume addictive substances [especially alcohol] with a tax on all addictive drugs to provide for realistic prevention and rehab programs. The tax on transportation fuels could pay for the infrastructure of transportation. The department of agriculture could derive the money it needs from a targeted tax on food. Taxing consumption instead of production allows the ability to track a product's need for community investment. We could tax toys, not tools.

However we do it, if we wish to restore a viable democracy, we must somehow convert from democratic capitalism to an increasingly less capitalistic democracy in order to avert a very serious crash. Democracy derives its power from taxation of the money flow of capitalism. In order for democracy to gain control of runaway capitalism, it must find efficient ways to harness the energy of capitalism. It seems that most democratic governments have developed a kind of bureaucratic Alzheimer's, so don't count on government to get it done.

The only real control of capitalism is cash flow. We vote for the kind of world we live in with every dime we spend. In a strange sort of way, capitalism is very democratic. The problem is that money buys government and we've let fewer and fewer people and corporations control the money.

If everybody pulled their own weight, we'd have no need for most of conventional government, but not everybody does. Some can't, some won't, some don't know how. For the some that can't, society either cares for them or they die. For those that know how but don't, we need to consider that too many parasites can be deadly and deal with it. For those that don't know how, some compensate by thievery, for which we have the options of tolerating it, containing it [prisons], compensating for it with forced labor [chain gangs, which can now be done with monitors], or teaching them how to pull their weight. Some don't know how and compensate with brute force. For this we have prisons. Lock 'em in a box, or better yet, a school.

In the entire history of humanity, with just a few small and isolated exceptions, from the smallest tribes to the largest civilizations, we find no evidence of complete anarchy for more than a few hours until someone takes charge. Any where, any time, throughout human history, there has always been government of some sort. Some are by consent, some by force. Some work and some don't. Some are honest, some are not. Some are competent, some are not. Some are benevolent, some are cruel. If you choose not to participate in your own government, someone else certainly will, whether you like it or not.

As the inevitable decline of the conventional economy causes elections to be increasingly decided by the fear and anger of fools, democratic government is becoming ever more foolish, ineffectual, incompetent, corrupt, and dangerous. Democracy is only as wise as the people who vote and the candidates available for them to vote for, and the average voter has been dumb enough to let thieves within the financial industries take all the money and buy their government. The United States has the best government that money can buy, and it sucks.

Democracy is essentially organized mob rule based on the assumption that the majority of those who vote will make correct choices. Maybe they will; maybe they won't. The success of democracy is dependent on the wisdom of those who vote which is dependent on the breadth and veracity of their perspective of the universe around them. In order for democracy to make right choices, we have a serious need to divert our attention and effort from consumption to education. The success or failure of any community, from local to global, is dependent on the wisdom of those who make the decisions that determine the investment of the community's energy.