

Laura Bonham: Citizens United vs. United Citizens — The Showdown of the Century (Common Dreams)

Despite the blinders and filters put in place by corporate media, I imagine that most people in the US would agree that this country is in the hands of multinational corporations.

How prevalent, how insidious, how total that control is, is obvious from the corporate-heavy presence in offices from the Trump Cabinet down to local governments, school districts and sports arenas, and the increasing income gaps between the 1% and the rest of us.

The condition is reflected in our pop culture images of totalitarian systems like the Matrix and widespread conspiracy theories of nefarious sinister evil-doers.

It's also apparent in the relatively recent additions to our everyday vocabularies of terms like oligarchy, plutocracy, kleptocracy, and hegemony, and the widespread agreement that we are now living in a new Gilded Age.

What may not be as clear to many, is exactly how we got here, and more to the point, how do we get back to some semblance of democracy.

As the Laura Bonham article here discusses, it didn't start with the recent Trump Congress tax bill, nor with the 2010 Citizens United Supreme Court decision. It didn't start with the Koch brothers and their ilk setting in motion the right-wing grassroots movement to take over electoral politics following Goldwater's failure to win the Presidency.

It didn't start with the little-noted but crucial decision of the Democratic Party to bring big-money PACs into Congressional elections in an attempt to counter GOP dominance in the Reagan era.

Although its origin can be traced back to the elitist-populist conflicts in the Revolutionary Era and the eventual victory of Hamiltonian over Jeffersonian ideology, a more clear-cut historical nexus, as Bonham points out, is the 1886 Supreme Court decision in *Santa Clara v Southern Pacific Railroad*, which gave corporations the legal rights of personhood.

The present ramifications of this landmark decision of the previous Gilded Age are enormous, and go a long way toward answering the question of how we got here.

Answers to how we get out of the mess are not as clear. How do you escape a

totalitarian system you are willy-nilly part of, formed by, embroiled in?  
How did human dignity and a sense of human rights survive the Nazi and  
Leninist-Stalinist totalitarian regimes?

While the "We the People" constitutional amendment proposed in the Laura  
Bonham article has all the right positions and may serve as a fine  
educational instrument and organizing tool, it doesn't present a viable  
means of escape.

Not only would it, like any proposed amendment, open the door to  
consideration of a host of other, very undesirable, amendments, but it  
doesn't stand a snowball's chance in the hell of corporate control reality.

So, yes, sign the petition at the end of the Bonham article, but realize  
that winning this fight is going to take more than that, more than signing  
any number of petitions, more than voting in any number of elections or  
marching in any number of marches. Do all that, the struggle must be fought  
on all levels at all times, but do it knowing that the struggle has been  
going on for a long time and will go on long after the 2018 elections, no  
matter who wins.

Participatory democracy means recognizing that we are political animals,  
that in order for democracy to work, politics must be part of our everyday  
lives, not (as the Koch campaign and corporate media has painted it) some  
dirty affair we hire others to do, and that we engage personally only in  
polls, petitions, and occasional elections, or in private kvetches,  
bullsessions, Facebook blurbs and otherwise preaching to the choir.

And as democracy is a matter of constant vigilance, constant participation,  
so Resistance is a way of life.

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