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The Illusion of Democracy in America. Rebellion Across the US against “Phony Democracy”

By Kevin Zeese and Margaret Flowers

July 13, 2014

More Americans are fed up with the phony democracy that exists in the United States. Across the nation people are engaged in democracy rebellions as many re-examine the nation's roots, especially with the 4th of July weekend just passing.

The Declaration of Independence proclaims that when a government does not support the rights and needs of the people, then

“it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.”



Rolling Rebellion banner at FCC protest seeking to ensure net neutrality. Act now, public comments end July 15th

Have we reached that point? Many think so. A recent poll found 74% of Americans agree the broken political system needs to be fixed first. The poll found that “corruption of government by big money and frustration with the abuses of the political ruling class: incumbent politicians, lobbyists, the elite media, big business, big banks, big unions, and big special interests unites Americans.” And, “the battle lines of the new political order are emerging. When presented with the proposition that ‘the real struggle for America is not between Democrats and Republicans but mainstream America and the ruling political elites,’ over 66% of voters agree.”

According to the poll, Americans see the sad reality of the state of the country and are ready to rebel:

- “Eighty-six percent of all voters believe political leaders are more interested in protecting their power than in doing what’s right for the American people.
- Eighty-three percent believe the country is run by an alliance of incumbent politicians, media pundits, lobbyists, and other interests for their own gain.
- Further, 79% believe that powerful interests from Wall Street banks to corporations, unions, and PACs use campaign and lobbying money to rig the system to serve themselves and that they loot the national treasury at the expense of every American.”



Rolling Rebellion was part of the Occupy Venice Beach 4th of July Parade ‘Rebel Alliance’

We have highlighted how representative democracy often does the opposite of what super-majorities of the people want (see also this and this). The people see this lack of representation and turn off — half do not register to vote and in most elections tiny minorities of registered voters bother to vote. Recently there have been reports about how government no longer represents the people but represents a small minority of the wealthy (see these three reports here, here and here). Academics are beginning to describe the United States as an

oligarchy, plutocracy or managed democracy. All this adds up to: The US government has lost its democratic legitimacy.

Americans Faced Blatantly Undemocratic Actions

Repeatedly the people of the United States are shown how anti-democratic the government really is. We saw this multiple times just in the last week.

The power of the big business corporate interests is regularly seen in the government where there is massive crony capitalism and corporate welfare. Policies are designed to help the corporate interests even if it means undermining jobs at home and expanding the wealth divide. The government is pursuing rigged corporate trade deals like the Trans Pacific Partnership in secret. This week, TPP negotiators fled thousands of miles across Canada to avoid protesters and public scrutiny.

We also see it with President Obama's landmark legislation, the Affordable Care Act. While sold to the public as providing healthcare to all and controlling the costs of healthcare, Obamacare will do neither. It is really a market-based approach to healthcare which enriches the corporations, e.g. insurance, pharmaceutical and for-profit hospitals. Although fewer people are uninsured, they still face financial barriers that make necessary care unaffordable.



Rolling Rebellion was part of the 'Love in Action' July 4th parade in Taos where they won award for Most Patriotic

In addition to corporatism, the US security state is an affront to real democracy. Thanks to Edward Snowden who blew the whistle on the NSA, we now know the government is conducting dragnet surveillance of our Internet communications and telephone calls. This week it was revealed that most of the people caught in the targeted NSA surveillance (not the dragnet searches) were not terrorists or people threatening the United States but commonplace Americans. We also learned that in the Muslim community, no matter how patriotic someone was, they were likely to be targeted for surveillance.

The Snowden case, and other cases involving whistleblowers, show another failed aspect of US governance – the courts.

Hillary Clinton joined John Kerry in urging Snowden to come home and face prosecution claiming he could defend himself in court. The reality is there is no way he could receive a fair trial. In fact, prosecution of whistleblowers has proven itself to be more like the court in Alice in Wonderland which was a mockery of due process and where the trial concluded with the Queen calling out: ‘Sentence first, verdict later.’

This week Snowden applied to have his political asylum extended in Russia and it is likely to be granted, because people around the world see how unjust the United States has become. A government official in Russia said that Edward Snowden’s temporary asylum is likely to be extended on the grounds that “his life is endangered.”



The North Texas Light Brigade put out the truth about US democracy as part of the Rolling Rebellion

It is not likely that Snowden could have gone through the system to expose the NSA’s crimes. CIA whistleblower Jeffrey Scudder tried that approach and was ruined. He is a sad example of what happens to people who try to work within the current system to expose the truth.

The good news is people are not being cowered by the attack on whistleblowers and journalists who cover them. This week a new NSA leak was released that did not come from Snowden, indicating that there may be a new NSA whistleblower.

Also this week, a set of billboards have gone up around the DC area featuring Daniel Ellsberg, urging more whistleblowers and providing a safe way for people to blow the whistle. We hope that more people who believe in real democracy, human rights and the rule of law will expose the truth either anonymously using SecureDrop or openly with public support (Visit the Courage Foundation to support Snowden, whistleblowers and our right to information).



Rebellion for Real Democracy

Ohio Move to Amend groups joined the Rolling Rebellion to send a message

People across the country are rebelling for real democracy with creative protests demanding an end to government corrupted by big money and corporate power.

We are in the midst of a week of wonderful spectacle actions to raise awareness of the need for real democracy. The Rolling Rebellion for Read Democracy is a new campaign that will be ongoing and will build over coming months to confront the corruption of government. In Venice Beach, CA, activists dressed as characters from the Rebel Alliance in Star Wars and marched in the Fourth of July parade taking on democracy-killing entities such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership and money in politics. Activists in Seattle, WA also marched with giant puppets and talking TV heads.

Hundreds marched from LA to Sacramento for real democracy this spring. They completed their walk and after a series of acts of civil disobedience made some progress, including the state legislature becoming the second to call for a constitutional convention.



Hundreds marched in begin the 16-mile New Hampshire Rebellion along the Seacoast at Hampton Beach the walk ended at Fort Constitution in New Castle. Photo by Suzanne Laurent.

Hundreds marched in the New Hampshire Rebellion organized by Lawrence Lessig. In addition to marches to raise awareness, his approach to getting money out of politics includes raising

millions to elect candidates that will work to end the 'rule of money.' He met the first hurdle this week when he raised \$12 million for his 'PAC to end all PACS.' Now he has to show the campaign can elect politicians who will effectively confront the problem. The plan is for the tactic to grow in the next election after testing it in 2014.

A march to stop construction of a high-pressure fracked gas pipeline is underway across the state of Massachusetts. This march is rolling from town to town along the path of the proposed pipeline and will end on July 30 with a rally at the State House. Click [here](#) for information on how to join it. Another march will take place in DC this Sunday to protest the construction of a liquefied fracked gas export facility in Maryland.

The Moral Monday Movement is devoting its energies to protecting the basic right to vote. While this is an important part of the work for democracy, it will be insufficient. Voting is problematic in North Carolina where the two party system has made it impossible for third parties to participate. North Carolina has already seen the failure of corrupt Democratic Party rule, so activists know replacing horrendous Republicans with corporatist Democrats will not improve their lives. Moral Monday has defined themselves as an independent movement, and independence from the duopoly is essential to be a truly transformative movement.

What Would a Real Democracy Look Like?



The Rolling Rebellion in New Hampshire gets to the root cause: Money is not speech.

People in the United States are talking about amending or even replacing the US Constitution. The idea of a constitutional amendment to get money out of politics is making progress in the Senate, with a proposed amendment going to the senate floor. This may be election year theatrics by the Democrats, trying to show their base they are on the side of getting money out of politics, since Democratic Party voters and most Americans support that view. They know it will not pass the Senate or even get to the House floor, but it makes a point most Americans agree with. It is strange they picked Senator Chuck Schumer (NY) to be the spokesperson for the campaign since he is known in Washington, DC to be Wall Street's Senator.

People around the world are thinking seriously about how to create real democracy, where the people rule their own lives. An American academic currently living in Italy, Steven Colatrella, has written a first draft of a new constitution that does away with nation-states and creates world governance by a series of what he calls Cosmopolis governments. The goal is: “A Civilization based on Self-Governing Cities and Townships, Cooperative Self-Governed Workplaces and Public Finance, Sustainable Agriculture and Renewable Energy and Universal Access to Citizenship, Income and Subsistence.” He hopes to start a conversation about this, so review his article and constitution and share your comments.



Rolling Rebellion Seattle ‘Big Money Bought Congress’ by CastKing

Activists in Spain have gone through a process of holding thirty workshops over a year to develop a “Charter for Democracy.” The Indignado Movement, their version of Occupy, was really a “Movimiento por la Democracia” (Movement for Democracy) where the seeds for this process were planted. Their movement, like ours, occurred because of a non-responsive two-party system, politics that was a disguise for domination by big business and the wealthy, resulting in austerity, high unemployment and increases in poverty, homelessness and economic suffering. They want their Charter to be the beginning of a discussion, a living document that evolves with more input.

They do not believe that working within the current framework will bring positive results. They seek a constitution that is “founded on participation, citizen control and equal rights:”

“Faced with this institutional stonewalling and the growing separation between the rulers and the ruled, it seems there’s only one way out: a deep expansion of democracy based on citizen control over political and economic power. Surely, since what’s left of democracy is constantly shrinking and attempts at internal reform would only mean repeating the same mistakes, we must take a chance on changing the rules of the game – a democratic change, geared toward returning to society the effective decision-making ability overall which concerns it.”



Rolling Rebellion Hits Two Key Foundations of Corruption of Government. Photo by Alex Garland

Just as the Bill of Rights in the US Constitution came from the experience of that era, where colonists experienced abusive searches, unfair trials, lack of due process and the monarchy curtailing their freedoms of speech and assembly, a constitution written today would reflect the challenges of our era. The Spanish put forward basic principles which “inspire a new, robust Bill of Rights” which include universality and diversity, equality, guaranteed democratic infrastructure and financial sufficiency. They conclude,

“Finally, it is understood that a subject of rights is also a subject of responsibilities, insofar as she or he is part of a community built around a common project. These responsibilities extend to the environment we inhabit, and include accepting the responsibility to care for it, protect it and enable its reproduction, and in doing so, our own. Such responsibility involves all citizens, but is distributed according to the differences of wealth and ability.”

Another document that came from the Spanish Democracy Movement is “Last Call: A Manifesto for Social Transformation” signed by more than 250 academicians, activists (including both of us) and others declaring the urgent need to create sustainable and just systems. It is available in English and you are invited to sign on if you agree.



In Los Angeles, Rolling Rebellion held a democracy performance

The Spanish Declaration and the Cosmopolis Constitution are recent examples from around the world. But, there are a lot of experiences we can learn from. Iceland actually went through a process of crowdsourcing a new constitution using social media and town hall events. The people created a very progressive constitution which has so far been blocked by the legislature.

We have often thought about what a constitutional convention – of the people – would look like in the United States. Going through the process designed by the Constitution would unfortunately result in a convention made up of the wealthy as they would be chosen through an electoral process that is dominated by money. Thus, the result would not be a constitution of the people, but another one created by the oligarchs.

Instead, we'd like to see a process that came from the grassroots – an online process using wiki technology and social media to create a framework for a new constitution, followed by assemblies or town halls held across the country that put details on that framework, then a return to a wiki process to meld these ideas together into a final document. What would a new people-powered constitution created by the American public look like? Looking at polls of the public, we think we'd like the result.