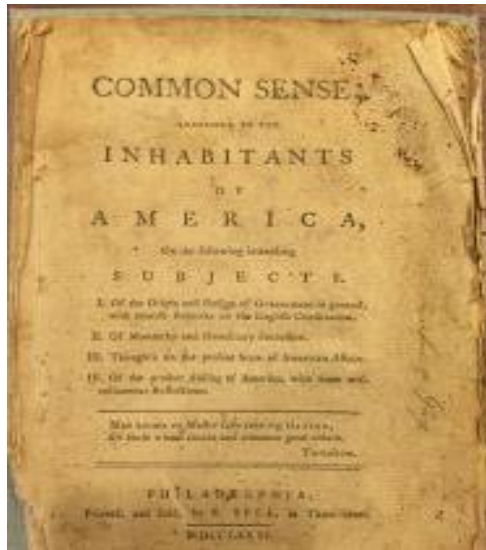


The American Crisis, Part Three

Who needs a President, anyway? Recovering America's legacy of direct democracy

by Kevin Annett



The American Republic has no need of a Chief Executive. Has not the experience of monarchy shown that endowing one man with such authority invites corruption and tyranny? Power must never be placed in the hands of any individual, for by nature it resides in the people generally. - Thomas Paine, 1786

The iconic satirist Lenny Bruce once quipped that a Presidential election is never a time to talk about politics. He might have had the year 2024 in mind. For while the corporate media would have us believe that whether Don T. is on the ballot or Joe B. can remember his own name is of national importance, in truth the everyday politics of bread, health, civil liberty, and the future of America is finding no echo in what passes as election discourse. Instead, it's all about the Oval Office and who will sit there in '25.

It's time for Americans to recall the words of Thomas Paine in 1776 when he wrote, *"Democracy does not consist of choosing our masters, but of having none."*

Americans used to know what those words meant, and they lived by them. Such self-governance was easier and more natural for our ancestors since they lived on their own farms and breathed in freedom and independence every morning. And it was people like that who not only accomplished the revolution and fought all its battles but wrote into the first Pennsylvania state constitution that *"No executive body shall influence, restrict, nullify, or interfere with the will of the people as expressed in their free Assembly"*. You will search in vain for any discussion of a national Presidency in the early constitutional debates in America.

In the words of Joseph Martin, a Connecticut soldier in the Continental Army in 1778, *"After this trouble is ended, we all will go back to our farms and mills and take up again as free men. I don't fancy a politician ruling over me any more than I do a king."*

That was the view from below. Among the slave-owning aristocrats who wrote the US Constitution, what mattered more than liberty was controlling the will of the masses of people. That's why their Federalist cronies like John Adams came up with the office of the Presidency (modeled on the British monarch), the Senate (modeled on the British House of Lords), an appointed national judiciary, and a secretive "Electoral College" that "corrected" any election results not favored by the guys with the gold. In fact, the original self-governance of the American Revolution was overturned by the 1787 federal Constitution that created a quasi-monarchy in America. The American President still retains the power of a king to declare war, suspend laws, and rule by Executive Order.

There have always been other possibilities. Instead of a President, Thomas Jefferson preferred the Roman Republic's system of two "Co-Consuls", elected annually, who would oversee the government's administration but remain subject to the will of Congress on all matters. Jefferson correctly foresaw that to battle for the Presidency, political parties would have to form and *"thereby create a permanent schism in the nation that will breed faction, unrest, and eventually civil war."*

As strange as it is to imagine the Blues and Reds disbanding and Trump and Biden jointly administering the government as a team, the fact that it does seem bizarre is a sign of how far America has drifted from itself and its founding spirit. The one-man Presidency is a sign of a pseudo-democracy where the people have lost the ability or the desire to govern themselves. No matter who "wins" the federal election next November, the only real winner will be the absolutist State.



Unite or Die

Walt Whitman, the New York street bard and lover of freedom, wrote that once liberty has left a people it can never return to them. Fortunately, the American soul, being a stream of eternity, lies in remission rather than death. I keep encountering it wherever I go. But it has still not found a way to rise again and express itself originally, outside the shackles of so-called mainstream politics. Americans' natural impulse towards self-governance and revolt is being channeled into the hands of corporatist politicians like Trump, who must be a student of Alexis de Tocqueville. For the latter wrote in 1831,

“Despite their independent nature, Americans conduct their political affairs like they do their churches: with the passionate self-assurance that they alone embody truth and goodness and will be led to salvation by an infallible leader.”

Donald Trump will not likely run for President again from inside a prison, but someone who did - the populist-socialist Eugene Debs - spoke from the American heart when he said to his supporters in 1920,

“I would not be a Moses to lead you into the Promised Land, for if I could lead you in, I could also lead you out again. Your destiny lies in your own hands.”

Well and good. But reviving the revolutionary heart of America is more than a matter of having the right spirit and intent. To stand free and independent is as dangerous a pursuit today as it was in 1776, for the same reason: because no Empire can allow its subjects to think and act for themselves, in their own name. And in the present age of the Corporatocracy, the means of state coercion and repression are extreme, since what calls itself the United States is one province in a global New Order that has no room for a self-governing Republic and its free people.

To make America again - like by reclaiming the courts and establishing local self-governing Assemblies embracing all the people across party lines - will bring us into direct conflict with an oligarchic State and the rising Chinese superpower that stands behind it. But contending against overwhelming odds is nothing new for American patriots and presents no reason for despair if we are clear of mind, pure of heart, and strong of will and purpose.

To be thus primed for the next American Revolution we must first lose the dependent habits of the techno-serfs we have become and turn away from the conditioned impulse to line up behind professional politicians and reach for a ballot next November. This is especially true since the presidential “options” being presented to us constitute twin roads to oblivion in response to America’s collapsing global position.

The section of the American ruling class around Trump are shifting allegiance to Russia and China under the cloak of a feigned isolationism and anti-NATO stance, while the Biden faction is clinging to America’s traditional partnership with the Europeans. But neither strategy will overcome America’s over indebtedness from a crippling military budget or its declining real and relative GDP, nor will it stem a rising Asian hegemony.

The captive politicians on both sides of the aisle in Washington have no solution to this ongoing American Crisis. That answer must come from the people and their ability to reimagine and reshape America and its politics to free it from the present elitist system of Presidential rule and establish direct democracy again.

To wage such a momentous struggle and to survive the dangers ahead, we all need to acquire a new love for our Republic and each other, remembering the promise and warning of Thomas Paine that was penned in the winter of 1777 from Valley Forge at the nadir point of the Revolution:

A nation without a sovereign, save the people themselves! Our bold American experiment has provoked the hatred and wicked design of tyrants and monarchs everywhere. Yet for all that, it is not a foreign enemy that will destroy our Republic, but only we ourselves. But where others see disaster, I see only possibility and promise.



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This article is the third in a series entitled *The American Crisis*, written in the spirit of its namesake by Thomas Paine to revive the hearts and sharpen the minds of a struggling people. The other articles in this series can be viewed at www.republicofkanata.org under Breaking News.