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Power

by Neal Ross

"Liberty has never come from the government. Liberty has always come from the subjects of it. The history of liberty is a history of resistance. The history of liberty is a history of limitations of governmental power, not the increase of it." -- Woodrow Wilson

Power is something that is often sought. However, once it is obtained it is like a drug that constantly demands an ever increasing amount of it. Most often it is wielded in a way that only benefits those who have it, with little regard for the welfare of those who do not.

Thomas Jefferson once said, ***"I have never been able to conceive how any rational being could propose happiness to himself from the exercise of power over others."*** Our Founding Fathers were wise when it came to the temptations which came with unbridled power. Anyone who has taken the time to research the writings of Jefferson, Madison, and the other founders would know that they were wary of a government with unlimited power.

English historian Lord Acton is quoted as saying, ***"Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are always bad men."*** Is that why Jefferson said that rational men do not seek such power, or is it, as author David Brin said, ***"It is said that power corrupts, but actually it's more true that power attracts the corruptable. The sane are usually attracted by other things than power."***

Whichever may be true the fact is that as Albert Einstein once said, ***"The attempt to combine wisdom and power has only rarely been successful and then only for a short while."*** That quote certainly applies to our government today, and particularly to the increasing scope of power sought by the executive branch under the present administration. Unfortunately, Einstein's thoughts on power turned out to be more realistic than the vision held by Thomas Jefferson when he said, ***"I hope our wisdom will grow with our power, and teach us, that the less we use our power the greater it will be."***

When the original thirteen states ratified the Constitution of the United States, they granted the federal government certain enumerated powers that were contained within that document. Those powers were specific and limited, yet over time the people of this country have become ignorant as to what powers the Constitution grants to the government, and more importantly, which ones it does not.

Thomas Jefferson stated that concisely when he said, ***"I consider the foundation of the Constitution as laid on this ground: That 'all powers not delegated to the United States, by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States or to the people' (10th Amendment). To take a single step beyond the boundaries thus specifically drawn around the powers of Congress, is to take possession of a boundless field of power, no longer susceptible to any definition."***

That is exactly what has happened, we, through our ignorance of what the Constitution says, have not only enabled our government to expand it's powers far beyond the original intent of the Constitution, we have voted for candidates who make campaign promises that they are not authorized to fulfil if they were to govern strictly according to their Constitutional charter.

Our founders realized that there may come a time when the Constitution may not fit the needs of

the nation, and they offered us a method to remedy any future deficiency. As we the people were the ones who granted the government its power in the first place by ratifying the Constitution, it is only by an act of the people that the powers granted the government could be increased. Otherwise, as Jefferson said, ***“Every government degenerates when trusted to the rulers of the people alone. The people themselves are its only safe depositories.”***

The proper method for either expanding, or restricting the powers of government are to be found in Article 5, which states, ***“The Congress, whenever two thirds of both houses shall deem it necessary, shall propose amendments to this Constitution, or, on the application of the legislatures of two thirds of the several states, shall call a convention for proposing amendments, which, in either case, shall be valid to all intents and purposes, as part of this Constitution, when ratified by the legislatures of three fourths of the several states, or by conventions in three fourths thereof...”***

Our first President, George Washington felt so strongly about this, that he stated, ***“If in the opinion of the People, the distribution or modification of the Constitutional powers be in any particular wrong, let it be corrected by an amendment in the way which the Constitution designates. But let there be no change by usurpation; for though this, in one instance, may be the instrument of good, it is the customary weapon by which free governments are destroyed.”***

We the people have forgotten that our government cannot simply assume powers not granted them by the Constitution, whether they do so by Executive Order, Presidential Signing Statements, Treaties, or Trade Agreements. Not only have we the people forgotten this fundamental principle, those we have elected to represent us seem to have forgotten it as well.

There is an organization called Friends of the Article V Convention, or [FOAVC](http://www.foavc.org) (<http://www.foavc.org>), whose webpage states, ***“We are a non-partisan association of American citizens from every state in our Republic comprised of a broad range of occupations, ethnicities, religious affiliations and political persuasions. Our common bond is a deep commitment to preserving the values and principles embodied in our founding documents - the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution - upon which this nation was founded.”***

One of the members of this organization sent out an e mail describing how he had contacted members of Congress in regards to holding a Constitutional Convention to propose amendments to the Constitution. This is part of what he said, ***“I have openly confronted several Congress members in public arenas now directly. This campaign season is open season, on them. They all respond with thundering silence, completely dumbfounded! One chased me down after the showbiz to ask about it. They don't have a clue what the Constitution says. I ts not just that they won't address the issue. Neither the members nor their staff have a clue.”***

So, it is not only we the people who are not familiar with what the Constitution says, it is those we elect to represent us as well. When a body of elected representatives do not understand the limitations placed upon them by their charter, in this case our Constitution, how can they be expected to govern within it's confines?

This also causes one to wonder, are the violations of their oaths of office to uphold the Constitution due to ignorance, or is it something more sinister, intentional violations of the authority granted them?

Could it be that all the special interest groups such the banks, the oil companies, the pharmaceutical companies, ad nauseam that lobby Congress, who contribute to the campaigns of these politicians are the ones who actually have the ultimate say in what our government does, or does not do?

Could it be that the political parties, who rely upon these special interest groups for their donations, have gained so power, that a candidate who truly understands the Constitution has no chance of ever getting elected?

George Washington warned us about the dangers of political parties, *"However [political parties] may now and then answer popular ends, they are likely in the course of time and things, to become potent engines, by which cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the power of the people and to usurp for themselves the reins of government, destroying afterwards the very engines which have lifted them to unjust dominion."*

Whatever the case may be, those in power, whether they be puppets controlled by the special interest groups, or merely ignorant people who unwillingly legislate outside their scope of power, we the people have allowed them to become firmly entrenched because we also are ignorant as to the powers which the Constitution grants them.

Whether we have simply allowed this to happen due to our own ignorance, or whether we have been lied to by those we've entrusted to govern according to strictly defined limitations, the end result is the same, we now have a government that is totally out of control.

What is worse is that when people try to inform the public as to the truth concerning their government, they are shunned and called all kinds of names. Carl Sagan, the noted scientist once said, *"One of the saddest lessons of history is this: If we've been bamboozled long enough, we tend to reject any evidence of the bamboozle. The bamboozle has captured us. Once you give a charlatan power over you, you almost never get it back."*

Folks, we have been bamboozled. Whether it be by design, or by ignorance, the end result is the same. Whether our nation still has the chance to turn things around, or if we are too far gone to survive is something that is being argued by many. In truth, only time will tell. Unfortunately, if we are past the point of no return, if our nation, as envisioned by our founders, is truly on the brink of self destruction, things are going to get awfully ugly, and awfully quickly. I only hope that people are prepared for what lies just over the horizon. At least they can't say that they haven't been warned.
