

February 7, 2007

Delusion Destroys Democracy

by Joel S. Hirschhorn

Will Americans learn to trust their fellow citizens or stay stuck on stupidly backing serial political betrayers?

I have been watching films from the 1940s and 1950s about World War II. It was well known that Adolph Hitler was truly delusional. His delusions prevented him from accepting wisdom and facts from experienced military officers and others, and caused millions to suffer and die. Surely George W. Bush resembles Hitler psychologically. His obsessive delusions about his Iraq war are also causing incredible suffering and death, as well as squandering our nation's wealth.

Our constitutional democracy makes it nearly impossible to free the nation from the grip of a seemingly sane but deeply delusional president. The present constitutional provision for impeachment is clearly inadequate. As with Hitler and other delusional tyrants, Bush has surrounded himself with sycophants that share his delusions, and perhaps nurtured them, and refuse to tell the emperor that he has no clothes. Congress, even under Democratic control, commits negligent cowardice. And our mainstream press has not rallied the nation to free itself from misused presidential power.

Also clear to some of us is that the delusional Bush has survived because delusion runs rampant across the nation, blocking populist actions in the national interest. Here are the main states of American delusion:

Millions of Americans persist in believing, contrary to all historical evidence, that changing control of Congress and the Executive Branch between Democrats and Republicans produces sorely needed reforms. But mainstream politicians are serial betrayers. Thus, people suffer from delusional political faith.

Millions of non-wealthy Americans believe that the economy works for them. This persists despite reams of facts that show how working- and middle-class people are not receiving their fair share of national income and wealth. They keep running on a debt treadmill that will not take them to the proverbial American dream. What they get is economic insecurity, inequality and injustice. Consumer confidence is an oxymoron. This is delusional prosperity.

Viral delusional thinking is that America sets the gold standard for democracies. The rest of the world, however, to its credit sees an arrogant nation with a government that uses its military strength foolishly and sees its policies rewarding the rich at the expense of all others. People from Finland to New Zealand question why Americans do not receive universal health care, why its workers are sacrificed for global trade and corporate powers, why millions of its citizens go hungry and homeless, why so few people bother to vote, why so many politicians are convicted of crimes, and why there are more people in prisons than in all other countries combined. Yet Americans by and large keep thinking that their constitutional republic gives them first class

democracy. This is delusional patriotism.

So, what are we to do? Keep expressing dissent by marching and protesting in the streets? Keep signing petitions on the Internet? Keep demanding impeachment of Bush? Keep reading and writing angry diatribes on progressive websites? Keep voting for mainstream politicians from the two major parties, hoping for a political messiah? Keep obeying Bush by borrowing, spending, shopping and consuming to keep our debt-ridden nation afloat?

Such activities release anger, but are largely placebo self-medications, unlikely to provide the permanent solutions our nation needs. Protests serve more as entertainment for the nation than a force to tear down the rotten system. Scale is a problem. Maybe if one million angry Americans sat down peacefully in the streets all around the White House, defying police action for many days, just maybe the system would crack. Protests must have a revolutionary character. They must induce fear into the hearts of smug and delusional power elites – like Dick Cheney.

The real needs are structural reforms that combat the major societal delusions that are driving America downhill. We must attack the root causes of problems rather than provide temporary relief or cover-up of symptoms.

Delusional political faith and delusional prosperity require profound reforms in our political system. A new competitive political party is needed. One that is guided by a set of principles that both mainstream Democrats and Republicans can not opportunistically accept, because the principles clearly conflict with their rotten behavior. A recent New America Foundation survey of Californians found that "seven in 10 voters say they often feel they must choose the lesser of two evils; more than half the voters say California needs another major political party."

Delusional patriotism is tougher to remedy. To revitalize American democracy we must have a national dialogue. Heed the words of the great John Marshall: "The people made the constitution, and the people can unmake it. It is the creature of their will, and lives only by their will." And James Madison: "the people have an indubitable, unalienable, and indefeasible right to reform or change their Government, whenever it be found adverse or inadequate to the purposes of its institution." Thomas Jefferson believed that the constitution-drafting process should be repeated by each generation of Americans. That's what real freedom is all about. A great democracy must be much more than stable – it must be self-correcting.

When a political system no longer deserves trust, citizens must trust themselves. Considering how doggedly our unrepresentative democracy stays under the grip of moneyed special interests and fails large fractions of Americans, more direct democracy aimed squarely at major reforms is desperately needed. That requires a lot more than protesting and ranting. Some urge citizens' assemblies (see <http://www.cusdi.org/> and <http://www.healthydemocracy.org/>), or national initiative elections (see <https://votep2.us/>). I and others believe that we have a constitutional right to Article V Conventions (see <http://www.foavc.org/>). However, elitist status quo forces have made the population afraid of such activities – a sick delusional, status quo bias belief. If it persists, Americans will not set themselves free of the oppressive forces that have hijacked their nation. They will keep venting their anger as dissenters or stay distractive consumers rather than work to return power to the people.

LET'S NOT DELUDE OURSELVES THAT ALL WILL BE WELL AFTER BUSH IS GONE. AS AWFUL AS BUSH IS, HE IS A SYMPTOM OF WHAT AILS OUR NATION. Our nation will remain in need of deep reforms. Millions of dissidents must wake up to what is really needed and rally around a revolutionary strategy.