



The Occupy Movement, Rigged Elections, and the Bastille Line

All revolutions, even peaceful ones, require a point of attack capable of breaking through the Wall erected by the Powers-That-Be. The Occupy movement, such a welcome and important revival of democracy, has great potential to “rattle the walls” and change our times. There’s great heat out in the winter cold all over America (and across much of the globe). Focusing all that Heat like an acetylene torch on restoring observable vote counting and honest elections may well be the best, if not the only, chance the Occupy movement has to break the chokehold of the 1%.

Although the historical evidence is that Marie Antoinette never actually said “Let them eat grass,” the phrase has become inextricably linked with the callousness and cruel inequalities that led directly and inexorably to the storming of the Bastille and the French Revolution. Now we have Newt Gingrich, among others, saying, to wild right-wing applause, that the Occupiers should “go get a job right after you take a bath.” The mockery is at or above the “Let them eat grass” level; the question is: Must revolution inexorably follow?

Every society has its Bastille Line, the point at which the provocation—the inequalities, naked unfairness, exploitation, derision—becomes so great and affects so many, and the prospects of redress through normal political processes grow so dim, that the cork blows and revolution is sprung. All the lies told, bones thrown, and Prozac prescribed can push the Bastille Line back somewhat, but it is still there when there is no other way. Even in America, where the Occupy movement, which continues to attract more and more to its ranks and to its consciousness, is the first stirring in a very long time, the first looking out of windows at the weather, the first test of the power structure’s response.

It’s becoming pretty clear, with the help of Michael Bloomberg and Newt Gingrich, what that response will be. In fact the “Let them eat grass” response is probably inevitable because America has become that broken, that polarized, that unfair, that cruel, that close to the gang rape that was pre-Revolutionary France. The Occupy movement is preparing for a long siege. They know there are no quick fixes to the mess that is America today. As they wisely expected, the Powers-That-Be are not going to change their ways, let alone yield control, to anything short of a Revolution. The question is “Why?”

Freeman Dyson, writing in *The New York Review*, gives us a good answer. “Democratic systems of government,” he writes, “are designed to answer the . . . question, ‘How do we make sure that rulers can be peacefully replaced when they rule badly?’ . . . Elections are held not to choose the best rulers, but to give us a chance to get rid of the worst without bloodshed.” Elections, in other words, are the primary mechanism for keeping a society well away from its Bastille Line, and they virtually never fail to do so. Unless they are rigged. Then they lose all such protective power and the only choices left are quiet desperation or the march on the Bastille.

This is what has happened in and to America. Election Defense Alliance, and our colleagues in election integrity and election forensics, have amassed mountains of evidence that America’s computerized, privatized, concealed, and partisan owned-and-operated vote counting system has been fully corrupted and manipulated to serve the interests of the few and to progressively disempower the many. To do, in other words, exactly what elections in a democracy are

designed to prevent. Much of that evidence and analysis is archived on this website (www.ElectionDefenseAlliance.org); it is available for your evaluation and will not be recapitulated here.

Because this is a Call To Action. The Occupy movement, and the widespread discontent and disempowerment it embodies, have met the First Response: get out of the park, take a bath, get a job . . . get lost. We don't know what will come next. America remains a rather closely divided, if dangerously polarized, nation and, yes, there is a lot of Prozac, actual and rhetorical, in circulation. Meanwhile, American elections are ceasing to function as the vehicle for "get[ting] rid of the worst without bloodshed." In the rigged game of American elections, it now often requires a 60% or greater supermajority to actually win an election against a candidate or proposition favored by the "1%." And, because computerized rigging knows no theoretical bounds, it can get a lot worse, the thumb on the scale morphing as needed into a ham fist and, ultimately, an elephant—whatever it takes to stay in power. And every rigged election brings us one block closer to the Bastille, to a stark choice between retreat and revolution, an obscenely uneven playing field with no democratic alternative, no political means of redress and recovery.

If our democracy is to be saved from generations of oppression on the one hand or bloody revolution on the other, an end must come to rigged elections. And it must come NOW. The only way that is going to happen is by replacing our secret and corrupted computerized vote counting with publicly observable human vote counting—all across America. "But," election officials in thrall to the speed and convenience of the computers wail, "we don't have the peoplepower to do this." Oh yes we do. They are out there in the cold in parks and public spaces in cities and towns all across this country. They are also in their homes and offices, inspired by the Occupiers, beginning to recognize that there is something terribly wrong with the picture and wondering what they too can do.

We recognize that the Occupiers have focused much of their energy on the challenge of creating a "real" democracy. And we understand the temptation to turn away from our larger "democracy" that is seen to be so damaged and corrupted. But we believe that, if the Occupiers can seize this moment and channel their growing power and their new insights, it is not too late to restore our democracy to health and vitality. Whatever other agenda or demands the Occupiers may ultimately embrace, they could begin now to focus their power on elections, the primary means our democracy has provided for its own defense. It is time to OCCUPY ELECTIONS, to storm not the Bastille but county and town clerks' offices all across America with signed commitments to work as vote counters and observers on Election Day, beginning this winter with the primaries. And then to actually OCCUPY THE ELECTIONS by assembling at polling places to relieve the computers from duty. That's right, to take the place of the computers, replacing secret cyber-counting by partisan programmers with open, observable counting by citizens. It doesn't get much more democratic than that!

The Occupiers could become a national militia for democracy, resolved to count the ballots—all the ballots—in the open, in public. And also rouse their fellow citizens to join them in this fundamental duty to democracy, fatally forgotten in this age of convenience-uber-alles. Yes there would still be Citizens United and lots of work to do, but even gobs of corporate cash soon run out of steam when it comes to buying votes and thwarting the public will. To add a bit to Lincoln, "You can't fool all of the people all of the time . . . but election rigging can make it look like you did." Years of data-gathering and analysis tell us that America—fooled, fooled again, snookered, cheated, stolen—would awake from its nightmare and be a very different and a whole lot fairer nation if honest elections were restored.

This could be the moment of truth. It is definitely a moment of choice. A moment of focus. If it passes, all that's left may be the Bastille and the agony that follows.

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