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Today we live in an age of *yellow journalism*, where the mainstream media sensationalizes their content in order to increase circulation and increase profits.

By putting television shows such as *Survivor* on the cover of their newspapers, or nicknaming a horrible conflict as a *showdown*, these guilty parties have given up on real journalism.

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"Screw, Inc."

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By Paul Harris
YellowTimes.org Columnist (Canada)



(YellowTimes.org) – Much of the world is rapidly deteriorating into the dark side of the 19th century. At a time in mankind's journey to, well, wherever it is that we're all going to end up, an age when we have the resources, skills, and abilities to eliminate most of the world's ills, we choose to revert to a happier and gentler time when the barons of finance ruled everything and the rest of us be damned.

We cheerfully elect government after government all around the world of people who wouldn't know their brass from their oboe but who surely know how to be the lickspittles of corporations. We have allowed ourselves to be conned into believing that what is good for business is good for society rather than the other way round; our governments have sold us down the proverbial river and have raped the resources that properly belong to the people; we have accepted the rule of merchants whose only goal is to make sure they get our money.

Globalization, in its modern incarnation, has been coming at us now for close to thirty years because it's about that long ago that it first grabbed hold of a national government. Turns out it was the Chilean government, but it has proved to be a rapidly spreading virus. It has all but supplanted democracy.

Democracy is not about abstract ideas and idealism; it is an extremely complex and concrete reality. It is about constantly seeking, selecting, refining, and developing practical options for achieving the common good. The modern world has developed what we call democracy today in less than 300 years and we developed it within the concept of the nation state. While nation states may not have been the best thing since the Garden of Eden, the positive thing we were developing was the idea of the citizen. With the advent of globalized economies and globalized rule, the power of citizens has been taken away.

On a superficial level, we can all agree there is more democracy now than there ever has been. There have never been so many countries that describe themselves as democratic but the reality is we have seen a steady depletion and weakening of the democratic dream. But consider this: The most powerful force possessed by an individual citizen is his own government. There are no other institutions or mechanisms that the individual can lay claim to as being his. In a democracy, the individual is the government; we are never General Motors or IBM or Krupp Steel.

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Yet, we are willingly giving away the only real power we have without getting anything in return.

One of the most insidious postures of those who favor globalization begins with the broad statement that government is too big, that government shouldn't be involved in things such as water and energy production because those can be managed better by private enterprises. So we buy into this argument and begin the process of surrendering our power to manage society.

We turn ourselves over to corporations who don't care a fiddler's fig about whether we get the best society we can have; these corporations care only about generating an extra few pennies for their shareholders. The amazing thing is that we do this willingly. We cheerfully choose to have artificial limits put on the only real power we have to order our lives. It seems that we do this because we have been convinced that government is the enemy of the people, despite our constant crowing that our governments are of, by, and for the people.


Over those 300 or so years that we developed our modern democracies, we have made many advances for the common good. It has taken us only a few years to begin seriously dismantling it. Democracies are led by people, not corporations, and the idea that any democratic society could be led by economics or by self interest demotes the citizenry to little more than a decoration. We have engaged in a form of unconscious suicide by allowing these enormously important powers to escape from our hands into the international arena where it is beyond our reach.

Another part of the disease that seems to have afflicted us is the rush to deregulate everything. As a citizen of Canada, I am personally regulated up the yingyang, along with many of the local businesses around me. But the international players which operate in Canada do so without even a hint that they should be controlled or constrained. In that regard, Canada is no different than any of the Western democracies because we have also bought into those international trade agreements whose sole purpose was to make our governments irrelevant.

Part of the deregulation movement has been to satisfy the worldwide taste for free trade. Western civilizations have known for 3,000 years that in order to have prosperity, you have to have extremely strict, but straightforward, regulations that will bring the kind of stability and long-term competition that can generate that prosperity. We know very well that without those regulations, we get horrible boom and bust cycles that end up in terrible depressions.

From searching the online databases of *Forbes Magazine*, the *Globe & Mail Report on Business*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, I have learned the following: five firms control 50 percent of the global markets in aerospace, electronic components, automobiles, airlines, and steel; five firms control about 70 percent of consumer durables; five control about 40 percent of oil, personal computers and media.

There are 200 companies representing about 28 percent of the world's GDP and less than 1 percent of the world's workforce. Even conservative capitalists should be horrified to realize that so much production is in the hands of people who provide so few



jobs because it's that production which should provide the wages that people can use to consume those products. You don't have to be a leftist to see how dangerous this is.

And the scariest statistic: 51 percent of the largest economies in the world are companies, not countries.

Now isn't all of this a good thing? Isn't it true that countries who trade together don't go to war with each other? The answers are 'no' and 'no.' Most of the wars throughout history have been the result of trade disputes. I'm not going to iterate them all here; if you didn't pay attention in history class, you should have. What we are leading to now is war over the inability to control trade. When my country and your country are being savaged by some corporation that is in a third country over which neither of us has any control, how are we going to solve the problem? War. It's the easiest answer to the frustration of being irrelevant. You can't go to war against some corporation.

Societies have shapes. Ideally, diamond-shaped is what most democracies would hope to be: a little bit of rich at the top, a little bit of poor-that-you're-always-trying-to-deal-with at the bottom, and most everyone else in the middle. The pure capitalist model of the 19th century was a pyramid with a concentration of enormous wealth at the top rapidly dropping off to huge poverty at the bottom. By allowing business to take on the leadership role in our countries, we are moving away from the diamond and headed straight for the pyramid. We are moving away from the social victory that democracy brought us and heading straight back toward disaster.

Proponents of globalization and free trade accept the premise that markets are self-regulating. They are not, they never have been, and they never will be. We have thousands of years of history to prove that to us. Advanced societies understand that they prosper and progress by engaging in trade and by doing so in as diversified a way as possible. But in order to do that effectively, they need to have some kind of industrial development policy. For 3,000 years, societies have had industrial policies, trade policies, and regulations. No sophisticated society in the history of the world has existed without an industrial policy.

But we have moved rapidly to dismantle the policies, the agreements between nations, and give them over to the corporations who will be the only beneficiaries. We have moved to make governments irrelevant without having any sense that we are also making ourselves irrelevant. In other words, we have achieved, or are close to, a point where democracy no longer matters. Government can and should equal the practical expression of the common good. Without reversal of this mindless worship at the tomb of the unknown shareholder, we might as well surrender right now.

Democracy was built on the nation state and every power that is removed from the nation state without the granting of some compensating international power for the citizenry is anti-democratic. As a minimum, we need to work out an international control to force taxation on corporations. Fifty or so years ago, corporations in most developed nations paid somewhere in the vicinity of 40-50 percent of a nation's total tax grab. Today, they pay about 6-7 percent. That's why we can't afford education,

health care, and assistance for the disadvantaged that all our governments are taking away from us. This is not a left-wing argument: every decent conservative economist of the past 150 years believed that you had to tax the real sources of wealth in order to fund the real necessities of the democratic state.

Democracy requires putting economics and self-interest into a subsidiary position. That is the best recipe for stable prosperity. It is the best recipe for restoring democracy.

[Paul Harris is self-employed as a consultant providing Canadian businesses with the tools and expertise to successfully reintegrate their sick or injured employees into the workplace. He has traveled extensively in what we arrogant North Americans refer to as "the Third World," and he believes that life is very much like a sewer: what you get out of it depends on what you put into it. Paul lives in Canada.]

Paul Harris encourages your comments: pharris@YellowTimes.org

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