

Disassembling the Political-Economic Complex

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Years ago, Dwight D. Eisenhower warned us against the growing Military-Industrial Complex. Assembled like a Chinese puzzle box, once completed, there would be almost no way to take it apart. Since that time, we have been overtaken by a second, more heinous complex: The Political-Economic Complex. Once, it was spoken of in hushed, if fatalistic terms, in back rooms. Once it was spoken of with praise derived from the fleeting, if exhilarating, successes it offered after each election. But last week, a prominent party official put it in writing. The name has been omitted because the statement could have been made by any of a thousand people within any of the top thirty political parties. The statement is truth unleashed.

The exact quote is: “The Truth be known.... It is a few very large donors that define which politician goes forward and which issues to address. [sic]”

I know of no one who doubts the ties between politics and currency and I know of almost no one who knows what to do about it. Unchecked, the P-E Complex shall be the death of the Representative Republic in which we live. We all know this in our hearts. We see time after time how financial power has trumped the will of the people and the needs of the nation. In the following paragraphs, we shall see the difficult, but hopefully not impossible, steps needed to disassemble the P-E Complex and redistribute power to the average American Citizen.

There are four steps. Each will move us forward, but unless all four are accomplished, we run the risk of winning battles while still losing the war.

STEP ONE. With the focused and willful intent of severing ties between those who govern and those with overwhelming financial powers, while preserving the capitalist foundation of the nation, I suggest that we start by reinstating the citizen as the primary financial backer, in fact the only backer, of the candidate. Our nation was founded on the concept that one individual would be elected to a position of authority from which he would represent the needs of other individuals. Corporate America has no place in this relationship, even though people who invest in, own, or run corporations certainly do.

Should the citizen in the originally intended relationship be fully juxtaposed with the corporation, then the elected individual would be charged with representing Corporate America, not the natural person. At the moment, the elected individual, at times, may represent both Corporate America and the citizen, but the former carries more weight because the former carries more cash.

Removing Corporate America from the electoral process would create a much stronger ‘middle class’ of American voters. Admittedly, wealthy individuals will still carry a lot of weight but the overwhelming power of corporate financing would be eliminated.

There is a second, and legal, argument for this unpinning of campaigns from corporate donors. Corporations are conglomerates of individual stockholders. It is statistically obvious that not all shareholders would have the same politics and would not support the same candidate uniformly. The directors who vote for corporate donations, therefore, are disenfranchising the shareholders who may have made a different personal choice. Legally, many of these shareholders may not even be American citizens creating the de facto situation where a corporate donation is derived from overseas capital. Nowhere is this more clearly evident than in donations from international trade unions.

Removing Corporate America as a donor cuts the ties between the corporation and the political process.

STEP TWO: The second suggestion I put forth must naturally follow the adoption of the removal of Corporate America. Given the premise that the individual who is elected is charged with representing those who elected him, I suggest that donations be limited to registered voters living within the district associated with the election. Presidential candidates would, therefore, be able to raise money nationwide while a city councilman would be restricted to raising money from his constituents. Severing these outside ties terminates the influence that candidates suffer from donors from far afield. Limiting the donors will limit the funds available, but it would also serve to limit the loyalty of the candidate to the constituents.

These two suggestions go hand in hand and serve primarily to reformulate the relationship between the candidate and the voter. Achieving either would be hard. Achieving both would be miraculous. Achieving neither will lead us to a nation where corporations and non-constituents, including foreign nationals, define our future by defining our candidates.

STEP THREE: My third suggestion is less evident in its effect but absolutely no less critical. I suggest that we must eliminate rules and regulations adopted by appointed boards. It is evident to anyone not bent on bending the interpretation of the Constitution to their own ends that a rule adopted by someone who was not elected is inconsistent with the very foundation of our form of government. The severance of financial ties, however, is less evident. The truth is that people are appointed to boards out of gratitude for favors received by the elected person appointing them. Most often, the favor owed is the result of donations received. The appointee is not immune from influence any more than is an elected person. The difference is, however, that the appointee need not be re-elected. While it is true that he may lose his seat when the next person elected needs to return a favor precipitated during their own campaign, the appointed board member is generally secure. It is that security that makes the influence even more forceful. The influence derives from the donor pool and the leverage is that the donor can withhold his donation to the appointing authority.

So, where does the P-E Complex come into play with the appointed board? The appointee certainly wields the perception of power. He is certainly close to the appointing authority and certainly will use his influence to the best of his ability to please the wealthy. It is deeper than that, however. The only investigation that needs to be done to prove the premise is to examine the jobs people take once they leave an appointed office. Many go on to use the friends and ties they have established to mount their own campaign for elected office. Others take high paying jobs with influential corporations where the

board member is expected to use the influence he developed and to use it to the benefit of the employer. At its core, however, the suggestion stands solidly on the original premise: Rules adopted by those not elected by the people are in stark contrast to the concept of a representative form of government.

STEP FOUR: The last step is to remove the power that lies within the ill-acquired wealth of the Federal government itself. Recall the social situation in 1773 and you will see that the power of the King derived not from money, but from the fact that he owned all the land. Owning the land meant that he was in a position where he was the only one able to derive beneficial financial use of it and so the money followed. This relationship was so prominent in the minds of those who wrote the constitution that there were very strong provisions put in place to prevent the Federal government from owning land unless it directly served the purposes of Article 1 Section 8 among others.

This all went horribly wrong and the restraints were loosed when the Federal government got around to winning wars. Territory won was claimed as Federal land. Soon afterwards, the Federal government went out and purchased land from other nations. The Constitution restricted the selling of land from a state or a person to the government but was silent on whether the government could purchase land from elsewhere. The Louisiana Purchase gave the Federal government all the power vested in land ownership that it needed to destroy the remnants of the restraints of the Constitution. Doubters are advised to simply compare a map of the Louisiana Purchase and the territory gained in the Mexican America War to the map of 'public lands' maintained by the Bureau of Land Management.

Without these lands, the Federal government would not own grazing land or mineral rights. More importantly, individuals, citizens, states, cities, and perhaps even corporations would own these lands. The suggestion therefore is to transfer ownership of these lands away from the Federal government. It may be done either by direct transfer to the state or by lottery to individual citizens. Those individuals may then sell, trade, or give away their interest in the land in a manner consistent with the pursuit of happiness we all desire so fervently. The economic stimulus would far outstrip the measures in place today but more importantly, the move would further serve to disassemble the Political-Economic Complex which runs our nation today.

Stripping Washington of land ownership would remove a good deal of the financial independence of the Federal Government striking at the very heart of the P-E Complex.

These four steps would serve to completely disassociate political power from the financial power of anyone save the registered voter. Where that association remained, it would be limited to specific political subdivisions and not exerted nationally. The steps would considerably restrict the financial power of the Federal government in keeping with the philosophical intent of the Constitution.