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“Why the Time is Right for Direct Democracy”

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PROLOGUE

Instead of providing a list of contents, I will briefly outline the structure of the book. I begin with a broad summary of some of the issues facing the world as a whole and then talk about the nature and history of democracy and its implications. Recent advances in citizen collaboration on the internet are then discussed. This is followed by a case study of how a democracy can be corrupted, using the United States as a subject.

The book then goes on to explain the system of direct democracy and also its drawbacks, along with suggestions of solutions to those drawbacks. A simple method of implementing direct democracy is also put forth. An appendix with the original text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ends the book. In keeping with the spirit of direct democracy, I have decided initially to publish the book online and publicize it directly by myself in order to bypass publishing companies and establishment media. In the same vein, I have further elected to leave the choice of payment (including no payment) for the book completely up to the reader.

Chapter 1: State of the Nations

“Every man is guilty of all the good he did not do” – Voltaire

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted in 1948 by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris. The most translated document in the world, it is now the basis of laws and national constitutions in numerous countries. Yet more than sixty years on, we inhabit societies in which, to a lesser or greater degree, each of the thirty articles in the Declaration are routinely contravened.

Even the most basic human rights violations occur every day. The practice of slavery, for instance, has existed for thousands of years, and although it is now universally illegal - the last country to abolish it was Mauritania in 1981 - according to varying estimates, between 12 and 27 million people (equivalent to the population of Malaysia) are currently held in slavery. Most are bonded laborers in Asia - notably Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Nepal – people whose bodies are collateral for debts which, in many cases, will never diminish or be paid off. Many modern slaves are children, who are particularly susceptible to sexual abuse, while those aged younger than ten are often trained to commit crimes in order to take advantage of the fact that they fall below the age of criminal responsibility.

Human trafficking is also alive and well. Although there is debate about the numbers, the United Nations estimated in 2008 that 2.5 million people from 127 countries are being trafficked into 137 countries at any time, pressed into the sex industry or being used as forced laborers. It is extremely profitable, making it a priority for international criminal gangs – an estimated 32 billion dollars a year is brought in, only slightly less than that made from arms trading or drug smuggling. This industry is growing and is expected to overtake drug trafficking as the most profitable criminal industry in the future.

Words and numbers are inadequate to convey the scope of this tragedy, not least because we are inundated with statistics in the media and become inured to them. Needless to say, most people would recoil in horror if directly confronted with a little boy or girl, or indeed an adult, in such straits and would likely do everything in their power to help them, but when such horrors are presented only as raw data, they become just another problem which ordinary people can do little or nothing about, and so they are dismissed and eventually forgotten amid the distractions of everyday life.

This is not to say that people are heartless. On the contrary, humans have the potential for great good, as demonstrated by the huge numbers of charity workers and volunteers around the world. It is an inescapable fact, however, that people feel that they are powerless to help, that these issues are beyond their power to change, and that they are

best left to organs like the UN, which have the organization, manpower, will, and charter to work effectively.

What if a system existed through which people actually *could* do something to help; if the goodwill lying latent in millions of people *could* be channeled in an efficient and meaningful way?

In order to answer that question, it is necessary to examine the fundamental nature of society, and to ask what makes one 'good', despite the obvious fact that given the vast diversity of peoples, cultures, religions and attitudes around the world, it is impossible to *uniquely* define an ideal one.

While the UDHR is the moral template from which many modern societies have worked, not everyone regards it as perfect. Criticism comes, for example, from Muslim societies under Sharia which do not accept freedom of religion, or from those objecting to mandatory education.

However its intentions are noble, meaning that it is a sincere attempt to create a world where every single person can feel free to do as they wish as long as they do not damage or interfere with the freedom of others, and can have access to the same rights as anyone else, regardless of social status.

It is a list of ideals, and ideals are the ultimate basis for law. Those who dismiss ideals as pipe dreams for the unrealistic fail to comprehend one basic point: no one expects these ideals to be perfectly realized. They are simply targets, noble goals which we should always strive for and never give up trying to attain, reminders of what may someday be possible if our societies evolve sufficiently.

If we accept such ideals as principles, it should logically be regarded as a gross violation of our integrity if we contravene them. Imagine you are a scientist sent to observe an alien culture on a distant planet which is as yet unaware of humanity. Your job is to learn their languages by analyzing their communications and to observe their behavior in detail, and you are required to submit a report to your government back home. The government will then decide whether to deal with the aliens based on your judgments.

Now consider that you observe that the aliens have a clear code of laws, but that they occasionally, sometimes, often, even routinely violate them in special cases. It is likely that you would write in your report something like this:

The aliens consistently break their own laws with varying justifications. I recommend that these aliens absolutely NOT be trusted in any dealings.

We can only ever be an untrustworthy species, harming our institutions and each other, as long as we continue to ignore our own principles when they are inconvenient. The principle of strict adherence to due process and the rule of law, including that applied retroactively, is paramount and the only way to ensure fairness and consistency. Further, as fundamental principles act as a guiding light when people or societies are faced with deep or seemingly incompatible ethical conundrums, it is even more vital that they are adhered to.

The first priority of any government is to eliminate, or at the very least, reduce any form of suffering of its civilians to the best of its ability, while also providing its people with the framework and tools required to attain personal freedom: education, health, law and order and so on, all the time adhering strictly to fundamental principles.

This seems such an obvious tenet, but even in developed countries, these basic human rights are under assault: access to higher education or health is becoming increasingly difficult for the poor due to cost. The *haves* have, and the *have-nots* increasingly do not; if the *have-nots* want a university education, or require a costly medical procedure, they can only do so if they incur sometimes crippling debts, and indeed may not even have the means to obtain a loan in the first place.

In the UK in 2011 the upper limit for university tuition fees for undergraduates and postgraduates was increased from 3,290 up to 9,000 pounds sterling (from \$5,100 to \$14,000) per year. Despite the government insisting that few universities would charge the maximum rate, sixty-four universities announced they would do so from 2012. Students from poor families attending these universities will find themselves 27,000 pounds (around \$42,000) in debt for tuition fees alone after a three-year course.

Alarmingly, student debt in the UK is set to *double* for those entering university in 2012. While it is true that everyone still potentially has access to higher education in the UK, it is becoming more and more unfeasible for the poor, who understandably may feel reluctant to spend years paying off debts equivalent to a small mortgage.

Large student protests against the tuition fees increase in the UK went unheard.

Increasing the cost of health and education can severely damage the livelihoods of millions of people, but, as with modern-day slavery, unless people come face-to-face with such issues and are directly affected by them, they are only ever likely to see them as something they are powerless to influence or change.

Just some of the other issues facing societies today: poverty, hunger and starvation, illiteracy, human trafficking, animal trafficking, debt slavery, sexual slavery, forced labor, inadequate healthcare, preventable diseases and epidemics, AIDS, drug abuse, addiction, drug trafficking, discrimination, genocide, ethnic cleansing, genital mutilation, violence against women, honor killings, torture, political prisoners, corruption, persecution, depleted uranium munitions, land mines, cluster bombs, climate change, pollution, desertification, drought, famine and war.

The nature of war in particular is a casualty of the modern media. War reporting often describes the nature and numbers of the combatants, their philosophies (on a superficial level), and motives for fighting. It describes certain battles, especially those of strategic importance, and, of course, it details the numbers of dead, although not necessarily accurately on both or all sides.

However, this is not the true nature of war at all. War is the deaths of young people, the maiming and injuries that will devastate them (and their loved ones) for the rest of their lives. It is severe mental trauma that leaves returning soldiers often unable to fit back into society or maintain normal relationships. It is the slaughter and rape of civilians; men, women and children. It is the destruction of infrastructure, property and land, and poisoning of the air due to the radioactive nature of some munitions. This radioactive dust will be breathed in by inhabitants long after the war is over and children will be born with genetic defects. This has already happened, is occurring right now, and will again and again.

The vast majority of people have no first-hand experience of war and are therefore incapable of comprehending it. This is not helped by the fact that images of victims of war are rarely shown anywhere in the media and only sanitized versions of events are provided. It is therefore unsurprising that many 'hawks' in governments around the world are men and women who have never personally experienced battle, while a significant number of veterans are avowed pacifists.

All the issues in the above list of horrors can be addressed to some degree – there are hundreds of imaginative strategies conceived by knowledgeable people with intimate experience with them. Thousands of charities and organizations work with the United Nations and national governments in order to help those affected. However, these organizations are constrained, often crippled, by various factors and in many cases are fighting a losing battle for funding and cooperation from governments.

The United Nations itself is a considerable problem. Dogged by scandals such as allegations of funds from the Iraq Oil-for Food Program being diverted to UN officials and the government of Iraq, as well as a series of sexual abuse scandals involving UN

peacekeepers, the reputation and credibility of the UN has been tarnished.

In addition, the fact that the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) have the power to veto any resolution has severely limited the ability of the UN to carry out its primary mandates, namely to '*maintain international peace and security, and if necessary to enforce peace by taking preventive or enforcement action*'.

This veto in particular, wielded by five powers whose interests are often in direct conflict, or which are motivated by self-interest, has crippled the effectiveness of the UN in vital areas. It is noteworthy also that one of the countries with this power of veto (which can affect democratic nations) fails to itself practice any form of democracy at home.

For these reasons, despite the great good achieved by most UN operations and the dedication and bravery of the majority of its staff, the UN has lost some relevance in the geopolitical realities of the twenty-first century in comparison to the dominant nations and, increasingly, corporations.

Imagine for one moment – horror of horrors – a United Nations in which each member nation has *equal* standing and *no* veto power is possible, one which itself can democratically veto the self-interest-driven desires of any single nation or corporation. For the sake of argument, call it the *New United Nations (NUN)*.

As it is extremely unlikely that the five veto-wielding nations would permit such an organ, the only means of achieving it would entail a concerted breaking away of the non veto-wielding countries.

In order to establish how this hypothetical *New United Nations* could fulfill its charter, it would be necessary to define clearly the roles and responsibilities, with clear laws and restrictions, on all members. These laws would necessarily correspond with the ideals set down in the UDHR. Nations which currently flout these laws, such as those with poor human rights records, or dictatorships, could be offered powerful incentives (economic or otherwise) to join the rest of the world in embracing freedom and democracy.

This would and *could not* be a global government. Such a government could not function efficiently, not least because societies and cultures are so varied. However, the nature of civilization is changing rapidly and fundamentally in the information age, where billions of people are interconnected anytime at any distance.

The increasingly influential phenomena of trans-national corporations, which have little or no need to recognize boundaries, as well as international 'think tanks' must also be taken

into consideration.

Multiple issues are arising from this fundamental change in the ways societies operate. In order to cope, a paradigm shift in conventional thinking is required; simply put, the old ways are simply no longer effective or appropriate.

Aims for a *New United Nations* could include:

The creation of an international *NUN* committee to regulate trans-national corporations, to enforce regulations, and severely punish unethical behavior. This would essentially give large corporations a legal status similar to that of sovereign nations. The largest corporations are richer than most countries: currently, 53 of the 100 largest economies in the world are corporations. With this level of financial power comes massive influence, which could be (and already is) used nefariously. Such a committee would represent a powerful means of ensuring strict observance of international law and reining in any destructive, undemocratic and illegal behavior.

In the sensitive areas of humanitarian intervention or peacekeeping, The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has acted unilaterally in recent years, and even the US itself (with its '*Coalition of the Willing*') invaded a sovereign country (Iraq) without the backing of the United Nations Security Council. A typical justification cited is the need to remove a 'brutal dictator'. All such interventions would be the domain of the *NUN* alone in order to allay suspicions of NATO or individual nations intervening for economic reasons (oil etc.) or strategic ones (important supply routes etc.) Nations eager to remove dictators could fund the *NUN* directly along with all other members for required interventions, which would be decided upon democratically, and also provide logistical support with their own qualified citizens. All such interventions would take place with *strict adherence* to international law.

All members would also necessarily agree to work together on international justice with no exceptions. The illegal human trafficking, arms and drug trades are all huge international operations. In order to cope with these growing issues, a clearer international code of laws, designed to be as efficient as possible, and requiring all members to cooperate, could be put in place.

The right to work enshrined in Article 23 of the UDHR could be enforced fully. Unemployment is a scourge that leads to all manner of societal ills. Those looking for work or without skills could be offered work on a state minimum wage (one large enough to permit them to live an existence '*worthy of human dignity*'), while at the same time being given training in skills which could enable them to find jobs by themselves, or to set up their own enterprises.

Looking around at any society one can see countless jobs that need to be done, from maintaining parks and cleaning dirty neighborhoods to supplementing non-professional staff at public facilities like schools or hospitals. More obviously, with the existential dangers of climate change now apparent, thousands of people could be put to work on state initiatives to convert existing infrastructures to green ones, killing two birds with one stone and providing a generation of people with skills and experience.

Considering the International Energy Agency said in November 2011 that any new fossilfuel based infrastructure built will lead to *irreversible* climate change within five years, switching immediately to a green infrastructure would not only be wise, but *essential*, and there are vast numbers of unemployed young people desperate to work, waiting to be taught useful skills.

A *New United Nations* could make military action for any other reason than self-defense an illegal act, punishable by the harshest measures available. This could be achieved by requiring all members to make a constitutional amendment banning any military action except in the case of self-defense. This may seem like an alien concept, but Japan currently has such an article enshrined in its constitution, while at the same time maintaining a modern professional self-defense force. Japan has not been involved in any military action since the end of World War 2 beyond peacekeeping and supply missions, and has contributed only when asked to by its allies, but is nonetheless a strong and safe society.

Outlawing military operations to all except the *NUN* in the case of humane interventions and peacekeeping would save literally trillions of dollars in suddenly obsolete arms and defense contracts, money which could be spent on humanitarian needs. Although it is *currently* a crime under international law for one country to invade another sovereign nation without the consent of the UNSC, the Iraq War (and others) have shown us that there are nations willing to overrule international law in the name of furthering their own perceived national security interests.

Members of a *New United Nations* could sign a collective defense pact, meaning that all members, if attacked, would be obliged to provide troops and logistical support, via the *NUN*, in the event of an attack. This, incidentally, is the founding principle of NATO with regard to its member nations.

If a significant number of nations joined this hypothetical *New United Nations*, each would be unable to engage in military action by law, and would simultaneously enjoy guaranteed protection from *every* other member if attacked. For peace-loving people, this would be an attractive proposition to say the least, not to mention a powerful incentive to join.

Retired US Marine Major General Smedley D. Butler, who died in 1940, had these recommendations for warfare:

1 War should be made unprofitable: Owners of capital should be ‘conscripted’ before soldiers: “It can be smashed effectively only by taking the profit out of war. The only way to smash this racket is to conscript capital and industry and labor before the nation’s manhood can be conscripted....Let the officers and the directors and the high-powered executives of our armament factories and our steel companies and our munitions makers and our shipbuilders and our airplane builders and the manufacturers of all other things that provide profit in war time as well as the bankers and the speculators, be conscripted — to get \$30 a month, the same wage as the lads in the trenches get”.

2 Acts of war should be decided by those who fight it: Butler suggested a limited plebiscite to determine if a war is to be fought, and the voters eligible would be those who risk death on the front lines.

3 Limitation of militaries to self-defense: Butler recommended that the US navy be limited, by law, to within 200 miles of the coastline, and the army restricted to the territorial limits of the country, ensuring that a war, if fought, can never be one of aggression.

Interesting words from (at the time of his death) the most decorated marine in US history. This is the man who also famously said: *war is a racket*.

To satisfy the demands of democracy, an equality doctrine is required and should be enforced: the idea that *everyone* has an equal vote and say over world society, meaning that *all* societies, and by extension, their citizens, are given equal importance, with not a single veto in sight. The definition of democracy itself includes this concept. How is that possible if five nations arbitrarily hold vastly greater power (in the form of veto) than the others?

A *New United Nations* could be a powerful force in unifying the nations of the world despite their disparate cultures, while at the same time acting as a powerful restraining influence on any rogue nations or leaders.

Many readers will, consciously or unconsciously, dismiss such an *NUN* charter as unrealistic, naïve even. However, it may come as a surprise that many of these principles are nothing new - they *already exist* as the *stated aims* of the *current* United Nations. A *New United Nations* would simply be the *existing* body freed of unreasonable constraints like the power of veto for only five member nations. The only additions, as suggested here, would be a policy of collective defense and a pact of non-aggression. Who, apart from

those who crave or profit from violence and war, would argue against that?

It would require foresight and bravery from enlightened nations willing to stand up to the wrath and even possible retaliation of the current veto-wielding nations, but if a significant number of countries around the world stood together, they could take a giant step towards realizing a world whose priorities are peace, health, education, solidarity, humanitarianism and freedom.

And democracy. All member nations would necessarily be democratic, with the added proviso that the people have at the very minimum the ability to wield veto power (via referenda) over their governments against unpopular or immoral laws passed in their names, as well as the ability to *directly* put up for debate the creation of new laws and constitutional amendments if necessary.

Above all this, the most vital issue at stake for solving many of the world's problems is political will, or more accurately, lack of it. Millions of people want to help despite the problems in their own lives, and would do so if they could, but hold back for various reasons such as legitimate concern that donated money will go toward funding dictatorships or arms, and also the perceived lack of progress despite the huge amounts of money poured into fighting these ills. They have no choice but to hope and trust that their representative governments and agencies will solve the problems for them. However, political will is sorely lacking; especially now, thanks partly to government preoccupation with recent economic woes.

But the will is there, latent in millions. If it could be tapped, people could take a more direct hand in attempting to solve these global and national issues and not have to rely on their distracted, disinterested or bought government representatives. A system for direct participation is required, one which has the potential to spread from local, to national, regional and on to global levels.

Chapter 2: δημοκρατία

“Democracy is simply the bludgeoning of the people by the people for the people” – Oscar Wilde

The word ‘democracy’ comes from the Greek words *demos*, meaning the common people, and *kratos*, which means rule, power or strength. The first formal democracy was established in 507 BCE in the Greek city state of Athens, and it took a form of what is now known as a direct democracy. Two interesting features of this new form of government were firstly that any citizen could speak or vote at the assembly, and secondly that ordinary citizens were assigned to government offices and courts by lot. It goes without saying that such a system, if implemented today, would be extremely restrictive for any leader bent on going against the public will.

Almost every modern democratic society is a so-called *representative democracy*, namely a system in which elected officials represent the will of the people. While in principle this can work reasonably well, as indeed it does in the more transparent governments around the world, it has proven susceptible to manipulation, abuse and corruption. It is a tragic fact today that the word democracy itself has been hijacked to hoodwink citizens into thinking that they are *truly* free to determine the kind of society they want, that they have an equal say in how their society is run, and that their governments actually do *unerringly* represent the will of the people.

While governments of democracies are very happy to talk up their dedication to human rights such as freedom of speech and so on, we sometimes see this dedication tested and found wanting. A recent example can be found in the world’s largest democracy, India, where 1,300 protesters were arrested in July 2011 in an attempt to stop the hunger strike of a prominent anti-corruption activist, Anna Hazare.

Hazare wants a new anti-corruption ombudsman with unlimited power to investigate any official for corruption, including the prime minister and judges, and believes that legislation offered by the administration in its current form is ‘a cruel joke’. The authorities reacted to criticism of the arrests of Hazare’s supporters by denying they are suppressing the democratic right to protest and saying that they themselves have the right to set down conditions on protests, such as limiting numbers of protesters.

Justifications and plausible reasons are always given by governments which are democratic in name only. The fact remains that however you justify these government actions, they are not, by definition, those of a truly free society. In other words, there are limits to freedom, and these limits are laid down arbitrarily to justify actions governments feel they need to

take in order to protect themselves.

Why does this happen?

There are countless examples throughout history of those in power acting against the interests of the people, and of leaders being corrupted. This is an issue at all levels of every society, not only in government, and only a combination of strict transparency, accountability and awareness can hope to bring them under control.

Related to this is the fact that the people who rise to the top of political establishments are in many cases ambitious, ruthless, manipulative and occasionally even slightly sociopathic. It may come as a surprise that a 2009 British study found a community prevalence of sociopathy of 0.6% among the general public - hundreds of thousands of people. While these qualities may indeed be valuable in the quest to *get ahead*, do ordinary people really want such characters representing them, let alone providing moral guidance and leadership? Are people with these personality-types really the best we can do? These are people who believe, for example, that *only results matter* and that how we get to a goal, even if it is in some underhand fashion, is unimportant. This is not to say that *all* highranking politicians are sociopaths, but merely that the potential for this type of person to find him or herself having a profound influence over society is very much there.

The ancient Greeks, choosing officials by lot, did a lot to get around this problem. That may, of course, not be viable in modern society, but the idea should not be discarded out of hand, at least with regard to citizen committees responsible for checks and balances on the actions of elected officials or other entities with power over society.

All too often politicians create policies and make judgments and decisions without heeding the consensus views of credible (not celebrity) economists, scientists and other experts. By any measure, that is insane. When the British Prime Minister David Cameron described the London riots of 2011 as 'criminality, pure and simple', was he conveying to the public theories suggested to him by leading sociologists and riot experts? Or had he judged the public mood, found it extremely hostile toward the rioters, and taken the opportunity to make a populist statement designed to insulate himself and his administration from criticism and culpability over other possible causes of the riots? You decide.

Unfortunately, people like David Cameron are not confined to politics; they can also be found at the top of big corporations and banks. Consider this exchange in the British *Independent* newspaper between a film maker, Chris Atkins, and an unnamed representative of the Royal Bank of Scotland (84% owned by the British taxpayer since 2009) on the subject of several British banks (also Barclays, TSB, HSBC and Lloyds)

investing in companies which make cluster bombs:

Atkins: *"Did you know that RBS are investing in the companies that make cluster bombs?"*

Banker: *"Excellent – how much money is it making us?"*

"About £20m," I guessed.

(Groans with pleasure) "Print that."

"Is that good for you?"

"Yep. How do you think you get paid your benefits?" (I was wearing a pretty grubby T shirt).

"Er, I'm not on benefits. I'm a journalist."

"How do you think the banks make money? By investing in things."

"But cluster bombs mainly kill civilians."

"They're 'things'."

Around 270 million cluster bomblets were dropped on Laos during the Vietnam War and around 300 people there are killed or injured/maimed every year even today. Many of these victims are children. They have also been used in other countries around the world and still pose a severe menace to civilian populations.

The unnamed representative is a merchant banker. There are people working in and out of government who lack empathy and compassion, and whose only priorities are their own well-being and survival, who have a great deal of power and influence over our societies and lives with no accountability for the impact of their actions upon others. Since this exchange made the national press, the Royal Bank of Scotland has laudably ceased investing in these companies.

A second problem with *democracies in name only* is the widespread and unquestioning public acceptance of the absolute need for political parties. Most readers will be aware, and if they are not, they should be, that political parties are ideal breeding grounds for corruption, clannishness, cronyism, selfishness and greed. More importantly, there seems to be little understanding of the idea that representative democracies are not the only way to run a society. Conventional wisdom states that political parties are a necessary evil as they are all we have, and if they were not there, societies could be dragged down from civilized democracies into barbarism. This is a damaging and erroneous view.

Thirdly, elections are often turned by the media into epic battles between two (or more) opposing sides, as if they were sporting contests or movie plots. This satisfies the prerequisite for modern 24-hour news channels - manufactured drama - and so the electorate is duly drenched in endless minor scandals regarding gaffes of one particular party representative or another. This, combined with the fact that modern parties spend a fortune on PR companies who strictly control everything politicians say in public, leads to

an atmosphere of extreme pressure for politicians who know that any gaffe could easily be their last and who therefore play it as safely as possible, avoiding certain important but controversial issues and mouthing platitudes for the cameras.

How is honest debate expected to thrive or even exist in such an atmosphere? Certain vital issues, made taboo for politicians by the media, are either left untouched or treated in unrealistic, media-friendly ways with sound bites and catchphrases. And people, not to mention the democratic process, inevitably suffer.

What this means is that when a politician makes a statement, it is not what he or she *actually* believes; rather it is what they have been *told* to say by highly-paid advisers with reams of public opinion data in order for the public to strategically hear what they *want* to hear. Public statements are tactical, designed purely to improve their own standing while damaging that of opponents. In other words, you cannot believe a word they say. There is no guarantee that politicians will keep their word after they are elected anyway. Indeed, there are numerous instances of politicians doing the exact opposite of what they promise in campaigns.

In an ideal world, a democracy should involve honest exchanges of views with vigorous debate presented neutrally by media to the public. Frankly, modern election campaigns are pretty much the direct opposite of that. We also need to bear in mind that the media itself can be a major player in elections, with certain newspapers or television channels endorsing particular parties or candidates and running biased reports to help them, hurt opponents, and skew public opinion.

Yet *another* issue is the fact that modern election campaigns are extremely expensive. Rich donors or corporations can donate large amounts of money in some democracies and expect favors in return once a party or leader is elected. These favors often take the form of huge tax breaks, deregulation, or the passing of laws that help the donors, while in many cases hurting either ordinary civilians or the environment. Further, the existence of tax loopholes greatly helps these huge corporations: Bank of America with a profit of \$6.28 billion in 2009 and General Electric with a profit of over \$10 billion paid **no** US federal taxes in 2009. These loopholes, which are so damaging to society, are highly unlikely to be closed while politicians are beholden to the corporations and wealthy donors who fund their campaigns.

We also have big manufacturers who have used their power and influence over politicians to push through trade agreements which reduce product safety standards and allow them to outsource jobs. Oil companies do the same to block environmental protection laws. Britain has been described as the world's first onshore tax haven, with the UK's billionaires

paying only 14.7 million pounds income tax on their combined 126 billion pounds in 2006/7. More recent data is unavailable as corporations, banks and the wealthy tend not to be forthcoming with details of their finances.

And let us not forget lobbying, which is the attempt, often by individuals, corporations or advocacy groups, to influence government policy and decision-making. In some democracies, lobbying is so entrenched in political culture that it has become the normal way to do business, sometimes to the disadvantage of ordinary voters. While it can be legitimately argued that lobbying is a necessary part of a democracy, as indeed it is, the financial power and resources of some lobbyists gives the wealthy and powerful an insurmountable advantage over ordinary citizens, whose voices are often unheard.

Naturally, proponents of representative democracy would then argue that the voice of every citizen is heard at the ballot box, but that also is often untrue, with many regional and national governments engaging in dishonest methods to disenfranchise those unlikely to support the party in power, and to enable likely supporters to vote more easily. There are several documented methods by which this is achieved, one being the re-drawing of district boundaries to manipulate the demographics of voting districts. Such tactics are common. Further, taking the United States as an example, in presidential elections, a registered Democrat in a so-called 'red state' might as well not bother going to the polling booth, and the same goes for registered Republicans in 'blue states'. The upshot is that even in free and open elections, there are a significant number of people whose voices do not register at all. Elections come down to a few close races in so-called *swing states*. The systems are skewed, and clever political strategists know how to play to win given the game they have to work with.

In the UK, the Conservative Party led by David Cameron is governing in a coalition with the smaller Liberal Democrats. Despite gaining only 36.1% of the popular vote (with a turnout of 65%), Cameron is forcing radical education and health policies on the nation, as well as a brutal austerity drive which has led to the cutting of hundreds of beneficial, sometimes vital, social programs. The majority of the country do not want these radical policies, and do not support the Conservative Party, but have to accept them anyway. When the majority of the country is forced into accepting policies they did not vote for and which were not even discussed before the ballot, something is clearly wrong with the system.

All these issues exist to some degree in modern representative democracies. In some societies, notably Scandinavian ones and selected others, there is a far greater degree of government transparency, meaning the people have more confidence that their leaders are acting legally and honorably in their name and with their tax money. Such societies are examples of where representative democracy works better, as it fundamentally relies on

trust between voters and the public officials who represent them.

However, other representative democracies are suffering varying degrees of assault on their democratic institutions, and this erosion inevitably leads to social injustice and nonrepresentation of certain unprivileged segments of society at first, and later to more tragic, even dangerous, circumstances, such as a society being a *democracy in name only*, while in reality being a form of *oligarchy*, in which power rests effectively in the hands of a small group of wealthy and powerful people.

Politicians in democracies have, ultimately, only three priorities - to *get* elected, to stay elected, and to enact legislation which favors those who funded their election. In order to do this, they will say or do whatever it takes to win, and that depends on the demographics of their electoral district. Priority is placed on pleasing the electorate in the short-term, and making promises that sound good and make sense to people who may not have all the facts at their command, or are too busy or indifferent to understand a given issue in depth. One common approach of politicians in countries which have problems with violence, for example, is to appear tough on crime. This leads to statutes like 'three strikes' laws, where long (sometimes life) mandatory sentences are handed down for three felony offences, no matter how minor.

It is highly unlikely that any politician would follow the advice of experts on, say, criminal behavior if the advice would cause them to lose an election. This is an extremely harmful dichotomy as it can severely hamper social progress, and is prevalent in many fields of government policy, most notably the environment and education. What is the point of having experts at all if they are not used to improve our societies, if their advice is ignored and even condemned by politicians who may have no discernible expertise in the fields in question?

Billions are spent by lobbyists, politicians and political campaigns on PR companies whose sole purpose is to get their client elected, or to ensure a certain piece of legislation gains public support, no matter what, and will do everything in their vast power to achieve this by means of using the media to mislead or misinform the public into supporting or voting for something that may well not be in their interest. Not by any stretch of the imagination does this behavior have any place in a democracy. Put in frank terms, it is simply groups of greedy shysters teaching groups of power-hungry shysters how to play the crowd.

Honest public debate, the lifeblood of democracy, has been replaced by an endless series of punchy, voter-friendly sound bites designed to manipulate public opinion to maximum effect. Are we to accept that complex social issues can be compressed into a few catchy sentences? Major Cable news channels add to this problem with cheesy catchphrases,

showing once again that the news itself is a product that has to be nicely packaged before human consumption.

Question for the media: is the news not supposed to be straight reporting of the facts as uncovered by journalists instead of uncritical repetition of press releases and government talking points?

One must have a modicum of sympathy for politicians in the midst of this chaos. They have little choice but to do the best they can with the situation they are in, and not all politicians are corrupt or dishonest – indeed, there are many admirable figures in public service. However, this serves only to remind us that the system itself is dysfunctional and needs to be changed at a fundamental level for the good of everyone.

Chapter 3: The Rise of Alternative Media

“The corruption of the best things gives rise to the worst” – David Hume

In the last decade or two we have seen the rise of internet journalism and the blogging phenomenon.

As with all journalists, the credibility of a blogger can only be established over time, through unwavering honesty and accurate, fact-driven articles and analyses. It is also vital that errors, which even the best of us make, are corrected, and that the corrections are given due prominence. People can accept errors of the honest variety, and appreciate it even more when a journalist is big enough to admit he or she is wrong.

The word ‘blogger’ itself raises negative imagery: that of an angry young man or woman with a serious axe to grind bashing away on a keyboard in a basement somewhere. This image is one which is gleefully propagated by the establishment media as they know that *in reality* there are many bloggers who provide far more insight and accurate analysis on stories that *really* matter than they ever could, partly due to editorial control of media which is corporate-owned.

At every opportunity, bloggers and alternative media enterprises are subjected to disdain and disparagement from establishment journalists, and their analyses are not taken seriously, even when they have a proven track record of excellence. Bloggers are in some cases former journalists who have tired of being told what to and what not to say. There are also legions of dishonest bloggers, but their lies and distortions speak for themselves. Savvy readers can learn to separate the diamonds from the rough.

Perhaps in an effort to subsume the popularity of blogging, major online newspapers carry opinion pieces written either by in-house or guest journalists, celebrities, or even ordinary citizens with something to say. Hundreds or even thousands of readers then comment on the articles. These comments range all the way from insightful or humorous to sniping or banal, and constructive discussions may or may not ensue.

In the past, no such opportunity for reader input existed within the media beyond the readers’ letters pages, and that was very limited in that any debate between readers would have to take place over several days or weeks. Think postal chess. Therefore comments sections are a giant step forward in the field of discussion between unconnected citizens, and will undoubtedly turn out, along with the rise of dedicated social media, to be seen in history as a key move toward mass online organization at the civilian level.

This power needs to be harnessed. By its nature, mass discussion is chaotic, with several threads of debate occurring in strict chronological order. In addition, as discussions are open-ended and participants are not tasked with reaching a consensus solution to the issue at hand, what generally occurs is a mish-mash of opinions and solutions that may or may not be constructive or relevant. This leads us to a third problem.

Few participants in these discussions are experts on the issue at hand, while many have only a passing knowledge of it. For this reason, while non-experts are obviously entitled to their opinions and can ask important and intelligent questions, there is absolutely no reason to take them seriously when actually *attempting to find* practical and realistic solutions for serious issues.

In the wake of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and subsequent nuclear accident in Fukushima, comments pages seethed with thousands of people who had mysteriously become nuclear physicists overnight and knew everything about *sieverts and becquerels*, as well as the complex issue of harmful radiation dosage in humans. It is a common trait of online commentators to state opinion as fact, and to express facts without credible sources.

With all due respect to those commenting, only the views of a credible expert are relevant. Ordinary people reading up about radiation on Wikipedia, or worse, believing some of the profit-minded, sensationalizing hacks in the mass media, will always be nothing more than that: ordinary people with zero experience in the field. These amateur '*experts*' can even be dangerous: spreading rumors, intentionally or not, that may cause harm and create fear and confusion. Tens of thousands of foreign residents fled Japan in panic at that time, leaving behind jobs and even families. How many left because of something they read in comments below articles, or indeed in some of the shameful fearmongering masquerading as journalism in some foreign media outlets? While questions should certainly be asked by everyone, it is necessary to be extremely selective about who answers the questions.

To illustrate, if you had a question about quantum physics and it was vital that the answer be correct, to whom would you pose the question: an internet news discussion forum, a media outlet, or an expert in the field? The large numbers of Chinese people who poisoned themselves with iodine-rich salt and Americans who bought iodine tablets at wildly inflated prices out of panic in the mistaken belief that they needed such things to protect them from radiation clearly need to think about the answer to this particular question.

It should be noted that even some '*experts*' were often wrong as limited information was available in the wake of the accident, and in some cases the '*experts*' wheeled out to spin doom and gloom had axes to grind for the green lobby, while those dismissing serious safety concerns may have had ties to the nuclear industry. With this in mind, the websites

of the World Health Organization and the International Atomic Energy Association were the best bets for accurate information as they both report to the UN and maintenance of credibility is more important to them than any ideological or profit concern.

Is there a way to organize and harness the flow of accurate information from *real* experts to ordinary people directly?

Mass social media like Twitter and Facebook have already proven their value to democracy as seen in the recent Arab Spring uprisings in which these media tools were used tactically by oppressed populations. Such was the threat to the establishments that attempts were even made to block these sites. There is no doubt that organized social media accessible to all is now the single biggest nightmare for every oppressor on the planet.

Recall that during the 2011 London riots, there were calls from some to shut down Blackberry's instant messaging service and others, demonstrating that when disagreeable events occur close to home and one feels in personal danger, people are far more likely to accept authoritarian control over communication networks than when it is in some far-off land where the only danger is to people they do not know.

What must always be kept in mind when dealing with oppression, whether in representative democracies or autocracies, is simply this: there are more of us than them, a **lot** more. The key is organization, courage, cohesion, an honest message, and persistence. The 7 billion people in this world are a dormant *beast*. At the moment, as in almost all periods throughout history, they are subdued by the hijacking of the word democracy and distracted by inconsequential stories in the media such as celebrity scandals, sport, and pointless partisan political point-scoring, as well as, ironically, the same social networking sites that are so feared by oppressors – there are people spending literally endless hours on Facebook doing nothing constructive whatsoever. However, the idea of even a tiny fraction of these 7 billion people organizing to fight oppression or control terrifies every single corrupt leader, politician, corporate executive and top banker on the planet, because they know that when it finally happens, the party will be over.

Given the desperate plight of some countries, and the fact that in many cases their suffering has been directly caused by incompetence, corruption, and lack of honest, democratic representation, it is long past time to start seriously working out how to empower these enormous numbers of people, and providing ways through which they can empower themselves. The free flow of information through the internet and accompanying technology can be exploited to allow people to take matters into their own hands and create societies that cater to the public as a whole, not a tiny elite.

In the thousands of articles written by professional journalists or bloggers, we read a deluge of explanations, statistics and complaints about any issue you could care to name, but few suggested solutions. A major problem is that a multitude of issues are ultimately societal in origin, and therefore cannot be solved with cosmetic measures such as simply throwing more money at them or creating fact-finding committees. The only viable solutions are ones that go to the root causes: the inequalities in society, the disenfranchisement of millions, education, and so on.

Such a solution is required.

Chapter 4: Case in Point

“If I had an argument with a player we would sit down for twenty minutes, talk about it, and then decide I was right” – Brian Clough (football manager) on team democracy

Revolution has always been the historical vehicle for sudden societal change, brought about through public discontent with the policies or behavior of those in power. While revolution is intended to bring about fundamental change and improvement in quality of life, there is no guarantee that this will actually occur.

One obvious drawback of revolution, assuming it is not of the bloodless variety, is the deaths of ordinary civilians. There are some who say that such sacrifice is necessary for real change; the blood of patriots and all that. However, it is more accurate to say it is inevitable rather than necessary, and it is a great tragedy that the deaths of people who want nothing more than a better life occur.

A more insidious problem is the fact that incoming regimes sometimes turn out, in the long term, to be no better than the overthrown ones, Egypt being a glaring recent example. Human nature will out, after all, and power can eventually corrupt even the best intentioned. Even when an autocracy is replaced by a democracy, unless elections are free and fair, and the government is completely transparent, then essentially the populace is still chained by whatever whims their new leaders have in mind.

It can be argued that such enormous change does not happen overnight, and that is obviously true. There is no doubt that attrition and pressure groups can enjoy significant success in the long term. Yet even in the long run, true democracy can only ever be attained if the playing field is flat and fair. Unfortunately, it is not. The game is rigged in favor of distinctly undemocratic forces.

We are talking, if you had not guessed, about trans-national corporations, major banks, some financial institutions, and certain billionaires. The gigantic sums of money available to these entities give them unprecedented power to work behind the scenes in ways that influence public opinion, utilizing long-understood psychological methods to make people vote for policies which are in fact harmful to them. The Tea Party movement in the United States is a prime example of this phenomenon.

In a move that makes this substantially easier, the US Supreme Court ruled in 2010 that corporate funding of political broadcasts in candidate elections cannot be limited, using violation of First Amendment rights as justification. In other words, any candidate who is happy to extend the interests of corporations can expect almost unlimited funding for their

campaign, but is obliged therefore to provide significant help to their benefactors after being elected, regardless of the fact that this help may run contrary to the interests of ordinary people, the environment, public safety and so on. This occurs against the backdrop of the fact that 85% of Americans think corporate influence in politics is too great, according to a poll by Hart Research.

These forces behind the scenes can act in their own interests without any need to worry about the usual checks and balances which exist at the state level. They transcend national boundaries and have the ability, via lobbying, special interest groups, political action committees, and power over media companies to profoundly influence public opinion and both local and national politics.

Do not think for one second that these are benevolent forces. Indeed, the opposite is true – to employ a tired analogy that is closest to the truth nonetheless, they are an aggressive virus in the body of societies, nationally and globally, in the sense that they consume what they can by commodifying everything: education, the news, and even people. This virus is spreading. And worse than a virus, it has the ability to strategically adapt to temporary setbacks and approach from other angles to get what it wants.

This analogy brings to mind a notable scene from the 1999 movie, *The Matrix*, in which the leader of the human resistance is told by a representative of the dominant artificial intelligence that humans are not mammals, but are in fact a virus. He justifies this assertion by pointing out the historical tendency of human civilizations to use up resource and then move on to new ones after the old ones are exhausted, just as viruses do.

This scene is impressive in its impact, as many viewers may not have considered the analogy before. Indeed, it is an accurate evaluation to a degree, as human civilizations have in fact behaved in this way throughout history, and still do. However, it misses an important point: this is the behavior of the decision makers, the people in power; not ordinary people.

In other words, the overwhelming majority of humans are not a virus, but there is certainly one in our midst. In democracies, some of the people we vote for represent it. What does it want? The answer is simple - it wants to maintain the status quo, and to consolidate its position in order to eventually become an impregnable power, untouchable even by popular revolt.

The above sounds like some kind of shady conspiracy theory; if only that were true. It is necessary at this point to look in detail at a country which is also a prime example of democracy gone badly and dangerously wrong: the United States of America.

The Home Front

“The secret of life is honesty and fair dealing. If you can fake that, you’ve got it made” – Groucho Marx

First, some background. In a May 2011 article in Vanity Fair, Joseph Stiglitz, a Nobel laureate, writes that the top 1% in the United States has seen their incomes rise 18% in the last ten years, while for men with high-school level degrees, incomes have fallen by 12%. He also points out that the top 1% control 40% of all wealth, and takes in almost a quarter of total income per year.

Between just after the end of World War 2 and 1979, US productivity rose 119% and the income of the bottom 20% of the population rose by 122%. Between 1979 and 2009, productivity rose by 80%, while the income of the bottom 20% **fell by 4%**. At the same time, the incomes of the top 1% **rose 270%**.

In August 2011, President Obama came to a deal with Republicans, who were at the time in control of Congress, to slash state spending while not raising taxes on the wealthy in order to obtain Republican support to raise the debt ceiling and stave off a default. According to a Quinnipiac poll, US voters by a 67-25 percent margin say that any debt ceiling increase should involve tax increases on the wealthy.

In the background of all this we have the Tea Party movement, which rose to prominence as a group of ordinary Americans who were fed up with huge federal spending. They have brought about the election of some people with extreme views into public office, people whose intransigence *ostensibly* forced President Obama into such a deal.

And we have the Koch brothers, Charles and David Koch, who run Koch Industries, Inc. (KI). In 2008, Forbes described KI as the second largest privately held company in the US with annual revenue of around \$98 billion. They are responsible for supporting the founding of Americans for Prosperity (AFP), a Washington D.C.-based political advocacy group, from 2004. They have also provided significant funding for Tea Party candidates in elections, and are both in the top twenty of the Forbes list of billionaires of 2011.

In 2009, AFP set up a Tea Party Facebook page and began to organize tea parties all over the country. These events were promoted on a massive scale by Fox News, owned by another billionaire with an interest in politics, Rupert Murdoch.

The Tea Party movement is an extremely useful entity. The billionaire funders and promoters used their power and influence to raise the movement to national prominence,

while at the same time selling it as a group of ordinary, hard-working Americans who have had enough and will not take any more, creating its popular appeal. These Americans certainly exist, and the vast majority of Tea Party members are indeed as they are sold, but they seem either blissfully or willfully unaware that they are being used as a tool to bring about societal conditions which benefit the rich, while vociferously fighting social advances which would benefit ordinary people such as themselves like improved healthcare, education, workers' rights and environmental safety.

The Kochs and the Tea Party movement have been introduced here to illustrate how a democracy can be hopelessly corrupted, how the system of checks and balances can always be worked around with knowledge of law, psychology and human nature, and how political ideology can intrude into all democratic institutions, even the judiciary and media. Even worse, all this can be done legally, and gradually, so that the vast majority of the population, those who live in a media culture of sound bites and superficial media coverage of important stories, not to mention juicy scandals, do not notice the world incrementally changing around them.

The US has two major political parties, the Republican Party and the Democratic Party. Other smaller parties have zero chance of receiving any serious coverage from the media. Even candidates seeking nomination *within* these parties who step outside traditional US policy boundaries (such as cutting military spending) are given minimal coverage or ignored and disdained by the establishment media. The choice, therefore, for over 300 million Americans every time the election show comes to town is either a standard Republican or Democrat.

A Washington Post poll in August 2011 shows that **79%** of Americans are dissatisfied with their political system.

The big corporations and Wall Street give very generously to fund the political campaigns of both parties and so do not give a damn which one wins the election as each party is obliged to pay them back in kind. As mentioned earlier in this book, this can take the form of huge tax-breaks or legislation leading to deregulation of banking or corporate practices, the latter being partly responsible for the 2008 financial crash.

As if this were not egregious enough in a supposed democracy (in which a government is supposed to represent the will of the people, not the corporations) we see former bankers and big corporation executives rewarded with high positions in government after elections. The current Obama administration is filled to the brim with former bankers with close links to Goldman Sachs and others. These are the people tasked with ensuring that the unethical and fraudulent banking practices that led to the 2008 crash never happen again.

Try reading that sentence again with a straight face if you can.

At the same time, former senators and congressmen are given seats on the board at large corporations and banks when they retire or are voted out. This revolving door system can only lead to policies skewed by the political and financial intentions of those benefiting from it. Does anyone really think that these people have hearts full of pain and concern for the plight of the ordinary working man and woman, the sick, the elderly, the disabled, the unemployed, the disadvantaged and the poor?

As Stiglitz writes in the Vanity Fair article, these bankers were the ones who directly caused the financial crash of 2008 with their recklessness, incompetence and greed (watch the Academy Award-winning documentary, **Inside Job**, for more details), and yet now, just a few years on, after being bailed out with taxpayers' money, they are back to their old tricks, making enormous profits while awarding themselves obscenely large bonuses. All this while those who have given great, tangible benefits to society, scientists and researcher who pioneered genetic engineering and the internet and so on are rewarded with little *in comparison with* those responsible for the extremely risky financial dealing that caused home disclosures and misery for untold masses of people - those responsible for bringing the global economy to the verge of collapse.

So in American democracy, reward those who recklessly and selfishly bring about economic catastrophe, but not those who work to take civilization forward and improve the lives of billions.

This is the danger we face, and it is happening in democracies around the world to some degree. Make no mistake, as these huge corporations are borderless and undemocratic, they will not stop with corrupting the US; anywhere is fair game. Given their record, can anyone expect otherwise?

One has to feel for the American people. There are countless comments on news blogs where people seem genuinely desperate, imploring someone to suggest some way out of their nightmare. They know that a revolution in the US is almost unthinkable because of the general apathy and the fact that most of the population has more than enough to worry about with their families, jobs (and lack of them) and everyday lives to consider taking to the streets and attempting to change things in significant numbers.

It is intensely ironic that the reason Americans have the right to possess arms is to enable them to fight a tyrannical government. Arms are of little use against the subtle form of tyranny now being employed under the illusion of democratic choice in elections, where it makes no difference which party wins as both are beholden to Wall Street, corporate

donors and lobbyists. There can be little argument against describing the US today as an oligarchy, a society in which power is concentrated in the hands of a privileged elite.

An oligarchy is not a democracy.

Therefore the United States is **not** a democracy.

The presidential elections held every four years, with billion-dollar campaigns and wall-to-wall media coverage, are nothing more than a show to prolong this illusion of democracy. And it works. The rich do not care about healthcare, pensions, education, the environment or whatever. After all, if they need any of those things, they can simply buy them.

People, however, are cottoning on. The Occupy Wall Street protests have spread rapidly around the country and now all over the world, and may continue to do so. The reason for the popularity of these protests is simple: the protesters want to live by truly democratic principles and are tired of bought and corrupt politicians. They know who pulls the strings and want no more of it. It is remarkable in itself that the Occupy movement is supported according to polls by a majority of Americans. Historically, such movements take much longer to garner such support. The fact that this has happened so quickly serves as testament to the frustration huge numbers of Americans feel.

Yet another worrying domestic issue for Americans is the massive database being created by the National Security Agency (NSA) through warrantless wiretapping. This power to eavesdrop on any US citizen without a warrant was bestowed on the US government via the Patriot Act, passed just after the September 11th attacks. The NSA has also been authorized to eavesdrop on international calls and emails of people 'suspected of having links to terrorism', as long as one party is in the US.

Big Brother.

A report on this huge story, detailing possibly illegal and unconstitutional behavior, was submitted to the New York Times in 2004, *before* the presidential election, in which George W Bush was attempting to be re-elected. The former Executive Editor of the New York Times, Bill Keller, apparently a journalist, *elected to sit on* the story for around a year at the **request** of the White House, who justified this by saying that the publishing of this story may aid terrorists who were unaware of the existence of the program.

A free press in a democracy is supposed to inform the public of possible illegal behavior of the elected government. Holding this story back until after Bush was safely re-elected is

truly shocking. Presumably, Keller felt that knowledge of the NSA program would no longer benefit terrorists *once the presidential election was over*.

The New York Times is (or was) a so-called *newspaper of record*.

Even worse, considering that the Patriot Act was passed as a result of the 9/11 attacks and was not part of the manifesto of the Republican Party before the 2000 presidential election, it was essentially not approved by the people themselves. Had the people been aware of the level of abuse of government power that would come about as a result of this Act, many could have expressed their opposition at the ballot box in 2004. Thanks to Bill Keller, 300 million people were denied that democratic right. Fortunately for him, he is not the only one to blame, as representatives infamously failed to properly scrutinize the bill before it was passed.

If the US had had even the basic mechanisms of a federal direct democracy, the people could have vetoed this NSA program before it even began. They may even have approved it - who knows? The point is the people in a *democracy* were not given the chance to approve a possibly illegal and unconstitutional database holding personal and private information on anyone and everyone, with all the potential for abuse that it entails.

In his election campaign in 2008, Barack Obama strongly criticized the Bush NSA wiretapping program, leading his supporters to believe that he would end the program when elected. After he was safely in the White House, Obama performed an about-face, expanding the powers of this program and also extending it, infuriating the supporters who had given him their money and votes for the very purpose of ending this program.

Each time politicians campaign on something so important, and then do the precise opposite when they are beyond the reach of the power of voters, democracy inches ever closer to its own grave.

Foreign Policy

“I spent 33 years and four months in active military service and during that period I spent most of my time as a high class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street and the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism. I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street. I helped purify Nicaragua for the International Banking House of Brown Brothers in 1902-1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for the American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras right for the American fruit companies in 1903. In China in 1927 I helped see to it that Standard Oil went on its way unmolested. Looking back on it, I might have given Al Capone a few hints. The best he could do was to operate his racket in three districts. I operated on three continents.” – US Marine Major General Smedley D. Butler (1881-1940)

“I’m oftentimes asked: what difference does it make to America if people are dying of malaria in a place like Ghana? It means a lot. It means a lot morally. It means a lot from a... it’s in our national interest” – George W Bush, Accra, Ghana, February 20, 2008

A true democracy in the US is vital for the simple reason that as a direct consequence of its status as the world’s sole superpower and a de facto empire (369,000 troops stationed in over 150 countries worldwide), to employ an economy-related aphorism in a more general way, when the US sneezes, the world catches a cold. The behavior of the US, and by extension its corporations, directly influence the lives and livelihoods of multitudes. If this behavior is unchecked by the electorate and allowed to be essentially undemocratic, incalculable damage can be (and indeed has been) caused.

Let us take a look at a series of examples.

The US has attempted to overthrow the governments of more than fifty nations, many democratically elected, since 1945. Thirty nations have been attacked and bombed, causing the deaths of countless civilians. One is justified in asking what right the United States feels it has to take these actions against sovereign nations.

Duane Clarridge, who was the head of the CIA’s Latin America division in the early 1980s, gave the following answer in an interview: “National security interest.” When it was pointed out by the interviewer that the victims have no say in this, Clarridge replied: “That’s just tough! We are gonna protect ourselves and we’re gonna go on protecting ourselves ‘cause we end up protecting all of you. And let’s not forget that. We’ll intervene whenever we decide it’s in our national security interest. And if you don’t like it, lump it. Get used to it,

world! We're not going to put up with any nonsense.”

In the past decade US foreign policy has been dominated by its response to the September 11th attacks - the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the borderless *War on Terror* in general. In the month of the tenth anniversary of 9/11, a group of academics working with Brown University's Watson Institute for International Studies put the full cost of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars to date at about \$2.5 trillion. They added that this will eventually reach a price tag of between \$3.2 and 4 trillion, a significant amount more than the standard \$1 trillion figure given by the Obama administration. With future interest payments included, this figure may even rise to \$5 trillion.

The Pentagon, in the days before the war, estimated a final cost of \$50 billion. When Lawrence Lindsay, an economic advisor in the White House, suggested that costs might reach \$200 billion, he was fired in part for doing so.

Anthropology Professor Catherine Lutz, a co-director of the Watson Institute study, says that a minimum of a quarter of a million people have died as a result of these conflicts, minimum because those deaths only account for cases of direct violence. If deaths due to indirect effects of the wars are included, Lutz estimates that the number could be closer to a million. These deaths are not only of soldiers, but also of citizens and private contractors.

Most of those who have died are Iraqi citizens.

A million people dead; untold others maimed, badly injured, or traumatized; vast damage to land, property and infrastructure; and a possible price tag of \$5 trillion dollars, as calculated by a respected US academic institution.

These huge numbers are essentially meaningless as most people have no experience in any context with which to appreciate them. A million does not seem all that much anymore, while a billion is certainly nothing to sneeze at. But a trillion? How can we comprehend what that actually means?

The only way is to provide a material equivalence; in other words, what could we buy with a trillion dollars? For a start, you could give every man, woman and child in Iceland more than three million dollars. Laid end to end, a trillion dollar bills would stretch nearly from the Earth to the sun. However, given the focus of this book, it will be more illuminating to focus on humanitarian issues.

According to globalissues.org, for just \$6 billion, basic education could be provided for every child on the planet. For \$9 billion, safe water and sanitation could be provided for

everyone. Considering the huge numbers of people who die of diseases caused by dirty water, it is a travesty that this relatively small amount of money cannot be found. \$12 billion could ensure reproductive health for all women; ninety percent of the women who die from pregnancy complications are in underdeveloped countries, and many also undergo unsafe abortions. Basic health and nutrition for everyone could also be provided for \$13 billion. In total, that is \$40 billion.

Numbers like these from aid groups should provoke skepticism, as it is obviously problematic to put a value on such complex procedures, and the statistics may have been massaged to put the best face on affairs. However, even if they are just a half of the true amount, or even a quarter, the total is still miniscule in comparison to, say, military spending. More than \$40 billion is spent on cigarettes every year in Europe alone, while more than double that amount is spent on alcohol (in Europe).

These numbers are nowhere near a trillion dollars, and as we have seen, the final bill for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars could come to \$5 trillion. Considering the current states of both countries, the question must be asked: are we insane?

Unless this madness is stopped, tragedies like the following will continue to occur: on 15th March 2006, during a house raid in Iraq by US forces, a family and their children were handcuffed and then summarily executed with shots to the head. Philip Alston, the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary, or Arbitrary Executions, wrote the following in a letter (exposed by Wikileaks) to the then Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice:

“It would appear that when the MNF [Multinational Forces] approached the house,” Alston wrote, “shots were fired from it and a confrontation ensued” before the “troops entered the house, handcuffed all residents and executed all of them.” Mr. Faiz Hatt Khalaf, (aged 28), his wife Sumay’ya Abdul Razzaq Khuthur (aged 24), *their three children Hawra’a (aged 5) Aisha (aged 3) and Husam (5 months old), Faiz’s mother Ms. Turkiya Majeed Ali (aged 74), Faiz’s sister (name unknown), Faiz’s nieces Asma’a Yousif Ma’arouf (aged 5 years old), and Usama Yousif Ma’arouf (aged 3 years), and a visiting relative Ms. Iqtisad Hameed Mehdi (aged 23) were killed during the raid.*

Alston’s letter also went on to say that a US airstrike was then called in on the house, presumably to destroy the evidence, but autopsies were possible and later carried out at Tikrit hospital’s morgue, where it was shown that ‘all corpses were shot in the head’. The adults and children at least were reportedly shown to have been handcuffed.

While it is hard to accept that any human being could act thus, another tragedy is that this kind of incident is not rare – other cases have been reported – but it is difficult to

corroborate any story from a war zone. How many incidents have not even been reported?

The soldiers in question were apparently fired upon from the house and so were obviously under a great deal of stress. Some might say that the farmer was unwise to shoot at an approaching party of troops, but if one puts oneself in his shoes, it may not be so easy to blame him: it was the early hours of the morning and therefore dark – he could have simply been firing warning shots to deter intruders, and he may not have been even able to see that they were US troops at all.

One has to wonder why the commander on the scene decided to order executions after entering the house and seeing a farmer with his family, including infants, especially after they were handcuffed and suitably docile. We could speculate all day long and never know the truth. However, one inescapable fact remains: if these troops had not been in Iraq, that family would very likely still be alive today. The fault lies not only with the soldiers, but also, and even more so, with the original architects of the war who put them in these intolerable situations.

In January 2003, before the Iraq War began, a CBS News/New York Times poll found that 63 percent of Americans wanted President Bush to find a diplomatic solution to the Iraq problem, with 31 percent favoring immediate military intervention. When one considers the almost blanket cheerleading and support of the main media outlets for the invasion of Iraq at the time, along with the almost entirely uncritical reporting of the now-debunked fearmongering claims of the Bush administration (WMDs etc.), the fact that such a large number of Americans were still uncomfortable with the idea of abandoning diplomacy is remarkable.

It is up to the reader to decide whether the wars were worthwhile endeavors, bearing in mind the other ways we have considered of spending even just a tiny percentage of the cost of those wars. In an effort to preempt those who raise the oft-repeated line about how a 'brutal dictator' was removed, let us shift our attention to another brutal dictator that the US and its allies have been quite happy to deal with. Recall that the US has supported (financially, politically and with arms) various dictators, and once supported Saddam Hussein himself.

Islam Karimov is the dictator of Uzbekistan. Saddam Hussein's brutalities have been well publicized for US political expediency but Karimov's are perhaps not so well known. Uzbekistan is one of the world's largest suppliers of natural gas and has huge untapped fields of crude oil. This material wealth, which could so easily make Uzbekistan an economic powerhouse, is blatantly looted by Karimov himself. At least Saddam spent some of his country's oil wealth on creating a reasonable infrastructure. Karimov ensures

the '*approval and loyalty*' of his people with the help of his military police, who have the freedom to do what they like, most of which you can guess by yourselves, to the population, who in turn despise and greatly fear them.

Anyone with the temerity to challenge Karimov in any way ends up kidnapped, tortured and/or killed. Craig Murray, the former British ambassador to Uzbekistan, who was dismissed after condemning Karimov's regime, has specifically told of the boiling alive of two men, and has said that this is not an isolated incident. He has also spoken of the systematic rape and torture of detainees.

Why does the US not remove Karimov as they did Saddam Hussein?

The answer lies in the fact that the US wants Uzbekistan to permit it to run a vital military supply line, known as the Northern Distribution Network, into Afghanistan.

The US supported Saddam when they needed him, and then demonized him when his usefulness had run out. This shows that the strategic goals of the US trump buzzwords like *democracy and freedom* every time, and is demonstrated once again by the tolerance of murderous dictators like Karimov.

If the US government was truly under the democratic control of its people, would it have dealt in any way with Karimov's despicable, murderous regime?

The US also interferes with the laws of other countries. When Haiti passed a law in 2009 to raise the minimum wage from 24 to 61 cents an hour, US corporations like Levi Strauss and Hanes were furious. These corporations pay workers in Haiti, the poorest country in the western hemisphere, which is still struggling to recover from a devastating earthquake, extremely low wages to sew clothes in their sweatshops. A Wikileaks cable showed that the corporations lobbied the US State Department, who then had the US ambassador put pressure on Haiti's president. The result? A new minimum wage of 31 cents an hour.

This may never have been revealed had it not been released in a Wikileaks cable, demonstrating that the US government acts in secrecy. The justification for secrecy is usually national security interest, but it would be hard for anyone to place this in such a category. The American people were not to be informed of how their elected officials were interfering in a desperately poor country in their name.

Democracy?

The issue of global warming is generally cited by credible scientists as the greatest threat

to mankind. 97% of active climate researchers agree that human activities have caused global warming, probably more now in light of a recently released study, which demonstrates beyond doubt that global warming is real.

Clearly this is not what the large energy companies want to hear, as they spend huge amounts of money on creating misinformation and confusion in the media and casting doubt on or even smearing climate research while also aggressively lobbying the US government to ignore or water down emissions commitments in global environmental treaties.

Considering the negative effect climate change is already having around the world, a lack of control of the government and lobbyists could be devastating for people everywhere, especially in developing nations which are less able to cope with climate-related disasters.

The election of Barack Obama in 2008 was a time of real hope for millions, not only in the US, but also around the world. The Norwegian Nobel Committee which chooses the Nobel Peace Prize winner was also taken in by the wave of optimism as they awarded him the prestigious award despite the fact that just days before his acceptance speech, Obama deployed an extra 30,000 troops to Afghanistan.

One reason for the surge of euphoria for many was the end of the domestically and globally unpopular Bush administration. Obama seemed to be ushering in a new era of hope, peace and fraternity. However, reality has bitten. Domestically, Obama has continued almost all the controversial policies of the Bush administration – notably warrantless wiretapping and persecution of whistleblowers.

Indeed, regarding whistleblowers, Obama has stepped persecution up to an unprecedented degree. While some like to see whistleblowers as ‘rats’, spilling precious insider secrets for attention-seeking reasons, the reality is that in a true democracy, whistleblowers should be protected, even revered as heroes if they uncover secret immoral or illegal behavior by people in power.

It is not only in the domestic arena that we can describe Obama as Bush III. The CIA Special Activities Division under the direction of the US government has since 2004 carried out numerous drone attacks on targets mostly in northwest Pakistan, along the Afghan border. While George W Bush was in power (until 2008), there were 42 attacks, with 33 coming in 2008. In 2009 alone, there were 53 attacks, then 118, more than double the number of the previous year, in 2010. Attacks continue at a similar rate.

These attacks are authorized as part of the ongoing *War on Terror*. When the location of a target is confirmed, one of these flying *drones* goes to the location and drops a bomb there. The problem is what the US military calls ‘collateral damage’, namely any unlucky civilian or

group of people who happen to be in the same area.

Imagine the following scenario - your 11-year-old daughter stays overnight at her friend's house, which happens to be in a small apartment block. Consider also that, unknown to you, the CIA has identified it as a target. A predator drone delivers destruction and one more terrorist is history. Unfortunately, so is your daughter. And her friend. And her friend's family.

The media will report the news the next day in the following way - "A medium-level terrorist target was killed last night in a predator drone strike. Seven other casualties were reported."

And that is that. How would you react?

This might (currently) be only a hypothetical nightmare for anyone living in a developed country, but for the people living in villages in northwest Pakistan, it is a reality. Believe it or not, those '*strange*' people living there are actually real people with families, friends, feelings, senses of humor, and hopes for the future just like anyone else. Yes, they may eat weird stuff like rice instead of Big Macs, and they may not enjoy sports like baseball, but they are assuredly human beings. In most cases, anywhere between 1 and 30 people are killed in a single strike, but there are some notable exceptions. On 23 June 2009 in the city of Makeen in South Waziristan, Pakistan, a drone targeted a funeral procession of people killed earlier that day by a prior predator attack. Sixty people were reported killed, while other sources claimed up to 83 people were dead. The intended target of the strike escaped unhurt, although he was later killed in another strike.

Like Westerners, these foreigners also become rather upset and angry when someone drops a huge bomb on their children, even to the extent that they may swear revenge (or the preferred media word, *jihad*) against the perpetrator of the action. Anyone swearing revenge against the United States will by definition be designated a terrorist, a new target for the next drone strike. And so the cycle continues. Forever.

Philip Alston, the UN investigator on extra-judicial killings, has said that these actions may constitute illegal assassinations and violate international law.

The strategic usefulness of these strikes or otherwise is beside the point, as is whether one agrees or disagrees with the use of such a weapon. The essential point is that this program, which may well violate international law, and has killed thousands of civilians, is being run in near complete secrecy and completely beyond the control of the American people. One might argue that the American people can speak at the ballot box on this issue, but that is simply untrue, as *both* main political parties in the US tacitly approve the

use of these drones. Even worse, the US government refuses to even comment on or admit the *existence* of the drone program. The people have no say whatsoever, and never will until they gain direct control over their government.

According to the New York Times, the Pentagon now has around **7,000** aerial drones, compared with less than fifty a decade ago, and has asked the US Congress for around \$5 billion dollars to make *more* in 2012. The most recent CIA estimates are of between 50 and 100 al-Qaeda fighters still in Afghanistan or Pakistan, making it 70 drone aircraft for each fighter at least.

The true purpose of the drone program is not to kill 'terrorists'.

The shocking extent of this program brings to mind scenes from the most nightmarish science fiction scenarios as currently an estimated *sixty* drone bases are now operational around the globe, with no doubt more on the planning table.

This clearly demonstrates that the Pentagon has grand plans for its future military actions. After all, the mere knowledge of drone bases within striking distance of anywhere and anyone would likely be enough to ensure obedience to US demands from most governments, and even better, with no military casualties. This terrifying, *Terminator*-like future scenario must be stopped here and now, and the only way to make that possible is to give executive power to the people.

Aside from the prospect of a new empire enforced by flying robots of death, consider that at a time when social programs are being cut and real poverty is everywhere, not least in the United States itself, this spending, and spending like it, can only be seen as obscene...and insane. Recall that \$6 billion could provide basic education for every child, and \$9 billion clean water to everyone on the planet. Instead, \$5 billion is being asked for to build more machines that will rain down death and destruction on civilians all over the world.

The base budget for US military spending on '*overseas contingency operations*' (the preferred Obama administration euphemism for the *War on Terror*) for fiscal 2010 was \$663.8 billion. The US military is deployed in more than 150 countries around the world, with, for example, almost 10,000 troops in the UK. Outside of combat zones, the largest presence can be found in Germany (around 54,000), Japan (around 33,000) and South Korea (around 28,500). According to the Washington Post, US Special Operations forces are deployed in *75 countries*, an increase for the Nobel Peace Prize winner from *60 countries* at the end of the Bush administration.

This insanity threatens world peace and the lives of innocent people everywhere. The idea

of endless war is nothing new, and was perhaps most famously depicted in George Orwell's seminal '1984'. This is now a reality. There is nothing good about war, unless you happen to be an arms manufacturer, or a private company providing 'services' in war zones (bodyguards, security, catering and so on), or a corrupt politician/leader aiming to expand your powers. Weapons and bombs are expensive, and arms manufacturing is extremely profitable. These profits can be used in part to buy political influence under the safe auspices of 'lobbying' to ensure that weapons are always needed. And so it goes.

The people who pay the price for this madness are ordinary people: men, women and children, usually in poor countries where they lack any means to defend themselves. Even worse, these places are themselves ruled by corrupt politicians who can or will do nothing to defend their citizens. The US is a major offender but it is by no means the only country in the world which seems to feel it has the right to interfere in the affairs of other nations in the name of the prevailing justification of the times (communism, terrorism etc.) Politicians, bankers and corporate executives have proved again and again that they have no moral qualms about running roughshod over human rights, killing civilians, poisoning the environment and endangering the entire human civilization by working against the crystal clear threat of climate change. There is a dangerous creature in our midst and it needs to be tamed.

In the period since September 11th 2001 alone, we have seen this unaccountable power build a massive unwarranted domestic spying database, construct a worldwide rendition and torture network, almost destroy the global economy with reckless, unethical and illegal financial practices, and take the country into two devastating wars that have killed over a million people, the vast majority being innocent civilians: fathers, mothers and children, even babies.

Change you can believe in.

This dangerous creature will not go down easily. It has all the money and owns most of the media and a large number of politicians. How long will it take before a way is found to limit the internet as well? As soon as it can be shown to be a credible threat to the status quo, how can we be sure it will not be taken out?

Anyone who stands up to the empire is swatted down, as can be seen in the hysterical reaction to Wikileaks and Julian Assange, who could be extradited to the US where he can be held in indefinite detention. The Occupy Wall Street movement, at first ignored completely by the establishment media, is now feeling the full force of the propaganda mill, with protestors smeared as 'hippies' and 'pot smokers' with 'no direction in their lives' and so on.

The author of this book is not a professional journalist, so I hereby request that professional journalists in the media point out to me the part of the course in journalism they studied at college which says that journalists are supposed to *criticize, insult, judge and demean* the subjects of the stories they cover. It may be old fashioned to say it, but are journalists not simply supposed to report facts in a neutral fashion, and provide honest, unbiased background or analysis (without omissions of important, relevant information) in order to inform the public?

The Occupy movement, while an important expression of discontent, is in danger of stagnating unless it evolves and/or grows significantly. With winter already here, only the hardiest will remain steadfast in the face of wall-to-wall media condemnation, ridicule and propaganda. And many are. When spring comes, the elites know that most of the country will be engrossed in the biggest reality show in town – the presidential election. By this time, the media will all but ignore the Occupy protests in favor of covering every last facet of the billion-dollar campaigns, from examining the fashion choices of the first ladies to analyzing every last word uttered off PR-company-written script. Only violence or eye-catching publicity stunts orchestrated by the Occupy protesters will catch the interest of the media by that stage, neither of which will serve anyone.

Even if the movement does keep growing, which it *will* in some form or other as awareness of inequality grows, the only concessions will be platitudes from presidential candidates who will *promise, hand on heart*, to rein in Wall Street ***if and only*** if they get your vote. And once safely in the White House, they may create an oversight committee, which will then do precisely nothing but provide the new president with future armor against criticism for inaction against the corporate lobbyists and money men.

In other words, even hard-won concessions will merely be delaying tactics, another distraction to dissuade people from taking to the streets. And the status quo will continue.

If a true Democrat, someone who is not a Wall Street pawn, someone who is popular and has no skeletons in the closet, were to challenge Obama for the Democratic nomination, and if that person ran on a platform (with cast-iron promises) of ending the wars, cutting military spending, taking money out of politics, closing down the NSA database, ending the drone program, bringing the CIA and the Pentagon under control, restoring all guarantees of human rights (including the abolition of indefinite detention), social justice, transparency of government, reversing deregulation of the financial industries, retroactive justice for *everyone* responsible for bringing about the Iraq War and the 2008 banking crisis, electoral reform, and all the other things peace-loving people actually want, Obama and any Republican candidate would have a serious problem on their hands. In the next election, as the current Republican candidates are one and all almost unelectable, even such a true

Democrat could win.

This could never happen, because both parties are controlled by their financial benefactors, but it would be an interesting experiment, as the media and all other instruments of the corporate elites which ensure the status quo is maintained would be forced to fire at such a person with all guns blazing, just as they are doing with the Occupy movement. The world would witness a campaign of character assassination the like of which has never been seen before.

An alternative is for someone to run as an independent candidate. Step forward Matt Damon!

There is only one other option, one thing that can save the sane majority who do not want violence, war, torture, hatred or greed, but simply want to live a productive life in peace with all the tools of freedom guaranteed for them and their children in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - and that is to endow the people with executive power in a legal fashion as described later in this book. If not, the abuses and lawlessness of trans-national corporations and elected officials will certainly worsen until we all reach the point of no return.

Chapter 5: Direct Democracy

“Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed” – Martin Luther King, Jr.

What is direct democracy and how does it work?

Switzerland has a system of direct democracy, or to describe it more accurately, a representative direct democracy, as it is combined with the more familiar institutions of a parliamentary democracy.

Put simply, any Swiss citizen has the right to challenge any law passed by parliament if they can collect 50,000 signatures within 100 days. Then a national vote ensues and a simple majority is enough to affirm or reject the law.

Citizens are even able to submit constitutional amendments if they can successfully obtain 100,000 voter signatures within 18 months. Parliament can then submit a counterproposal and voters can express their preference in a national vote. However, in the case of constitutional amendments, a so-called double majority is required, in other words, a majority in the national popular vote as well as a majority of the popular votes in the 26 cantons of Switzerland.

This system gives the people of Switzerland power of veto over controversial legislation, effectively stymieing abuse of power and allowing the population a far greater amount of control over their society in comparison with representative democracies.

The gravest decision any government can make is to put its citizens in danger by going to war. If a government in a direct democracy had been asked to join the forces entering Iraq in 2003, and had been put under diplomatic pressure by the US in order to do so, the people could have thwarted any decision by the government to send even a token force by simply forcing a referendum.

In the United Kingdom, the closest ally of the US, there were huge protests against the Iraq War, and opinion polls showed massive objection to it, but these voices went unheard by the democratically elected government.

A country in which the government ignores the overwhelming will of its people is not a true democracy.

Lip service is often paid by politicians to the fact that citizens of Western democracies have

the right to protest, as if it is a privilege people should feel fortunate to have, rather than a basic human right. Whenever protests occur, politicians invariably say things like: “They’re lucky they even have the right to protest” and “This is what democracy looks like – we should feel fortunate that we live in a society which allows such protest.” This right to protest is also praised when it occurs in other countries, especially dictatorships or quasidemocratic societies, as it poses no threat to the status quo domestically (unless it poses a threat to corporate interests).

However, when it erupts at home, politicians, and pro-establishment media outlets in particular, resort to veiled, sometimes overt, condemnation. The protesters are told to do things like ‘get a job’, ‘have a bath’, and ‘stop bothering other people’. Tony Blair demonstrated that even the largest protests in British history, those against the Iraq War, amount to nothing. In other words, there is simply no point in protesting because the decision-makers rarely, if ever, change their minds, especially if lucrative oil or corporate contracts await down the road.

If opinion polls showing huge opposition and massive protests do not sway governments, democracy in that nation is a sham.

Clearly, therefore, representative democracies in some societies are deeply flawed to the extent that they do not function as they are supposed to. Such a system can only work when the elected officials work honestly and transparently in the interests of their citizens, and are subject to accountability. If people are serious about taking control over their own destinies, the flawed system in these societies needs to be discarded in favor of a more pragmatic, more just, less damaging and less dangerous one.

One possible alternative is direct democracy, the exact form of which can be decided by each population to reflect their own unique cultures.

A major obstacle to such a transition would be those currently empowered by corrupt and broken systems. These people, who in many cases benefit in terms of wealth, power and relative immunity from the law, will only go down kicking and screaming, and you can be certain that they will try every dirty trick in the book to discredit such reform. The only answer to such tactics is simple: act always with honesty, civility and dignity, and nonviolence, and never stoop to the level of those opposing you. An unwavering commitment to the cause is also required, and persistence in the face of repeated setbacks over perhaps a long period of time.

The first step in achieving this transition is to use the one tool still accessible and free: the internet.

As with all movements, it is vital at first to simply get the numbers. A website (or an app which can be used with existing social networks) will be created and anyone will be eligible to participate. Anyone signing up should also ask everyone they know to join.

A name is required: For convenience, let us use *The Direct Democracy Alliance (DDA)*.

Each member will have a unique profile page, and will be able to interact with other members in the same way as any other social networking site. Friend lists and blogs will be available, as well as instant messaging. Privacy will be utterly respected - the level of privacy afforded profile pages will be completely in the hands of each member. The only data required would be a unique nickname, which need not bear any relation to a member's real name.

This registration process is just a first step, and it will eventually lead to universal suffrage.

There will be links on each member's profile page. The most important link will lead to a *society forum*, on which all issues will be discussed by *experts* or people who have significant knowledge or experience with them.

The *experts* will be tasked with reaching *consensus* solutions to the issues at hand based on their expert knowledge of research on the topic, as well as experience in the field. Clearly, a single consensus will almost never be possible, which is natural, as there is not necessarily only one way to solve a problem.

All final consensus solutions will be listed in a simple format in order for people to vote for their preferred one. As most people may not have the time to read the detailed discussions, the *expert* contributors will also provide a concise and *strictly factual* summary of each solution, *free from emotional rhetoric*, and also consisting of any possible drawbacks to the solution (again based on credible research). Voters would then be able to decide with a clear appreciation of the issue.

On the *society forum*, any member (including non-experts) will be free to ask questions or point out apparent contradictions.

Members will also be able to open new discussions on a given issue, or even create a completely new issue. As the forum will use *Wiki* software, pages can be created by anyone. Comments of other members in discussions may not be edited, but the number of pages which can be created and issues discussed is unlimited.

In theory there could be a society forum for every nation, in every language, on Earth.

Subforums for each state, county, prefecture, city, town or even village or single organization (like a school) could also be created, allowing people to discuss and vote upon any issue at all, from important topical ones such as what to do about corporate greed, to tiny ones like how to improve a local public park in a small village. A separate international society forum on which global and international issues can be discussed freely and fully will also be created.

All discussions on the *society forum* **must** be constructive, civil and respectful. Any facts put forward in a discussion must be given a reliable source and personal attacks will not be permitted. It is a sad fact that modern political discourse all too often descends into barrages of insults, violent rhetoric, hyperbole and plain misinformation. In order to discuss issues, an atmosphere of honesty, civility, restraint, decorum, good humor, as well as respect for those who hold differing views, is essential. This rule will be **strictly** adhered to.

The other main link from the home profile page will lead to a *general discussion forum* on current news stories along with other more casual issues such as fashion or sport and so on. However, in the case of sport, for example, there may be serious issues that belong on the *society forum*, such as the management of national sports or financial problems of important local institutions like football teams and so on. Other discussion websites and forums will probably do this better, but discussion on all issues, whether they are central to democracy or not, can only be a good thing.

However, it is the *society forum* which will form the pillar of the first stage of any transition to direct democracy as it will give an accurate snapshot of public opinion on any given issue, and will also provide alternative solutions to any government policy on a given issue from various knowledgeable people and *experts*.

To illustrate simply how this works, consider the death penalty debate. This would require a simple for-or-against vote. While it would also be necessary to separately discuss which crimes the death penalty would apply for, or for whom it would not apply: children and the mentally ill etc., a vital question is simply whether it should be utilized or not in *any* situation. *Experts* would be invited to discuss the issues surrounding the death penalty on the *society forum*, while any other member would be welcome to join the debate to ask questions or point out perceived contradictions.

Finally, a neutral and concise summary of all the salient points for and against will be provided on the voting page. The summary supporting capital punishment would perhaps contain references to its deterrent value etc. while the one against the death penalty might point to executions of people later found to be innocent or research from a reliable source proving that the death penalty provides no effective deterrent to crime and so on.

All users would be required to read these summaries before voting, and reminded to approach the topic without preconceptions and with an open mind. As all summaries are required to be neutral, factual and based on reliable research, as well as important arguments put forth by experts in the field, voters will have a far better opportunity to make an informed decision on the topic. There is also the advantage that these summaries come directly from the source, not through often partisan media outlets.

This is greatly preferable to the situation with modern referenda, where voters become confused with conflicting, often greatly biased information transmitted shrilly from both sides of the debate. This information is often distorted even further by partisan media, and can also be put out in an emotional way, creating fear and even anger. The result is that people sometimes vote against their interests due to misconceptions caused by this confusion.

More complex issues can also be dealt with on the *society forum* in a similar way. The issue of drug abuse is one which affects numerous societies in deep and destructive ways all over the world. To find a realistic solution to this complex problem, who should we ask for advice: drug counselors, drug abuse experts, and researchers with decades of experience in the field; or should we ask politicians what to do? On one hand, you would get frank and honest suggestions that may nonetheless be difficult to face up to, while on the other, politicians will say whatever their PR advisors *tell them* to say in order to get elected.

There are multiple issues surrounding drug abuse, but one thread on the *society forum* might concern the issue of drug use being a crime in most countries, a fact which leads to a wide variety of problems.

After exhaustive discussions, with reliable studies cited, statistics given and stories told, the voting options might be as follows:

Increase severity of sentencing for all drug use

Increase severity of sentencing for hard drug use

Reduce severity of sentencing for hard drug use

Decriminalize soft drug use

Decriminalize all drug use

None of the above

And so on.

The number of options will be decided by the participants but is in theory unlimited. A page moderator will ensure, with the democratic consent of participants, a sensible number of options that ensure a broad spectrum of distinct suggested solutions. A member can click on each of these options to read the ongoing discussions on that particular solution, with opinions for and against, in order to decide what their own personal opinion is. Again, summaries of all salient points for and against will be provided by moderators and/or other qualified contributors for each option.

Once a member decides to vote, they can click on the box anonymously and their vote will count toward the total. A member can only vote once on any given topic thread, and may change their mind at any later time.

Depending on the issue, different pictures will arise. In the above case, for example, two options may be almost equally popular, in which case, a new consensus option should be explored as far as possible.

With this system, the vast combined knowledge of a huge number of experts in the civilian population could be tapped on any issue imaginable, from what to do about traffic safety, to how to improve the education system. A comprehensive plan on tackling tax avoidance/evasion could be created, and from this a broad budget which addresses social needs could be made for everyone to see and vote upon. Media regulation could be comprehensively discussed and a plan appropriate to the demands of the modern media environment laid out.

All issues can be discussed and voted on concurrently. With enough people, a broad array of policies based on expert opinion and research and voted for by ordinary civilians could be created.

This is true politics in action. Politics is a process by which a group of people, even extremely large groups, make collective decisions. These decisions, in a true democracy, should come about through consensus as much as possible. In representative democracies, some decisions or policies are made with no public consensus whatsoever, and can turn out beneficial only for special interests, or have a negative effect on society.

If a large enough number of people participate or vote, it will force politicians to take note of which direction people want their representatives to move. The larger the number becomes, the more seriously it will be taken until it becomes an indispensable organ of public opinion: *a people's online government*. This would make it very much harder for any politician or

other figure in power to go against the will of the people.

Nevertheless, this is not real power. Elected officials would still be able to make the excuse that they have been voted into office through a 'democratic' process, even though we know that this process is far from truly representative of the people. They would therefore not see such an online government as binding in any way and would likely see fit to ignore it.

This leads us to the second step, if it is required.

In a democracy, any citizen (with some exceptions) is eligible to run for elected office. If a government continues to ignore the will of the online government described above in ways that are destructive to society, there is nothing to stop people affiliated with or nominated by the *society forum* from standing for election themselves.

The Direct Democracy Alliance could itself form a party that exists for one reason alone: to bring about constitutional reform which enables a form of true direct democracy to come into being. Once that goal is achieved satisfactorily, the party would dissolve.

It may seem ironic and counterproductive for a movement so diametrically opposed to the party political system to *itself* form a party (*The Direct Democracy Alliance Party – DDAP*), but it is unavoidable as it is currently the only way to legally gain power. In other words, it would be a temporary but necessary evil.

Candidates, highly respected figures in each community, could stand in every constituency to run on a manifesto based on the *exact policies* that voters in the online government want in each voting district. This would have the bonus effect of forcing other traditional party candidates to tactically move their policies toward those in the manifesto of the people's government, or could even lead to DDAP candidates being directly elected. In theory, if the movement catches the imagination of the people, the DDAP could eventually come to power in a country, or gain enough power to influence a coalition government into real electoral reform, finally leading to a form of direct democracy.

It must be emphasized that the ultimate goal of the DDAP is to enact electoral form in order to bring about a form of direct democracy, and so the 'electoral manifesto' would not be used in the traditional sense, as the party would cease to exist as soon as direct democracy comes into being. The 'manifesto' would simply serve as a guide to voters in order for them to understand what policies they have chosen as a society, both at the local and national levels.

For societies reluctant to countenance such a radical change, the mildest form of direct

democracy – that which currently exists in Switzerland – where the people simply have the power of veto over government actions, as well as the power to make new laws or initiate constitutional amendments, could be adopted as a minimum measure while keeping the existing form of representative democracy. This kind of direct democracy is being employed right now in the US state of Wisconsin, where the people are in the process of collecting enough signatures to initiate a recall of the unpopular governor.

These are attainable goals if enough people put their efforts to the task. The alternative is to leave our world in the hands of banks and corporations, who have demonstrated that they do not care about social justice or poverty, and in the hands of politicians, many of whom are easily bought, and who will stay bought.

Chapter 6: Issues with Direct Democracy

“The best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter” – Winston Churchill

For a direct democracy to work, the populace needs to be engaged and interested in the process. In order for this to come to pass, the system needs media attention and scrutiny, leading to enthusiasm about taking a direct hand in policy and societal issues, as well as credibility. It goes without saying that there will be droves of naysayers, but such a negative attitude should be confronted robustly. Switzerland, a peaceful and stable society with a strong economy has shown that direct democracy works, and no one can deny that simple fact.

Education

One obstacle facing the implementation of such a system is education. Simply put: are ordinary people too ignorant to take a hand in governance? Certainly there will be many who lack understanding of certain issues, or whose views are skewed due to ignorance of the facts, not to mention media bias and spin. It is vital therefore that those engaging with issues retain an open mind before reading what others have to say. This is why a calm, respectful and fact/source-based debate among experts and other knowledgeable people on the *society forum* is necessary in order to provide a balanced view of all the options and enable people who are not familiar with the issues to learn as much as possible without partisan views screaming in their ears from all angles.

A key argument against the ‘ordinary people are idiots’ objection is this: in many countries, ordinary citizens take part in jury service every day in courts everywhere. These people, chosen randomly from the population and obliged to serve, are entrusted with one of the most important things a society can do - deciding whether to take freedom away from a defendant. Many of these cases are extremely complex, and yet we trust ordinary citizens to do the job. Few even question this state of affairs. If we can trust people to decide if a complete stranger is guilty or not guilty of a crime, we can certainly also trust them to take an active role in deciding the kind of society they would like to live in.

In Iceland in July 2011, a group of 25 ordinary citizens presented a new *constitution* draft to parliament. They completed the work with the help of hundreds of volunteers online. One lawyer, who aided the group with their work, said: “What I learned is people can be trusted. We put all our things online and attempted to read, listen and understand and I think that made the biggest difference in our job and made our work so so so much better.”

This new constitution was in part brought about as a result of the emergence of new social movements in Iceland determined not to let the 2008 economic crisis happen again - ordinary people demanding a decisive role in determining and controlling their society.

The same argument about citizens being too ignorant to take a role in shaping their society was given in England when only the rich or the upper classes had the vote, before universal suffrage. Not many would voice that argument today, but it is disappointing to see that same old snobbery is alive and well.

This issue of education is a crucial one. It is a fact that education, or more accurately a lack of it, is a root cause of many, if not all, problems facing societies around the world. Education empowers people to take their destinies into their own hands, allowing them more opportunities to find work, to escape the poverty cycle, and to use their knowledge to improve their communities and the lives of those around them.

Unfortunately, there is a trend in some democracies to turn education, especially at university level, into a profit industry. This will to a large extent exclude the poor, who are understandably reluctant to borrow large sums of money to obtain a degree, especially in modern times when even a degree is no guarantee of a good job. This trend ultimately dumbs down the population and reduces intellectual curiosity in general.

It is not only the general public who will become less knowledgeable or informed; powerful politicians, many of whom have great power over curricula and teaching methods under their purview, are not immune. Consider the following exchange between Texas Governor Rick Perry and a young boy, who was being prompted by his mother, while on the US presidential campaign trail in 2011:

"I hear your mom is asking about evolution and, you know, it's a theory that's out there, and it's got some gaps in it," Perry said. "In Texas we teach both creationism and evolution in our public schools. Because I figure you're smart enough to figure out which one is right."

The boy had asked earlier: *"How old do you think the Earth is?"*

Perry: *"You know what? I don't have any idea. I know it's pretty old. So, it goes back a long, long way. I'm not sure anybody knows completely and absolutely how long [sic] the Earth is."*

Such a display of ignorance, feigned or otherwise, would be inexcusable in a thirteen-year-old, let alone the governor of a powerful state.

A lack of education directly leads to less appreciation and understanding of the issues facing society, and therefore a lack of interest in them. This is extremely destructive as not only is a huge amount of potential talent wasted, but those in power find it much easier to distract the populace and get away with undemocratic actions, leading to injustice and inequality.

With this in mind I further propose the creation of a **free** online education system, courses in all subjects or fields based on current existing curricula at all levels, again using *Wiki* software. This system would be directly linked from the *people's government* (as described in the previous chapter) member profile page.

These courses would be created by volunteers around the world as a collaborative effort (in the same manner as the hugely successful Wikipedia) and will contain modules, video lessons, use of graphics and software, tutorials and anything else traditional universities currently offer. Similar projects already exist online, notably Wikiversity, one of the many features of Wikipedia. However, courses that lead to *real, accredited qualifications* are required in order to enable anyone with online access (at first) the chance to a **free** education and a useful piece of paper at the end of the course.

This education project would also separately contain *non-academic* courses in any field imaginable, from dog training to vegetarian cooking and so on. Once again, ordinary people would be the creators.

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: 'Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages'.

Let us extend that to all educational levels so everyone has a chance at obtaining a decent qualification, not to mention access to some useful and free information that is of great use to people's daily lives or hobbies.

This education project is an important idea, as not only could it one day enable the poor to educate themselves and receive a meaningful qualification, it would also symbolically demonstrate that ordinary people can *bypass* the authorities on this issue and any other one, that they can take their well-being into their own hands without the need to pay prohibitive tuition fees.

Ordinary citizens created the Wikipedia project; those same thousands of generous volunteers could turn their attention to creating something that may hold even more benefit for huge numbers of people.

The Media

A neutral, competent, informative and honest media is absolutely essential in a real democracy. It is also necessary for journalists to maintain a professional distance from government officials and corporations in order to prevent inappropriately cozy relationships forming, which can be disastrous for transparency and the public's right to know acts carried out by elected officials in their name and with their tax money. Sadly, but inevitably, there are journalists at famous organs who are more concerned about being invited to the seats of power or cocktail parties than actually doing their jobs and holding officials accountable for their actions.

The 2011-12 Leveson Inquiry in the UK into the allegations of phone hacking by tabloid media outlets has been a horror show detailing the quite disgusting behavior of the paparazzi and, by extension, tabloid editors and bosses to bring in a dramatic story, spitting in the face of a celebrity in order to provoke a violent reaction and catch it on film/camera being one of numerous examples. No argument can justify this kind of behavior.

Reporting in the modern media is driven relentlessly toward increasing readership or viewer ratings for the purpose of garnering better circulation figures in order to gain advertizing revenue. For this reason, manufactured drama, overdramatic reporting, exaggeration and overemphasis on positive emotional human dramas in negative stories are all common fare. Witness the massive focus on a baby rescued from the rubble in an October 2011 earthquake in Turkey, for example. While this is undoubtedly wonderful news, it ignores the reality that a large number of other babies were not so lucky.

The death of Apple's Steve Jobs also brought about days upon days of reflection on and praise of the fact that Jobs unconventionally dropped out of college to study another subject, which by lucky chance then aided him greatly in his later career as an IT-product designer. Again, while it is a worthy lesson for any child not to blindly follow conventional wisdom, this kind of focus passes over the reality that the vast majority of college dropouts *do not go* on to become acclaimed billionaires.

Stories like these skew reality and create a false subconscious sense in people that *anyone* could be the next Steve Jobs. While this is strictly speaking correct, it will nonetheless only be true for a handful of people in a generation.

The '*American Dream*'.

More egregiously, as mentioned in chapter two, some newspapers and cable TV news channels openly endorse political parties or candidates, and then proceed to carry

misleading, biased, and even openly false articles and stories supporting their candidate while attempting to destroy the credibility of the opposition. This also distorts reality and creates confusion.

Further, while debates about serious issues are broadcast regularly, each side is given only limited time, so 'discussions' are often simply the swapping of sound bites and catchphrases for viewers to hopefully remember, and even sometimes degenerate into bickering and trading of insults. This may make for entertaining television, but it does no justice to often complex issues which can require deep and sober reflection.

Considering it is a known fact that catchy phrases broadcast by the media, especially when repeated ad nauseam, strongly influence the opinions and beliefs of the general public, who rely increasingly on sound bites for news about the world around them, it is deplorable that any media entity is allowed to take political sides. In a democracy, one vital function of the media should be to help educate the populace with facts based on scientific or expert consensus so that people can make informed choices about their society.

For these reasons, in order to function correctly, a direct democracy would need to enforce **prohibitive** fines or other punitive measures upon any element of the media which can be proven to lie, distort the truth, or put forward any information without credible evidence; in other words, break basic journalistic principles. *Omission* of vital information also needs to be punished, as this can be as devastating as lying.

Journalists and other media figures (even bloggers) could for instance, be given a kind of license, which can be taken away if they are found guilty of lying or deliberately misleading the public. As lying to the public is a direct attack on democracy, the accompanying penalty should be severe. Under such a system, journalists like Judith Miller, who was a major cheerleader in *The New York Times* for the Iraq War and the claims of the existence of weapons of mass destruction, would not now be allowed to influence the public in any way as many of the articles she wrote in the run-up to the war have now been found to be either misleading or even completely false. The Bush administration even pointed to some of her front-page articles as proof that Saddam Hussein had to be removed. She is still writing today.

This is not about suppressing information - on the contrary, as much information as possible is desirable - but about ensuring that nefarious elements have no scope to unduly influence the free thinking of the people in a democracy. Events like the News International hacking scandal have shown what can happen when the media is out of control.

Fractured Societies

It is well known that in the United States, the views and cultures of the people in each state can be markedly different, in some cases uncompromisingly so; or in, say, Thailand, where the country is divided cleanly between two very differing viewpoints: those of city dwellers and those of people in rural areas. More seriously, when people of two or more religions or sects co-exist, serious problems, including violence, can occur.

Each society is unique and the solutions to its problems, whether through direct democracy or not, will necessarily also be unique. One solution is to give each state or group a high degree of autonomy over how they live, as is the case in the cantons of Switzerland. Whatever the solution, people coming together and discussing issues in a serious and constructive way can only be a good thing; certainly better than repressive tactics employed in some regimes to enforce one view on those who do not subscribe to it, as can happen in nations with two or more differing cultures or religions.

Security

There will always be concerns about internet security, or people cheating the system somehow to create an unrealistic voting pattern. This is indeed a serious issue but e-voting software is now quite advanced thanks to projects undertaken by mathematicians and computer scientists who have anticipated these problems and taken steps to greatly reduce or eliminate them. Sophisticated methods now exist to identify and treat appropriately suspicious voting patterns and so on. The recently-introduced UK E-Petition project allows hundreds of thousands of people to uniquely sign petitions online, demonstrating that this kind of secure software is already available.

Cost

The deep reach of the internet into almost every home in developed countries around the world has removed the problem of cost, always the main obstacle to direct democracy in the past.

Past Attempts

It is true that past experiments with direct democracy have failed, but there could be many reasons for this. The Direct Democracy Party of New Zealand existed from 2005 to 2009, partly as a reaction to the banking crisis and mounting national debt. Thirty-two party members stood as candidates in the 2005 elections but only pulled in 782 votes, 0.03% of the electorate. This failure could be due to a lack of public recognition of (and media

disinterest in) the candidates and the party itself, as well as distrust of such a new and radical political entity. At that time, three years before the 2008 financial crisis, fears for the national and global economy among the population were not as widespread as they are now. Further, New Zealand generally functions well as a representative democracy and the majority of people would have perhaps seen no need for change.

There are other direct democracy parties in countries like Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. While the US does not have a federal system of direct democracy, many states have such systems, including the ability to recall elected officials.

The movement has a hold and is growing, but it needs numbers and serious media attention in order to flourish.

Can It Work?

Switzerland proves it can, but more importantly it is necessary to examine why we have to *make* it work.

The Democracy Index is a measure of how democratic a society is based on five categories: civil liberties, political participation, electoral process, functioning of government and political culture.

The 2010 Democracy Index rankings:

- Norway
- Iceland
- Denmark
- Sweden
- New Zealand
- Australia
- Finland
- Switzerland
- Canada
- Netherlands

The Human Development Index is a statistic used to rank countries in order with comparative measures of literacy, life expectancy, and standards of living and education.

The 2010 Human Development Index rankings:

- Norway
- Australia
- New Zealand
- United States
- Ireland
- Liechtenstein
- Netherlands
- Canada
- Sweden
- Germany

As can be seen from this simple comparison, there are six repeat names in the top ten lists, suggesting a significant correlation between transparent and functioning democracy and general high standard of living and development. If we add tables of indices for health and education, many of the same countries above again appear in the top ten. Interestingly, in the 2010 Human Development Report, an additional list was provided in which rankings were adjusted for societal inequality. In this list, the big loser was the United States, which fell from 4th to 12th.

What this shows quite clearly is that the more open, transparent and truly democratic a country is, the better the quality of life in real terms for ordinary people – life expectancy, education, health, safety and so on. For this reason alone, people from societies which are *democracies in name only*, which are being dangerously influenced by special interests, need to take back control of their nations.

Who Cares?

By far the greatest enemy of introducing this (or any kind of new system) is indifference. Looking around at any bar, cafe or office, you see and hear people absorbed in their own life problems, with their work, with sport and with hobbies. Very few spend hours agonizing over issues like modern slavery, extreme poverty and other serious issues unless they are directly affected by them. This is human nature and is unlikely to change.

However, there is reason to be optimistic at this time. The internet age has brought with it an awakening to many - people no longer so readily accept what they are told by politicians and other public figures, or by pundits in the media. It is far easier now to more deeply appreciate what is going on, literally with a few clicks. Those affected by the austerity policies of countries suffering from sovereign debt are now beginning to feel the pinch and

considering what to do about it. The Occupy movement is growing as a result of this.

If this anger and outrage can be tapped, and people legally gain power through a form of direct democracy, there will be very little those supporting the status quo could do about it. The alternative is to keep building up the protests until the state is forced to act via the police, leading to probable violence with no guarantee of a fairer system in the long term.

What's the Difference?

A common criticism of direct democracy is the idea that giving ordinary people power to shape societies will lead to the same problem we currently have in representative democracies; namely that we will still need officials making decisions, and that they will ultimately behave just like any politician in power right now.

However, this is a misconception. Direct democracy simply requires people to vote, and that is all. Government officials would simply act as delegates of the will of the people. Any rogue officials could be immediately removed by popular vote, and any unjust or unpopular law would be forced to face a referendum.

Leading to...

Inconvenience

The idea that people would be required to vote all the time, taking considerable time and causing great inconvenience, is also bogus. In reality, in a representative direct democracy, officials tasked with running the government will be aware of the policies the people want based on the opinion polls in the *people's online government* and will be able to implement them without requiring any further input. However, new laws would obviously need to be voted in and/or ratified over time. As a suggestion, a national vote on all pending laws could be held, say, once every six months, with that day made a national holiday on which democracy is celebrated. There are national holidays which celebrate religious events, so why not allow them for something just as important: the basis of our lives and societies?

String 'Em Up

Every time there is a particularly heinous crime that shocks the nation, there are always increased calls for stricter punishments or the death penalty, regardless of whether they are effective deterrents or not. This again reflects the base human desire for revenge and reciprocal justice. This phenomenon is not limited to the most serious crimes like murder: in the wake of the London riots in 2011, there were numerous calls from the government

and some media outlets for rioters to lose social benefits and to be removed from public housing.

Aside from the fact that removing benefits of people with no income and throwing them out on the street is only likely to create more crime, there is a lamentable human desire to see people suffer for their wrongdoings without regard for whether that person has already suffered greatly in their life, or that they are suffering now.

There is a lot of concern that under a system of direct democracy, there will be endless campaigns and votes to bring back the death penalty or more draconian measures to control crime, against all warnings of criminologists, every time a serious crime or event occurs. However, this is not necessarily true. On the UK E-Petition website, just below 26,000 people have (at the time of writing) signed the motion to bring back capital punishment, well below the 100,000 threshold required for Parliament to consider debating the issue. Many would raise the specter of screaming lynch mobs taking control of society under a system of direct democracy, but as can be seen here, this is simply not an accurate assessment. In any case, as a pertinent example, Switzerland, which has direct democracy, does not seem to suffer an excess of lynch mobs.

As a suggestion to temper this all-too-human reaction to high-profile crimes, a cooling-off period of a minimum of three months might be wise before any legislation related to a major event is allowed to be voted upon or discussed on the *society forum*. This will allow a lot of the intense emotions to die down and allow people to consider the issue with cooler heads.

51% versus 49%

Imagine if 49% of the population of a nation followed one religion, while 51% followed another. In an extreme example like this, almost half the nation could suffer greatly due to the imposition of the will of a slight majority.

This is yet another nightmarish example that opponents of direct democracy raise. However, it is again a blurring of reality. Firstly, direct democracy works best with consensus decision-making, not majority voting. Everyone comes to the table knowing that no one is ever going to be completely happy and therefore compromises have to be made.

Each society is still governed ultimately by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, or each nation's own bill of rights, meaning that even in the extreme example given here, any minority would still have the right to live their lives freely without fear of interference from the majority and no oppression or discrimination would be tolerated by law.

System Justification

There is a tendency among people to try to defend and sustain the status quo, even when it is not in their interests to do so. This phenomenon, *system justification*, is well known in social psychology, and any movement to install direct democracy would certainly come up against it on multiple occasions. However, as can be seen from the huge global wave of anger against inequality, now is a better time than ever before to raise the issue as people of all ages and backgrounds from around the world are uniting to fight against the existing state of affairs.

Will an implementation of direct democracy be smooth? No. Will there be all sorts of unforeseen issues? Yes. But we just need to look at the system we have and what it has brought us to: the banks and corporations running rampant above the law, acting illegally and causing hardship and misery for millions with the 2008 crisis, which has now become a sovereign debt crisis putting Europe in serious danger. Billions live in hunger and poverty, millions are enslaved, and criminal enterprises are making billions of dollars on human misery. Wealth inequality is off the charts and there is no sign of improvement.

People will be forced to continue to suffer national leaders like Silvio Berlusconi, George W Bush, who require no introduction, and Vladimir Putin, who regularly stages fraudulent photo ops to enhance his macho image. Leaders like these, who hold enormous power over the livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people, employ (or have employed) methods of deception to further themselves in the eyes of their people and influence public opinion to maintain popularity.

If the systems we currently accept have allowed these things to occur, it is time to try something new. If ordinary people had been put in charge after the 2008 financial crisis, every single culpable banker would now be in a prison cell. Where are they now? If ordinary people were in charge, the political will to put priority onto social and humanitarian concerns rather than financial and military or strategic ones would be overwhelming.

The time is right for direct democracy.

Chapter 7: A Final Word

There is nothing as powerful as an idea whose time has come – Victor Hugo (paraphrased)

It has been established in this book (as if it were necessary) with numerous examples that the world is rife with inequality, injustice, poverty, crime and a lack of true democracy. The examples given represent a tiny percentage of all the serious problems confronting billions of people all over the world, from small injustices to matters of life, liberty and death. Quite literally, new articles detailing shocking abuse by elites are published *every day* in media around the world.

The political will required to confront these issues will not come from the government, or even in the fatally hamstrung United Nations. The laudable charities work tirelessly, but even they have no chance of solving problems of this scale. When natural disasters strike, the world often comes together with millions of compassionate people donating money to the stricken areas, but the reality is that a huge amount of this aid ends up paying the huge salaries of consultants, or for transport costs. Throwing money at problems is simply not enough.

The reason for this is simple: money can alleviate the symptoms for a time, but it does not address the root cause of these problems. These root causes are invariably societal in nature and therefore fundamental, radical changes are required in order for these issues to be resolved.

Nations which have problems with poverty or corruption need a truly democratic system, with full accountability and transparency, and unerring adhesion to due process and the absolute rule of law, based on compassionate, fundamental principles such as those enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The fact that the safest countries with the best education and health systems are strong representative democracies makes the case for true democracy irrefutable.

If even a few nations can demonstrate the viability of direct democracy, people all over the world will see that they can follow suit, and do so legally and without violence, by first forming online people's governments and then, if necessary, political parties, and standing in elections with the aim of bringing about electoral reform.

This would clearly be ineffective at this time in countries like China, which strictly control the internet and the activities of the population. The hope for such regimes would be a growing movement within the population to force the regime to consider relaxing their control. As discussed in chapter one, a *New United Nations*, or a reformed UN, would also be an

essential tool for persuading these countries to embrace democratic principles.

Such change would inevitably take time, but countries which choose to follow truly democratic principles could act as a powerful influence.

The people who have changed history, those who have made staggering discoveries that enabled human progress or appreciation, have overwhelmingly come from civilian populations, not from the ranks of corporate executives, bankers or politicians. It was a civilian who discovered mass-energy equivalence, a civilian who painted the Sistine Chapel, a civilian who risked imprisonment and even his life to go against the dogma of the Catholic Church and state that the Earth revolved around the Sun, and not vice-versa. It was a civilian who invented the transistor, and who discovered penicillin.

On the other hand, certain politicians and paid spokesmen for the energy industries tell us that global warming, the greatest threat to the continued existence of mankind, is actually a disputed theory when it is overwhelmingly supported by scientists everywhere.

Why do we allow the latter category of people to make such important decisions over our lives and not the former? This is not only baffling; it is dangerous.

Even in relatively transparent societies where representative democracies work well, it needs to be well understood that just one politician with nefarious intentions, if elected and given sufficient power and funding, can begin an insidious process by which democratic institutions are undermined gradually. The only truly safe system is one where the people retain *at the very least* the power of veto.

To those who say we should trust in the systems we have, that change is a gradual process and that things generally get better over time, consider this: while it is true that some things improve over time, such things are no threat to the dominance of the ruling elites who have gamed the system to their advantage. We may indeed have better gadgets to enable us to keep in touch with our friends and loved ones, or better medicines to help us live longer (assuming we are lucky or rich enough to afford them), but in many societies, even democracies, the true power over the policies that affect our lives, and the lives of people we never see, lies in the hands of officials elected by demonstrably flawed and unfair systems and who are beholden to lobbyists and corporate contributors.

In the UK, the *E-Petition* website was created by the government in order to provide a more direct link between the people and the government. Any issue which attracts 100,000 signatures *may* then be debated in the House of Commons. However, the government is under no obligation to adopt any suggestions from the public, vote on them, or even

discuss them. Therefore, any perceived democratic gains from this initiative are an illusion. Such projects can be cited by politicians as evidence of their democratic openness, but as it gives no true power to the people, it is a sham.

All is not lost, however. Some movements are gaining traction, notably the Occupy Wall Street movement which has had instant and global appeal. There is also talk of a 'Robin Hood tax' in Europe: a tax on all transactions involving shares, bonds and derivatives, which would then go towards aiding the poor or putting social programs in place.

This is all very well, but even noble movements and ideas like these do not address the root causes of the world's problems. The elites will not be overly concerned about Occupy Wall Street as they control most of the media, the politicians and by extension, the police and the military. The Robin Hood tax is a wonderful idea, a way of forcing financial institutions to give something back to societies. However, even in the unlikely event this becomes law, as 61% of Europeans support a financial transaction tax, it will still not change the fact that the people in the saddle are the last people we should want there.

\$1.2 trillion is spent every year on defense around the world. Recent figures quoted to end extreme world poverty are \$175 billion, around 15% of that annual figure. This ludicrous comparison alone should make people realize that the only way we can ever eradicate social ills is for people to take matters into their own hands.

I have often wondered, when almost no-one of the thousands of people I have personally encountered in my life would support war or indeed violence of any kind, why the world is violent and miserable in so many places. There are millions of volunteers and charity workers around the world, motivated not by financial gain but simply kindness and compassion. It is not human nature to seek power in most cases. Most people simply want to live a good life and even help others whenever the opportunity arises.

The inescapable conclusion therefore is that in fact billions of people feel the same way, but the few people who have gained decisive power over the world do not. These are people who are motivated by greed and the rewards of power. This power needs to be taken from them before they can do more damage, and the billions of people who only want a safe, clean and free world must take the reins. It is time for the world to grow up, to move on to the next step in its evolution. Those overly concerned with material possessions and goals must overcome this shallow, childish and primitive fixation.

Until the people assert power over their own societies, the specters of war, poverty, inequality, injustice and human misery will always loom large. It absolutely does not need to be this way. Instead of viewing democracy as a sliding scale, where we talk about *moving*

towards a more democratic society, we need to start seeing it as an absolute – either a society is fully democratic, or it is not. We can start the ball rolling but it will be necessary to make a leap of faith and recognize that we are capable of creating a just and peaceful world through our own collaboration.

APPENDIX: THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

PREAMBLE

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,

Whereas it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,

Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

Now, Therefore THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY proclaims THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

ARTICLE 1.

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

ARTICLE 2.

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

ARTICLE 3.

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

ARTICLE 4.

No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

ARTICLE 5.

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

ARTICLE 6.

Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

ARTICLE 7.

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

ARTICLE 8.

Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

ARTICLE 9.

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

ARTICLE 10.

Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

ARTICLE 11.

(1) Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.

(2) No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the penal offence was committed.

ARTICLE 12.

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

ARTICLE 13.

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.

(2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

ARTICLE 14.

(1) Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

(2) This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

ARTICLE 15.

(1) Everyone has the right to a nationality.

(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

ARTICLE 16.

(1) Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.

(2) Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.

(3) The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

ARTICLE 17.

(1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.

(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

ARTICLE 18.

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

ARTICLE 19.

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

ARTICLE 20.

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

(2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

ARTICLE 21.

(1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

(2) Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.

(3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

ARTICLE 22.

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

ARTICLE 23.

- (1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.
- (2) Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.
- (3) Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.
- (4) Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

ARTICLE 24.

Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

ARTICLE 25.

- (1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.
- (2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

ARTICLE 26.

- (1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
- (2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.
- (3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

ARTICLE 27.

- (1) Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.
- (2) Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

ARTICLE 28.

Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.

ARTICLE 29.

(1) Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.

(2) In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.

(3) These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

ARTICLE 30.

Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.

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ALL ORIGINAL CONCEPTS AND ORGANIZATIONS (AND NAMES)

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