

# AMERICAN OLIGOPOLY

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## AMERICAN OLIGARCHY

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Woe to those

who join house to house and add field to field until there is no place left in the land for common people to dwell securely and productively. They build great houses with the proceeds of their villainy, but the Lord says they shall soon be desolate and unoccupied. Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may drink until night as wine inflames them. But they do not consider the works of the Lord, nor do they regard the operation of his hands.

My

paraphrase of Isaiah 5:8-12

The United

States is evolving rapidly into an oligarchy, but with democratic and constitutional overtones and pretensions. It becomes ever more difficult to pretend we have a democratic republic energized by the people and their elected representatives when faced with a moribund Congress increasingly responsive to political donors and notorious "think tanks" spreading propaganda beyond the ability of voters to comprehend, much less combat.

Oligarchy

means rule by a few rich and powerful persons or families with the fruits of productive enterprise, including labor, increasingly transferred through favorable (read: rigged) laws and judicial decisions to those at the top of the economic pyramid. The smaller and smaller amounts of national income remaining are then fought over by various consumer and worker groups with no one winning because the economic pie is too small.

This has

happened before, namely in the Gilded Age of the 1880s and 90s and the Roaring Twenties between World War One and the Great Depression. Each case was motivated by government connivance, regulatory quiescence, business aggressiveness, and a public too drugged by survival concerns and the search for pleasure to give it much attention.

Each of these anomalies was ended by differing circumstances. The Gilded Age fell before reform laws ignited by the rampant corruption uncovered by the so-called Muckrakers. President Teddy Roosevelt and several of his appointees used the "bully pulpit" of presidential power to attack the forces of great injustice, and the Populist and Progressive movements drew public attention to political and economic abuses. The excesses of the Twenties met their end in the Stock Market crash of 1929 and the ensuing Great Depression.

Today the scene is similar. Half of our people remain mired in recession with little hope of permanent recovery because the game has changed---and not in their favor. "Little" people have lost the labor unions that had gained them a living wage, and working people can no longer depend upon a concerned Congress to legislate in their favor because recent Supreme Court decisions have awarded corporations the same free speech rights as citizens, meaning they can propagandize and spend money for political gain just like real people.

So oligarchy marches on while a comatose public deadened by vapid entertainment, liquor and drugs, rampant consumerism, and a complacent clergy sits by as their hope for a meaningful future disappears.

Is there anything you can do? Yes! You could begin paying attention to what's transpiring on the world stage. Your freedoms are being stolen and your future is becoming ever more insecure. Oligarchs have destroyed the unions that formerly agitated for living wages. Now they're after Social Security and other pension sources. If they finally succeed in turning the wealth and power of our nation into a power structure existing only to protect their thieving strategies and to transfer ever increasing amounts of money into their coffers, then we'll have true oligarchy and all its accompanying evils.

Another thing you can do is to insist that your churches begin preaching the "full gospel" of real human justice in addition to the ever-present individual soporifics now existing. As Jim Wallis says, the church needs to learn to "speak truth to power" and inform the political and economic debate. That's what it's really all about. The time is here for the earth to turn to God. Until this occurs disasters of every sort will continue, since they are God's method for getting the attention of his wayward people.

So get onboard God's train---it's heading for the kingdom of God on earth.

