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Democracy: a Privilege that Bangladesh Cannot Afford

by Nobonita Chowdhury

Southern Identity and

Independence... but not the
south you're thinking of

by Andrew Hill

plus Absalom! by Joseph Richard

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Letter from the Editor

We pay too much attention to leaders. I don't want to hear about leaders anymore.

Let me elaborate. I received an email from the school a few weeks prior to writing this, addressed to the "movers and shakers" of the senior class. It was from a well-meaning woman from the alumni association who had gone to everyone she could think of: the dean, career services, Chris Krueger. Everyone except the tutors, I guess. So we were called upon, about twenty-five of us in total, to help the school facilitate our transformation from student to alumni. Most of us were uncomfortable. Those who weren't should have been.

I had no friends in that room, I didn't expect to. I don't hang out with movers and shakers, or at least, I don't hang out with these ones. They were the usual suspects, you know who they are. A disproportionate number of sports-ball captains, big-name party club archons, and legacy students compared to the rest of us. And they're great, they really are. We had a good conversation. I wish I could say in good faith that we accurately represented the senior class, but we didn't.

We go to one of the last schools in the world that don't treat education as vocational training. Why, then, did they only call upon students who were known particularly for non-academics? The people who make this school what it is went unrecognized, and they went unrecognized because we've forgotten what matters. They come alive in the classroom. That's where it matters. They don't treat St. John's as a stepping stone; they treat it as an end in itself because that's exactly what it is. Stop calling them room johnnies like it's a bad thing. Maybe you should spend some time alone.

Real leaders, real powerful forces for good don't seek glory, and so they rarely get any. But answer this question: would it have been better if Christ rode into Jerusalem on a valiant steed with a flaming sword? No. The donkey means more. You don't need a steed. The things you need are so much greater than you are. Seek to listen. We do good as instruments of God, not of ourselves. That's why politics corrupt.

This has been a message from your beaten-down editor. You won; I'm the bad guy. Does that make you good?

Sincerely,
Grace Villmow (A'20),
Editor-in-Chief

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POLITICS

On the Nature of the State and its Relation to the Church

BY JOSEPH PADGETT



Photo: Joadl

Societies that are or claim to be democratic or representative of the desires of their people, seem often to embrace secularism, so as to be impartial on the subject of religion, by which I am somewhat vexed. I see secularism as a disclusion of the church from the state. For what does separation of these entities entail in democracy and representative government? Why is it the nature of the state, or perhaps that of a good state, that it be separate from the church? What is the nature of the church that it ought to be separate? Is there not some level of contradiction between secularism and democracy in a society with any members of a religion? The nature of the state is complex, however, though I might divide it into two general parts: a state has people and a state has laws which are less physical.

A state cannot exist without people. This is because the purpose of the state lies in its people, as the purpose writing lies in its readers. That is, the state exists in relation to people. This relationship cannot be defined without law, for it is law that determines both how and to who the state has a relation, and what sort of relation that is.

Law defines the relationship of the state to people. Laws are sayings, orders, imperatives, with the implication of obedience by the people under the state. But it is not this simple. The state says, but indeed how the state may say such laws is itself prescribed by law, often in the form of a constitution. It is in this way that the state relies on people, for ultimately, it is people who must

prescribe laws to establish the state, and prescribe through the state. Some people may have separate sets of laws apply to them, such as feudal lords or foreigners with visas, but all have laws applied by a specific state to them. This body to whom laws are prescribed I shall call society. Societies may therefore overlap, but all societies have a state, because they are defined by the laws applied to them by the state.

The state consists of members of its society, and laws apply both. For even in dictatorships there are invariably laws that apply to the people, or persons, that is, the people part of the state. How the law applies may vary in nature, but that it applies, is constant. This is because the mere fact of prescribing any set of rules or restrictions is law. Even in cases such as the absentee papal fiefs in England, the Italian churchmen still demanded a regular flow of income to themselves. And by including themselves in this law, the included themselves in that society. In most cases, the people in states more obviously come from society, whether by election or nationality or some similar means. In addition, the state, containing these people, prescribes laws which relate to society. Therefore, to some extent, the state represents society because it influences society with law.

Here I must here digress, because influence may be made in two forms. Society influences law, and law influences society. It is difficult to describe how both influences work together

as one, but it is clearer to see how they work together when viewed separately. Such influence on both parts is also on a spectrum and varies by degree instead of dividing into a dichotomy.

Society influences law. This is done when a member of society also becomes a member of the state, where new laws apply to that member governing what the member's relation is to making law. Being still part of society then, the laws that derive from that member are influenced by society. The opposite case is anarchy, where there is no law for society to influence. The spectrum then lies in how much of society has influence over laws, for in some societies only a few people may have direct influence. Law influences society, because society follows law. If there were no society, law would be nothing, for it would apply to no one. When members of society do not follow particular or general laws, the law loses influence over them, because they do not follow it. It might be said then that there is a correlation, that as society (as a whole) has influence over what law is, law has less influence over society. This estrangement can not lead anywhere good for society or the state, as each relies on the other to exist.

Members, however, make up society, and they are in no wise homogenous in their thoughts, which complicates the process by which societies relate to laws. A dead law is one that no one follows, and thus living laws are ones that are followed. Likewise in society, a law may be more or less a living law as judged by how much it is followed as a proportion to the number of people in the society. However, in a society, it is possible that some individuals will disagree with the members of the state who determine laws. It is further possible that they would not follow the laws proposed by these members, for reasons profound or trite. Conversely, whether or not a law is prescribed by the state, it may still be observed by society, or a large portion of its individuals and thus be very alive. This sort of law prescribed by society I shall call custom, to distinguish it. Then it is clear that all laws are not dead or alive to the same extent as each other. It is society, it seems, which plays a much more

definitive role in the health of law. For if states do as they often do, they will remove someone who violates a law from society, acknowledging that it is the society that has influencing power. In some ways this weakens the law and in others it strengthens it. The removed individuals usually suffer a restriction of action, though sometimes they are simply exploited for revenue through fines.

It seems important to now, at least briefly, discuss the concept of enforcement, which both state and society may employ when laws or customs are broken. It seems that enforcement has two manners by which it may be reconciled. The first is through material compensation, whereby an individual gives up possessions to heal the breach between themselves and the law or custom. The other method is to remove the individual from society, presumably until they have understood the nature and gravity of their violation, and maybe reconciled it, though the motive is neither consistent nor clear. When this occurs, society grows smaller, and the law both weaker and stronger. The law appears stronger to those in society, for an individual has been prevented from violating that law, but it may also be considered weaker, if the individual never re-enters society proclaiming their obedience to that law. But if the individual is removed into a separate society within the primary society, usually a prison, then they come under the influence of a new separate set of laws, and indeed under a new and separate state. This seems to me to run counter to any ideas of re-including such individuals in society, especially if such individuals are set against obeying laws prescribed by the state.

Here is where the church may debut. I would posit that making the state secular in a society that contains churches is inviting weakness into law, and thus into society and the state. A church is, however, a society of sorts unto itself, or can be, mine is less so, but in some religions the customs are quite temporal, such as dietary restrictions and prayer times. I mean this in that they limit behaviour. Individuals in a church I think are of the mind to favour their church over society in matters of custom and law, favouring divine wisdom to that of society. Thankfully,

these can often align in laws, but sometimes they will contradict. This is especially the case in a secularised state, where declining to pass or supporting laws based on religion is decried, and the church, despite being made up of individuals who are also members of society, is driven from the state wholly. I think that is a mistake, at least in a democratic society, one that claims to reflect the wishes of its individuals.

A democratic society proclaims as its chief virtue its listening to the will of the people, which is accounted by my depiction of society and its individuals. If these individuals are members of the church, it follows that the church should be included as part of that society, at least partially, for churches tend to span across states, rather than stay with a single state. It seems to me that a separation of church and state would either require a separation of the church's society from the church, which seems difficult to effect, or a separation of the church's society from the society associated with the state, which also seems difficult. Both also seem to potentially violate the wishes of the individuals who have chosen to be a member of both societies. Both indeed seem undemocratic.

For the one which separates members from the church would need to declare so by law, that is, through the state. If this were against the wishes of the members of the church, it would then violate that democratic principle. In the other method, again through state action, the church society could be cut off from the rest of society, but this again might contradict their wishes, and so be undemocratic.

It seems then that the democratic state must relate to the church in some other way then, unless it seeks change in its law and society, for changing one would change the other. The art of statecraft is not in rejecting parts of society, but instead in discovering how to reconcile contradictions that might arise, which I suppose I shall now explore. I have encountered in history several ways to resolve differences in individuals that arise through society. I have observed the aforementioned methods, expulsion and forced renunciation, as well as majoritarianism, inde-

pendence, and subdivision.

Expulsion and forced renunciation seem to me generally distasteful, and are both difficult to effect. For I have previously somewhat ignored custom, but within society, among its individuals, custom forms sub-societies, and the church might be considered one even, and these sub-societies overlap a great deal, such that to rend these sub-societies is to generally rend and tear society, which weakens society and law. Forced conversion pushes the conflict from intra-societies to the individual themselves, which still has a similar effect, if some do not renounce, which is usually likely. Even then, some may continue to hide the customs they renounce, which hurts the law rather than helping it, and scarcely remedies the fractured nature of society, with some living with and others violating certain laws. Majoritarianism is a mistake, for it is simply the use of a majority among members of a state to impose a law upon society which will necessarily, by nature of its majoritarianism comes with a minority, and so majoritarianism is a means by which a state may resort to forced renunciation or expulsion. Independence is an interesting idea, whereby the religion is treated as separate society and given special accommodations to that end, such as reserved places in the government. It instead seems to add separation within the state, which I suppose could be fine. This however may invite more problems, for though churches are easier to delineate, why should they alone of all sub-societies be privileged with independence and special considerations? Thus in measure the idea could work, but in practice, some sub-societies must be excluded, or else the state will be confusing mess, for the whole problem of separation of church and state arises from potential contradiction between different law giving sub-states.

For it makes sense, if every society has a state, that every sub-society has a sub-state, which prescribes its laws or customs, the two being similar enough as far as prescription. And while this is partially a question for the individual, to determine their society, it is also a question of how a state should prepare to deal with such interactions. Note well that determining society

is a sort of calculation, and that an individual cannot willingly disassociate from others within in its own state without themselves disassociating from their own state. This is also how much of the difficulty arises, for a member of a society is put into great distress when to states they are in issue contradictory laws. This is why I favour the last method, which avoids the problem as much as possible on the states, and minimises discord when such conflicts become unavoidable. For indeed, they can become unavoidable if an individual resolves to simultaneously follow the associate with two states in a state of contradiction.

I would propose first two types of societies. Some societies are formed by geographical association, and others by common interest. It is possible that societies may be both, but it is one foremost, in all likelihood. For a geographic society is one in which the members reside and exist in close proximity, such that they either do meet or could meet regularly and often, and indeed should. Societies of interest are closer to sub-societies, being unbound by physical proximity, and instead bound in some way tied with the soul, or the mind. It follows then that there is a special sort of state for each type of society, since societies form states. States in the more political sense tend form around geographical societies, and I would continue that trend, for I con-

sider it most conducive for dispute resolution to know and be familiar, as friends, with those who make up the society which one might come in conflict with due to other societies one might be in. I would recommend making political states as small as possible indeed, or, if they must be large, making the large one weak in making law, which becomes more controversial simply by virtue of being exposed to greater numbers of members of its society. Then, a more true democracy might be achieved.

I would also avoid making the state a society unto itself, with so many members that it must provide law prescribing a separate set of actions unto members of the state. For when the members of the state are members of their geographical society, they may more easily perceive the feasibility of the law they prescribe, and how alive it would be. For an ideal law would be universally accepted in its society and outside of it, and it would be most alive.

But the essence statecraft is not the ideal law though, but instead, the ideal society. For the law flows from society and lives through it, and a bad but universal law would still be bad. Thus it is better that the society be good, to its members and others, and the members of the state should reflect that, as individuals recommended by society to provide society with law.

GOVERNMENT

On Factionalism in the Federalist Papers

BY JAMES RUBIDGE



Photo: Public Domain

When I read The Federalist Papers, I found the authors' criticism lacking and overly optimistic. The authors dismiss complaints about the Constitution with a hand-wave instead of a rebuttal. I found this frustrating, as many of these weak arguments were on topics that concern me, as a citizen, primarily regarding the representation of the people and the limits to the powers of government. This discussion will analyze the two problems of factionalism and tyranny, and their solutions, or the lack thereof, as presented in The Federalist Papers.

First we will criticise Article 1 Section 2 of the Constitution. It lays out the structure of the House of Representatives, where each state will elect representatives proportional to the population. The proportion specified is one representative for no more than 30,000 citizens. However, the House is in charge of itself—it may alter itself and change the proportion of its own representation. By increasing the proportion, we can prevent the number of Representatives from expanding to an unmanageable size as the population grows. The changing proportion is necessary, for without it the system could become unbalanced.

The necessary balance is that the representatives must be raised to a certain number, in order to guard against the cabals of a few; and that, however large it may be, they must be limited to a certain number, in order to guard against the confusion of a multitude.

In other words, the government must be accessi-

ble and easy for the citizens to comprehend. From the perspective of the legislature, having so many people to convince to vote one way or another on any issue would be a nightmare. The House is intentionally designed for this inefficiency, compared to the Senate. The Senate's representation is two per state, which guarantees that this branch will always be smaller and thus more manageable and efficient than the House. It is the Senate's job to represent the States, not the people, which is why the number of representatives is not influenced by the population.

There must be an upper limit on the number of Representatives to limit the inefficiency of the House and prevent the confusion of the people. With too many Representatives there would be no incentive to vote based on the needs of the nation as a whole—each Representative's congressional district would be so small that local concerns would override a national perspective. With too few Representatives, the number of citizens each Representative represents would be so great, that the Representatives would have so little attachment to their constituents that they would not consider the possible harms done to their constituents. Thus, there must also be a lower limit to the number of representatives. A balance between these two extremes is necessary to maintain a proper representation of the people. The members of the legislature would always want to be as efficient as possible, to increase their ability to pass legislation. Thus, the House

of Representatives' goal would be to decrease its membership as much as possible. This would lead to a disconnect between the Representatives and the represented. Instead of prioritizing efficiency, the intention of the House should be to keep the most proper proportion possible to the people. Once there is a separation between the Representatives and the represented, the Representatives no longer care for those they represent. There would be no way to convince the House to return to a proper proportion aside from revolt, except perhaps the interference of another governmental branch. If another governmental branch had such a power to interfere this would make the one a proxy of the other.

The loss of appropriate proportionality could happen by accident, if the House does not keep up with the changing population. This would be without any intention to harm the system or silence the voice of the people. The Representatives must be self-aware and mindful of their feelings towards those they represent. If they begin to feel a disconnect from either the citizens or from the nation, they must attempt to adjust the proportion of representation.

The loss of appropriate proportionality might also be born of malice. In this case, the ability for the House to change its own representation becomes a major threat to the nation. Imagine that the House has been compromised by a faction.

A faction is "a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interest of the community." Stretching this definition, let's one say that any group of citizens that are united working towards a common goal could be a faction. The distinction between my definition and James Madison's is that the goal of a faction isn't necessarily evil. For example, these groups may be rival political parties, each working towards the suppression of the other. This is the end goal of any political party, or faction, or any group of like-minded citizens that wish to challenge the status quo: to make the alternative out to be the greatest evil one could

conceive of.

Factionalism does not lead to productive discourse among the citizens, nor does it produce leaders with a love of truth and justice. Factionalism only leads to the separation of citizens and the collapse of the system as a whole. Given that factions are so dangerous, how should society deal with them? Madison says:

"There are two methods of curing the mischiefs of faction: The one, by removing its causes; the other, by controlling its effects. [...] There are again two methods of removing the causes of faction: The one, by destroying the liberty which is essential to its existence; the other, by giving to every citizen the same opinions, the same passions, and the same interests."

The first method goes against the principles of liberty. The second method is impossible. Madison also says that the unequal distribution of property among the people is enough to cause factions, for the rich and the poor classes emerge. Madison concludes from this, that, "The inference to which we are brought, is, that the causes of faction cannot be removed; and that relief is only to be sought in the means of controlling its effects." The effects of factions are civil unrest, violence, and the eventual collapse of the state. When the faction is in the minority the only way for it to gain power is to upset the system. When it is in the majority it keeps power by adjusting the system to maintain its status and oppress any new factions. In a small, pure democracy, where each citizen represents himself, there can be "no cure for the mischiefs of faction." The United States is not a democracy. It is a republic, where one sends a representative in his place to make decisions for him. For Madison, this is a solution to factionalism, but in my opinion, this solution only worsens factionalism.

Madison believes that a republic will refine the people's ideas by processing them through a representative. This takes the burden of decision off of the people, so they are less likely to fall into factions. I believe that the republic's structure promotes the development of factions rather than limiting their effects. The people should be divided into many classes, as Madison desires,

to lessen the influence of any one faction over another. These factions become political parties, each with their own leaders who speak for them. This may initially prevent parties from gaining power, but it would not be long before the parties realize that they might appeal to a wider range of people. They might do this by compromising or generalizing their views, in the hopes of receiving a larger voice when it comes time to vote.

In general, three types of parties would arise: the Progressives pushing to change the status quo, the Conservatives wishing to preserve it, and the Reactionaries attempting to roll back changes that have already been made. Each citizen would filter and prioritize their concerns, so they could decide these three parties best represents their views. For example, a citizen may desire social progress, while also preferring a conservative economic policy. The citizen would decide one is more pressing to decide which party they would side with. But this process of individual compromises to choose a party means that the individual perspectives are considered less and less.

The House of Representatives is meant to act as a check to factionalism within the nation. But if the House is taken over by a majority belonging to a faction, that party may pass a bill fixing the proportion of representation to their benefit. This problematic situation assumes, as Madison desired, that all branches of government are able to regulate themselves. While it is necessary that the members of one branch not be able to name the members of another, lest that second branch be no more than an offshoot of the first, the will of each department over itself needs to be, in some way, checked. Without a wide-reaching and strictly enforced system of checks and balances, a single party taking a majority in a single branch might seize the power of the entire government.

The main protection against this in The Federalist Papers is to have as many political parties as possible. If no party can gather enough support to become a majority, there is no threat to be found in them. Once even a simple majority is reached, however, all those who are not a member of the majority are at risk of being powerless, with no voice in the government's decisions. With many

parties available, the people would find themselves so divided that it would be impossible for a single group to gain full control over the House. This division of the people should be great enough to prevent factionalism, but not so extreme that it would encourage people to desire independence from the United States. This sort of protection against factionalism is the crux of many of the arguments in The Federalist Papers. I feel this argument is weak, because there is no system laid out to ensure that this variety will be present in the system—there is nothing stopping the parties from becoming like the three general parties described above.

Concerns like those I present are all too often dismissed in The Federalist Papers by saying that there would be so many people voting and running for office that they should have no issue selecting only the best of the lot. The authors compare the United States to far smaller republics, claiming that because these small republics can avoid voting a corrupt person into power, our larger population and larger number of representatives would drown out the voices of the corrupt. The Federalists argued that a larger range of people wouldn't bring about more corrupt individuals, it would bring about more security against them by diluting their influence further and further. The only way this could fail would be if even these intelligent voters were somehow tricked into voting for a faction. In contrast, I believe, that the potential for factional deception makes it even more important to have a system to ensure that large political parties are broken into many smaller ones. Without measures to prevent the consolidation of political parties, there is nothing to stop one of the more moderate groups from appealing so generally that it can guarantee itself to hold a majority of the powers of government. There is again nothing to stop this party from guaranteeing its victory by changing the way the House represents the people. There is nothing to stop this party from focusing on its own success rather than the values of the people who elected it into power. The factionalism threatening the government does not have to be against the people from the inception of the party, it may just as well cor-

rupt itself over time out of a lust for power.

But what kind of solution can exist for the problem of factions rising out of political parties? John, Jay, and Madison made it clear that there can be no way to prevent the causes of factionalism, but there may be a way of maintaining or controlling the effects. In doing this, we must maintain the same sort of standards held when considering their prevention, that is, our methods cannot encroach on either the liberties or freedoms of the people. One solution might be to limit how many seats in the House a party can hold. But if many people vote for this party, this solution would violate their freedoms. Any solution like this is anti-democratic.

As an alternative solution, the limitations could instead be placed on the candidates, as this might restrict the ability of one person to influence too many of their peers. For example, we might set rules controlling how candidates can interact with other states' Representatives, how they canvass, etc. The issue with this solution is that the eligibility and the election of the candidates are controlled by each of the states, not the federal government. If the federal government imposed restrictions on how the states organize their elections, this would limit the states' autonomy. Even if the states themselves tried to impose this solution on themselves, the question remains, how can any government limit the ways in which its citizens interact with their candidates without encroaching on their liberties?

In summary, there appears to be no way to limit the effects of factions without resorting to authoritarianism in one form or another. In a pure democracy, limiting a faction would directly limit the freedoms of the people. In a republic, limiting political parties indirectly limit the freedoms of the people, by limiting those who represent them. Taking this to be the case, that political parties must be present in the system, I want to now consider what could be done if *res ad triarios venit*—if a faction has taken the House, what is the last line of defense against the usurpation of the other branches of government? The system of checks and balances does not appear to apply as thoroughly to the Legislative branch as it should, or

at least, not in proportion to the way they apply to the other branches of government. Furthermore, the abilities of the Congress as laid out in Article 1 Section 8 of the Constitution are far-reaching and, in some cases, exactly the same powers that one should never allow a faction to control.

The job of the Legislative branch is to draft the laws of the nation for the Executive branch to approve and execute. The power of the Presidential veto is insufficient should more than 2/3 of the Congress be compromised by a faction. Should this ever happen, one might as well consider saying that the powers of government have been collected within a single branch. The ability to override a veto is more powerful than the veto itself. Its purpose is to pass a bill that the President may not approve of. The veto is asking the Congress to reconsider or revise its proposal, the override is Congress forcing what should not progress to progress. Should the ability of the Congress to override a veto be revoked, a bill may either be delayed until the President is out of office or let fail after its first rejection. If the President's concern with the bill is something that can be revised without much change, why not consider it the same as any new bill that might come across the President's desk? The Congress already has the ability to try the President for a crime or remove him from office, should the situation ever be so dire; the ability to override the Executive branch is unnecessary, if not tempting the prospect of tyranny.

This threat of Legislative usurpation may go unnoticed by many, but as Madison says, "One hundred and seventy-three despots would surely be as oppressive as one." The abilities of the House should be either controlled by the other branches or redistributed to a far greater extent. For example, the Senate might determine how the House should represent the people, or that the House's proposed changes to the way it represents the people must be approved by the Senate or the Executive branch. These come with their own worries, in the first case that the Senate may have already been corrupted, and as a result will adjust the House to make it more susceptible to usurpation. In the second case it may be thought

that the Executive branch having a greater influence over the affairs of the House may also open the door to tyranny.

There may be no way for the system to exist without being at risk of tyranny. The consolidation of power seems unavoidable, unless the entire population can be of one impossibly perfect mind. The United States is destined to fall into the hands of factionalism, and no amount of inefficiency through increased amounts of representatives can prevent this. Politicians must always belong to one party or another, and every party that exists is already or will become a faction. The nature of our government is a flawed one, and the only remaining question to ask is how effective it could be in this state.

The goal of the United States government is to be a system that represents the people, as well as the individual states. An abundance of freedoms must be available to the people, else the system will lead to authoritarianism, such as the monarchy it is trying to break free from. These freedoms, however, will lead to factionalism, since the republics brings them about in the form of political parties. The system put in place, then,

must obtain an almost impossible balance between freedom and restriction. Even the Founding Fathers had to admit that there has not yet been a system of government comprehended that is "able to discriminate and define, with sufficient certainty, its three great provinces, the legislative, executive, and judiciary; or even the privileges and powers of the different legislative branches." This is not to say that one should be content with the current system or that one should work to destroy all government. It should encourage us to do as Hamilton says in the ninth paper, to acknowledge our failings as a nation in our times of success and search for ways to improve our government in times of failure. Stagnancy and inflexibility will lead to the usurpation of one branch or another, giving way to tyranny and despotism.

Factionalism cannot be defeated in a single motion, but by the changing representation of people it may be kept at bay. The representatives must change in proportion and amount to shadow the people, keeping the one in lockstep with the other, never allowing themselves to become disconnected from their neighbors nor their countrymen.

Democracy: A Privilege that Bangladesh Cannot Afford

BY NOBONITA CHOWDHURY



Photo: Public Domain

December 2018 was the first time I went to the polls.

I was somewhat aware that my vote wouldn't make much of a difference. But I went anyway. Because deep inside, like every other human being on this planet, I wanted my opinion to matter. Regardless of how corrupt the political sphere was, I wanted to have the same privilege that my parents once had, in choosing the people who ran our country.

The concept of unfair elections isn't exactly a new introduction to Bangladesh. As long as I can remember, there has always been a degree of corruption surrounding elections in the country.

"Go to the polls early, otherwise your vote might be stolen!" was a warning I often heard adults give each other.

Except, the atmosphere surrounding the December 2018 election was completely different. Everyone knew which coalition was going to win, well before the voting even began. There were reports of voting booths shutting down well before the officiated closing time.

"Allegations of voting irregularities including polling booths closing for 'lunch breaks', voters being turned away, and ballots being counted unrealistically quickly were widespread. In fact, many voters reported that they were turned away directly, upon being told that their votes have already been cast." - The Guard-

ian [1]

Despite the reported irregularities, news sources that seemed to have highlighted the unreliable election results were mostly international. The ruling coalition (and the current Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina) won 288 out of the 300 seats in Parliament.

"That kind of margin of victory — 96 percent — was a result one might expect in a place like North Korea, not a democratic nation such as Bangladesh," states an article from The Washington Post. [2]

Being compared to North Korea is not where I expected to see Bangladesh in my 20s. Of course, there are other factors to take into consideration. Unlike the former, the latter has a fast growing, free market economy (among the fastest in the world)[3]. It also exercises more freedom of media/press; even though incidents like the arrest of photojournalist Shahidul Alam[4] do somewhat challenge that claim.

However, one factor is certain: as far as living standards go, Bangladesh has seen positive changes. Ironically, the autocratic government has actually contributed to a more stable economic environment. The more democratic Bangladesh of the early 2000s was marred by frequent, violent strikes that severely hampered economic activity. In recent years, Bangladesh has not only seen more stability, but also better infrastructure;

including an improved public transportation system (with a citywide metrorail based in Dhaka, set to launch in 2020). Load shedding, i.e, frequent electrical power shutdowns, has reached an all-time low. Both the RMG (ready-made garments) sector, a principal source of the country's foreign exchange earnings; as well the public sector, has seen yearly increases in wages.

With this turn towards a more comfortable living environment, it is easy to perceive that perhaps, a democracy is not the ideal governing system for Bangladesh at the moment. In Plato's *Laches*, Socrates throws out a rhetorical question, asking whether the vote of "one who had been trained and exercised under a skilful master" would be worth more than the votes of all four individuals engaged in the dialogue. He further follows up this claim with the question: "And for this reason, as I imagine, -because a good decision is based on knowledge and not on numbers?" [5]

To a certain extent, Socrates' claim in *Laches* does hold true. For a democracy to function well, the members of the democratic state need to obtain a certain level of political literacy. This is something that appears to have been integrated into the social and academic environment of the United States. In Bangladesh, not so much. In fact, the Bangladeshi social structure (excluding political families) actually discourages individuals from becoming politically involved, particularly due to the violence that accompanies it. On the other end of the spectrum lies a large population living in poverty; members of this demographic cannot possibly afford the privilege of political literacy.

Therefore, a stable democracy may be well beyond Bangladesh's reach at the moment. While speaking in favor of China's autocratic government, New York Times columnist Tom Friedman raises a valid claim:

"One-party autocracy certainly has its drawbacks. But when it is led by a reasonably enlightened group of people, as China is today, it can also have great advantages. That one party can just impose the politically difficult but critically important policies needed to move a society forward in the 21st century." [6]

Another state that has clearly benefited from its autocratic governing system is Singapore. Since being expelled from Malaysia in 1965, it became a global economic miracle, primarily due to the efforts of its first prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew. And while Bangladesh is certainly no Singapore, returning to a more balanced democratic state is likely to hamper its current stability and economic growth. The real risk rises in the long run; when we find out the extent to which the ruling coalition exploits their unchallenged power.

[1] Safi, Michael, and Oliver Holmes. "Bangladesh PM Hasina Wins Thumping Victory in Elections Opposition Reject as 'Farcical'." The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 31 Dec. 2018

[2] Joanna Slater, Azad Majumder. "Analysis | Why Bangladesh's Landslide Election Result Is Bad for Its Democracy." The Washington Post, WP Company, 31 Dec. 2018

[3] "Real GDP Growth: Annual Percent Change." imf.org, International Monetary Fund, 3 Oct. 2019

[4] "Shahidul Alam: Bangladesh Is 'an Autocracy by Any Means'." Bangladesh | Al Jazeera, Al Jazeera, 20 Apr. 2019

[5] Source: <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/laches.html>

[6] Friedman, Thomas L. "Our One-Party Democracy." The New York Times, The New York Times, 9 Sept. 2009

Southern Identity and Independence ...But Not the South You're Thinking Of

BY ANDREW HILL



Photo: Public Domain

NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR: *Writing about Yemen forces you to take your disgust with the conflict and channel it into reasonable thoughts, and suggestions about paths forward. It also pits you against an ever-evolving timeline. This essay, which I wrote a few weeks before it was sent to be published, lost the battle against time. Between writing and printing, a Saudi-negotiated cooperative governance agreement between the STC and Hadi Government in the south has been enacted. I am skeptical that it will hold. However, this article provides some interesting information that I hope can help readers understand what's happening in Yemen, or how they should approach studying Yemen.*

I'm not sure which south you were thinking of, but I'm thinking of south Yemen. Maybe you know about it, but you most certainly know about northern Yemen, where Saudi bombing campaigns against a Zaydi ethnic rights group-turned-government/militia has elicited strong public outcry. You might even know about the branches of Daesh and al-Qaeda in Yemen, whose scimmages, and sometimes humorous name-defamation campaigns, against one another, have received ample media attention in the past months. However, the Southern Transitional Council (STC), the organization leading the southern Yemen separatist movement, has not

received the same attention by the U.S. (and you will see that this qualifier is important).

In the past few weeks, there have been some articles published about them, as their recent uprising in southern Yemen's largest city, Aden, has earned them prominent places in the New York Times, and other leading publications. But this is a great departure from typical Yemen coverage, which lacks any detailed mention of the STC, or the southern cause. There is also little evidence that the U.S. pays any more attention to them, despite their role in southern Yemeni politics, which is deemed pivotal by most scholars of Yemen; their demonstrated capability to organize and perform government functions, military actions, and protests, and their historical significance that is as solid as the Houthis. This failure falls in line with the century-old habit of world-leading countries to not listen to smaller party's needs, and will only continue to degrade stability, and chances for peaceful reunification in Yemen if it is not corrected.

Through this article, I hope to describe the southern separatist movement and Southern Transitional Council, and make the case that the STC, along with the countless other factions in Yemen whose voices get out-shouted until they can out-shout, needs to be taken seriously by those relevant in international decision-making on Yemen.

THE ORIGINS OF SOUTHERN SOCIALISM

On January of 1839, the British Empire conquered Aden, and made it into a major port on the British East India Company's Britain-India shipping route. This, coupled with Ottoman domination over the north, effectively ripped Yemen into two, as nearby tribesmen and villagers from most of the south flocked to Aden to take part in the lucrative new industries, and allowed Britain to expand their control from Aden to the surrounding areas (Gavin, 1975).

The economic pull for Yemenis was prominently the availability of seasonal work in Aden. Troves of Yemeni seasonal workers moved to Yemen throughout the colonized period (1839-1967) to work at the docks, oil refineries, and construction of the new amenities and housing developments needed by the Colony.

As the colony grew older, and the opportunities for colonial employees expanded, the availability of work and quality of life available to seasonal Yemeni workers shrank, destroying the livelihood of many Yemenis. Despite this angst against the problems which Yemeni workers faced, a political culture fitting for real opposition did not exist, partly due to the low education rate in Aden. However, the demand for educated workers, which was much higher than the amount they could import, forced the British Government to build schools in Aden.

As much as the Colony tried to recruit neutral teachers to Aden, the mere access to truth (even if it was diluted with propaganda) sparked outrage in the newly-formed Adeni intelligentsia. In 1946, students protested against the absence of the Arab Leagues' founding day in the list of public holidays, showing their capability to think and act freely, instead of serving as agents of the Colony, as the Colony intended. Alongside strides in labor rights and union power which were made with the support of these new students, the first Adeni newspaper was published, political power made its way into Yemeni hands, and organizations made in conjunction with the Colonial administration, like unions and legislative councils, swayed toward what I read to be the roots of a

socialist government in Aden.

In the years following the student protest, two major strikes that led to monumental changes in Aden's domestic worker culture took place. In reaction to the strike of 1946 (a strike by the shipworkers in response to taxes imposed on workers in response to an economic downturn) the Colony established a Labor Office in Aden, and out of necessity, became friendlier to the Unions. In reaction to the strike of 1956, which saw more than 7,000 workers strike over living standards, conditions of employment, and desire for modern labor standards; 47-hour workweeks, vacation time, sick pay, and free medical attention were provided to most workers involved. This strike also increased the demand for union representation among workers, increasing the number of labor unions in Aden from eight to twenty-four within the year. These new unions, who represented a new political movement in Aden, attracted the aforementioned intellectuals, who became union leaders. These unions quickly swelled to power through their political presence: making their way into space previously dominated by organizations loyal to the Colonies; and making alliances with several Adeni revolutionary groups, while hindering the operational ability of Colonial legislative bodies to bolster their power.

The consequence of this was the eventual expulsion of the British in southern Yemen by the hands of several liberation groups, and the foundation of a divided Yemen. The two governments that came from this were the Yemen Arab Republic, which is out of the scope of this article being in the north, and occupied the bulk of north-western Yemen; and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), a Marxist government whose rise came out of the trade unionism which rallied all factions of Yemeni society, who reigned over the southern coast of Yemen, and most of the eastern in-lands. Their territory, which occupies similar territory to what the modern STC seeks to occupy, stretched from Yemen's furthest south-western tip through Aden, al-Mukalla (another important port city), the core of the Hadhramaut territory, and to the borders of Oman, and then up to a vast, arid border with Saudi Arabia.

In the context of the Cold War, control over the ports of Aden and al-Mukalla, and their surrounding coastlines were invaluable, and this value was comprehended early by the Soviet forces.

Both the Soviets, and China, around this time, were eager to fortify their new Navy's presence in the Suez Canal and Indian Ocean, protect their oil field's Sea Lines of Communications (which ran through the Suez Canal), and increase communication and trade with their Asian allies. Seeing both the creation of the PDRY from the expulsion of the British, and seeing the subsequent domination of the Marxist National Front for the Liberation of South Yemen, the two communist states were able to invest heavily in both Yemen's businesses, infrastructure, military, and agriculture, with an emphasis on those that were near the sea. Further, the two countries accepted military and diplomatic delegations into their countries, and the Soviet Union especially provided military advice through Cuban proxy advisors, working to secure the strategically placed island of Socotra as a quiet naval base (Creechman, 1979).

Without going into Yemeni history since the 70s, one can deduce that the Soviet Union, in particular, implanted itself into the fabric of southern Yemeni society, bringing its strain of socialism with it. Through the calm of post-unification in the 90s, the simmering of Zaydi/Sunni relations in the 2000s, and the boil of post-Arab spring Yemen, these socialist and southern-separatist tendencies have remained present. Although socialism is not as strong today as separatism is, socialism's discouragement of religious governance made its way into the center of southern-separatist leader's worldviews, and is behind a lot of separatist's distrust for the current Yemeni government.

Further, the longtime physical separation of the country keeps the culture divided between southerners and northerners. Even though the Capital's placement in a central location (Sana'a) outside of traditionally southern land, many southerners see northerners as others. A prominent Yemeni activist describes herself in her Twitter biography as a "southerner fascinated

with the north".

Throughout the last two decades, in reaction to the distraction of resources held by the legitimate government, now based in Aden, a need for governance has arisen in the south. Various armed groups, and international aid agencies have tried to fill this role by imitating different parts of government, but none have been able to span the entire non-Houthi occupied territory, nor provide the full array of resources necessary for southern and eastern Yemenis to live appropriately. For similar reasons, tribes are not capable of providing a patch-work government to the south. It is likely these conditions that caused the southern separatist movement to emerge publicly, then form into the STC in response to the dismissal of the Governor of Aden (now-president of the STC, al-Zubaidi).

THE STC TODAY

The STC of today has proven itself capable of competent military action, organizing a government, and overpowering its main competitor, which is the legitimate government run by Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi (the Hadi Government). The current leadership is made up of several governors and former-ministers, who seek to use the council's influence, and security forces, to secede from Yemen. Since 2017, their competition with the Hadi Government has been profound, taking over the government seat of Aden from the Hadi Government several times, most recently in August, which forced the Hadi Government to relocate (al-Arifi, 2019).

The STC has demonstrated its governing capabilities in various ways. They run council meetings across the country. Their media arm uses social media, TV, and their website to produce decent English-language material that has an international reach. They can organize pro-STC protests in Yemen, and the U.S., alike. They respond to most terrorist attacks, attacks by the Houthis, and UN actions, with a statement, published in both English, and Arabic. Al-Zubaidi visits hospitals, schools, and villages, and congratulates students

on getting high test scores on live television.

As far as public information shows, STC's arms and funds come from the UAE. The alliance with the UAE comes from their mutual distrust of the Hadi Government, and in particular their domination by the Islamist Islah party, which the UAE/STC suspect have been aspiring with the Houthis to destabilize the country (Kalin & Ghantous, 2019); and the UAE's desires to access Yemen's natural resources, and compete with Saudi Arabia in being a regional leader. This pits them against the Saudi Government, who has the same desires, but supports the Hadi Government. It is worth noting that many of the arms provided to the STC by the UAE are U.S. manufactured, despite the U.S.'s efforts to keep our weapons in the hands of those who we sell them to (FOX 43, 2019).

The STC also seems to see the importance of winning over public opinion through diplomatic efforts. They are constantly meeting with envoys from states (mainly China and Russia), and NGOs (ranging from UNICEF to local ones), but also frequently send envoys abroad, and have even begun to open make-shift diplomatic missions to other nations. They even have an office in Washington D.C., from which their U.S. advocacy campaigns are operated.

The southern separatists have also rekindled a relationship that stretches back to their liberation from the British: their friendship with the Russians. Earlier this year, the STC's website announced that an envoy of their own visited Russia, while the Russian Ambassador to Yemen met with STC leadership in Aden, with the STC President Al-Zubaidi announcing that they "look forward to develop [sic] a strategic relationship with Moscow to ensure meeting the right of the people of the South to resolve their cause and will, as well as for ensuring the regional stability[...]" that "there was a collective agreement on the goal of a credible political solution, including a permanent cease-fire based on the Stockholm Agreement [...]" and finally, that they "look forward to the day when we can reestablish diplomatic relations between our two countries in our capital Aden." (STC-Aden, 2019) This relation-

ship seems to have developed further through Russia's meetings with the STC's patron, the UAE.

WHY SHOULD THE U.S. CARE?

Where the tension between the STC and Hadi Government; the UAE and Saudi Arabia; and Russian, Chinese, and American interests will lead this conflict is unknown. However, looking at it from the perspective of somebody concerned with supporting U.S. interests, there must be some effort made to ensure the possibility of STC cooperation with the U.S.

The first reason, which I will mention but not delve into, as an appropriate discussion of the subject would take more time than I have, is that there is a trend in Yemen's circular history of peace talks, and alliances breaking down due to the omission of important parties. We saw it with the British, when their failure to take the interests of Yemeni workers and leaders into account opened the door for their exit. We saw it in the 70s, when unification talks broke down due to the protest of tribes who were not included in the talks. I would argue that we see it in the popularity of al-Qaeda and IS-Y in Yemen, who feed off of failures to provide human security to villagers and tribes. We don't want to see that happen with the STC.

I'm certain that this is partly behind Russia's sudden interest in the south again. If their goal is to build their relationship with Saudi Arabia, support Iran, and regain some nominal control of the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean, or at least keep it friendly, it is necessary to prevent a hostile Arabian Peninsula. The same can be said of China. It is critical that we, as invested players in Yemen's war, do what we can to learn from Yemen's history to not repeat the failures which have repeatedly led to the suffering of the Yemeni people, and instability in the area.

The second reason is perhaps more important, especially to parties who have been vocal about the Yemen War: friendliness with the STC can provide us, and our allies, with the opportunity to provide aid and economic development to

more areas in Yemen.

We have seen, through the work of the SMEPS, a Yemeni-run economic and social development program, that meaningful development can happen in secure areas during the war. SMEPS, and the Social Fund for Development in Yemen, have provided emergency healthcare services, supported farmers through micro-grants and best-practice training, and has been received positively by organizations spanning from USAID to UNDP. The Hadi Government has its own development organization, although its results haven't been as stellar.

Support of Yemeni-run aid groups, like SMEPS, can help keep some aspect of life stable during war-time, and nominally improve the quality of life for Yemenis in the areas impacted by SMEPS. For example, SMEPS has taken a particular interest in sustaining the Yemeni coffee industry. Coffee has been, for a long time, one of Yemen's staple products, and was responsible for much of Yemen's economic success in the past. Many would argue that coffee production part of Yemen's identity (Khan, 2018). SMEPS, with the help of USAID and UNDP, was able to "mitigate the impact of the current crisis on local citizens and assist their revival using local systems, capacities, and institutions to gradually resume and scale-up service delivery," and "revive livelihoods and basic services for people, increase their awareness on using new technologies, increase employment and livelihoods opportunities and to address food insecurity and reviving [sic] local agricultural and fish sector through the support of value chains." Through this project, SMEPS was able to engage 500 farmers, across western Yemen, in this project (SMEPS, 2018).

Supporting projects like these have myriad benefits for the U.S., and Yemen. These projects keep the local economy engaged, and allows Yemenis to shape their country's economic development themselves, with the advice of USAID and other international organizations. They could theoretically increase inter-regional unity through economic development, supported by the fact the SMEPS has been able to work with farmers in both Houthi, and Hadi Government-run

areas. Finally, since we have seen that al-Qaeda in Yemen recruits youth through appealing to the lack of economic opportunity, and underdevelopment, among other problems, working to alleviate the causes of these woes would undermine al-Qaeda's recruitment capability, and achieve one of our major objectives in the Middle East-defeating terrorist organizations.

Utilizing governing structures with deep ties to various communities, who are not notoriously corrupt and proponents of human trafficking, is a great way to expand our development initiatives in Yemen. The STC is qualified by meeting the first criterion, and by meeting the second, which is evident in their focus on human rights, and lack of evidence showing that they profit off of the same illicit trades as the Houthis do. Whether this be through working with the STC to allow the operation of these programs in territories controlled by them, or using partners who are allied with the STC, like the UAE, to set up an STC-run development program, pursuit of this opportunity could allow us to expand our reach in the south and east of Yemen.

The third, and final, reason is that we don't know what will happen in Yemen. If the STC is capable of repeatedly taking over Aden, holding congresses throughout the south and southeast, and has such widespread support from Yemenis to foreign nations, it is reasonable to conclude that they could usurp the power of the Hadi Government, and potentially rule southern Yemen. If this occurs, we do not want to be in a position where there is no potential for American engagement in the region. We already have no diplomatic contact with the north, being allied heavily with Iran, I do not think it is wise to risk putting ourselves in that same position in the south. Avoiding this can take two forms: using our diplomatic prowess to mediate some agreement between the Hadi Government and the STC, or using a variety of channels to keep on friendly terms with both the STC and Hadi Government.

The former seems more efficient, especially if you subscribe to Clausewitz's doctrine of conflict tending toward the extremes. A power-

sharing agreement should be struck, with the goal of allowing each group the ability to accomplish their missions insofar as they do not require the devastation of the other, and create avenues for conflict mediation between the two groups. It will be messy, require a lot of oversight, but at the end of the day, it is necessary. This will also create a stronger front against the Houthis.

CONCLUSION

This essay, which has discussed the Southern Transitional Council and its colonial roots, demonstrates the necessity of understanding the country's history, various militias, armies, and governments, and ever-evolving dynamics in policymaking and diplomacy. Every decision must be made with all of these factors in mind, and an understanding that no conflict is two-sided, or even three-sided. Within the Houthi-Hadi conflict are layers of internal conflicts ranging from long-standing religious disagreements, to alliances and hatreds between tribes, and residual problems from Colonialism and Nasserism; coupled with a complex string of international dynamics putting that span the world, and find their way into Yemen in the form of proxy wars, and counter-terrorism operations. This essay, although only dealing directly with one organization and its relationship with the Hadi Government, touches on all of these relations.

Engaging with the STC is as consequential as not engaging, in light of this, as any decision made involving this player is an action considered separately by every group involved in the country's conflict. I suggest a proactive approach, aimed at taking the policy failures in history into account to try to create some stability between the STC and Hadi, the two biggest Yemeni players south of Sana'a.

However, it's also important to keep in mind that there are opinions that differ from mine on the subject of the STC. Helen Lackner, in her book "Yemen in Crisis" Argued "While some want to return to a state within the former borders [of South Yemen], [...] this is unlikely to happen as internal divisions between much smaller enti-

ties are at least as strong as the wish to leave the broader Republic of Yemen," especially those of the large Hadhramaut region, who she argues are "unlikely to be willing to stay in a state alongside the people from the western mountainous tribes whom they regard as petty warlords," and southern Yemeni intellectuals who "are wont to assert that 'our Southern tribes are different, they were civilised by the British for over a century.'" (Lackner, 2017) I cannot comment on the accuracy of her statements, since I am not fully versed in all of the interregional dynamics of the south, but I do agree that a full-on southern state would be difficult to achieve partly due to tensions like these. It is precisely for that reason that policymakers must thoroughly investigate interregional dynamics, and the ethos and missions of each group before making decisions that could change power dynamics in the country.

Anecdotally, I have heard from some policymakers that the STC is not powerful, or organized enough to be consequential in any way. This might have been true a few years ago, but with the capacity that they have shown to be an effective governing and fighting organization, I think discounting them is a great error.

Regardless, this conflict deserves more attention and care than it is currently receiving, even if it has become more mainstream over the past year. It warrants attention, but it also warrants studies of its cause, and calculated proactivity by those with the means to improve the situation. I hope that this all comes, but that it also is done correctly, with a historical perspective in mind.

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POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Absalom!

BY JOSEPH RICHARD



Photo: Felix Vallotton

“...ἀλλ’ ἀμηχάνων ἐρᾷς.”
-SOPHOCLES

“But I will keep on knocking, even though I don't know where God is.”
LEV SHESTOV

I've never been able to tell the difference between the father in the story of the prodigal son and Bromios in the Bacchae. Good king Pentheus was lost, then was found, did die, then did live, and Pentheus, like the Prodigal, was forgiven that cancer of the soul that is gravitas. Why must we always assume that the Serpent's being honest? And so, given to that primeval respect for the most cunning creature in Eden, the mob refuses to see in Bacchus' affirmation of Pentheus' transformation anything more than a taunt—the mob, perhaps not, I take it back, but certainly the philosophers. The philosophers know well that to be like God is to know good and evil, but never to dance, never to crossdress, never to create. The truth, of course (known by us fools and madmen), is that Dionysius approaches the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob most in this moment, most when he recognizes that man's political (and thus philosophical, economical, and theological) vocation is eminently mislogic. Mad king Pentheus woke from the swoon of freedom and crushed the serpent under heel when he saw that around him

wasn't a cave wall, beneath him stone, but Pascal's bedside abyss.

What are the political implications of Pentheus' divine insanity, of divine insanity in general? What accord have ἄτη and πόλις? The answer is, of course, everything. In the groundlessness of insanity, all the idols of absolute morality, all the spectres of boundedness disintegrate. In insanity man offers himself up as a whole-burnt offering to the Lord before the place where once stood a flaming sword barring us from the one tree we've always longed for; statist impositions on man's spirit cry halt before a deafening, narcissistic cry of self-affirmation in self-revelation.

The Lord regards the madman and his offering but shirks the serious man and his (who is Cain but Hegel's forebear?). Man is made again man when he becomes again the feeling man (and not counting, or reasoning, or measuring man), when he shouts at the sun and dances with gods, when he gets decapitated and paraded in the palace. When man is freed from the truths that bind, personal and social, physical and metaphysical, man brought nearest to the God for whom all things are possible.

Man is able to be most man with other men when he wields his humanity like an axe in a mad struggle against Ananke's ghost. Man is most man when he starts dancing. And so let God bless Pentheus the prophet, Pentheus the light of revelation to the gentiles! Let God bless all the

deranged who found Him in the dazzling darkness, all who left without knowing where they were going! God bless them, every one!

I - THE OTHER ETERNITY

Philosophers are quite like lobotomists; Lucretius and Walter Freeman, they're all the same. They want to close curtain on man's unique tragedy. All of them want to sedate, all want to pacify man. David met a greater enemy than Goliath in Epictetus. The little ticker on the gauge of our air-tank gets e'er closer to empty as we near Titus Carus' abyss, but 'necessity does not allow itself to be persuaded', and we are to smile serene as we suffocate (not drown, reader, would that they have us drown!) in the deep. That coquette smile, that faux servility, that corruption of the erotic (alogos!), that's the key.

II - STOCKHOLM SYNDROME

Anaximander's credo, 'whence things have their origin, there they must also pass away according to necessity; for they must pay penalty and be judged for their injustice, according to the ordinance of time', is the mantra of all speculative philosophy. Man, in daring to come out his mother's womb, is doomed to die. The biblical narrative of the Fall is foreign to this paradigmatic Greek account, to this speculative account, for it begins in necessity and punishment, where the biblical account begins in the free blessing of particularity by the Creator. This is where the God of Abraham and the God of Anaximander differ. The original sin of Hellenic Adam isn't tasting the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, is not even the milquetoast 'disobedience' of some of the Church Fathers, but freedom itself.

The individual unrepeatable gives the God of the Greeks palpitations, then; the particular is repugnant to the general, and so the particular should (and shall, like it or not--get in line!) march back on to the general to take a whipping (we can almost hear Plato whispering in our ear, 'it is better to suffer injustice than to mete it out!'). Solon's weeping, Job's shrieking,

Kierkegaard's sighing, all mere breath--they were wicked men, every one, and their struggle to fight against that necessity that forces that which has come into being from oneness to return again to a common burial was but an expression of an original criminality.

In brief, we are to smile, we are to grin, we are to bow our heads like submissive temple prostitutes before that great praetorian Necessity. We can't (it's always Ismene's 'χρῆ' with them!) do anything else. The particular dare not stand up for his rights against the general. The general, which is unpersuadable, which is uncaring, unloving, is to be offered all the sacrifices and whole-burnt offerings men once gave to Baal. Shestov is right when he warns us that the philosophers do not want us to accept the reality of our suffering (just recompense for the sin of being!), oh no, they long, like Rebekkah with her boy, to have us bless it. Let's show whose image we're made in and spit on the lot of them--a pox on that first philosopher in the Garden!

III - PRIMUM PHILOSOPHARI

It's a commonplace of Marxist rhetoric that the philosophers have only interpreted the world, but that it is the vocation of the proletariat to change it--this, too, is mere breath. Marxism proves itself an exercise in radical Lucretianism. The Marxist tells us that he will free us from the incantations of sophists, from book-worship, from religion, but the Marxist, like Lucretius, breaks our chains only to offer us padded restraints. The person, the concrete person (there is no form of flesh and blood and hair and shit, lest we forget), is always secondary, and the longing for something more than Socratic dialogue becomes yet another philosophy dead-set on subjecting man to phantasms.

But mustn't we ask where this will to submit comes from, why man ever feels the need to subject his fellow to something yet higher than him after he's finished the long, daring work of breaking chains of so similar a metal? Marxists don't imagine their philosophy yokes the human spirit, and Lucretius' tantum religio says the

same; all the paragons of philosophical liberation really did imagine themselves voices crying out in the wilderness. Lucretius, Plato, Marx, they all of them felt themselves little saviors--and they were! But their daring seems to have stopped short of a will to dare truly everything, seems to have stopped short of a will for Antigone's impossible things. Where did they go wrong? Why does Ananke rear her ugly head even among Bolsheviks?

IV - QUIXOTE BETWEEN NOMOS AND PHYSIS

I should like to be a fool for Christ. I should like to be Don Quixote. I should like to be the sort of person who sees reality for what it is yet spits on it 'till it gives way, for this is imitatio Christi.

The fools for Christ, as any read Orthodox believer will tell you, were eminently sane lunatics who threw stones at priests and ran naked through the streets of strange cities. The fools for Christ, as the Quixote (for the Quixote is their high priest), knew that to follow in the footsteps of the Lord who became man is to follow the God for whom all things are possible, to follow the God for whom all custom as nature is as mere breath, and to follow David in weeping for his son Absalom.

The fools for Christ would be more palatable to the man of our august twenty-first century if the fools for Christ were just iconoclasts. We delight in iconoclasm, reader. We've transcended Roman bloodsport and thrill instead in crushing custom--and this, my dear, is not a bad thing. The issue lies in the daring of the doer. The fools for Christ scandalize the modern precisely because they don't stop at custom. These fools are on a crusade against the self-evident--St. Symeon of Emesa in his vita is described as a man who 'acted against both nature and custom'--even after they've followed Lucretius and 'dared to trust their senses'!

V - NEOPAGANISM

Once men had Zeus on Olympus, now

they have his hand flitting over the free market. This is the charitable contribution of the Christian evangel, for before the Lord came one could denounce Zeus and all his works, but now they have dressed up their Zeus as the Lord of armies (Ζεῦ ὑψίστε!), and we are too timid to cast Him down. Capitalism is nothing more than Aaron's last shout before Moses comes down the mountain, a golden calf greater and grander than all the works of old Israel. It, too, submits to the necessity that does not feel anything and does not allow itself to be persuaded.

If the Marxist breaks your chains so he might give you others he thinks better (at least he's a human being!), then the Capitalist tightens the restraints, ties your legs, slices off your tongue, shaves your head, and gives you something to bite down on. This is speculative philosophy let loose in the world like a tomcat; the general, the dynamic forces of history and state and society and market and supply and demand, conquer the particular. The particular's only recourse is to control the things he can. The particular is Epictetus' victim; he dare not demand more--he has control over this, he has control over that, but all the rest is external, necessary, and thus neutral. What good would it do to raise a shout? What good would it do, asks our dear Shestov, to answer logic with claps of thunder?

VI - KIERKEGAARD'S CREDO

I will not sacrifice a single man for the good of all mankind. Belinsky's little letter guides me where his idealism drives me mad--the destiny of one person is more mysterious than the destiny of mankind in general. I will follow the Lord for whom all things are possible, and I will save the one at the expense of the ninety-nine, and I will cry out for my son Absalom, if it is the last thing I do.

VII - PHAEDRUS BY THE SEA

Is there anything political in ἄτη? Aristotle, the philosophus, says no. For the philosophers ἄτη is the root of all ill--for bound up with

ate is change, is spontaneity, is a revolt against the general and a crying out against all hope and in defiance of all reason. Here Anaximander's theme comes back into our line of sight; insanity, divine insanity, misologism, these defy the boundaries set for us on our long penal march back to the One. There is nothing political in insanity because the political must be an expression of the logical, because our lives together must be bound, because the particular dare not question the general. What is Aristotle's nous, what is his practical reason, what is his moderation but an expression of a sort of pagan Catholic guilt?

VIII - DARE TO TRUST YOUR SENSES

I don't have the tenacity to lead you back to Eden. I don't have the strength to take you to the land promised to Abraham. I will, though I keep for the last words silence, tell you what little I do know of the first--τά ἐρωτικά. I tell you with Socrates that I know the erotic things, as do you. You know that the horrors of life in the world gag you, that the truths which constrain hold you in a vice, that the 'facta' of life--blessed and sanctified for all eternity--toss you into the pit. If I am to exhort you to any course, any scheme, then let it be this one: fight the self-evident, the logical, the formulaic, and embrace the erotic. It is only *de profundis* God could make it so that the gadfly had never tasted hemlock.

IX - SUB SPECIE AETERNITATIS

Is Oceania's twice two makes five not the twice two makes four of our world? Is a completely external, necessary truth that does not bend no matter how hard we might shift it any different from a totalitarian imposition? Where do the fascists and οἱ φιλόσοφοι differ, is not Ananke the great dictator?

X - THE HATERS OF REASON

Socrates warns us that the worst fate to befall a man is to become a mislogos, but the heart warns us that it was ho philologos megistos

who took old Adam out of the Garden.

XI - THE CAMELS OF UZ

Job began a god and ended a beast, proving Aristotle's point in nuce. Job, the man who would debate God, who would reprove God, ultimately loses the tenacity that brought the Lord down from the tempest. Should we forget that God demanded Job keep on, that he gird himself like a man? Should we forget that Job and his children are still rotting? Let Leviathan croak, let the forests melt like wax before a flame, let reality shimmer, shake, stumble, but let Job have his murdered children!

The moral of Job is *primum detestari, deinde lugere, tandem ridere, sed numquam intelligere* (first to detest, then to abhor, at last to laugh, but never to understand), not *non ridere, non lugere, neque detestari, sed intelligere* (not to laugh, not to abhor, nor to detest, but to understand). Will Ananke allow us to speak in such terms?

XII - AT THE END OF TRAGEDY

'Remember,' says Epictetus, 'that you are an actor in a play decided by the Author.' These words are a thunder-clap greater than the one that set Job's to naught. We're actors, you and I. We're poor players. The tragedy of life shows itself, in Epictetus, to be nothing more than a sort of sick performance we're all to go along with for the benefit of some captive audience beyond the flaming walls of the world. All the victims of history, each and every one, were but actors, playing a role, taking up air, filling the stage.

I have a question for Epictetus, mind--we're players, yes? We've been pressed into theater like sailors into the Royal Navy; we're forced into this tragedy, this drama, this play. Why should we go along with it, then? Why shouldn't we dismember the playwright? Epictetus tells us that those after improv are, in point of fact, the greatest slaves of all, but one would do well to remember that Stoicism begins in a kowtow to Necessity.

XIII - PEOPLE OF TRAGEDY

Orpheus and Job have more in common than it seems at first blush. Orpheus, Job, they represent the same enigmatic type, 'the man of tragedy'. This man is not the hero, is not the god, is not even what any one of us would call a 'good' man--he is something more. He is a man who wields the law of non-contradiction like an axe and demands it yield, who will accept nothing less than the capitulation of the whole cosmos for the sake of a single banality.

It's only possible for all to be possible when there's no solid ground beneath our feet. Only when we realize that the world lacks a sure foundation, only when we realize that we are falling can we begin to fly--here the words of the Psalmist, so loved by Shestov and Unamuno, fly well beyond the flaming walls of the world and ram themselves into our minds: out of the depths, o Lord, have I cried unto thee! It is in these depths that we find God, in these depths that our prayers are answered. It is *de profundis* Shestov can get back his son, Kierkegaard his Regina, Nietzsche his good health.

When we turn a drama into a comedy, when we go off-script, we find ourselves inching ever closer to the gates of Eden. This is the supreme intuition of the private thinker, of Nietzsche, Shestov, Kierkegaard, Pascal. It is the intuition of one sunk deep in human suffering who nevertheless refuses to bow to it. It is the intuition of one who truly dares to trust their senses.

This is not a call to action; there aren't words for everyone. This is a martyrdom of self to self, a sacrifice of the soul to the flaming sword at the gate of Eden. The political implications of this madness--is it madness?--are personal, existential, conditioned, hostile to the general. Each of us has his own truth, and where Plato gives you the Truth common to all, this man gives you his own knowing well that the rest of you--the mob, the crowd, but bless you, all of you, each and every one!--have flocks and flocks of truths floating high and above the imaginary suns of Greeks and Germans.

All That Appears Is Good

BY REUBEN MORRIS



Photo: Today Testing

Guy Debord, active in the middle of the twentieth century, was a french marxist and a founding member of the situationist international. His contributions to this realm of political thought are important, within that sphere, and worthy of consideration. I do not set out to write of him in this way. I wish to take a work of his, the *Society of the Spectacle*, and describe it so that it seems like it was written about our own time and place rather than France of the 1960's. Thinking about Debord in this way, as someone who was aware of the strangeness of our times in a very general way, has helped me in forming my beliefs about the present condition. Debord identifies the spectacle as something like the focal point of all activity. It demands your gaze and is very difficult to look away from. I contend that you have already experienced it and know about as much about it as Debord can tell you.

Even while trying to talk about this book without reference to its historical or political context, there is one piece of background information that should not be dispensed with. The *Society of the Spectacle* is a *Detournement*, or a Hijacking. What this means is that the content of the book is nearly all lifted from other texts, with key terms changed to fit the form of what Debord is describing. To understand this let me give as an example the first sentence of Debord's text,

1. *The life of societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles*"

Now, compare this with the opening sentence of Marx's Capital:

"The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails presents itself as an immense accumulation of commodities."

Aside from the idiosyncrasies of translation, these two sentences differ only in the substitution of certain nouns. Wealth in the Marx becomes Life in Debord, and Commodities become spectacles. Now is not the time to dwell on the content of this substitution, but only the fact that Debord's book is largely composed by such replacements. His writing style is to take the words of other people. Substitute some of his terminology in, and then place these thoughts in a new order. Sometimes he adds an entirely new sentence in when clarification is necessary. The whole work takes the shape of a numbered series of claims, divided into nine chapters. My writing will focus on the first three. I attempt something of my own *Detournement* of Debord, taking his words out of their original context and placing them in our own.

One more thing before I begin. Debord himself says that the spectacle is difficult to describe. One of the reasons for this is because of how pervasive the spectacle is in our lives. If our culture has in fact been steeped in spectacle

it would be hard to describe it without on some level praising it or at least using the language that was developed for the service of the spectacular. What I am saying here is essentially a warning that appears near the beginning of the book.

"11. To describe the spectacle, its formation, its functions and the forces which tend to dissolve it, one must artificially distinguish certain inseparable elements. When analyzing the spectacle one speaks, to some extent, the language of the spectacular itself..."

Leaving aside for now the question of what this "spectacular language" would be, let this quote serve as a guide for trying to interpret the spectacle. It is easy to fall into traps when describing this thing because we are completely surrounded by it. One mistake would be to become excessively focused on a single part of the spectacle, and equate this part with the spectacular whole. Another error, more insidious, would be to attempt to describe the spectacle in a way that allows it to be understood and criticized, but end up instead with a description that is itself just another spectacle. We live in an age of the spectacle and it is difficult to speak in a way that does not appeal to this.

It is important to try and get an image of what this spectacle is and how it is apprehended, even if at first this image will probably appear as just another spectacle. If I cannot describe the entire spectacle, I should start with some element that shows an important aspect of the spectacle. Debord tells us,

"4. *The spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images."*

Here we get the spectacle as something that is related by images, and at times exemplified by certain images. All the same, it is not in itself an image. What is the meaning of this second sentence, that the spectacle is a social relation mediated by images? Mediation is a relation between two things that occurs by way of the third. To have a mediated relation to someone means that a third person, or something that is not

a person, is responsible for the communications that occur between the two of you. The presence of a mediator implies separation between the two people. Otherwise they could interact directly. In this light, here is another quote.

"29... *The spectacle is simply the common language of this separation. Spectators are linked solely by their one-way relationship to the very center that keeps them isolated from each other. The spectacle thus reunites the separated, but it reunites them only in their separateness"*

What is this spectacle, this thing that unites people who are separate, while even in this reunion, keeps people trapped in their separation.

I am reminded of Billy Joel. These people *Share a drink they call loneliness.*

Debord would contend that this is no better than drinking alone. We all form a part of the lonely crowd, a phenomenon that is demonstrated by the loneliness people report feeling in cities. People have been forced apart by the spectacle and gaze into its center in order to interact with one another. As individuals, it is difficult to escape the edge of the spectacle, because it has forced its way into the center. In this way and in others, Spectacle has the character of centripetal force. It makes room for itself at the center of our attention while pushing all other things to the edges of our awareness. Spectacle makes room for itself and nothing else, hijacking our personal relationships and controlling our lives. Now I veer too quickly into a polemic against the spectacle. I must focus on its description. For this task I will bring speak of something familiar and then explain it in terms of what has already been said about the spectacle.

The term "Social Media" is suspiciously resonant with the phrase "*a social relation between people that is mediated by images.*" Mediation, which sounds academic and uptight, becomes media, familiar and easy to watch. Social relations become socialization. Socializing can occur on social media. How does social media mediate our social life? On instagram we look at many pictures of our friends, of celebrities.

We can like these pictures and even write our responses to them. The collection of images on a site such as Instagram is always growing, with more added constantly. No person will see more than a tiny fraction of these images. Yet each person who uses the platform will experience a distinct form of interaction with other people. Although the images are distinct for each user, the way these images present themselves as a vertical stream offering itself up for your approval or dismissal, this is a spectacle. This is just one website out of many, and surely our world is composed of much more than websites. Yet is the basic outline of what I describe applicable to more than just this site?

To ask for more instances of the spectacle, first a better understanding must be reached of its character and origins. Is there anything that preceded the spectacle? Elsewhere Debord claims that the spectacle *"dominates all aspects of modern life"*. How could this be so, especially if we are people who do not feel that we are being dominated.

"16. The spectacle is able to subject human beings to itself because the economy has already totally subjugated them..."

This is the answer Debord gives as to the origin of the spectacle, along with an early instance of his claim that our interaction with the spectacle is one that involves our subjugation. Preceding this subjugation, there is already the dominance of people's lives by economic relationships. I do not wish for this to become a paper on Marxist economics. Yet it is impossible to speak of the spectacle without acknowledging that we are situated in a world of Capital. People work to earn a living and spend their earnings on commodities. Marx would say that because we produce things not for our own sake but so that we can earn enough money to survive, we are alienated or estranged from our work and ourselves. It is not enough just to be a person, one must also have enough to live on, you must have the means to prop yourself up in the economy. Debord calls this the transition from "being" into "having" (pp. 17). This is the underlying condi-

tion for the spectacle to come about. To begin speaking of a spectacle we must already live in a world that is melded into the shape of an economy. People are subjected to this economy insofar as they are forced to participate in it in order to earn what they need to live.

A similar process is carried out in the development of the widespread economy into the spectacle.

"17. ...The present stage, in which social life has become completely dominated by the accumulated productions of the economy, is bringing about a general shift from having to appearing — all "having" must now derive its immediate prestige and its ultimate purpose from appearances"

This is a process that mirrors the change from "being" into "having". The key of this second transition is that the economic life takes over all functions of the social life. A complaint I have heard frequently is that there are not many places like libraries. A library is a rare example of a public place, a social place, that is not an economic place. Nearly all living activities involve money. The presence of money tints all of our actions. It is a truism to say that how much money one has largely determines your opportunities. The growth of the spectacle involves the union of money and appearances. An excellent illustration of this union is advertising. We see advertising everywhere. Returning to the example of Instagram, a feature which was introduced soon after the launch of the site was the introduction of advertisements into the feed. Presented alongside the images posted by friends and celebrities are images sponsored by a corporation, hawking some product or service. Often it is difficult to distinguish these advertisements from the non-sponsored content.

Advertisements as a part of life are not a particularly recent development, and they themselves are not necessarily representative of the spectacle. However, as life becomes increasingly consumed by a procession of appearances, advertisement becomes more prevalent because there are advertisements mixed into all these ap-

pearances. Because the spectacle grew from the dominance of the economy, it retains the money-generating function of the economy. Someone, usually the rich and powerful, is always profiting from the mediation of social relationships between people. Advertising is a useful way of tracing the spectacle through life. Advertising relies on the supposition that an advertisement will be seen. They crop up anywhere where the gaze of people accumulates. Debord might say that advertising is not a collection of images, although advertising uses all sorts of images to accomplish its task. Rather, it is a social relationship through images. Particularly, it is the relationship of spending money. This is a relationship that guarantees separation even when people are together. To share the drink of loneliness you must have the money for your bar tab.

I am finding the task of a proper *Detournement* of Debord's spectacle into our times challenging. Here is something anecdotal which might help some of what I am trying to say about the spectacle. I find it very difficult to focus on one thing for any length of time. There are such a great number of things to see. Setting out on the work of writing is hard and distraction is very easy. In truth, I have had some desire to write a paper on Debord for many months now. Always when I sat down with half a mind to write it, it seemed something impinged on me. Writer's block is nothing new, but if you do your writing on a computer you are subject to the spectacle in a way that people in other times may not have been. The internet is the great generator and perpetuator of spectacle. Here is a place where all appearances are shown, where all things are shown. It was sold as something that would foster communication between people all over the world. I doubt that this description accurately shows what had become of the internet. It has fallen to the control of a few corporate masters, much in the same way that media in prior decades did. Moreover, the most widely used websites all share a similar model. Like Instagram, they present an endless feed of information and images. I have often found myself in a loop of consumption as YouTube continues to provide me with more

videos. I exaggerate this by saying that watching these videos is something like the condition of being farmed. For every video I watched, a few cents of advertising revenue is generated. My attention is being harvested for a cheap price.

"24... The concentration of "communication" is thus an accumulation, in the hands of the existing system's administration, of the means which allow it to carry on this particular administration."

The decline of Net Neutrality was a demonstration of the growth of the spectacle. While the internet in its early days appeared as a space that would be free from the corporate control that had come to dominate so much of the physical world, this illusion was soon crushed. Insofar as the internet is a vast improvement over prior systems of communication, it had to be co-opted by the forces most ready to wild it. Administrators of corporate and governmental breeds soon took complete power over this new means of communication. The core of the internet is now overwhelmingly corporate. Ongoing struggle against the growth of the spectacle must occur at the vanishing periphery where the spectacle does not yet have a total grasp of opinions.

Continuing to reference my copious consumption of YouTube videos, here is another quote from Debord.

"12. The spectacle presents itself as something enormously positive, indisputable and inaccessible. It says nothing more than "that which appears is good, that which is good appears. The attitude which it demands in principle is passive acceptance which in fact it already obtained by its manner of appearing without reply, by its monopoly of appearance."

Usually when someone is trying to sell you a product they assume a cheerful tone. Consider the great privilege you have in being offered this wonderful product! The statement goes something like this: We are so fortunate to live in this time of unparalleled abundance. Never before have people had so much choice in the things they buy, and never before has the quality of life

been so high! Even better, we have a full complement of pleasant images to enjoy. Wherever you turn some version of this promise manifests. For better or worse, the example of this that immediately comes to mind for me is Zizek's comments on Coca-Cola's motto, Enjoy Coke. We are commanded to enjoy coke, and this is disturbing because the corporation which gives this command is powerful enough that it may wield coercive power. There may be a threat of violence when we are told to Enjoy Coke. Everywhere there are versions of this advertisement. A common form of it is an ad that tells you to "treat yourself". The message is to take advantage of the beautiful world of commodities in which all is well. There are parts of life that are irreconcilable with the spectacular claim that everything "*which appears is good, that which is good appears*". The recommended action when bad things appear is to just focus on the positive. It is suspiciously often that this focusing on the positive takes the form of some therapeutic transaction.

Continuing down the same path of how the spectacle is something which allows people to ignore the unpleasant or even exploitative things in their lives, here is yet another quote from Debord. In this section, Debord is talking about the seemingly contradictory status of a person when they are at work versus when they are in relaxation.

"43... This worker, suddenly redeemed from the total contempt which is clearly shown him by all the varieties of organization and supervision of production, finds himself every day, outside of production and in the guise of a consumer, seemingly treated as an adult, with zealous politeness."

Shortly after, Debord likens the growth of the spectacle to an "Opium war" in the sense that the spectacle serves to silence dissent by showing people how good they have it, the sedative power of the spectacle constantly growing and expanding. The life of the consumer is an example of the movement from "having" to "appearing" which I introduced earlier. Marx speaks of the worker as someone who is uniformly downtrodden come

night or day. Debord updates this concept for his time and ours by telling of the products and sights that are now offered to the worker. During the day the worker is subject to the demands and vicissitudes of working life. When not at work, this same person can now feast on the products of accumulated labor. To say that this is a numbing force, something which prevents 'real change' and degrades a person further, would doubtless be a controversial claim. At the very least it is a delightfully bleak picture of modern life, one which is often presented. People work because they have to, so they can live. This life can be turned back into work even when someone is not working when they become a consumer.

A striking feature of Debord's writing is how often he seems to repeat himself, or say things about the spectacle that hardly differ from his previous claims. The picture he creates comes together like transparent slides of images stacked on top of one another. The images vary only slightly, and over time a new image emerges. I take this to be one of the ways in which by speaking of the spectacle, it is hard not to reproduce it. Reproduction is essential to understanding the spectacle.

"14. In the spectacle, which is the image of the ruling economy, the goal is nothing, development everything. The spectacle aims at nothing other than itself."

If I had to choose one of Debord's aphorisms which I thought best encapsulated what the spectacle is it would be this one. Development is the key term for. What is meant when we say 'Developed' or 'Developing' country, aside from these terms being contemptible euphemisms for wealth and poverty? More broadly put, what is it what we suppose society is developing into? The spectacle develops itself and has no goal besides this. It seeks to create not a better version of the world, but a more totalizing version of itself. Disillusionment is a process whereby people come to believe that nothing really changes. The modern cynic says its not worth voting, the parties are both the same and they will probably throw out your vote anyway. The news is printed fresh

each day but draws from a completely predictable set of catastrophes, insults and banalities. All throughout this trudging process a torrential downpour of new media and sights comes down on us, more and more choices and happy distractions to take our attention from the work of the administrators, to keep us focused on an expanding spectacle. In all its expanse, in all its technological development, this spectacular thing does not change.

I will close for the time being with another disturbing aspect of the spectacle, one which follows from its production of itself and nothing else. One argument that may be raised against Debord is that he fails to take into account opposition movements. Yes, we may grant to him that there are opiates for the masses, and perhaps some people partake, but how can someone say that society is unified in a common act of idol worship when we are so cracked and divided? Is the spectacle really something so strong and whole that it can survive the violence of politics and changing climates?

"54. The spectacle, like modern society itself, is at once united and divided. The unity of each is based on violent divisions. But when this contradiction emerges in the spectacle, it is itself contradicted by a reversal of its meaning: the division it presents is unitary, while the unity it presents is divided."

The spectacle being 'united and divided' suggests that it will be difficult to connect varying instances of the spectacle. I must be careful to avoid the trap warned of by the very beginning, namely the belief that the spectacle is a collection of images. In searching for the spectacle one must always be mindful of the social relations that surround these images. Sometimes these social relations will present themselves as conflicts. Con-

flict takes on the character of a spectacle when the interests of the two sides essentially align. I admit that I am confused by this characterization of the spectacle. Is it not something that can be resisted? I am skeptical of claims that all people are deceived or fall victim to a single prevailing ideology. I do not believe that the spectacle is as expansive as Debord claims. One instance of the claim that the spectacle includes all conflicts is that the Soviet Union became in America something of a spectacle. At some point it no longer posed any threat, except as an appearance.

The spectacle continues to expand, and may come to include all feuding sides. There may still be a few places where the spectacle has not yet reached. Consider the recent story of an American missionary who went to the Andaman islands, a place where people live who have successfully resisted all forms of European settler colonialism. When this missionary arrived attempting to spread his religion and bring back images, he was told to leave. When he refused, he was killed. This may be the only recent instance of the spectacle being stopped in its tracks.

I have fallen short of the task of describing the spectacle, but I am happy that I have began. I would like to encourage you to continue trying to understand the spectacle, and identify its influence in your life. I find this exercise helpful. The frivolous images we are surrounded by may be more sinister than they seem. Beware all salesmen and hucksters. Try and find unmediated social contact. I hope this does not sound too much like an empty appeal to 'get off your phone'. There is something growing all around us, and I fear that it will not stop. It threatens to suffocate all good things. It presents itself as the only good left in a world of drudgery and stochastic disaster. I want to be more cautious of it.

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