

From Government alone to Governance by all ***The emergence of a new politics and the next balance of powers***

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Our current system of government relies on a political innovation that was first introduced by the founders of the American Republic in 1776. They separated what was once a unity - the power of governance held solely by the King - into three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial. In order to curb the power of any one branch of government, they created a system of checks and balances to regulate their operations and leave them relatively autonomous. In this way, one branch of government (the Office of the President, for example) cannot simply demand that another (either Congress or the Supreme Court) do its bidding. A certain kind of political objectivity is maintained. Since then, this innovation has spread over the whole globe.

What the American forefathers wanted to avoid was the absolutist state models of Europe where the King was the Government (best exemplified by King Louis XIV's declaration "The State is me.") As king, he was law-maker, executor, and judge all rolled into one. There were no structural checks and balances. Hence, monarchies were most often totalitarian and dictatorial.

More than two centuries later, this invention, standing by itself, has outlived its usefulness. In the end, governments do not simply run themselves. Human beings, with their beliefs, habits, skills, passions and imperfections, run governments. And they invent all kinds of ways to circumvent the rules.

Real change or simply business as usual?

Clearly a new concept of governance is needed to supplement the traditional balance of power. One can begin to discern the contours of this new approach by focusing on the problems alternative candidates face when they assume office. They have great difficulty in governing. Instead of the three branches achieving a higher unity, functioning as one healthy organism, they've become merely the staging centers for traditional politicians - politicians who derive all their wealth and power from the current system - to attack any initiative by a new, non-traditional politician. In reality, corruption is rampant.

In such a political climate, there is only one kind of power that a non-traditional politician can truly rely on: the organized force of its citizenry, the strong and autonomous power of civil society in her own town, state, or nation. When a political dispute arises, the truly progressive politician is unable to bring about a healthy resolution unless she can actively engage the independent network of activists and nonprofits already concerned with this issue (and hopefully such a network exists!). It is only through including stakeholders outside the narrow confines of the traditional political process - where "business as usual" reigns - that real and positive change can come about.

The importance of partnership between the New Politics and Civil Society

Civil Society has the dual capacity to both protest and partner. Through effective organizing it's able to have self-serving politicians voted out of office or expose their shenanigans in the media. It can also come together behind a genuinely progressive government official. From the outside, it can advocate for the kind of policy reforms that the new breed of politician can then push from the inside. The politician can then be far more effective because he's able to demonstrate that the new initiative he's pushing is not merely his own agenda but is backed by the public.

Civil society is the key factor in the movement for good governance. It is also the key concept that any proponent of the new politics should take to heart if they genuinely wish to create a better government. Most politicians have yet to recognize this. In his presidential campaign, Barack Obama utilized the force of Civil Society like no other politician before him. This was the key to his success. His meteoric rise to power was fueled by the good will and effective organizing of ordinary citizens. But Civil Society's role is not just to help politicians win elections. A healthy citizenry is not one that wakes every four years but one that is constantly participating. To effectively govern, the new politician must understand the threefold nature of modern society, must recognize and respect the different forms of power it contains, and directly engage the key actors involved.

Considering all aspects of society – Political, Cultural, Economic

Society is complex. It is more than just politics even though we, as a people, have an almost incurable addiction to confuse political change with societal transformation. Societies also have an economy that provides for the physical and social needs of its citizens. Therefore, the economy, and not just the government, has to be transformed to make it more prosperous, efficient, equitable and caring.

Society also has a cultural dimension. We are all embedded in a cultural reality that deeply affects how we think and feel. We cannot just change institutions, for at bottom they are nothing more than the people who constitute them. If we want new, healthier institutions then we also need to change our mindsets and behaviors. We cannot simply create new laws to combat corruption. We also have to change the mindset and identity that generates corruption almost automatically in spite of all institutional arrangements.

The battle for hearts and minds is the mother of all battles, and will deeply affect what happens in the economic and political arenas. This is why a societal revolution, including the radical redesign of our politics, requires an inner revolution. Cultural power is truly the major power in any society and it is organized citizens and cultural institutions that wield it for good or for bad.

A Higher Balancing of Powers

In order to harmonize the diverse perspectives of everyone who genuinely wants something different, the new politics needs to understand the different forms of power in society. Each of the three key actors in society brings a different kind of power to the table. Government, of course, harnesses political power. Business mobilizes economic power. And civil society wields cultural power.

In the old balance of power, the politician is only dealing with one kind of power: political. And politicians are generally adept in the use and abuse of political power. In this new approach, however, the situation is very different. Because these are different forms of power, a traditional politician will have a much more difficult time consolidating and controlling the three kinds of power. He may be adept in the use of political power. But he may be totally illiterate and in the dark when it comes to understanding and harnessing cultural power.

This new form of governance therefore goes well beyond the old concept of three branches of government and instead brings together the three key power-holders of society for the benefit of the whole. It's therefore society-centered, and not just state-focused as has usually been the case. We can call this revolution "societal threefolding" because it aims for the radical transformation of all three spheres of society.

Modern societies face complex challenges. To solve them, the new breed of politician who wants to advance good governance must ensure the involvement of civil society and business in the process. In this way, the new politician utilizes a systemic perspective to understand and solve a systemic problem. The United Nations in 2000, under then General Secretary Kofi Annan, understood this and mobilized its own version of societal threefolding. Its approach calls for the activation of "tri-sectoral" networks consisting of government, business, and civil society, to solve world hunger, climate change, deforestation, violence, and the dozens of other problems that plague the world. In addition, the UN even partially funded a graduate course at Cambridge University, UK, to teach tri-sectoral skills.

Societal threefolding is happening at all levels, from international organizations such as the UN and World Bank, to national organizations such as the Center for Social Partnerships in Denmark, to local governments such as in the towns of Batad and Bingawen in Iloilo Province in the Philippines. The time for this idea has come. It is now only a question of what form it takes.

The Promise and the Task

Besides the promise of societal threefolding, there are also numerous perils. Chief among these is the danger that traditional politicians and business leaders will pay lip-service to threefolding while actually subverting the process by setting up pseudo civil society groups (Civil Society refers to fake NGOs as BINGOS, if they are business initiated, and GRINGOS, if they are government established). It can be expected that many people who hold positions of power will attempt to weaken this most potent approach to world transformation and render it servile to the powers that extract benefits for the elite at the expense of billions. In short, threefolding will be used to advance unsustainable elite globalization instead of creating sustainable societies and a more living planet.

For those truly concerned about authentic sustainable development and good governance, the time to advance societal threefolding at the national and global levels is now. Many powerful world leaders are finally getting exposed to the general concept of threefolding. They are in the beginning process of their education in this area. It is of the utmost importance that all concerned advocate for this approach and help their leaders discern between manipulative and authentic threefolding. If our politicians are still unable to envision anything other than business as usual, then we need new leaders. The new breed of politician has to be fluent in the new

language of a tri-polar world, in the reality of a threefolded world. They have to be adept in harnessing the resources and the power not only of governments, but also of business and civil society, and employ this unified power, not to subvert society, but to serve it with vision, passion, depth and effectiveness.