

## **THE RATIONIST**

**TWELVE ESSAYS INTRODUCING A PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO PRESERVE THE DEMOCRATIC-REPUBLICAN MODEL OF GOVERNMENT.**

**ADDRESSED TO THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.**

**BY GRACCHUS, A LOYAL CITIZEN.**

**NUMBER FOUR:**

**THAT AN INDEPENDENT MIDDLE CLASS IS THE CONDITION PRECEDENT OF AUTHENTIC DEMOCRACY.**

To the People of the United States of America:

*Power always follows Property. This I believe to be as infallible a Maxim, in Politicks, as, that Action and Re-action are equal, is in Mechanicks.*

**John Adams**

Having summarized the sequence of Anacyclosis, we now examine the emergence of its most celebrated phase: **DEMOCRACY**, by which we mean a popular government characterized by frequent elections, representation, and majority rule.

We are presently in our second age of democracy. Almost all the world's countries proclaim themselves to be democratic. About half the world's states actually deserve that title according to prevailing academic standards. Yet perhaps none of the world's governments are accountable to an upright and independent middle class that is the original creator and sole guarantor of an authentic democracy, whatever else academics may say on the topic.

All wealthy democracies which cannot be regarded as authentic are therefore vulnerable to the mob-rule, demagoguery, and authoritarianism that herald the violent and destructive consummation of Anacyclosis – America above all. For whatever credit intellectuals, politicians, and activists may take in promoting and protecting mankind's most cherished political precept, we shall see over the next three essays that an **AUTHENTIC DEMOCRACY** – by which we mean a popular government that is substantially accountable to the common people and actually sensitive to their preferences – is bestowed upon political society by one political agency alone: an upright and independent middle class.

**THE DIFFUSION AND RE-CONCENTRATION OF WEALTH DICTATE THE DIFFUSION AND RE-CONCENTRATION OF POLITICAL POWER.**

Throughout history, people have generally needed to obtain some wealth before attaining much influence. As Noah Webster put it: “*Wherever we cast our eyes, we see this truth, that property is the basis of power.*” Few would dispute the proposition that great wealth confers political power. Even those individuals who are themselves not independently wealthy but wield political power by virtue of their offices are almost always beholden to the moneyed interests

which fund their campaigns. The connection between wealth and power was earlier identified by James Harrington, writing during the English Interregnum:

*If one man be sole landlord of a territory, or overbalance the people, for example, three parts in four, he is grand seignior; for so the Turk is called from his property, and his empire is absolute monarchy. If the few or a nobility, or a nobility with the clergy, be landlords, or overbalance the people to the like proportion, it makes the Gothic balance (to be shown at large in the second part of this discourse), and the empire is mixed monarchy, as that of Spain, Poland, and late of Oceana. And if the whole people be landlords, or hold the lands so divided among them that no one man, or number of men, within the compass of the few or aristocracy, overbalance them, the empire (without the interposition of force) is a commonwealth.*

In articulating the link between wealth and political power, whatever cannot be explained by outright bribery, plunder, and extortion can be explained by the fact that all governments depend upon the hands which sustain their treasuries and militaries. These are the twin pillars of secular authority. Whatever the character and objects of the prevailing regime, the most basic authority of government resides in its exclusive exercise of the powers of the **SWORD** and the **PURSE**. The ability of any citizen to refuse an indispensable contribution to either not only presupposes a financial surplus exceeding the level of mere subsistence by that citizen, it is the foundation of voluntary political agency.

The greater the number of ordinary households needed to fulfill the regime's revenue and manpower requirements, the greater the democratic potential of that society. Where there exists a group of households whose financial station places them between the boundaries of subsistence and opulence, we find by definition a middle class. These middling households can, because of their surplus, make an indispensable contribution to the treasury or the military. And when many middling households supply the treasury or the military, it is possible – though not inevitable – that a significant proportion of the commoners will hold political rights, enabling them to steer the wheel of power, in some degree, toward democracy.

The contributions of the middle classes being essential for the regime's survival, adroit organization, common cause, and sufficient willpower are thereafter required to translate their latent democratic potentiality into kinetic political force.

The democratic potential of the body politic may therefore be provisionally estimated based on the relative importance of the people's contribution, the clarity of their political vision, and the effectiveness of their political mobilization. We should thus not be surprised to discover that the office of the Roman Tribune, devised to serve the interests of aggrieved commoners, was conceded by the creditor-patricians only after the debtor-plebeians seceded from Rome. Or that Athens was among the most democratic of ancient Greek cities on account of the fact that it had great need of its lower classes to serve in its navy. The low social rank of rowers, relative to cavalry and infantry, compelled Athens to confer more extensive political rights deeper down into the social strata than many other cities of Classical Antiquity not similarly situated. As Dr. Woodruff's study of Athenian democracy confirms:

*During the age of democracy, all the Greek cities had to pay special attention to their citizens, because the citizen body provided the warriors, and the warriors paid for their own equipment in this incessant warfare. All this worked best when the warriors were*

*willing. Cavalry came from the upper class, armed infantry were supplied by the middle class, and rowers for the navy were recruited from the working class. The configurations of government in Greek city-states were affected by the dominant military needs. Where cavalry reigned supreme, the aristocracy ruled; where armed infantry was needed, the middle class gained power; and where a navy was required the poor had an opportunity to make demands.*<sup>1</sup>

The development of the English Parliament illustrates the same essential principle in action, but scaled up and across a more complex political system. Expanding national commitments compelled modern states to obtain widespread consent to taxation through negotiation with and by giving concessions to various sectors of the body politic. Dr. Spufford's commentaries describe this experience in England, which was not wholly dissimilar to that of Germany and France:

*In 1297 Edward I, hard pressed by political circumstances, faced with war in both Flanders and Scotland at the same time, was compelled to yield to the claims of the more vocal part of his baronage. Under pressure he confirmed both Magna Carta and the Forest Charter ... promising not to levy any future taxes, whether direct or indirect, without the common assent of the whole kingdom. ... it was not until 1362 that it was finally and definitively established that consent to any taxation, whether direct or indirect, must be obtained in Parliament, and that the commons must participate in granting it.*<sup>2</sup>

The doctrine that authority should derive from the consent of the governed is accordingly only observed so long as ruling elites are under duress, whether they be kings or nobles. Following his escape from American slavery, Frederick Douglass captured this mentality most concisely when he stated that “*Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.*” From the standpoint of entrenched elites, the common people as such have no real argument for democracy unless they satisfy this political formula: **NO INDISPENSABLE CONTRIBUTION, NO POLITICAL RIGHTS.**

**POLITICAL AGENCY DOES NOT DERIVE FROM THE FANTASY THAT CONSENT IS GIVEN BUT FROM THE REALITY THAT IT BE WITHHELD.**

But as Mr. Douglass also knew, just making an indispensable contribution and articulating a shared list of goals and grievances is not enough to sustain political volition. In both ancient Rome and in America until the Civil War, for example, slaves made an indispensable contribution to their respective societies, the grievances of whom should go without stating. Indeed, slaves and serfs have made indispensable contributions to countless societies all throughout history. Yet in no case do we find slaves or serfs granted meaningful political rights.

<sup>1</sup> *First Democracy.*

<sup>2</sup> *Origins of the English Parliament.*

Moreover, whereas we do not find slaves and serfs anywhere granted meaningful political **RIGHTS**, we do not find wards, dependents, and clients of the state anywhere exercising meaningful political **CHOICE**. As Alexander Hamilton stated in *Federalist No. 73*, and again in *Federalist No. 79*: “*In the general course of human nature, **A POWER OVER A MAN’S SUBSISTENCE AMOUNTS TO A POWER OVER HIS WILL.***” Later essays will explore how, in democracy’s twilight, economic insecurity and dependency finally reduce the people’s electoral alternatives not into a question of whether the public treasury shall be deployed to support the body politic – for there becomes no serious question that it must be – but rather whether to blame the rich, the poor, or foreigners for the diminished status which makes that support necessary.

Before we address democracy’s death however we must first appreciate its birth, and for that we must understand that while it is one thing to **MAKE** an indispensable contribution to the regime, it is quite another – and far more unusual and historically remarkable – to be able to **WITHHOLD** it. But, as the political impotence of slaves, wards, subjects, clients, and dependents testifies, the ability to withdraw a contribution is no less essential to the question of political autonomy than the ability to make that contribution in the first instance. In all of history, there has only existed one popular agency with the power to both make and withhold their indispensable contributions, thereby sustaining a challenge against the elite status quo to a democratic effect. It was the financially independent, self-sufficient and upright middle classes, what Aristotle called the ***HOI MESOI*** (οἱ μέσοι).

And therein lies the true birth story of authentic democracy in Antiquity and in America. Ancient democracy commenced in military labor strikes; America’s experiment in a tax revolt, albeit springing out of a much older British tradition and expressing democracy indirectly through a scheme of representation.

Democratic movements, both ancient and modern, are in any event at their inception powered by middling people able to feed, clothe, shelter, and organize themselves, not headless proletariat mobs preoccupied with their next meal, making rent, or exacting vengeance on some hated oppressor. For the reasons considered here and in our second essay, in no place in the past do we see and in no place in the future will we see democracy granted to the people or sustained on their behalf by the largesse and good will of a few powerful men. For all these reasons, we may be assured that **AUTHENTIC DEMOCRACY IS NOT ROOTED IN THE FANTASY THAT CONSENT IS GIVEN, BUT IN THE POSSIBILITY THAT IT BE WITHHELD.**

## **MIDDLE CLASS REVOLUTIONS BRING FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY, UNDERCLASS REVOLUTIONS BRING CHAOS AND AUTHORITARIANISM.**

Having established the link between the diffusion of wealth and the first appearance of democracy, the relationship between Anacyclosis, the middle class, and democracy is now crystal clear. Democracy comes and goes in waves. The first wave broke on the Mediterranean Basin in the sixth century BC, summoned by the independent middle ranks of ancient Greek society. There it spread and flourished across hundreds of city states. More than three hundred democracies rose and fell in the ancient Mediterranean world before the conquests of Rome. The second wave of democracy broke along the North Atlantic more than twenty centuries after the first. Over one hundred democracies have emerged around the world since the American Revolutionary War.

Both great waves of democracy were preceded by the emergence of an independent middle class in those territories where it was first seen for the reasons aforesaid. Thus democracy, when it reawakens from a long slumber, originates from a threatening and concerted act of force and resistance leveraging a substantial fiscal or military contribution by those having something to lose, not a bloody expression of outrage by those having everything to gain.

The outbursts of the proletariat may by contrast successfully challenge prevailing forms of oppression, or even the identities of the oppressors, but never the continued existence of oppression. When the popular fury manifests through any agency other than an independent middle class, authentic democracy does not issue whatever other concessions may be exacted. It does not matter how many people protest or riot, for how long, for whatever aims, to redress whatever grievances, how many heads roll, or how many gallons of blood are spilled.

Despite the substantive impotence of all precarious and dependent underclasses, it may nevertheless be convenient for elites to quell uprisings, pacify and manipulate mobs, legitimize regimes, and disguise their ownership and control of public institutions by sponsoring periodic elections to populate legislative assemblies so as to convey the appearance of democracy and representation. Yet these ritual forms of popular government almost everywhere practiced – even in autocratic states like Russia and China – do not confer true political volition or make regimes accountable to the common people. For the reasons stated, that comes from one source alone: the power of ordinary people to withdraw their support from the regime.

Hence we see why an authentic democracy cannot be maintained by or imposed upon any population except by an upright, preeminent, independent, and organized middle class of its own volition. We see why, for example, authentic democracy did not take flight in Iraq following America's overwhelming military intervention and the expenditure of many billions of dollars, no matter how ardently we tried to impose it. Or why Wat Tyler's rebellion did not bring democracy to fourteenth-century England. It is because every egalitarian outburst not sustained by an independent middle class, like a rocket that fails to generate enough velocity on takeoff, quickly crashes back onto the ground. The independent middle class alone generates sufficient lift for true democracy to take flight, and it does so by conditioning an **INDISPENSABLE AND REVOKABLE CONTRIBUTION** to the regime upon a substantive right to participate in its administration. For this, the people must be prior to all other things financially independent.

Equipped with a clear understanding of how democracy is first ushered into the world, our next essay will consider its prime under the calm, steady, and optimistic dominion of the upright middle classes.

***GRACCHUS.***