

THE NEW PARTY: A DIALOGUE

As its name suggests, *The New Party* is a new political party which was formed three years ago by a diverse group of people to provide a viable alternative to both of the major American political parties. Since 1992, the New Party has been working to cultivate support from the ground up. It is a "value-centered and issue-driven organization, one that believes that the Party should be guided by a set of ideas and principles." Here, to discuss some of those issues and principles we include a dialogue between New Party founding members Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers, and W.B. Allen.

After Liberalism

by Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers

Last November and everything that has come since should inspire rethinking — serious rethinking — among those committed to democracy in this country. It's not that Contract politics and Republican cyberpunks announce a general collapse of progressive values. They may not even inaugurate a long period of Republican political dominance. But they are very bad news, and no effective response to them will come from the present Democratic leadership. In fact, no effective response can be offered by conventional Democratic liberalism, which now lacks a coherent program and a social base. Democratic renewal will require a different sort of politics.

Where We Are

According to Republicans, insurgent voters sent a "clear undeniable message" by ratifying the Contract. Not so. The Republicans won with only 14 percent of the eligible electorate. The Democratic share of the vote dropped just two points from 1992. A vanishingly small share of voters had even heard of the Contract they were allegedly signing; polls since have shown majority opposition to many of its key terms. As usual in American politics, the election was far more an economic referendum than an ideological one; those gaining economically voted overwhelmingly for the incumbent party and those losing voted them out.

But such observations should provide little comfort. With or without a mandate, the radical Republicans now in power are out to do some real damage. They aim to repeal the New Deal along with the Great Society — to disable the affirmative state by mandating supermajorities on tax increases; repeal or render toothless virtually all important environmental, consumer, and worker protections; remove through "tort reform" the possibility of direct citizen action against corporate power; recommodify vast reaches of the

educational system; ensure worsening inequality and squalor among the poor by appointing business-dominated local governments as their reluctant (and increasingly bankrupt) guardians.

To be sure, the Contract is only the beginning. Beyond it lie social revitalization, cultural purification, heavenly redemption. But the Contract — described by Bush advisor James Pinkerton as "essentially a pro-business agenda" — needs to be in place before such heavy lifting can get started. The appropriate analogy is not 1954, the last time the Republicans controlled the Senate and the House, but 1896, when the massive defeat of the populists initiated a period of Republican and business dominance that lasted until the New Deal.

And the Democrats? Back in the palmy, pre-Contract days of one-party government, the Clinton administration's proudest achievements were deficit reduction and reduced domestic investment, two trade bills without worker rights or environmental stan-

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dards, a punitive crime law, and the promise of truly punitive welfare reform. Now, as Clinton ponders further regressive tax reform and deregulation, he draws the line on assault weapons, and low-wage national service.

If the past is prologue, this immoral response is not even a promising electoral strategy. Democrats may profit from Republican self-destruction on abortion, school prayer, or the virtues of caning, but don't count on it. The Republican victory stands at the end of a two-decade-long secular decline in the Democratic share of the vote. The roots of this decline, though rich in cultural overlay, are fundamentally economic. The Democrats are the party of government; government costs money; and unless the White "middle class" (a.k.a. working class) believes government action benefits them they are usually unwilling to pay its costs or support the party associated with them. It follows that winning back support from Reagan Democrats requires more than removing some social "wedge" issues by mimicking Republican positions on them. The Democrats can build more prisons than Stalin, privatize garbage collection in Little Rock, and moan about

the responsibilities of the poor, but if that's all they have to offer it won't be enough. Given a choice between a real Republican and an imitation, voters tend to go for the real thing.

Nor will it help Democrats to court business even more assiduously — to establish more war rooms in the Commerce Department, to close deals for the multinationals, or retreat further on labor law reform in the hope of satiating national capital. Given a choice between a real Republican and an imitation . . . well, business makes its choices too. It is the economy, stupid, and without a credible economic alternative, it's hello President Gramm.

So this is where we are: Republicans intent on rolling all of us but business, Democrats standing speechless before their mirrors, the public upset that it alone seems to lose every election. All of

which, among those still committed to democratic values, naturally prompts two questions: *How did the Democrats get into this mess? and How can we all get out?*

Democratic Decline

Why don't the Democrats do something? After all, problems in American economic and political order are widely recognized and deeply felt. Opinion surveys and election results show massive economic anxiety, profound distrust of business, and sky-high rates of alienation and disgust with government. There is mass discontent with politics as usual and evident hunger for an alternative — some way this economy and society might be newly run for the general benefit. Why don't the Democrats provide it? If they are getting hammered by middle-class anger at a government that doesn't deliver the goods, why not deliver them?

One popular answer looks to Bill Clinton. Having devoted so much of his life to being first in the class, and pleasing his many friends, companions, and political supporters along the way, Clinton is now incapable of making the hard decisions needed to confront the Republicans and move the country forward. A more serious answer traces the Democrats' failure to their allegiance to a liberalism of racial preferences that is condemned by once-Democratic White men. A third argument points to contradictory demands on the Democrats as the party of government: they need to expand government's role to deliver benefits to the middle-class, but certain needed supporters — consider the Perotistas — reject any such government expansion.

The problem with all these explanations is that they take too

narrow a view of Democratic difficulties. New Deal style social-democratic politics are in trouble everywhere. No party anywhere is winning elections on the old promises — to beat back the market with an affirmative state committed to full employment, a fair distribution of income, and an efficient provision of essential public goods — because the world in which such promises were credible has largely disappeared.

To understand and find a way out of the present disasters of Democratic politics, we need to take measure of that change. In the old world, the responsibilities of government were understood as principally economic, and the economy operated on Keynesian premises. Aided by unions and other private multipliers on its effort, government policy sought (within limits) to stabilize mass

demand, which gave firms markets for sales and thus reason to invest, which increased productivity and lowered the costs of mass consumption goods bought by ever better-paid workers. The damage such consumption-led productivity and income growth did to the environment was not a major issue. Policy inattention to the costs of "social" reproduction — keeping a culture, raising kids — was excused by stable communities and traditional families in which women did most of that work.

More particularly, the politics of the old world relied on:

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•A nation-state capable of managing the economic environment within its territory — a national economy sufficiently insulated from foreign competitors that the benefits of demand-stimulus could be reliably captured by firms within its borders, and a monetary policy apparatus sufficiently insulated from world-wide financial flows to permit unilateral, easy-money correctives to recession.

•The organization of the economic core into a system of mass production dominated by large, lead, stable firms. The size and stability of these firms made them ready targets for worker organization as well as levers to extend the benefits of organization throughout the economy. The organization of production within them also tended to underscore some modicum of class solidarity. Working on the assembly line, it wasn't too hard to figure out which side you were on.

•The dominance of class concerns in the politics of equality. This dominance depended on a more or less determinate working class (obviously more in Europe than here, but still), whose organi-

zational strength and superiority dwarfed other secular, non-business organizations and concerns. And again it reflected the largely unquestioned acceptance of the division of labor inside the household and an economy organized around steadily increasing consumption and energy use. In the United States, it presumed as well what European social democrats liked to call the "American dilemma" — a simple denial of the effects on equal opportunity of 400 years of racial exclusion.

Today, by contrast, the political economy of the United States and other advanced industrial societies is marked by:

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•More sharply delineated *limits on the capacity of the state to promote the general welfare*. These limits result in part from internationalization — which means that foreign competitors can beat domestic firms to expanding domestic markets, and firms are better able to exit unfavorable tax or regulatory regimes. In larger part they stem from changing demands on the state, which underscore limits on the state's institutional competence. While governments are "all thumbs and no fingers," fingers are now what are commonly in demand — in economic policy, to address the fine issues of labor market transitions and firm modernization; in social policy, to pick up where destroyed communities and job-holding women leave off; in economic and social regulation, where common standards need to be applied in diverse contexts or developed through negotiation among affected actors; in political deliberation itself, where money and sound-bites have so fully replaced people and argument that "discussion" seems a waste.

•The collapse of traditional mass production, and with that collapse, the *unmaking of the (male) working class as the privileged agent of equality*. While increased competition among firms has occasioned many strategies of response — from simple sweating of labor to lean production to high-skill strategies geared to product distinctiveness — all disrupt the commonalities of experience that provided the foundation of traditional industrial unionism. Firms are more decentralized and varied in the terms and conditions of work they offer, career paths and rewards are more jumbled, and the heterogeneity of skills provides a further source of division. The fracturing of the male working class coincided with its changing sexual composition, as women joined men in wage slavery. In addition to complicating the tasks of working class organization,

women's entry presses into sharp relief the costs of social reproduction — once confidently assigned to the private household, outside the bounds of politics. Another source of new demands on the state, these changes make it harder to decide what the economic fight is all about, and — as they blur the boundaries between society and household — which institutions are responsible for what.

•Increased *political heterogeneity* within the broader class of citizens who might support democratic ideals. If the organization of the working class as a determinate class has been qualified, so too has acceptance of its material concerns as universal (something asserted since Marx, but achieved only after Keynes). Indeed, the very idea of universalism is in disrepair. As an organizational matter, no institution but business is sufficiently powerful to *impose* its interest as the general interest. As a matter of ideology, none but the sectarian are prepared to elevate any particular interest — whether class or gender or race or the environment or sexual toleration — to that exalted status. And in everyday life and culture, the relentless privatization of civic culture makes the idea of a new universal class of other-regarding citizens increasingly barren.

New Deal social-democratic politics is in trouble, then, because the economy is no longer under any effective social control; the institutions and practices that once provided that control are suspect or disappearing; the range of interests and concerns up for discussion is broader than it once was; and the conditions for generating social discussion of those concerns are widely absent. In this world, cooperative social projects are less plausible and appealing than they once were. It makes more sense to cut your own deal. Ideologies and political projects promoting that option have a certain natural attraction. And ideologies and projects that would recover the value of collective, democratic action need lots of work.

How To Get Out Of This Mess

What might that work be? Let's say you've taken seriously all that we've said so far. What would it imply for current political practice?

Centrally, that people sharing a commitment to democratic values need to get more serious about a constructive political project, not just about protesting or correcting the exercise of power at the margins. Left to its own devices, this society is headed toward truly ruinous division, inequality, and squalor for much of the population. To prevent that, an alternative future needs to be described, its values declared, sides taken in arguments for its advance.

All this will require a sharp break with conventional liberal politics. While liberals often have reasonable views about political outcomes (some equality, some decent living standards, some personal freedom), they are elitists as to means. They don't believe that people of ordinary ability and intelligence are capable of running the society themselves. And so to achieve their ends they typ-

ically favor the kinder and gentler administration of people — usually through the state — to popular organization. Liberals are also deeply accommodating of corporate power — preferring to mop up after its damage is done to controlling it in the first place. Indeed, without any organization outside the state they can barely contemplate what a more popular administration of the economy might look like.

Liberalism worked for a time because its key organizational assumptions held — that reasonable progress on egalitarian ideals could be reached without directly contesting corporate power, that the state sufficed as an agent of the people, that the "natural" organization of the people (into determinate classes, neighborhoods, whatever) assured a multiplier on state efforts. But that world is now gone. Unless people get much better organized, democratic politics will fail for lack of troops (consider the health care debacle), or administrative capacity (consider what's happening inside our firms and classrooms), or ability to convene discussions that need to happen (about race, public safety, environmental protection, neighborhood revitalization). And, starting from present disorganization, that democracy needs to be aimed at to be achieved.

It follows that any new democratic politics must not only articulate a social alternative to the "business as usual" domination of public and everyday life, but also deliberately nurture the democratic practices and organizations required to give that alternative a fighting chance. This double move would be the signature of a new democratic politics — paving the road as we move along it.

Running the Economy as if Values, and Place, Mattered

A natural place to begin such movement is with the economy. The dominant experience of most Americans is that the economy is running their lives (down), and they have generally given up hope that the world could be any different. The conventional explanation is that the internationalization of product, capital, and even labor markets makes social control of the economy impossible. With everything in the economy slopping around or potentially slopping around and across international borders, political boundaries have lost their economic significance. Place doesn't matter. And because it does not, there is no way to make values matter — no way for people organized in some place to impose some social standards on the economy.

But this description of our economy and the possibilities of its social direction is deeply misleading. Internationalization, while important, has been vastly exaggerated: most U.S. manufacturers buy and sell overwhelmingly to themselves; most manufacturing

sectors have exiguous international competition; and the long-run trend of the U.S. economy is toward more services, usually not in trade at all. And even within internationalized relations of competition with profit-taking constraints, alternative strategies with very different social consequences are available. Choices between them can be shaped by factors clearly under our control. Even the diminished state retains a large share of employment and purchasing power, not to mention the ability to pass laws; it can use that power to establish standards on economic practice, to support some strategies of industrial restructuring over others, to limiting public supports to those adhering to public standards. And even a rootless capital relies, in its most advanced productive forms, on immobile public goods — decent school systems, transport systems, safe neighborhoods, clean environments — which if provided in *places* can help root investment there.

Even if such a project were available in theory, however, would it be available in practice? Is there any good reason to think that its potential beneficiaries could actually unite in its advance?

Yes there is. Consider, as a hard case, our nation's major metropolitan areas — where most people live, where the consequences of an economy untutored by social control are painfully evident, where those who would benefit from a more humane order are profoundly divided. Even there, a political alliance is waiting to happen among a series of groups that have, for the past 40 years or more, defined themselves as mutual antagonists.

Take the White dominated labor movement. Because of its declining city membership it cannot protect itself against low-wage privatization and the destruction of regional labor market standards, let alone assure the public investments needed to support high-wage production and services, without the voting support of central city Black and Hispanic populations. And those populations know that their economic devastation will not be reversed anytime soon through an increased welfare effort or expanded public sector. They need private sector investment and jobs within their communities — best provided by firms and individuals rooted in those communities themselves — and access to jobs without, and they need those jobs to pay a living wage — all things more likely to be achieved if they were allied with unions.

At the same time, environmentalists and those concerned about organization inside firms may find common ground on the supply-side of production. Just as unions have found that they can only defend member interests by invading what was once taken to be the inviolate "core of entrepreneurial control" — decisions about technology, product strategy, investment, work organization, work relocation, and the like — environmentalists recognize that mov-

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ing from pollution abatement to source-reduction requires a presence inside the firm.

Even inner-ring suburbs, now suffering from the same low-wage sprawl that helped destroy the cities, have common cause with the cities against which they have so long defined their politics.

A new democratic politics, emerging at the local level and recognizing the heterogeneity of the new world, might first dedicate itself to bringing these people together on a high-wage, low-waste, metropolitan development strategy.

The core of this strategy is straightforward. Instead of using tax abatements and other giveaways to lure firms to our metropolitan cores, such incentives would be coupled with conditions on hiring, training, and compensation. Those that invested and hired and trained in certain areas would be rewarded for that investment; those that did not would not. Instead of using public monies to subsidize low-wage firms — as is now generally the case in movements to privatize government services — we would have “living wage” (and benefits) standards that guided all government purchases and contracts. Instead of simply encouraging the young and dislocated workers to “get smart” with additional education and training, we would establish regional labor market boards, sectoral training and employment consortia, regional “hiring halls” and job location assistance to forge more organic links between training and employment opportunities.

Efforts of this kind would naturally be allied with efforts to diversify the ownership base of the local economy, with supports directed not to attracting rootless capital but developing firms attached to that economy. Business development assistance would be directed to those investing and employing there. Smaller and start-up firms would be the targets of modernization assistance — from advice on best technology applications to intensive assistance in managerial skills, perhaps pooled across clusters of firms. And environmental costs, throughout, would be taken seriously both as a source of capital and employment opportunity. Projected energy savings (most cities still import most of their energy) from conservation and local sourcing programs could be used to capitalize the training and investment needed to realize them.

Of course places vary, and countless details of a regionally organized economic project would depend on location. But the common thread uniting the separate efforts would be a democratic economy, guided by constant discussion among citizens about the terms of their cooperation. The result would be regional economies with higher levels of advanced production, less pollution, more fairly distributed employment opportunities, better-paying jobs, and a revived tax base to reinvest in social and physical

infrastructure. We would roll back urban devastation, while declaring democracy to be both an intrinsic good and a new force of production.

Rebuilding the Civic Infrastructure

Again, for any of this to happen people must be organized. When it comes to norms on business, the need for organization is clear. A disorganized people will *always* be defeated by private business power, which can be expected to resist standards of accountability. But organization is also essential for economic and social administration, and for the process of alliance-building and shared deliberation about social problems.

For many social problems, the proper answer to the question “should we give this one to the state, or leave it to private markets” is a double negative; neither public hierarchy nor unregulated market exchange is sufficient to generate the right outcome. That the market fails to respect social norms, again, is obvious; given the opportunity, firms will pollute, pay their workers as little as possible,

and otherwise run down social standards. But it should be equally clear that the “all thumbs, no fingers” state commonly lacks the political capacity to specify reasonable standards, the monitoring and enforcement capacities to make standards stick, or the local knowledge to find the best means for achieving them. You just can’t get occupational safety and health unless workers know how to spot problems inside firms; you can’t get suitable intervention in industrial restructuring without the know-how of those involved; you can’t get good

education inside classrooms unless parents support what’s going on in them; you can’t get public safety without engaging the community, as well as the cops, in upholding standards of behavior. Sometimes organization is needed merely to supplement state capacity to monitor or enforce existing standards. Sometimes it’s needed to define and help solve problems that everyone knows are important but that government cannot legislate away. Either way, citizen organization is a condition of effective governance.

The problem in America now is that popular organization is widely trashed and politically excluded. Within our formal political system, the power of organized money dominates organized groups. In addition, citizens are disabled from organizing themselves as workers, consumers, taxpayers, and shareholders in public and private wealth. So what to do?

As regards the formal political system, anyone committed to democracy should also be committed to the democratic financing of elections. Of course, in a capitalist system such as ours, any democratic financing commitment needs to be realistic. No matter how much private money we get out of politics and how much public money we get in, those with economic advantages will find

a way to exploit them. But it should certainly be possible to put forth a program of public funding for citizen action — ideally, perhaps, in the form of a universal citizen tax-credit or special voucher that enables citizens to subsidize their chosen candidates or parties. By permitting those with popular support but little money to mount credible candidacies, such a program would make office-holding more widely available and ensure greater equality of opportunity for political influence. And it would — combined perhaps with significant limits on campaign contributions — restore some measure of citizen confidence in government and electoral accountability.

With elections cleaned up in this way, moreover, the road would be cleared for other efforts to build the social infrastructure of democracy. Moving beyond the “live free or die” choice between public hierarchies and private markets, democrats should be encouraging the state to convene and staff the private deliberations and deals needed to solve social problems. Instead of simply revving up environmental regulations or scaling back on their enforcement, local government might, for example, bring industry, environmental advocacy, and community and labor groups together, and say roughly “these are the general standards the voters have decided they want met; you figure out a way to meet them and get back to us with your proposal.” Or radical labor law reform could facilitate worker formation of “unions” — not only the sorts of organizations that go by that name now, but various kinds of independent worker organizations rooted in the economy. And those unions could be assigned a role in economic reconstruction — say, through their assistance in organizing regional labor market boards, sectoral training consortia, sectoral hiring halls for youth and displaced workers. Throughout, state purchasing power as well as other means could be used to encourage associative activity that is democratic, sufficiently inclusive of affected interests, and technically informed.

Such moves would produce a government much more genuinely “of the people” and administration and definition of social problems infinitely more “by the people.” The state would certainly not disappear, but its appropriate function as the privileged arena of popular deliberation about social ends, and articulator of social standards, would be more prominent than its increasingly delegitimized role as administrator of problems it lacks the capacity to solve.

Who, Then?

If the polls and common sense are to be believed, such a program could reach a huge political market. Still, it will need to be fought for. And that fight requires a political party — an encompassing political organization that exists to articulate programs and to advance them by winning elections.

Is that the Democratic Party? At the national level, at least anytime soon, we seriously doubt it. National Democratic Party lead-

ership is almost wholly business-dominated. And for most middle-class liberal Democratic supporters, the thought of turning power over to citizens is horrifying — a world of right-wing talk radio and regressive state initiatives. For both types of activists and controllers, a program like this would require a jump out of their skins.

In truth, however, we cannot hope to influence national leadership anytime soon, and don’t need to wait on it to get started. At the local level, it is possible to imagine political formations, operating both inside and outside the Democratic Party, that could arise almost overnight to do the necessary work. These would be value-centered organizations (parties) rather than candidate-centered ones. And they would operate first in the netherworld of non-partisan races and local partisan ones that do not draw the big money or where party label is less important or obscure. Building those organizations — as, for example, the New Party is now doing in several cities — is a natural project for progressives, postponing any final adjudication about relations with national Democrats.

Imagine, then, New Party or New Party-like formations that help catalyze efforts at comprehensive alternative economic development and radical democratic reform — paving the road as they

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move along it — and recruit average citizens to run for office (often nonpartisan office) on the basis of their commitment to that program. Imagine that these separate efforts share intellectual and financial resources — for program development, training, media — and think of themselves as united, at least in their effort to bring this kind of alternative to the American people. Imagine this alternative working in major metropolitan areas, through a combustible mix of strange allies on a more moral economy, facilitated by state action, and changes in the rules of the game to assist both. Imagine this done in 10 states with major electoral populations — states in which capture of the major metropolitan areas would give powerful weight in state governments themselves. Let your imagination go from there, or just imagine much better-run and democratic metropolitan regions and states. Either way it’s a win.

Possibility and Necessity

This sort of strategy is available to us. In 1994, the Democrats were going down to defeat, citizen-led initiatives on radical campaign finance reform along the lines mentioned passed in Montana, Oregon, and Missouri, and missed only narrowly in Colorado; in Massachusetts, the threat of such an initiative forced the legislature to its most radical campaign finance reform in history. Today, substantial efforts at comprehensive alternative economic development, also along the lines indicated, are underway in places as diverse as Brooklyn, Detroit, Milwaukee, Chicago, Oregon, and San Jose — with real discussion across issues, real norms imposed on the regional economy, real deals being cut between former antagonists. And, running on a program of democratic reform and alternative development, over the past two years the heavily urban-based New Party has won 80 out of 100 sub-Congressional electoral races — electing New Party or New Party Democrats to school boards, administrative authorities, city councils, county boards, and state legislatures.

If you would like to know more about the New Party you can contact them at 227 West 40th Street, Suite 1303, New York, NY 10018. Phone: (212) 302-5053; Fax: (212) 302 5344; E-mail: newparty@newparty.org; <http://www.newparty.org/>. They have just published the first edition of their newsletter.

Given the availability of this strategy, and the absence of anything more than a “let’s keep them from beating up on us too badly” response to Republican schemes, there is — not to put too fine a point on it — a good case for not standing by and watching. It is possible to imagine a path forward to a more democratic country, a path starting right where we are now. To move along it, though, ordinary citizens need to get up, greet others also rising, and . . . *start to walk together*.

This essay is reprinted with the kind permission of the *Boston Review*.

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In the following short essay W.B. Allen comments on Cohen and Rogers, and more broadly on the direction the New Party intends to take.

The Age Of Final Policy: Heirs Of Antifederalists Lose Faith In Their Fathers

by W.B. Allen

American politics forgives apostasy with remarkable indulgence. Marxists and communists frequently learned this, as they lurched from bombast to submission over a sixty year period. Consistently misreading the culture of American politics and often speaking as aliens rather than peers, they nonetheless benefited from recognition as “fellow citizens.” Throughout this period, and continuing still, progressives have built upon foundations of antifederalism — fears of privilege and organized wealth — without ever understanding why the Antifederalists considered theirs the true conception of democracy. In the most recent agonizings about American political culture these heirs of Antifederalists (not the only heirs by any means) reflect sustained commitment to antifederalist democracy but have made no advance in understanding its genuine aims. For that reason, now and ever since the inception of the New Deal, they have pursued the one substantive goal which is entirely incompatible with antifederalism — namely, the conceit that there is some one policy or one set of policies which constitute salvation for democracy. Their goal is to end, finally, the one objective of all true antifederalism, which is to assure a cultural and political agility which enables the people, consistent with their own presumptions, to follow such policies as they wish, from age to age. Antifederalism built upon opposition to notions of final policy, politically administered, while contemporary progressives seek still the illusion of a final policy that resolves social and political contradictions.

Gordon Lloyd and I captured the Antifederalists suspicions about final policies bottomed on governmental authority in our essay “In Support of Capitalism and Democracy:”

The Antifederalists were deeply suspicious of economic and political privilege... They warned that the unlimited power over trade bestowed on Congress by the new Constitution would lead to the establishment of monopolies which, in turn, would give undue influence in government to the ambitious few... They asserted that the prosperity of the nation was best served when a large number of buyers and sellers pursued their self-interest in a market place free from the regulation and intrusion of a central government... Such power not only distorted allocation decisions and enervated the enterprising spirit, it also provided government with revenue for pursuing the aristocratic goals of international respect and grandeur...

[And] they admitted that in the nature of things certain inequalities were unavoidable. However, necessary inequalities were acceptable if they were compensated for by the elimination of unnecessary social inequality spilling over into the political realm which would, in turn, become the foundation for legitimizing both political and social inequality as natural...]

These core Antifederalist views were tied to broader social and political views in which the Antifederalists defended, essentially, an open-ended democratic process as the only just form of political association. An open-ended political process is precisely one in which the conceits of legislators (of the founding variety) do not over-ride the preferences of ordinary citizens. Every attempt at final policy (that is, foreclosing future democratic deliberation), by contrast, is predicated on a legislative presumption that popular will shall always prove inadequate to the necessities of justice.

The inverse is not applicable: there is no presumption that popular will shall always be generous and just. Rather, it is acknowledged that from place to place and time to time popular will shall

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waver, subject to generous and stingy influences. Antifederalists argued, however, that only a government organized so as to sustain the legitimate authority of that will could be just. Consequently, the practical effect, into the indefinite future that Antifederalists had to expect, was a dynamic politics that would merit variously praise as just and inclusive and criticism as unjust and exclusive.

This conception of political life poses a severe challenge to contemporary progressives, who suffer deeply by the thought of unborn millions who will not enjoy assured benefits beyond the “mere” benefit of a just government. In that respect they are much oriented as the founders were, although the founders spoke of unborn posterity as peers rather than as beneficiaries and were content to leave to them the policy determinations which would govern their specific enjoyments.

The Politics of Doers and Sufferers

The progressives’ dilemma emerged first in the most famous phrase from John F. Kennedy’s inaugural address: Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.