

G-20: Globalization Goes Bankrupt

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The rage of the disposed is fracturing the country, dividing it into camps that are unmoored from the political mainstream. Movements are building on the ends of the political spectrum that have lost faith in the mechanisms of democratic change. You can't blame them. But unless we on the left move quickly, this rage will be captured by a virulent and racist right wing, one that seeks a disturbing proto-fascism.

Every day counts. Every deferral of protest hurts. We should, if we have the time and the ability, make our way to Pittsburgh for the meeting of the G-20 this week rather than do what the power elite is hoping we will do—stay home. Complacency comes at a horrible price.

"The leaders of the G-20 are meeting to try and salvage their power and money after everything that has gone wrong," said Benedicto Martinez Orozco, co-president of the Mexican Frente Autentico del Trabajo (FAT), who is in Pittsburgh for the protests. "This is what this meeting is about."

The draconian security measures put in place to silence dissent in Pittsburgh are disproportionate to any actual security concern. They are a response not to a real threat, but to the fear gripping the established centers of power.

The power elite grasps, even if we do not, the massive fraud and theft being undertaken to save a criminal class on Wall Street and international speculators of the kinds who were executed in other periods of human history. They know the awful cost this plundering of state treasuries will impose on workers, who will become a permanent underclass. And they also know that once this is clear to the rest of us, rebellion will no longer be a foreign concept.

The delegates to the G-20, the gathering of the world's wealthiest nations, will consequently be protected by a National Guard combat battalion, recently returned from Iraq. The battalion will shut down the area around the city center, man checkpoints and patrol the streets in combat gear. Pittsburgh has augmented the city's police force of 1,000 with an additional 3,000 officers. Helicopters have begun to buzz gatherings in city parks, buses driven to Pittsburgh to provide food to protesters have been impounded, activists have been detained, and permits to camp in the city parks have been denied. Web sites belonging to resistance groups have been hacked and trashed, and many groups suspect that they have been infiltrated and that their phones and e-mail accounts are being monitored.

Larry Holmes, an organizer from New York City, stood outside a tent encampment on land owned by the Monumental Baptist Church in the city's Hill District. He is one of the leaders of the Bail Out the People Movement. Holmes, a longtime labor activist, on Sunday led a

march on the convention center by unemployed people calling for jobs. He will coordinate more protests during the week.

“It is de facto martial law,” he said, “and the real effort to subvert the work of those protesting has yet to begin. But voting only gets you so far. There are often not many choices in an election. When you build democratic movements around the war or unemployment you get a more authentic expression of democracy. It is more organic. It makes a difference. History has taught us this.”

Our global economy, like our political system, has been hijacked by a tiny oligarchy, composed mostly of wealthy white men who serve corporations.

They have pledged or raised a staggering \$18 trillion, looted largely from state treasuries, to prop up banks and other financial institutions that engaged in suicidal acts of speculation and ruined the world economy.

They have formulated trade deals so corporations can speculate across borders with currency, food and natural resources even as, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, 1.02 billion people on the planet struggle with hunger. Globalization has obliterated the ability of many poor countries to protect food staples such as corn, rice, beans and wheat with subsidies or taxes on imported staples. The abolishment of these protections has permitted the giant mechanized farms to wipe out tens of millions of small farmers—2 million in Mexico alone—bankrupting many and driving them off their land. Those who could once feed themselves can no longer find enough food, and the wealthiest governments use institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization like pit bulls to establish economic supremacy. There is little that most governments seem able to do to fight back.

But the game is up. The utopian dreams of globalization have been exposed as a sham. Force is all the elite have left.

We are living through one of civilization’s great seismic reversals. The ideology of globalization, like all utopias that are sold as inevitable and irreversible, has become a farce. The power elite, perplexed and confused, cling to the disastrous principles of globalization and its outdated language to mask the political and economic vacuum before us. The absurd idea that the marketplace alone should determine economic and political constructs caused the crisis. It led the G-20 to sacrifice other areas of human importance—from working conditions, to taxation, to child labor, to hunger, to health and pollution—on the altar of free trade. It left the world’s poor worse off and the United States with the largest deficits in human history. Globalization has become an excuse to ignore the mess. It has left a mediocre elite desperately trying to save a system that cannot be saved and, more important, trying to save itself. “Speculation,” then-President Jacques Chirac of France once warned, “is the AIDS of our economies.” We have reached the terminal stage.

“Each of Globalization’s strengths has somehow turned out to have an opposing meaning,” John Ralston Saul wrote in “The Collapse of Globalism.” “The lowering of national residency requirements for corporations has morphed into a tool for massive tax evasion. The idea of a global economic system mysteriously made local poverty seem unreal, even normal. The decline of the middle class—the very basis of democracy—seemed to be just one of those things that happen, unfortunate but inevitable. That the working class and the lower middle

class, even parts of the middle class, could only survive with more than one job per person seemed to be expected punishment for not keeping up. The contrast between unprecedented bonuses for mere managers at the top and the four-job families below them seemed inevitable in a globalized world. For two decades an elite consensus insisted that unsustainable third-world debts could not be put aside in a sort of bad debt reserve without betraying Globalism's essential principles and moral obligations, which included an unwavering respect for the sanctity of international contracts. It took the same people about two weeks to abandon sanctity and propose bad debt banks for their own far larger debts in 2009."

The institutions that once provided alternative sources of power, including the press, government, agencies of religion, universities and labor unions, have proved morally bankrupt. They no longer provide a space for voices of moral autonomy. No one will save us now but ourselves.

"The best thing that happened to the Establishment is the election of a black president," Holmes said. "It will contain people for a given period of time, but time is running out. Suppose something else happens? Suppose another straw breaks? What happens when there is a credit card crisis or a collapse in commercial real estate? The financial system is very, very fragile. The legs are being kicked out from underneath it."

"Obama is in trouble," Holmes went on. "The economic crisis is a structural crisis. The recovery is only a recovery for Wall Street. It can't be sustained, and Obama will be blamed for it. He is doing everything Wall Street demands. But this will be a dead end. It is a prescription for disaster, not only for Obama but the Democratic Party. It is only groups like ours that provide hope. If labor unions will get off their ass and stop focusing on narrow legislation for their members, if they will go back to being social unions that embrace broad causes, we have a chance of effecting change. If this does not happen it will be a right-wing disaster."

Chris Hedges' latest book is "Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle." His weekly column appears Mondays on Truthdig.

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