

“The Terrarium Economy” Amidst an Accelerating Concentration of Wealth. The Rise of Corporate Governance

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We, the vast majority of humanity, and especially the citizens of the United States, live in a terrarium economy. The accelerating concentration of wealth over the past decades, and the resulting control of agriculture, manufacturing, distribution, information and communication by a handful of multinational corporations means that the ultimate decisions of consequence are made by powers beyond our ken and our control.

The terrarium is a self-contained ecosystem within a glass bottle. It may maintain the humidity of the tropics conducive to the growth of ferns and mosses, or orchids and heliconia. It may serve as the home for rare frogs and salamanders, exquisite butterflies and jeweled beetles, or tropical fish and shrimp. It may contain within it a food chain ranging from algae up to iguanas.

But the terrarium’s fragile ecosystem is completely under the control of invisible powers far beyond the ken of the flora and fauna within its glass walls. The denizens of the delicate rain forest have no idea that invisible hands determine the temperature and the moisture, and provide the fertilizer and nutrients essential for their survival. If the masters outside of the terrarium fail to keep up that routine, for even a few days, no one will survive.

Today, citizens find themselves in a similar fix. They inhabit an economy that appears to be functional, that keeps them fed and with a roof over their head, if they are lucky, and the economy makes sense to them on a daily basis.

[The terrarium economy](#) from [Emanuel Pastreich](#) on [Vimeo](#).

This seemingly complete ecosystem includes the homeless, the middle class, lawyers and doctors, and even the wealthy with assets of up to 50 million dollars. Those little rich men

take great pride that they are somehow the equivalents of Jeff Bezos or Bill Gates, and so they lord over the little people.

The inequities and contradictions of human society are replicated perfectly in this terrarium economy. It has its rich and its poor, its good guys and its bad guys.

But that economy and that political process is enclosed in a hermetically sealed bottle. It is a closed system into which the billionaires pour a bit of financial liquidity here, a bit of inflation there, a bit of positive news when appropriate, and some ominous signs when required.

The owners of the terrarium can manipulate and modify the system without the consent, or even the knowledge, of its citizens. Citizens, by contrast, like Amazon tree frogs, are blithely unaware of their dependency on this contrived hidden hand.

If, suddenly, petroleum and liquid natural gas stop flowing, if, suddenly, corn, wheat, and rice stop traversing the waves in container ships, if, suddenly, accurate information stops circulating in the newspapers, and, if, following a Gresham's law for the aristocracy, reliable currency dries up, we will be helpless and doomed.

The vast majority will be unable to ascertain the source of the sudden changes and will no doubt attack the politicians and CEOs who occupy the upper stories of the food chain within the visible economy, the economy of the terrarium.

The powers that hide behind comical politicians, however, will watch the show with detached amusement.

Digital Share Cropping

The residents of the terrarium pay a hidden price in every transaction and in every interaction. They are subject to digital share cropping whereby the invisible master gets a pound of flesh every time money, products, or services are exchanged. The launch of digital currencies will make that prison into a living hell.

The distributors in the supply chain, the retailers, the marketing and advertising firms, the manufacturers of unnecessary plastic and paper wrappings, the hospitals, the insurance companies, the lawyers, and of course the private equity firms that lurk behind them, all of them, and more, take their generous bite from the breakfast cereal that you buy at the supermarket, or the gallon of gas that you put in your automobile.

You are free to work, but the hidden hand decides what kinds of jobs are available, what the salaries will be, and what the requirements for employment are.

The banks provide endless loans to massive corporations outside of the terrarium, much of which is never paid back, but they show extreme reticence to offer even paltry loans to us.

Intellectuals of all shapes and sizes crawl around in the terrarium proclaiming that this is the best of all possible worlds and praising the market economy, and the genius entrepreneurs who have risen to the top.

The public intellectuals get extra grubs from the masters for their arguments in best seller books that the only solutions are money solutions, and not cooperatives, or barter systems,

that offer citizens economic independence.

Democracy and the Republic

The terrarium economy became possible because the term “democracy” was purposely misinterpreted.

We were told over and over that there are “democracies” and that they are superior, but we almost never heard the word “republic.” Yet if a democracy, a government system in which citizens vote for candidates running for public office, loses the administrative infrastructure of a republic, it will become like a tiger without bones.

If there is no functional constitution that regulates the republic, defines the administration of the system, and describes the means for resolving conflicts, then democratic processes like voting for candidates, or passing laws, degenerate into superficial rituals.

A republic is essential to protect the minority against the wrath of a deluded and misguided majority. That threat is all too real. The desires of the citizens are easily fanned, and misdirected, by the few and will not correspond with the long-term interests of the citizens.

These days, that is the norm.

A smaller group of those informed on policy, and on the state of the world, people who are committed to ethical principles, must serve as a regulator, to assure that the system functions ethically.

After all, the truth is by its very nature undemocratic.

A great ocean liner can include thousands of devices maintained by hundreds of sailors. Yet the compass is a unique device that only a limited number of people can create and employ effectively.

If we are voting on the truth, or if we think that the truth is a matter of opinion, then there is no longer a republic, and therefore no democracy either. That, sadly, is precisely the current situation within our terrarium.

The terrarium economy resulted from the transfer of massive parts of the economy, and of the administration of daily life, to the control of accountable third parties. An abominable fourth branch of government, beyond the executive, the legislative and the judicial, slouches towards the desert.

The rise of Corporate governance

That rotten twisted branch, covered in horrific thorns, is neither government as defined by the constitution, nor the small stores, family farms, and local manufacturing that made up traditional society.

A new player, described nowhere in the Constitution, has weaseled its way in through back door to play the central role in governance.

Who might that be? None other than massive, multinational corporations and their evil twins, investment banks. Both are awash in free money printed up for their use by the

prostrate Federal Reserve.

They have seized control of much of the economy, and of much of daily life, over the past 40 years in a gradual process invisible to the naked eye. They have lulled us to sleep with a culture of narcissism and indulgence that keeps citizens from focusing on the covert takeover.

These corporations generously sprinkled money on their intellectuals to cook up arguments justifying this new tyranny.

Those experts argued that “the private sector” could handle the tasks of government more efficiently than the wasteful federal government of the United States of America.

But when they said, “Let the private sector do what the bumbling bureaucrats can’t,” what they really meant was, “Let us take authority away from a poorly run and demoralized government and give it to a totalitarian and cynical new government.”

Corporations are government, in every sense of the word, but are far more dangerous in that they have no constitutions to define their administration, they are opaque and unaccountable, and they are run for the benefit of stockholders; not for their employees, and most certainly not for the public.

The experts, conjured up by the rich, ran seminars, wrote books, and set up graduate programs in government in which they argued that government must be run efficiently like corporations. They have privatized huge chunks of government and created habits and policies within the fragments of government that remain that are modelled on the ruthless administration of corporations.

The truth is that the alternative to unaccountable and unresponsive government (something guaranteed to appear in due course in any system) is not private corporations run for profit, but rather local cooperatives run by citizens in a participatory manner.

Corporations and billionaires seized control of journalism and employed donations to universities and research institutes that rendered those sources of authority as their play toys.

The result was a politics of the self, of the incident, and of the scandal that occluded discussion of the republic, of the constitution, or of due process.

The Constitution is treated today as just one more voice in the wilderness, a quiet voice of reason drowned out by the screams and howls of pundits, politicians and plutocrats. Government no longer has the foundations of legitimacy provided by the Constitution is no longer the foundation that gives government legitimacy.

Rather than engaging in a serious discussion about how decisions are made in a republic, those in search of a more just society have been dragged down into endless debates on cultural identity, complaining about injustice without taking action.

There are plenty of voices out there that limn real conspiracies with varied degrees of accuracy. In most cases, however, the forces putting forth that information also are run in a totalitarian manner.

Sadly, the opposition to the cancerous combination of government and corporations that runs the United States does not invite you to join local organizational meetings, does not offer you a role to play in pushing for change, and is not interested in your opinion.

The result?

The United States has lost its compass and is increasingly jerked back and forth by obscure battles between tyrannical monsters. The “conservatives” on the one side denounce the COVID-19 fraud, but never demand that the assets of the rich who created it be seized.

These conservatives lead the citizen back to ineffective and deeply compromised figures like Donald Trump or Rand Paul. The “progressives,” on the other hand, take the destruction of the ecosystem seriously, criticize the ruthless domination of corporations, but are silent on the 9.11 fraud and the COVID-19 scam—the two catastrophic attacks that broke the back of our republic. The progressives are happy to feed us slop about cultural identity that obscures real class warfare.

In effect, those conservatives and progressives are but colorful fauna of the terrarium, amusing and intriguing, but incapable of effecting anything on the outside.

The population has dumbed down. Minds have been destroyed by newspapers and schools whose agendas are set by billionaires. Many citizens are no longer capable of even conceiving of world outside of the terrarium.

On the inside, the walls of the terrarium reflect back to its inhabitant his or her own image.

We have no choice but to seize the largest stones in the terrarium and smash those glass walls until they shatter and freedom is possible again. Then, and only then, will we polish and arrange those fragments to form a more perfect republic for all.

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