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From Capitalism to Egalitarianism, the Missing Link: Hierarchy, not Money, is the Root of All Evil.

Apologists for capitalism maintain that the brutal system of exploitation is consistent with human nature. Nothing could be further from the truth.

“I believe, that as of 40,000 years ago, with the advent of anatomically modern humans who continued to live in small groups and had not yet domesticated plants and animals, it is very likely that all human societies practiced egalitarian behavior and that most of the time they did so very successfully.”¹ These are the words of the anthropologist, Christopher Boehm. After an extensive study of 49 non literate societies he concluded that humans consciously maintain egalitarianism by “constraining and controlling upstarts”. These societies resist domination by ensuring that decisions are made by all, in the interest of all.

We propose that evidence demonstrates not only does human nature detest oppressive, authoritative systems but that human nature demands an egalitarian social order. Information provided here refutes the commonly held misconception that there is an “inherited primate predisposition for hierarchical social and authoritarian political systems.”² This fallacy is continually promoted by those who seek to maintain the present inequities of the system.

Christopher Boehm documented that in egalitarian societies members exert “intentional behavior that decisively suppressed hierarchical relations among adults as political actors.” Some strategies employed are: rebuking a chief for wanting all the power for himself, shouting down a leading hunter who becomes overassertive, ridiculing one who tries to assert authority, sanctioning for being greedy, dishonest, unreliable, or a liar. The ultimate forms of sanctions imposed are exile and execution.

¹ Boehm, Christopher, “Egalitarian Behavior and Reverse Dominance Hierarchy, *Current Anthropology* , Vol. 34, No.3, June 1993

² Somit A, and Peterson S., “The failure of democratic nation building ideology meets evolution.”, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Pg.23

In egalitarian societies a leader is simply “primus inter pares”, first among equals, and chiefs cannot command others. Boehm continues “differences between individuals are only permitted..., insofar as they work for the common good.” Such equality can only persist “as long as followers remain vigilantly egalitarian because they understand the nature of domination”; the “innate tendencies of individuals to dominate their peers”. The egalitarian ethos, the dislike of being dominated, is the cause of societies preventing the development of authoritative or coercive leadership. “If an egalitarian ethos is present, abusive leadership is by definition, deviant.” Boehm concludes ...”it is a war of the great majority who are willing to settle for equality against the occasional dominator who is not... Upstarts who think they can get away with it.”

When the upstarts do manage to get away with it, dominance hierarchy develops, and brings all forms of dominance: class, tribal, national, religious, sexist, racist...are commonly known. Hierarchy represents a failure of human nature’s preferred social structure, where decision making is in the hands of the vast majority of equals.

The anthropologist, Douglas P. Fry comments, “ Social stratification and resulting positions of leadership open the door for a plethora of injustices and cruelties that come with warfare, slavery, and other types of exploitation by unchecked power wielders. In centralized polities, the power of some people to dominate and control others increases many times over what is possible at the level of bands and tribes.”³

Once dominance hierarchy is established, the elite create systems “of dominance with influence and communication going down-rarely going up.”⁴, writes the social psychologist, Zimbardo. Those on top “are in command of the major hierarchies and organizations of modern society”.⁵ Those on top, the tiny minority, wield centralized power and are responsible for creating our living and working conditions. This hierarchy “involves authorization, permission from the higher authority, usually cloaked in the mantle of ideology, or a big lie”,⁶ which is reinforced by violence.

Clearly there are contradictory propensities in human nature: to dominate and to resist domination. These human propensities shape social psychology. The

³ Fry, Douglas, “The Human Potential for Peace”, 2006, Pg 113

⁴ Zimbardo, Philip, “The Lucifer Effect”, , 2007, pg. 11

⁵ Mills, C. Wright, “The Power Elite”, pg3-4

⁶ Zimbardo, Philip, “The Lucifer Effect” pg 213

evolutionary biologist, Stephen Jay Gould, agrees. “Both sides of this dichotomy represent our common, evolved, humanity; which, ultimately, shall we choose?”⁷

This duality, ambivalence, or contradiction is part of human nature. Cognizance of this fact is of great importance. For those in the progressive movement, preventing hierarchy must be seen as a crucial task. Every building block of our organizations should contain safeguards against hierarchical relationships. As we create, clubs, unions, political movements and political parties, it is important to maintain our stance as vigilant egalitarians. However correct we believe the politics are, the potential for corruption by dominance hierarchy will always exist. Zimbardo argues that “it is correct to rebel against unjust authority.”⁸ It is profoundly more human to rebel against authoritarian systems.

“We must learn that passively to accept an unjust system is to cooperate with that system and thereby to become a participant in its evil” Martin Luther King, Jr.

“Who would be free, themselves must strike the first blow”. Frederick Douglass

“The free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”
Karl Marx

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⁷ Gould, Stephen Jay, “The Essential Stephen Jay Gould”, 2006, PG 615

⁸ Zimbardo, Philip, “the Lucifer Effect”, pg 454