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James F. Welles

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Abstract

For lack of effective, credible criticism in the slap-happy world of the media, power does indeed tend to corrupt (as Lord John Acton noted 1) because stupidity is a corruption of learning. For some reason, the power to command frequently causes a failure to learn—with power being a substitute for wisdom. Worse yet, the errors of leaders are less likely to be corrected than those made followers lower on the power-ladder, so, as often noted, failure comes from the top down. Ideally, the responsibility of those in power is to govern as reasonably as possible to the mutual advantage of all. To accomplish this end, a leader has best be well informed, heed available information, be open-minded without being empty-headed 2 and judge all effects of policies objectively. However, it is unusual for someone transfixed by his own power to be open-minded enough to perceive that a pet policy is having unintended, negative effects, responsible enough to admit it and wise enough to replace it with a better one. 3 The principle of cognitive dissonance applied to politics would show that there is a constant push from way below and outside the powergrid to reform the system and force those in power above to live up to the ideals they routinely espouse but rarely honor and apply. Usually, such pushes are blunted by mid-level, career-minded, promotion-seeking mismanagers.

Index terms—

James F. Welles ??h.D. or lack of effective, credible criticism in the slaphappy world of the media, p ower d oes indeed tend to corrupt (as Lord John Acton noted 1) because stupidity is a corruption of learning. For some reason, the power to command frequently causes a failure to learn—with power being a substitute for wisdom. Worse yet, the errors of leaders are less likely to be corrected than those made followers l ower on the power-ladder, so, as often noted, failure comes from the top down.

Ideally, the responsibility of those in power is to govern as reasonably as possible to the mutual advantage of all. To accomplish this end , a leader has best be well informed, heed available information, be open-minded without being empty-headed 2 and judge all effects of policies objectively. However, it is unusual for someone transfixed by his own power to be openminded enough to perceive that a pet policy is having unintended, negative effects, responsible enough to admit it and wise enough to replace it with a better one. 3 The principle of cognitive dissonance applied to politics would show that there is a constant push from way below and outside the powergrid to reform the system and force those in power above to live up to the ideals they routinely esp ouse but rarely honor and apply. Usually, such pushes are blunted by mid-level, career-minded, promotion-seeking mi smanagers.

Generally, mismanagement is promoted when creeds and rituals of government become so rigid as to inhibit adaptive responses. Reduced to essence, politics is a battle between the "Ins" and "Outs" over loaves and fishes 4 -a civil war by peaceful means, with reform coming from below and revolution induced when the power-system fails bybeing too rigid to adjust to necessity. In such holy wars of politics, priests crusade and campaign, thrive and perish, 5 but even when victorious over political opponents, officials may find their reforms and policies lost to bureaucratic inertia. It often appears that the machine of government is designed to produce friction, constructed to break down and operated for those who service it. Society is there for the governmentnot the other way around to feed it and clean up after it, to nurse it through illness and to support it when it goes out to cut its teeth on its equally corrupt, problematic neighbors.

46 The sad fact of political life is that misgovernment may strengthen a regime temporarily. 6 Gaining and
47 retaining power is what government is all about, so the "Ins" tend to make decisions which they perceive to be
48 to their own short-term advantage albeit perhaps to the long-term detriment of all. The idea that F power
49 is not an end in itself but a means to help people is a myth political priests use to mask their short-term, self-
50 serving machinations from the long suffering public, or, as Spinoza almost said, authority is based on stupidity:
51 7 e.g., Congress as government by deadlock. 8 We have carried the Constitutional principle of "Checks and
52 Balances" to the excess of gridlock 9 because officials lack theoretically possible if oxymoronic "Political virtue",
53 which places the national good above individual gain of self-serving politicians. This happened in the Gilded Age of the
54 late 19th century and is happening again in the early 21st. 10 When the government takes control of a society,
55 it may be building itself up, but it also builds up a lot of aggravation and resentment. As agencies expand in
56 size, productivity is reduced to the point that one might think waste has become an incentive. This is the point
57 at which bureaucracies cease to solve problems and become problems themselves. While there is nothing quite
58 so stupid and aggravating in public life as officials perversely persistent in pursuing a policy clearly in everyone
59 else's worst interest, but the commitment of politicians to their favorite projects is a motivating force unto itself
60 and makes government immune to reason and restraint. The short-term gain of power through corruption makes
61 a mismanaged agency less ruly and more an end in itself. This may make the "Ins" temporarily stronger, but it
62 also intensifies long-term resentment against them on the part of the "Outs".

63 The craftier politicians have found that, while stupidity may lead to unpopularity, popularity may lead to
64 stupidity and that this is the most effective way to succeed in politics. If a politician really wants to be stupid,
65 as so many seem to, he need not be too circumspect—all he has to do is find a popular cause. The more popular
66 the cause, the less critical people will be about policies directed toward achieving the end: the more people want
67 something, the less they will be concerned about how they get it. This gives stupidity full rein to flourish in the
68 absence of skeptical criticism. Only after officials have persisted for a long time in contrived foolishness to the
69 point that their actions become unpopular and finally unacceptable will a government be forced to do something
70 intelligent/right. This is basically what happened with D. Justice is simply the matter of punishing the guilty
71 and freeing the innocent (Plutarch. Pompey. 10) but judges and lawyers then get clever about "Guilt" and
72 "Innocence". 11 e. A ruling by the Supreme Court in 2010 against Citizens United was denounced by former
73 President Jimmy Carter as "...one of the stupidest rulings ever..." for rolling back restrictions on corporate
74 spending in federal election campaigns. (Carter, Former Pres. J. Sept. 14, 2011.)

75 American involvement in Vietnam and to Soviet dominated puppet states in eastern Europe.

76 In addition, politicians are liars. They have to be, as lying is a way to get support from others. This is not to
77 say they lie all the time. Sometimes events fall into place so a politician can actually tell the truth, but (s)he has to be
78 ready to lie at a moment's notice and be good at it. 12 For others, the trick is not to find whom to believe but to
79 be able to spot the better liar from the others. Why anyone heeds campaign promises is beyond the comprehensibility
80 on even of an expert in stupidity.

81 Generally in political organizations, the leader is a popular headman—the first among unequals. Aside from the
82 fact that the wrong people often win office because anyone with self-respect cannot conduct a winning campaign,
83 11 as a central reference point, 12 an elected leader may play a largely symbolic role in that, most of the time,
84 people know what to do anyway. 13 Oddly enough, in our modern societies, traditional patterns of political
85 behavior have been strengthened by the emphasis of the role of the "Leading man" as a symbol to worship
86 rather than as a doer to emulate.

87 The American public, for example, forms lasting impressions from a President's incidental gestures as
88 representative of the people but pays relatively little attention to what he does as chief of state. 14 More
89 and more, when demagogic leaders are chosen, they attain office because of their popular appeal rather than
90 the validity or value of their publically stated policies. 15 As Harrison Otis noted before the 1800 presidential
91 election, Jefferson's approach was "A very sweet smelling incense which flattery offers to vanity and folly at
92 the shrine of falsehood". 16 Now, this trend has reached the point that administrators now govern as if in a
93 perpetual campaign 17 in which their actions are secondary to their slick, buttoned-down images, which in turn
94 were by 1960 spot marketed commercially as perfectly wrapped products like so much toothpaste or soap. 18
95 The Madison Avenue mantra for a synthetic image was that any political personality could be packaged without
96 reference to any serious issues. 19 Richard Nixon at one point explained how much preparation was required to
97 be spontaneous and, in addition, seem sincere. 20 Sincerity aside, hairy heads seem to be the decisive factor
98 in winning Presidential elections: Voters go for good heads of hair. 21 All this is rendered irrelevant because
99 votes are tabulated by the National Election Pool—a secretive private organization accountable only to the four
100 unnamed corporations which run it. 22 If we skip relevance for effectiveness, we note—as did the Romans 23—that
101 negative ads and personal attacks on opponents work in terms of winning if not informing the public who is the
102 best candidate.

103 Actually, the leader really does not lead anymore. He is just there, like an elected monarch, giving a general
104 tone to society and providing a focal point for the reverence of those who for some reason believe in the system.
105 He also provides the media with an object of attention so that hundreds of photographers have someone to focus
106 on and scores of reporters have someone to quote off the record. If any leading must be done while governing by
107 image, 24 there is least friction if the people lead the headman where they want to go while the most effective
108 leaders are those who can make people want to do what is necessary and make that appear to be right. Of

109 course, stupidity thrives at best in the gray area between the appearance and actuality of necessity posing as
110 desirable. d Beyond appearance, hard work and ambition trump (pun) a sense of justice and altruism as means to
111 political success, 25 but even more important are perspicacity, intuition and will power. 26 In terms of political
112 organization, republics are particularly stupid, due to the temptation of representatives to give people what they
113 want rather than what they need. All leaders are in danger of being told by their underlings what they want to
114 hear rather than what they need to know, 27 and then they turn around do the same to the electorate, the truth
115 usually getting mushed up in a campaign 28 culture of corruption. 29 Further, once elected, "Public servants" are
116 seldom in a position even to consider what ought to be done 30 except in the context of getting re-elected. The
117 inherent danger of gratifying the people in general is usually somewhat offset by the influence of special interest
118 groups, 31 whose campaign contributions are a principle source of corruption e among elected officials and make
119 many of their acts, if and when they are not revealed, appear to be as stupid to their constituents in the short
120 run as they may prove to be embarrassing to the legislators in the long-run if they are. Not only does power tend
121 to corrupt, but it tends to be eminently corruptible.

122 Franklin Roosevelt warned us of the deleterious influence of the special interest groups of his day 32 (presumably
123 the securities and stock market gamblers) and spent millions bailing us out of the Depression. Eisenhower did
124 likewise when he fingered the military-industrial complex in his farewell address 33 but to no practical effect:
125 the "Bombs-R-Us" boys still got their nice little war in the '60's to the tune of billions. In the 1970's, it was
126 the oil companies which shocked us with the price of gas. In the '80's, it was the savings and loan debacle; in
127 the '90's, the internet bubble burst. Early in the 21 st century, it was greedy bankers who led the country into a
128 trillion dollar dumper through the unregulated Renewal Sale and Repurchase (RE-PO) market which brought the
129 country to ruin if not 34 rack-another financial disaster Who will do it next is anyone's guess but the government
130 will presumably go through the motions of regulating the financial industry via the FDIC, SEC, OCC, CFPB,
131 FSO and CFTC-lumpable together as the FUCUscrabble around after the fact and then spend quadrillions
132 saving the country without upsetting-indeed, while bailing out-those responsible for creating the mess. To put
133 this back into a general context, in 2013, 11,000 lobbyists spent \$3.2 billion in Washington 35 all to get the best
134 government money can buy. It seems superfluous to add that the big, rich interests are organized, and poor,
135 uneducated marginalized people are not. 36 All they can do is vote according to their perceptions and reactions
136 to the slickest ad campaign.

137 Government s not only administer stupid laws ineffectively to address problems which may or may not exist
138 37 but also provide a professional judiciary to apply them unjustly. There was a time when people were judged
139 by trials of combat, fire and water f . 38 These were all based on a belief that trials were moral confrontations.
140 If a person was judged favorably, it was because he was right relative to another individual or neutral nature.
141 Those who deride such judicial mechanisms might take a good look at our modern jousting list-the court of law
142 and where hired wits do battle 39 to determine the morality (guilt or innocence) of the person or system on trial.
143 The hired guns-the lawyers-use all the tricks in and out of the book to win "Their" case. The jury determines
144 who has the best lawyer, 40 and at best, judges preside to see that the game is played fairly while occasionally
145 obstructing any real quest for the truth. 41 At worst , judges may 42 intervene to interpret formal rules according
146 to the principle that the game should be fair but not too fair. Only slightly better is the fact that many cases
147 are settled to the advantage of the reigning powers, which, put the other way, means were are condemned to
148 injustice. 43 In all seats of political power, be they administrative, legislative or judicial, ceremony shapes the
149 ways in which personalities interact to solve and create real and imaginary problems. The preoccupation with
150 most political officials is with the rituals of government. As long as these assure the likelihood that those in p
151 ower will retain their positions, the rituals are honored as sacred. The impact of decisions reached under such
152 circumstances is usually secondary to the desirability of main-taining decorum and giving speakers a chance to
153 pronounce a few slogans for public consumption. Stability depends not on the validity of pronouncements but
154 whether or not they satisfy the people. The regulation of society is considered secondary f. The idea here was
155 that a bound up guilty person would be rejected by water and float. This was challenged, in 1662, in Connecticut
156 by a skeptic who opined that anyone in such a condition would float and offered himself as a test. Unfortunately
157 for his cause and himself he sank. (Tomlinson. 34.)

158 and is indirectly affected only when conservatives become convinced the status quo must be further preserved
159 and protected or reformers can convince political hacks it really is in their own best interests to apply some
160 common ideal to reality. As many have noted, if you are not a liberal in your twenties, you have no heart; if
161 you are a liberal in your forties, you have no head. 44 As always, the biggest threat to the state is the man
162 who thinks for himself 45 and, ironically, lives up to the rules because-cognitive dissonance aside-at the first
163 sign of intellectual integrity, the state totters because then everyone else is shown up as a shallow faker. In this
164 context, the Puritans never tired of denouncing the "Civil" man-one who was a good citizen, obeyed the laws,
165 discharges his social obligations and never injures others. Such a paragon of virtue was continually reminded by
166 the preacher that he was on his way to hell. 46 To put it another way, there is no one so infuriating as one who
167 lives up to the rules. Don't we all cheat a bit? Isn't everyone a bit dirty? And if someone does not or is not,
168 how is he treated? Well, I know of one case like that, and he was crucified.

169 Of course, there are always calls for civic reform. When, on Dec. 27, 2007, Senator Barack Obama hyped
170 America's call for "A new politics", he was refreshingly stale. It was precisely what Fred Eissler, (who?) local
171 director of the Santa Barbara Sierra Club thirty-eight years earlier offered after an offshore oil spill. 47 Fred did

172 not get his new politics, and we got partisanship as usual and scandals at the VA and IRS. I suppose every forty
173 years or so we will get a call for if not the actuality of a new politics, so expect another circa 2050. Meanwhile, we
174 will suffer along with the hypocrisy, cynicism and egotism of self-serving elites espousing the rhetoric of democrac
175 y 48 or slamming it as being as stupid, uneducated and selfish as the democratic people are. 49 However p olitics
176 are practiced in America, we have two unsolvable problems which d oom us to failure while defining who we
177 are: 1.) Special interest groupse.g., corp orations, the NRA and Zionists; 2.) our debilitating if not suicidal
178 commitment to prolonged deficit spending. There is no way any American government can deal intelligently with
179 these problems any more than Catholic Mexico can curb its rampant overpopulation.

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191 [/it-wasnt-a-mortgage-recessi on-afterall-so-why-d ont-we-feel better? AOL (2010)] ‘/it-wasnt-a-mortgage-

192 recessi on-afterall-so-why-d ont-we-feel better?’. *AOL* 2010 02/ 26. Mar. 2. 2010.

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197 *observed, B Spinoza , Ca . 1675. 1963. New York: A Public Appeal. (Jewish House-holders) in The Rise of*

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204 *group of selfi sh men who would clip the wings of the American eagle to feather their own nests, F Roosevelt*

205 *. (Great image!)*

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211 [Redl ()] *Group emotion and leadership*, F Redl . 1942. p. .

212 [Diamond et al. ()] ‘If you vote for Goldwater, we will bomb North Vietnam’. I voted for Goldwater, and , sure

213 enough, we bombed North Vietnam. Candidates are all a bunch of liars. The say whatever i s necessary to

214 get nominated; then they say whatever is necessary to get elected; then they do whatever is necessary to get

215 re-elected. If anyone i s dumb enough to think otherwise, read on. Further, my one, individual vote never

216 would have made a difference anyway, so I do not waste my time picking and choosing among self’. E Diamond

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219 *. 416. As a personal aside, when explaining to acquaintances why I never vote, I cite my experience with the*

220 *election in 1964. I was told. serving liars to cast a vote that d oes not matter anyway)*

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