

PM: Injustice of Justices

By Polly Mann

A friend gave me a subscription to *The Nation* magazine, which I hadn't read it in years. Now that it comes to me I usually find at least one article that provides a new slant on some of the ills of capitalism. One such article, "Am I a Radical?" by James Gustave Speth, appeared in the February 16, 2015 issue. Speth is the former dean of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies and the author of the book *The Bridge at the Edge of the World: Capitalism, the Environment, and Crossing from Crisis to Sustainability* (Yale University Press, 2008). He is currently the co-chair of the Democracy Collaborative's Next System Project and a co-founder of the New Economy Coalition. He believes that the changes needed for this country to address the major crises of today can only occur with a total dismantlement of the system as we know it. I can certainly agree that the current system isn't working. In addition to environmental issues, it breeds injustices in other areas.

It would be wise to consider where many of the injustices come from—where they have ultimately been codified into law. For this, another article in the same issue of *The Nation* was useful. "How the Roberts Supreme Court Has Strengthened the Powerful and Screwed Everyone Else," discusses the influence of Chief Justice John Roberts on the court. The writers of the article, Nan Aron, William Yeomans and Michelle D. Schwartz, make this observation:

"The sad irony is that, rather than serve its traditional role as the institution of government where those shut out of the political process can find a voice, the Court has used its rulings to strengthen the already deafening voices of the wealthy and powerful."

Justice Roberts was appointed by President George W. Bush in 2005. I am reminded that such appointments have some of the greatest impact of any of a president's decisions, and will probably last long after the president has left office.

The article pointed out the following issues upon which the Roberts court has, thus far, left its mark.

Campaign finance: Corporations and unions are allowed to spend unlimited sums.

Rights of the accused: These have been greatly eroded.



Blind justice and scales with an eagle spreading its wings above. Relief sculpture in bronze. Part of the UAW Michigan Labor Legacy Monument (Detroit 2003) by David Barr and Sergio DeGuisti.

Photo: Mary Beaudoin

Corporate rights: The Roberts Supreme Court has imbued corporations with the right to unlimited political spending.

Access to justice: The Court has allowed companies to take away the rights to a trial by jury and has made it more difficult for victims of corporate misdeeds to attain justice.

Workers' rights: Its decisions have limited free speech and limited collective bargaining.

Voting rights: It has “unleashed a torrent of state voter-suppression measures that target African-Americans, Latinos, the poor, and the young.”

Reproductive rights: The religious rights of employers trump women’s rights to comprehensive health-insurance coverage, including cost of contraceptives.

Remedies for racial discrimination: The Roberts Court has prohibited voluntary efforts to integrate schools; made it more difficult for universities to consider race in admissions policies; and prohibited a police department from using methods to guarantee racial equity.

Guns: It decided that the Second Amendment to the Constitution guarantees the right to gun ownership.

Religion: Believers are favored over nonbelievers and upheld in government meetings. The Roberts Court decided that commercial enterprises can opt out of any law (except tax laws) they judge incompatible with their religious beliefs.

The Nation readers are reminded that Justice Roberts could be in office another 20 years. Two other like-minded justices—Scalia and Kennedy (Kennedy leans to the right, but occasionally disagrees with Roberts)—will most likely be replaced by the next president.

It’s important to keep that in mind as you go to vote for president.

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