

## THE TIME OF THE SPLIT SOCIETIES

John Dunn



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Sooner or later, all countries face the issue of loyalty. Some states manage to maintain stability in society, others don't. And the issue of prosperity is not the main one, it does not contribute to the strengthening of citizens' loyalty to their state. Rather, the opposite is true. Prosperity often contributes to the disruption of loyalty. A prospering and active population does not need to demonstrate loyalty to the state in order to achieve its practical goals.

Gradually the allegiance to the

state as a civil feeling gets weaker, and can actually become a problem to society under the conditions of an economic and political crisis. And that's what is happening today in Western societies. The economic crisis has become a certain test in prospering countries for the allegiance of citizens to their own state. Unfortunately, they have not passed this test. These citizens, having faced the economic crisis, have begun to demonstrate their true lack of allegiance to their own states. **And this lack of allegiance was shown at the very moment when the states needed it the most.** It should be noted that at present almost all Western countries are in a similar situation. The specific situation in each country depends on the country's history, on its economic, political and ideological legacy.

But if you look at the countries that are in greatest fiscal trouble, if you look at Greece, for example, you can see that the level of conflict between the Greek government and a quite substantial body of its citizens is quite acute. In essence, the confrontation of the citizens of this country is quite similar to the conflict that happened in Arab countries like Tunisia and Egypt. Obviously, it

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is not as bad in Greece as it was in Egypt or in Tunisia, but it is essentially the same sort of strain.

**The reason for detecting common traits in the societies of the Arab East and the European Union should be looked for in the recent influence of the neo-liberal ideology,** which has destroyed a balanced political system that once existed in those countries. And nowadays most of the citizens of European countries do not support the state, which do not protect their interests. As a result, they do not want to protect the system of distribution of public wealth, which seemingly acts in their interests.

There are two approaches to stabilizing the situation in Europe. **The first one** is exclusively economic. Its adherents believe that an effectively organized economy is bound to provide sufficient wealth to a large number of citizens, and they, in their turn, will protect the system from small groups whose interests are not taken into account by this economy. **The second one** is political. Its adherents perceive the economy as a source of wealth for the whole society. As a result, each member of the society should use the wealth the society produces. From the economic standpoint, attempts at implementing this political project have failed, but it has always been well-received by the popu-

lation, and in this sense it is still popular.

Whatever project is chosen by the existing authorities, they will

need to be much more cautious at the distribution of wealth, rights, and the obligations among citizens. **It is useless demanding allegiance from the population, if the majority of people does not benefit in any way from the existing policy of wealth distribution,** and especially when such an approach has been practiced for many decades. It should be clear to the authorities that something definitely needs to be changed in such a policy of distribution.

However, the traditional principles of raising people's allegiance to the state have remained the same for many decades. They are based on mutual interests, on habits, on the belief in statehood, which is indoctrinated, with various degrees of success, in the family, at schools, and in the army. All are elements of one whole, but they don't form a solid and stable structure, which is capable of ensuring perpetual allegiance of the citizens towards the existing regime. Nowadays many issues are centered around the educational sector.

The state should somehow exert control over what the growing generation studies at high schools and at universities. It is important to know what future they are facing. It seems that in most countries the most prestigious jobs go to university graduates, and one can enter a university only if he comes from a rich family. If this is the case, then it means that the authorities should not count on the support of the population when it comes to maintaining the system based on an unequal distribution of wealth.

It is also dangerous when the elite detaches itself from the main mass of the population. It is not so important whether certain citizens get prestigious jobs, study at renowned universities, and get treatment at respected hospitals, but it is important that the elite, which can use all these advantages, is acknowledged as an important part of society possessing the skills that are very important and that increase the economic and social prestige of its representatives. Doctors are popular in Western society, while politicians, on the contrary, very rarely enjoy public support. Scientists, lawyers, and supreme court judges are also popular. There are quite many popular groups. However, twenty years ago people had a much firmer belief that joint efforts of prestigious and non-prestigious social groups would be capable of changing the life of the whole society for the better. Today, this faith has been considerably weakened, yet it is exactly today's societies that need this faith the most in order to cope with a host of new challenges and threats. ■

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## COLLUSION BETWEEN COMMUNISTS AND SUPER-RICH



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The most important factor holding Chinese society together today is coercion. Yes, it helps that the Communist Party has engineered rapid growth, but the dramatic increase in social disturbances – perhaps as many as 230,000 protests in 2009 – indicates that Chinese society is nonetheless fundamentally unstable. Analysts say that the Chinese fear chaos and that this fear will effectively keep the Party in power. Yet if that were the case, why are so many disturbances occurring today?

Beijing's overreaction to calls for the Jasmine Revolution points to the fact that senior leaders considered their rule to be shaky. Secure leaders would not have called out the dogs, beat up reporters, or shut down the internet.

For Beijing, the lesson of the uprisings and revolts in the Middle East is obvious. **The Party cannot continue to treat the Chinese people as if they are children, incapable of governing themselves.**

The Communist Party is running out of potential partners within society. It is now relying on a coalition of corrupt cadres and the super-rich. That essentially excludes other elements in society, especially the peasants, workers, and the majority of the middle class.

The Chinese middle class is becoming politically aware of itself, as it has

in every other modern society. The Party has made as many inroads into the middle class as it possibly can.

South Korea in the 1980s and Taiwan in the 1990s are cases in point that demonstrate what happens when the middle class becomes politically active. And what resulted from that? Governments have had to change to meet the public's demands for meaningful political participation. Unfortunately, China's Communist Party will not yield to such demands at this point.

The Party's only fallback position is nationalism. That is especially dangerous for China's neighbours, because Beijing has territorial designs both on the lands of others and on international waters. Nationalism is the only way it can reach out to disaffected elements within society.

The Party's reliance on the corrupt and the rich has eroded its base of support within society, and, short of playing the nationalism card by causing trouble with its neighbours, it is no longer possible for Beijing's senior leaders to build a new consensus within Chinese society.

The Party needs to build a new basis of support quickly, but, apart from some empty rhetoric and small gestures, there is no indication that it is actually trying to do so. ■