

Excerpts from *Rebalancing Society*
radical renewal beyond left, right, and center
(Berrett-Koehler, 2015)

With the collapse of the communist regimes of Eastern Europe, Western pundits declared that capitalism had triumphed. They were dead wrong. Balance triumphed. But a failure to understand this has been carrying many countries out of balance ever since.

There's a tea party going on all right, for big business, under the slogan: "No taxation with representation." Adam Smith's invisible hand in the marketplace has become a visible claw in the U.S. Congress. So why not complete the American Revolution, in nations and the globe, by establishing renewed checks on dysfunctional activities in the private sector, for the sake of balance across the sectors.

I am a citizen concerned about the trends that I see around me: degradation of the environment, demise of democracy, denigration of ourselves. Economies of free enterprise have become societies of free enterprises. This has to change, ultimately for the sake of balance, immediately for the sake of survival.

The prevailing dogma centers on an "economic man" for whom greed is good, property is sacred, markets are sufficient, and governments are suspect. As one view of human society, this makes some sense; as the view of human society, this is nonsense. It is time to look forward socially, instead of backward economically.

America did not invent democracy so much as give impetus to a particularly

individualistic form of it. De Tocqueville identified the genius of America as “self-interest rightly understood.” Now the country is dominated by self-interest fatefully misunderstood.

*These days, big business is considered the “one best way” to manage everything: grow relentlessly, measure pervasively, plan strategically, lead narcissistically. **As corporations have become “persons” in the law, persons have become “resources” in the corporations. Organizations function best as communities of human beings, not collection of human resources.***

*We have to leave behind the linear politics of left, right, and center, to appreciate that a **healthy society balances a public sector of respected governments, a private sector of responsible businesses, and a plural sector of robust communities.***

*Radical renewal can proceed in three phases: 1) **immediate reversals**, through social movements that challenge practices that can no longer be tolerated; 2) **widespread regeneration**, as groups of concerned citizens develop more constructive practices; and 3) **consequential reforms**, brought in by responsive governments and responsible businesses.*

*This process won't start in the public sector: too many governments are overwhelmed if not compromised. And businesses won't solve our problems: **corporate social responsibility will not compensate for corporate social irresponsibility.** “They” won't do it. **Only we can do it**, not as the passive objects of exploitation, but as the active subjects of change.*

Tom Paine wrote in his pamphlet that “We have it in our power to begin the world over again.” He was right in 1776. Can we be right again now? Can we afford not to be?