

## Internalizing "What Cynicism Costs Us"

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Thursday, May 27, 2010

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Contending with decaying morale and cynicism is difficult. It's taken me almost a week to be able to read this article and reflect on it enough to absorb it. But I'm there now. It's been a good process. Here's what I've got:

*Those of us whose passionate engagement helped elect Obama haven't stepped up to help define our national debates.*

via [The Tyee – What Cynicism Costs Us](#).

It's easy to be disappointed in people in whom you inject high expectations. But democracy is a muscle. It must be exercised widely or it atrophies. I've complained about people subcontracting their democracy to "professionals" and while "the people" helped elect this Obama construct, going back to passive business as usual is the fertilizer for cynicism.

*Too many Americans, convinced that the greediest must always run our country, have responded by retreating into private life, whether the admittedly difficult challenges of economical survival, or the distractions and comforts we embrace as modest respite and recompense. Meanwhile, we bury whatever qualms they may have about our national direction, hoping against hope that someone will take care of things.*

The lure of private life is strong. It is compelling because it is rich with no shortage of sound arguments. Looking for "someone" to fix things, however, is no tonic.

Yet, I expected more after Obama got elected. He had an email list of 3 million, or 1% of Americans who actively helped him win the White House. I fully expected a machinery to mobilize those people to compel Congress to step up and lead and not weasel healthcare into corporate welfare. That mobilization which was effective during the election didn't materialize in the last year or so.

And while I didn't expect the grassroots fire of [Bolivarian Circles](#) a decade ago to erupt in the rust belt of the USA, I did expect something more than a thank you for the electoral win, now come back at mid-terms to help hold Congress.

*When we look at the larger issues, like global climate change, why so many people in America are hungry, or how to fix a greed-driven health care system or America's strip-mined economy, we throw up our hands in frustration. Taking them on just seems too daunting, and our chances of success too elusive. It seems wiser and more practical to narrow our horizons.*

I think about monarch butterflies, ants, bees and those awesome birds who fly inches from each other in tight formations that alter, twist and turn every second. They all work with hive minds and can

accomplish great feats and beauties.

Human beings? If we had the potential to cooperate to even a fraction of the hive species, what could we accomplish?

But notice my assumption here, that we don't have that potential. I/we can't accept that assumption.

*I'd like to propose a clear-eyed idealism, which recognizes that these are bad times but refuses to accept that the bad times are inevitable.*

I welcome this. But it takes strength to grab hold of this. When the cynicism beats us down, we need to gather our people together, enrich our communities and our souls, go dancing and build each other up.

Sliding into private life closes our living rooms off from the salons that they ought to be.

So in dealing with my cynicism, a core pledge can be to embrace my people and find ways to encourage each other. We're all in this together...unless we embrace some kind of despaired free agent status.

And when that happens, we have really lost.