

GET UP, STAND UP

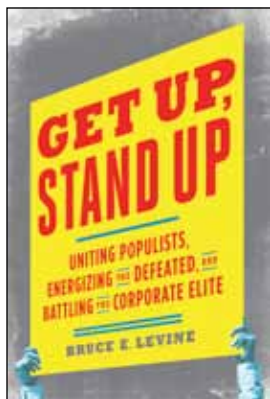
UNITING POPULISTS,
ENERGIZING THE DEFEATED, AND
BATTLING THE CORPORATE ELITE

BRUCE E. LEVINE

Get Up, Stand Up

Uniting Populists, Energizing the Defeated, and Battling the Corporate Elite

Bruce E. Levine



- Pub Date April 2011
- \$17.95 US, \$19.95 CAN • Paper
- ISBN 9781603582988
- 6 x 9 • 256 pages
- Politics & Social Justice
- World Rights



Photo: Aaron Lichtenberg

Bruce E. Levine is the author of *Surviving America's Depression Epidemic and Commonsense Rebellion*. He is a regular contributor to the Huffington Post, *CounterPunch*, *AlterNet*, and *Z Magazine*, and his articles and interviews have been published in *Adbusters*, *The Ecologist*, *High Times*, and numerous other magazines. Dr. Levine, a practicing clinical psychologist often at odds with the mainstream of his profession, also gives talks and workshops. His website is brucelevine.net.

Polls show that the majority of Americans oppose recent US wars and Wall Street bailouts, yet most remain passive and appear resigned to powerlessness. In *Get Up, Stand Up*, Bruce Levine offers an original and convincing explanation for this passivity. Many Americans are deeply demoralized by decades of oppressive elitism, and they have lost confidence that genuine democracy is possible. Drawing on phenomena such as learned helplessness, the abuse syndrome, and other psychological principles and techniques for pacifying a population, Levine explains how major US institutions have created fatalism. When such fatalism and defeatism set in, truths about social and economic injustices are not enough to set people free.

However, the situation is not truly hopeless. History tells us that for democratic movements to get off the ground, individuals must recover self-respect, and a people must regain collective confidence that they can succeed at eliminating top-down controls. *Get Up, Stand Up* describes how we can recover dignity, confidence, and the energy to do battle. That achievement fills in the missing piece that, until now, has undermined so many efforts to energize genuine democracy.

Get Up, Stand Up details those strategies and tactics that oppressed peoples have successfully employed to gain power. We the People can unite, gain strength, wisely do battle, and wrest power away from the ruling corporate-government partnership (the "corporatocracy"). *Get Up, Stand Up* explains how.

Praise for *Get Up, Stand Up*:

"As you read Bruce Levine's rousing *Get Up, Stand Up*, inevitably you will be reminded of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, which served as a rallying cry for the colonialists to take action against their British rulers. Today, Levine argues, Americans are ruled by a tyrannical 'corporatocracy'—i.e. government by big business and for big business—and his analysis of why the American people remain so passive in the face of such tyranny is smart, lucid, and passionate. Readers will also find, in his proposals for how the 'people' today can stand up and 'do battle' with the corporatocracy, a stirring call for action that surely needs to be heard."

—Robert Whitaker, author of *Anatomy of an Epidemic* and *Mad in America*

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CHELSEA GREEN PUBLISHING
WHITE RIVER JUNCTION, VT

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Project Manager: Patricia Stone
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Cover Designer: Evan Gaffney

Printed in XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
First printing XXXX, 2011
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 11 12 13 14 15

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Chelsea Green Publishing Company
Post Office Box 428
White River Junction, VT 05001
(802) 295-6300
www.chelseagreen.com

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FOREWORD

(TK)

The People Divided Versus the Corporatocracy in Control

How many Americans believe that their voice matters in determining whether giant banks, insurance companies, and other “too-big-to-fail” corporations get bailed out? How many Americans older than twelve believe that they have any influence over a decision by the US government to invade another nation?

There are a slew of books and articles out there providing analyses of the profound problems of American democracy and offering recommendations aimed at improving matters. However, these analyses and recommendations routinely assume that Americans have sufficient personal energy to take action. Instead, what if many Americans have lost confidence that genuine democracy is possible? When such fatalism sets in, truths about economic injustices and lost liberties are no longer enough to set people free.

While a charismatic politician can still garner a large turnout of voters who are angry with whichever party is in power, the majority of Americans appear resigned to the idea that they have no power over institutions that rule their lives. At least that’s what I see. I was curious if what troubled me also was troubling others, so I wrote an article titled “Are Americans a Broken People?”^o It was republished on numerous Internet sites, and I read more than a thousand reaction comments^o (some of which are included in this book). I was swamped with e-mails and received several media interview requests to discuss the article, which had apparently touched a nerve among those who identify themselves as progressive, libertarian, or populist. They too wondered why so many Americans have remained passive in the face of attacks on their liberties and their economic well-being. Some of the questions that I first raised in that article and will answer more fully in this book are:

- Has “learned helplessness” taken hold for a great many Americans? Are many Americans locked into an abuse

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syndrome of sorts in which revelations about their victimization by a corporate-government partnership produce increased anesthetization rather than constructive action?

- What cultural forces have created a passive and discouraged US population? Have so-called right-wing and so-called progressive institutions both contributed to breaking people's resistance to domination?
- And most important, can anything be done to turn this demoralization and passivity around? Is it possible for people to rebuild their morale and forge the connections necessary to support a truly democratic populism that can take power away from elite control?

Elitism—be it rule by kings or corporations—is the opposite of genuine democracy. It is in the interest of those at the top of society to convince people below them that (1) democracy is merely about the right to vote; and (2) corporations and the wealthy elite are so powerful, any thought that “regular people” can achieve real power is naive. In genuine democracy and in real-deal populism, people not only believe that they have a right to self-government; they also have the individual strength and group cohesion necessary to take actions to eliminate top-down controls over their lives.

If people lose sight of what democracy really is, or if they lose hope of the possibility of attaining it, then they lose their energy to fight for it. The majority of us, unlike the elite, will always lack big money, so we depend on individual and collective energy to do battle. Without such energy, the elite will easily subdue us.

This book is, in large part, about regaining that energy. There exist solid strategies and time-tested tactics that people have long used to battle the elite, and these will be detailed. However, these strategies and tactics are not sufficient. For large-scale democratic movements to have enough energy to get off the ground, certain psychological and cultural building blocks are required. With these energizing building blocks, it then becomes realistic—and not naive—to believe that large numbers of people can

take the kind of actions that will produce genuine democracy. The belief that their actions can be effective provides energy to take actions, taking actions strengthens the faith, and an energizing cycle is created.

Instead of this energizing cycle, there appears now to be a de-energizing cycle in which decreasing belief in the chance for success results in decreasing actions, and decreasing actions results in even less hope that genuine democracy is possible.

Historian Lawrence Goodwyn has studied democratic movements and written extensively about the Populist Movement in the United States that occurred during the 1870s through the 1890s, what he calls “the largest democratic mass movement in American history.” Goodwyn concludes that democratic movements are initiated by people who are not resigned to the status quo or intimidated by established powers, and who have not allowed themselves to be “culturally organized to conform to established hierarchical forms.” Goodwyn° writes in *The Populist Moment*:

Democratic movements are initiated by people who have individually managed to attain a high level of personal political self-respect . . . In psychological terms, its appearance reflects the development within the movement of a new kind of collective self-confidence. **“Individual self-respect” and “collective self-confidence” constitute, then, the cultural building blocks of mass democratic politics.** [emphasis added]

Without *individual self-respect*, people do not believe that they are worthy of power or capable of utilizing power wisely, and they accept as their role being a subject of power. Without *collective self-confidence*, people do not believe they can succeed in wrestling away power from their rulers.

What today, culturally and psychologically, has destroyed individual self-respect and collective self-confidence? One goal of this book is to examine this question. The good news is that answers to it provide, within the ordinary daily events of people’s lives, a road map of opportunities to regain individual self-respect, collective self-confidence, and real power.

The elite who maintain a hold on power are few; even with the support of some non-elites who share an ideology of hierarchical control, this group is a small minority. Those of us who believe in genuine democracy—of, by, and for the people—far outnumber the elitists, but we are divided. The elite’s strategy of “divide and conquer” is one that routinely works, but not always. Their strategy fails when we recognize that the divides among us pale in significance compared with a common desire to have our fair share of power. And so this book is also about unifying people who oppose elite control so as to focus on our common desire for genuine democracy.

Is wrestling power away from the corporate-governmental partnership a naive fantasy? If too many people believe this—and it’s exactly what we’re schooled by the corporate elite to believe—then it will remain just a naive fantasy. If, instead, enough people unlearn powerlessness and unify forces, then we can battle and beat the corporate elite. Describing how this can be done is the goal of this book.

The Corporatocracy in Control

A corporate-government partnership that governs society is a *corporatocracy*. In direct democracy, the people directly rule. In a republic, people have power through representatives, who actually represent them. In a corporatocracy, while there are elections, the reality is corporations and the wealthy elite rule in a way to satisfy their own self-interest.

In elections in a corporatocracy, it’s in the interest of the governing class to maintain the *appearance* that the people have a say, so more than one candidate is offered up. It’s in the interest of corporations and the wealthy elite that the winning candidate is beholden to them, so they financially support both Democrats and Republicans. It’s in the interest of corporations and the wealthy elite that there are only two viable parties—this cuts down on costs. And it’s in the interest of these two parties that they are the only parties with a chance of winning.

In a corporatocracy, corporations and the wealthy elite directly and indirectly finance candidates, who are then indebted to them. It’s

common for these indebted government officials to appoint to key decision-making roles those friendly to corporations, including executives from these corporations. And it's routine for high-level government officials to be rewarded with high-paying industry positions when they exit government. It's common and routine for former government officials to be given high-paying lobbying jobs so as to use their relationships with current government officials to ensure that corporate interests will be taken care of.

There are revolving doors of employment in what are now commonly called *industrial complexes*. Most famously, the term *military-industrial complex* was coined by Dwight Eisenhower, who devoted his Farewell Address in 1961 to its "grave implications." There is also the "energy-industrial complex," the "agriculture-industrial complex," and—as many Americans recently discovered—the "financial-industrial complex," with one of the most well-publicized door revolvers being George W. Bush's last Treasury secretary, Henry Paulson, who had previously been CEO of Goldman Sachs. However, this is not just a Republican thing. Prior to becoming President Barack Obama's chief economic adviser, Lawrence° Summers in 2008 received \$5.2 million from hedge fund D. E. Shaw; and Obama's number two man at Treasury, Neal° Wolin, was previously an executive at the Hartford Financial Services Group. In 2010, *Mother Jones* magazine ("The Bankers on Obama's Team") listed nine other high-level members of the Obama administration who have been part of the corporate elite in the financial industry.

Owing to my involvement in mental health treatment reform, the industrial complex that I am most familiar with is the "pharmaceutical-industrial complex." Two high-profile politicians who have revolved between the doors of government and pharmaceutical corporations are Billy Tauzin and Mitch Daniels.

When in Congress, Billy° Tauzin, a Democrat turned Republican, played a key role in shepherding the Medicare prescription drug law into passage in ways that it would become a financial bonanza for Big Pharma. Tauzin fought hard—and won—the battle to ensure that the federal government would be prohibited from negotiating discounts with drug

companies. The law was signed by George W. Bush in December 2003. A few months later, Tauzin announced that he was retiring from Congress to take the job as director of Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA), a trade group representing giant pharmaceutical corporations. Through February 2010, Tauzin received an estimated annual salary of \$2 million as head of PhRMA, where he became, essentially, Big Pharma's leading lobbyist.

In 2010, the national media began to discuss the possibility of Mitch Daniels, governor of Indiana, becoming a future Republican candidate for president of the United States. Mitch Daniels is a former vice president at Eli Lilly and Company, the giant pharmaceutical corporation headquartered in Indiana and best known for its blockbuster psychiatric drugs Prozac and Zyprexa. Prior to his career at Eli Lilly, Daniels had been Indiana senator Richard Lugar's chief of staff and also chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Committee. Daniels moved on to Eli Lilly in 1990, ultimately becoming senior vice president for corporate strategy and policy, where he served until leaving the company in 2001. He then became director of management and budget under George W. Bush.

The Bush family, Eli Lilly, and Mitch Daniels^o go way back. After George Herbert Walker Bush left his CIA director post in 1977, and before becoming vice president under Ronald Reagan in 1980, he was on Eli Lilly's board of directors and lobbied hard on behalf of Big Pharma (for example, for special tax breaks for Eli Lilly and other pharmaceutical corporations). In 1991, then Eli Lilly executive Mitch Daniels co-chaired a fund-raiser that collected \$600,000 for the Bush-Quayle presidential campaign.

Along with being the director of management and budget in George W. Bush's administration, Daniels was also a member of the Homeland Security Advisory Council (as was Lilly's CEO, Sidney Taurel). In November 2002, *The New York Times* pointed at Lilly for tampering with the Homeland Security Act so as to include provisions aimed at protecting Eli Lilly and a few other big pharmaceutical corporations from lawsuits.

Eli Lilly received even more attention from the national media on January 15, 2009, when it pled guilty to charges that it had illegally

marketed its blockbuster antipsychotic drug Zyprexa for unapproved uses to children and the elderly (two populations especially vulnerable to its dangerous side effects). Former Lilly sales representative Robert Rudolph, one of the eight whistle-blowers in this case, wanted jail time for executives, arguing, "You have to remember, with Zyprexa people lost their lives." Lilly pled guilty to a misdemeanor charge and agreed to pay \$615 million to end the criminal investigation and approximately \$800 million to settle the civil case. CBS reporter Sharyl Attkisson commented, "Eli Lilly has pled guilty to marketing the sometimes dangerous drug Zyprexa in ways never proven safe or effective . . . Lilly has agreed to pay \$1.4 billion . . . Ironically, that's about as much as the company's Zyprexa sales in the first quarter last year."

While the mass media, at various times, has reported on each of the above details, the mass media does not connect the dots to reveal the corporatocracy. In fact mass° media is a major part of the corporatocracy: Much of it is owned by a handful of large corporations, and all of it is dependent on corporate advertising. Still, polls show that most people know government, corporations, and the wealthy elite work together to ensure their own self-interest, even if they don't know all the details of how.

The elites referred to in this book are those people who hold positions of authority in large corporations and in government and who have the power to directly or indirectly affect the lives of thousands or even millions of other people. Those running corporations answer to their board of directors instead of to their employees or citizens in general. Nearly all governmental officials are elected with the help of money from corporations and the wealthy, and all face daily influence from corporate lobbyists and other wealthy campaign donors.

The problem of the corporatocracy will not be solved by replacing the current crop of CEOs with kindhearted men and women. Many elites give generously to charity and believe that they are acting in society's best interest. The problem of rule by a corporatocracy is that it creates disproportionate power, the antithesis of democracy. Such disproportionate power is intoxicating, and so it's no surprise that elites fiercely protect their positions and the institutions and systems that enable their power.

The corporatocracy is not a monolith, not a uniform bloc. The profits of one corporation can reduce the profits of another, and the profits of an entire industry can affect the costs of another. So, as is the case among organized crime families, there is certainly infighting within the corporatocracy. However, members have retained an effective unity when it comes to maintaining a system that benefits them as a whole. But just as the corporatocracy has divided and conquered the rest of us, it is not impossible for the corporatocracy itself to be divided and conquered.

The People Divided

I will provide evidence in chapter 4 that the majority of Americans are actually populists, in the sense that they are anti-elitists who trust the American people's judgment more than the corporate-government alliance. I will also describe differences among populists. I believe it is possible that populists can overcome their divides and together battle against elite control, and I will offer suggestions as to how to create this unity.

The corporate media routinely divides Americans as "liberals," "conservatives," and "moderates," a useful division for the corporatocracy because no matter which of these groups is the current electoral winner, the corporatocracy retains power. In order to defeat the corporatocracy, it's more useful to divide people in terms of "elitism" and "anti-authoritarianism"; and in order to unite anti-authoritarians, it's important to understand the psychological differences among them.

One example of an anti-authoritarian movement that I am personally familiar with is the mental health treatment reform movement, which comprises people who identify themselves as "on the left," others who identify themselves as "libertarians," and still others who disdain any political labels. I can tell you from my nearly two decades of working with these reformers that they certainly have different political views, but they all share a distrust for Big Pharma, a contempt for pseudoscience, and a belief that people deserve truly informed choice with respect to treatment. Most of these reformers respect the late Erich Fromm, the leftist psychoanalyst, along with Thomas Szasz, the libertarian psychiatrist,

both passionate anti-authoritarians who have confronted mental health professionals for using dogma to coerce and control people.

Similarly, the education reform movement includes anti-authoritarians across the ideological spectrum, from libertarian educators such as John Taylor Gatto to left educators such as Alfie Kohn. While there are political differences among them, they agree that most standard schools are oppressive environments that more often encourage obeying orders, apathy, and dependence on authorities rather than nurturing curiosity and critical thinking.

Among anti-authoritarians, there are both the more “afflicted” and the more “comfortable,” and it’s important to understand their differing psychological realities in order to better unite them. This comfortable-afflicted continuum, at its most fundamental level, is based on the magnitude of frustration and other pains that one has in getting through the day. In our money-centric society, the capacity to pay bills significantly affects people’s level of comfort, but there are other important nonfinancial variables that can either mitigate or exacerbate pain. Pain is reduced by having a platform in which one’s voice can be heard by others; pain is increased when one feels completely voiceless, impotent, and powerless. Pain is reduced by having a meaningful job, even if it’s not lucrative; pain is increased when one is working *only* for a paycheck. Pain is reduced by having other people in one’s life who are joyful about one’s joy and sad about one’s sadness; pain is increased by isolation and an absence of caring. Pain is reduced by a feeling of connectedness with one’s locale and natural world; pain is increased when one feels completely alienated from one’s surroundings.

The afflicted are pained by some combination of their money worries, their employment, their unemployment, their isolation, and their alienation. In contrast, one is in the comfortable group if, all in all, the satisfactions of life outweigh the frustrations. One need not be financially well off to be in the comfortable group. It may be enough to have a platform, a meaningful job, and/or a non-alienating locale.

At different times in my life, I have been at different points on the afflicted-comfortable continuum. I have been overwhelmed by the pains

of money worries, a stupid job, an alienating environment, and isolation. But I also know what it feels like to not have these pains. And I have come to understand how my level of pain about everyday life affects my receptivity to ideas, my energy level, and my capacity to take action.

Among “comfortable anti-authoritarians,” many may know that there are millions of Americans working mindless jobs in order to hold on to their health insurance, or hustling two low-wage jobs to pay college loans, rent, and a car payment, or who may be unable to find even a poorly paying, mindless job and are instead helplessly watching eviction or foreclosure and bankruptcy close in on them. Many comfortable anti-authoritarians may intellectually understand the plight of the afflicted, but unless they have been part of that afflicted class—and remember what it feels like—they may not be able to fully empathize and respect the afflicted’s emotional state. One major symptom of this lack of empathy and respect is the assumption that passive people are politically inert because they are ignorant; for example, that they lack knowledge of how they are being victimized. This assumption of ignorance as the cause of passivity is a great source of resentment for the afflicted, and this resentment is a great source of disunity.

I don’t presume to know what everybody in the afflicted class needs, but I can tell you what would have engaged me when I was a member. I certainly didn’t need lectures or other easy ego-tripping advice on what I should do. From the comfortable, I would have liked to hear some recognition that human beings often become passive not because they are ignorant, stupid, lazy, or immature but because they are overwhelmed by their pain, and their primary goal is to shut down or divert themselves in order to function at all. So when I found myself watching too much stupid television to divert myself from the pain of my life, I *knew* that watching stupid television was destructive for me. People *know* that alcohol, drugs, gambling, and other shutdowns, escapes, and diversion are not healthy; but they also know that without these shutdowns and diversions, their pain can be so overwhelming that they feel suicidal, homicidal, or psychotic. Comfortable anti-authoritarians need to respect the reality of

the effects of overwhelming pain. The assumption that people's inactions are caused by ignorance sounds and smells elitist to many in the afflicted class who lack the energy to be engaged in any activism. Instead of lecturing to the afflicted, the comfortable might try respecting them and, if possible, sharing resources with them. Respect, resources, and anything that concretely reduces their level of pain is likely to be far more energizing than a scolding lecture.

Other divides among anti-authoritarians have caused disunity. It's natural for us to come to different conclusions as to the causes of passivity as well as to have different strategies for transforming it. Spirited debate is what democracy is all about. But when debate turns to mutual antipathy and divides anti-authoritarians, it plays into the hands of the elite. When advocates become so ego-attached to their analyses that they're unwilling to hear other explanations and other solutions, then they have forgotten the spirit of democracy. All of our experiences are limited, and so none of us has all the answers. The spirit of democracy is one of mutual respect and confidence that others can have truths and solutions that any one of us may not have yet considered.

Most of us understand the reality that we are governed by a corporatocracy, and for many of us it's a truth that triggers frustration and anger. Some of us are able to use that frustration and anger to energize constructive actions. However, there is a large group of anti-elitists who have been so worn down by decades of personal and political defeats, by financial struggles, by social isolation, and by daily interaction with impersonal and inhuman institutions that they no longer even feel the urge to act; for them, the truth of elitist control does not trigger resistance. Instead, their pain results in an ever-increasing withdrawal from the political sphere.

This is a different explanation for widespread political inaction by Americans than is routinely offered, and some activists struggling for democracy disagree. They insist that people are inactive because they are ignorant of what's going on, or that flawed organizations that should be channeling the desire for change are failing us. I am certainly in favor