

Collective Intelligence and Economic Fascism

Charles E. Smith Ph.D.

The future of humanity depends on our choice between Collective Intelligence and Economic Fascism.

The working definition of Collective Intelligence is groups of individuals doing things collectively that seem intelligent.

Thomas W. Malone, Director, MIT Center for Collective Intelligence

Economic Fascism is a system of governance, whether political or corporate, in which money is always more important than people. It is led by authorities with complete power forcibly suppressing opposition and criticism, and regimenting economic infrastructures and resources.

Charles E. Smith, Director, The Merlin Institute

In the past few years, I've worked and traveled in the United States, France, China, and elsewhere. The United States is Capitalist. France is Socialist. China is Communist. Each country has a prevailing myth – its own kind of God, determining how the people ultimately see things. I observed that the God of Capitalism is Money, the God of Socialism is Equality, and the God of Communism is the State.

I could see that ordinary people in any one of these countries were not particularly happier than people in any of the others. While nationally they all have economic, social, and political problems, all lay claim to the special virtues of their own way. Most people don't love their jobs, and their personal, familial and intimate relationships are equally as happy or dysfunctional as everywhere else. Money is a problem for all but a few.

Capitalism, Socialism, Communism and various religious practices offer systems for dealing these conditions while everywhere, electronics and media are distracting people with television, sports and other entertainments. Most people I see on the streets and working are walking around

their different countries with low levels of personal vitality, and many look like they wish they were somewhere else.

I recently read that the suicide rate for retired people in South Korea has quadrupled -- four times more people are killing themselves. The story was about a 65-year-old woman who went to the public square, swallowed pesticide and died. What had happened was that the government took away her pension because her son-in-law had just gotten a job.

As I read this, the words, "Economic Fascism" leapt into my mind. In a flash, I saw that nearly everywhere, and most of the time, the impact of money, power and position trump people's needs for security, festival and delight.

Economic Fascism is the underlying disease of our time. Just as smoking needed to be considered a disease before many people acted on it decisively, so it is with Economic Fascism. Most of us go around trying to do the right thing and trying to do a good job in the hope those general conditions will keep getting better. But the news continues to be upsetting and the tunnel seems to have no light at its end. Consider that the name of the tunnel is Economic Fascism in the guise of political, economic, and social systems with different names, all presenting themselves as doing people a favor.

Another example:

Frequent Fliers, Prepare to Pay More

The world's largest airlines have agreed to adopt a new standard for distributing airfare information that could significantly compromise the privacy of customers and allow carriers to charge travelers different prices for the same trip.... A majority of the group's 240 members, which include most American airlines though not Southwest, voted for the standard.... It seems clear that the standard... could also be used to present higher fares to, say, a business traveler who airlines determine could pay more because she travels between New York and Dallas every week. *New York Times Op Ed- March 4, 2013*

I looked up "Economic Fascism" on the internet and found Austin Cline's blog on the subject posted December 14, 2012 on About.com. He cites a sermon of Davidson Loehr's at his First UU Church of Austin, Texas, in which he described the principle characteristics of fascism and the ways in which he sees the United States adopting far too many of its features. Loehr cited fourteen "identifying characteristics of fascism" used in Dr. Lawrence Britt's essay "Fascism Anyone?" from *Free Inquiry* magazine, including:

Powerful and Continuing Nationalism -- Fascist regimes tend to make constant use of patriotic mottos, slogans, symbols, songs, and other paraphernalia. Flags are seen everywhere, as are flag symbols on clothing and in public displays.

Disdain for the Recognition of Human Rights -- Because of fear of enemies and the need for security, the people in fascist regimes are persuaded that human rights can be ignored in certain cases because of "need." The people tend to look the other way or even approve of torture, summary executions, assassinations, long incarcerations of prisoners, etc.

Identification of Enemies/Scapegoats as a Unifying Cause -- People are rallied into a unifying patriotic frenzy over the need to eliminate a perceived common threat or foe -- racial, ethnic or religious minorities, liberals, communists, socialists, terrorists, etc.

Supremacy of the Military -- Even when there are widespread domestic problems, the military is given a disproportionate amount of government funding, and the domestic agenda is neglected. Soldiers and military service are glamorized.

Controlled Mass Media -- Sometimes the media are directly controlled by the government, but in other cases, the media are indirectly controlled by government regulation, or sympathetic media spokespeople and executives. Censorship, especially in wartime, is very common.

Religion and Government are Intertwined -- Governments in fascist nations tend to use the most common religion in the nation as a tool to manipulate public opinion. Religious rhetoric and terminology is common from government leaders, even when the major tenets of the religion are diametrically opposed to the government's policies or actions.

Corporate Power is Protected -- The industrial and business aristocracy of a fascist nation is often who puts government leaders into power, creating a mutually beneficial business-government relationship and power elite.

Disdain for Intellectuals and the Arts -- Fascist nations tend to promote and tolerate open hostility to higher education, and academia. It is not uncommon for professors and academics to be censored or even arrested. Free expression in the arts is openly attacked, and governments often refuse to fund the arts.

Obsession with Crime and Punishment -- The police are given almost limitless power to enforce laws under fascist regimes. The people are often willing to overlook police abuses and even forego civil liberties in the name of patriotism. There is often a national police force with virtually unlimited power in fascist nations.

Loehr also quoted Vice President Wallace's 1944 comments on the nature of fascism and fascists:

Democracy, to crush fascism internally must..., develop the ability to keep people fully employed and at the same time balance the budget. It must put human beings first and dollars second. It must appeal to reason and decency and not to violence and deceit. We must not tolerate oppressive government or industrial oligarchy in the form of monopolies and cartels.... Another important caveat is the fact that many qualities of fascism can exist independently of it and in other political/economic systems.

Most of this evidence for Economic Fascism is present in the United States, France, and China. It occurs in democracies and tyrannies, socialist, communist and religious systems, in families, and really anywhere. It's always justified as necessary by authority figures and main stream media, and is reinforced with laws, police and government action. The demonization of any one system by the others is part of validating and reaffirming the virtues of one's own true belief.

The impact of Economic Fascism that I observe in many different corporations is:

Money is always more important than people, and loyalty is undermined.

Many people think only what they are paid to think.

Collaborative problem solving doesn't happen enough between hierarchical levels and between functions.

Control Freaks are promoted to high position with resulting rigid management of the most valued resources.

Ideology prevails over Inquiry and keeps anything new from happening.

Relevance is determined by linear measurement while human factors are minimized and results are weakened.

Peoples' vitality, energy and natural creativity are suppressed. They become bored.

Culture de-motivates.

Dramatically reduced quality and sales, with plant shutdowns from quality problems and other misunderstandings and miscommunication.

Lack of truth telling to avoid upsets and accommodate authorities produces misleading information.

Fundamental problems are not acknowledged, identified, investigated, or fixed.

The punch line is that Economic Fascism kills what it doesn't like and creates enormous resistance, whether explicit or covert. In contrast, Collective Intelligence requires a temporary suspension of beliefs, and calls for dialogue, inquiry, generous listening, openness, diversity of views and willingness to experience uncertainty longer than usual.

The Promise of Collective Intelligence is to create high performing and caring human workplaces, communities, political systems, and nations.

Research and Breakthrough Applications of Collective Intelligence promise to include:

- Non-ideologically based economic systems that would be able to learn positively from their experience and not unnecessarily distorted by historical beliefs.
- Levels of cooperation and co invention to enable migration of humans to other planets with new forms of effective and cooperative forms of social order and governance.
- Reduce the number and intensity of ethnic and national identity based conflicts.
- Political systems that reflect the best of Conservative and Liberal points of view.
- Innovation in large systems unsuppressed by the fact or character of hierarchy.
- Sensible balance between measurement driven and innovation driven concerns.
- Less conflict and war.
- Harmonious marriages and other forms of family organization.
- Effective systems and governance in generating individual responsibility.

The future of humanity depends on the choice between Collective Intelligence and Economic Fascism. Why now?

Founder of the Co-Intelligence Institute, Tom Atlee suggests that as complexity and crises increase more people and institutions are recognizing that our collective intelligence at every level, and especially in its wiser forms -- has tremendous potential to produce positive change and even turn major breakdowns and crises into evolutionary breakthroughs. He sees Collective Intelligence as a kind of Holy Grail of social change and creativity, and says, "If we better understand how to support, increase, and facilitate it, we will more effectively co-create a better world." *<http://www.co-intelligence.org/ConveningTheCIField.doc>*

British systems consultant John Caswell says, "Most organizations spend countless time and billions of dollars trying to solve the wrong problem."

Learning to value and use Collective Intelligence is the right problem.