

Efficient Oppressors

Human history is replete with class oppression. In an unequal society the natural tendency is for those of superior wealth or power to maintain supremacy. This often requires some form of oppression.

Persuasion is greater than force. Efficient oppression involves convincing the oppressed that they are not oppressed or that their wealth and welfare are improving. Less efficient oppression is more overt and involves the use of force or law or artificial legitimacy, but is all ultimately backed by force.

The efficient oppressor addresses the welfare of the oppressed, aiming and working to continually improve welfare and standards of living, at least in absolute terms. The aim of oppression is to maintain relative supremacy and therefore it is necessary to ensure that the rates of growth experienced by the oppressed pale in comparison to the rates of growth of the oppressors. However, it is important to at least maintain a positive growth rate for the oppressed.

When average growth rates are insufficiently high and rates of growth for the oppressed fall to negative levels, the risk of revolt rises. Moderately or temporary re-distributive policies can maintain the status quo which is preferable to regime change.

In the face of slow growth and high inequality, reluctance to adopt some re-distributive relief policies can lead to revolt and regression to oppression by force. This is inefficient.

The last decade is characterized precisely by slow growth and high inequality, conditions conducive to spontaneous revolt. Incidences of passive aggressive revolt and outright revolt have been rising. The ostensible catalysts appear unrelated, petrol taxes in France, extradition laws in Hong Kong, separatists in Catalunya, isolationism in the US and the rise of populists in Europe. The common thread is disenchantment with the status quo and the desire

for any kind of change.

The enemy without has often been a convenient distraction for the enemy within. Could it be that the absence of an enemy without, a nemesis, has created a vacuum inducing an enemy within? Could the demise of communism have allowed capitalism to outgrow itself and transform the efficient oppressor into an inefficient one? Might capitalism balanced with communism have had to maintain some limits or moderation and avoided the extreme conditions that have emerged? Given current conditions, what can be done to prevent escalation?