

## The Hypothetical (Assumed?) Relationship Between Power and Economic Suppression (ECONOCIDE)

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**Abstract:** Power is a phenomenon which becomes a reality of itself and for itself. Its purpose throughout history focussed on the subjugation of others and it has therefore come under intense scrutiny. The individual who is subjugated sacrifices a degree of freedom and becomes vulnerable, even if such an individual exercises voluntary choice with regard to losing this freedom. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights identifies certain inviolate human rights, stating that amongst others, everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. Despite the proliferation of a large number of treaties focussing on human rights, the abuse of power has resulted in atrocities. Approximately 174 million people have been murdered through democide during 1900-1987. Absolute power kills absolutely. Globalisation and internationalisation are fundamental forces which cannot be denied – it permits obvious benefits to large number of people, but conversely threatens life in its broadest sense. Society is manifesting diverse ills it is postulated that protracted civil disturbance and revolutions could isolate governments from its subjects. It is proposed that a much more subtle and refined methodology exists on a global front to subjugate people in an economic sense: economic suppression. It is further postulated that there is a possible relationship between the utilisation of power and economic suppression. History and its scrutiny would conceivably react very negatively towards economic suppression and its disastrous consequences, for which the term “econocide” is coined.

**Key words:** hypothetical, degree of freedom, human rights

### INTRODUCTION

Power, human rights and econocide: Human rights and power are fundamental to the consciousness of social thinkers econocide is a novel introduction (if only in nomenclature). This paper will attempt to explore the linkages and correlations between these concepts in essence illustrate that unrestrained power could result in extreme ramifications for those role players within power relationships.

#### POWER:

Lord Acton once declared:

Power corrupts - absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Furthermore, Disraeli declared in 1845 that power only has one duty, namely to secure the welfare of the people.

For centuries power has impacted deeply on human life in all its diverse facets.

**Galbraith<sup>[1]</sup> declares:** Few words are used so frequently with so little seeming need to reflect on their meaning as power so it has been for all the ages of man. In association with kingship and glory it was included in the ultimate scriptural accolade to the Supreme Being; millions still offer it every day. Bertrand Russell was led to the thought that power, along with glory, remains the highest

aspiration and the greatest reward of humankind.

Power is not a neutral entity. It is a phenomenon, which in its ultimate manifestation, is of a magnitude beyond description, both in cause and effect. Power does not function in a vacuum, rather, like water, it infiltrates every available space if not functionally curtailed, expands proportionately to dominate all matter within the sphere of its control. In this sense, power succeeds in exiting the realm of an end to a means becomes a tangible reality of itself, for itself in itself.

Throughout the centuries and across all societies, the exercise of power by people in order to dominate or subjugate others, has been a basic and perpetual characteristic of human existence. Those people or groups who are subjugated through the exercise of power, often perceive power along a continuum, from constraining and humiliating, through to life threatening or even to the termination of life itself. Conversely, those individuals or groups who exercise power, often stand in an uneasy relationship to the concept. Therefore, in essence, power and its utilisation is a highly problematical feature of human societies<sup>[2]</sup>.

Per definition, power is a dynamic concept, yet it remains an entity that does not rest easy with the great majority of people. Conceivably, this is a function of the unavailability of power to the masses, as people aspire to

and desire power, but remain unfulfilled in the achievement thereof. Therefore, a negative perceptual paradigm of the concept is acquired. Liberal thinkers have tended to abhor power and its manifestation. It remains an indisputable fact that the existence of power and its gross effect on humanity cannot be ignored. Power is an issue that requires intense and prolonged analysis and investigation, as perceived by John F. Kennedy:

The men who create power make an indispensable contribution to the nation's greatness. But the men who question power make a contribution just as indispensable. Especially when that questioning is disinterested. For they determine whether we use power or power uses us<sup>[3]</sup>

Power relates to the acquired ability of an individual or group to exercise control over others or events in the surrounding world. It relates to an ability to produce desired effects on a pre-defined sphere of existence. A continuous equation develops, as a logical outflow of the above. If one individual utilises power to control the behaviour and desires of another, the converse is a reality, which impacts on the existence of the subjugated individual. Possessing power is one condition. However, the antithesis does not revolve around not possessing power, rather it is defined as having less freedom.

The individual who is subjugated by the relative non-possession of power, is subservient to the needs, demands and desires of another individual in the process, sacrifices a corresponding level of freedom. Beetham<sup>[2]</sup> is in accordance with this principle:

- The restriction of freedom is not an all-or-nothing affair, but is greater or less according to the seriousness of the deprivation that can be inflicted. To speak of 'having power over' someone usually implies a continuous relationship, in which a substantial sanction is always present.

It could be argued that the process of power utilisation should be regarded as both active and passive. The individual who acquires and exercises power, actively pursues develops it, as far as conditions will allow. The recipient, or subjugated individual, stands in a passive relationship to the powerful figure the degree of subjugation is proportionally related to the extent of power that the other party lays claim to. Such an argument appears to be intrinsically negativistic and even defeatist. It denies the existence of the concept of free choice, which individuals have. In most, if not all situations, humans have the capacity and potential for choice can actively pursue such choices. Victor Frankl, the Viennese psychiatrist, initially introduced this paradigm in his exposition of logotherapy. Although this argument might

appear to border on the pedantic, it remains a reality that the individual who is subjugated, mostly chooses to act in a submissive manner, with various motivations. Galbraith<sup>[1]</sup> states:

- The specific relationship between the reward offered or the punishment threatened and the submission achieved (is crucial). ... another motive for submission is present: It is a submission that derives from belief and choice. And such submission is not only of great, but also of increasing importance.

Therefore, in essence the exercise of power is an active process requiring the willful cooperation of both parties in the relationship. Intrinsically, one party derives positive outcomes, while the other sacrifices some element of him or herself. It is for this reason that power is often presented in a negative light - as the ultimate result is an active dehumanisation or subordination of one party, to a greater or lesser extent.

What then, are the uses of power? Why do people aspire to gain power what is the driving motivation behind the accrual of the concept? A simplistic and elementary approach to understanding power usage is to claim that it revolves around manifest gain. This means that the individual who possesses power, is capable of generating personal gain through its utilisation. The individual can actively strive to advantage his or her own position, or the position of the social or political group of which he or she is a member. This can manifest on either a passive or active level. For example, the powerful individual can actively or passively strive to disadvantage individuals from the out group, who do not fall within the gambit of the powerful individual's sphere of influence or preference.

Numerous examples of the above are apparent throughout the course of human history, for example, the Roman Empire, the excesses of the Ku Klux Klan and the regime of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. This type of power utilisation invariably connects to an enforcing of the right to exercise it concomitant results are often violence in the extreme definition, warfare. In this context, Howard<sup>[4]</sup> states:

- Peace was preserved only so long as the strongest ruled ... Not only was war a highly effective instrument of policy: it was what the ruling elites were for. Their capacity to conduct it legitimised their authority.

Therefore power becomes a means to an end, as it is a mechanism by which to obtain and retain certain tangible and desired outcomes.

It is necessary to approximate a grasping of the concept of power on a more esoteric level. It is possible, as stated earlier in Russel's quotation by Galbraith, that power is the highest aspiration and the greatest reward of humankind.

**Toffler<sup>[5]</sup> asserts that:** Power is among the most basic of social phenomena it is linked to the very nature of the universe.

The essential issue here is that power becomes an entity in itself the possession thereof contributes an elevated dimension in terms of personality variables, social interaction, communication patterns many more. The accumulation of power for the intrinsic value which the ownership thereof bestows on the holder, becomes a means to an end in itself.

Power can be classified according to various typologies. Galbraith<sup>[1]</sup> identified and defined two primary types of power, namely condign and compensatory power:

Condign power threatens the individual with something physically or emotionally painful enough so that he forgoes pursuit of his own will or preference in order to avoid it. Compensatory power offers the individual a reward or payment sufficiently advantageous or agreeable so that he (or she) forgoes pursuit of his own preference to seek the reward instead.

From the above, it is apparent that a passive - active process exists in the relationship between the provider and the recipient of power. It is irrelevant whether that process manifests on a conscious, pre-conscious or unconscious level. For the purposes of this argument, four distinct types of power bases are postulated:

**Political power:** The owner of political power, whether democratically invested or not, is in a position to exercise fundamental and comprehensive power over others. Political power stands in direct relation to the legal formulation, adjustment and enforcement of the rules by which societies function. The American system of representative participation serves as an illustrative example.

**Economic power:** The manifestation of economic power revolves around a dictum of controlling behaviour through the implementation of monetary measures. The granting of access to financial resources, or conversely, the barring of access to these resources, is an extremely dynamic powerbase, which is frequently not observed, ignored, or glossed over by social commentators. The possession or non-possession of financial resources is often a primary and dynamic source of conflict between

individuals or groups. An illustrative example is the system introduced in the USSR in 1918, which although frequently equated with an ideology, clearly also vests in the economic dimension. One of the Communist system's essential stipulations revolved around equalisation of people through the non-ownership of money.

**Ideological power:** Ideology refers to a constructed belief system, in which:

- Both the evidence and the interests of the subordinate are so structured that the justifications advanced for the rules of power prove plausible to them within the given social context<sup>[2]</sup>.

This system could be based on either a single, or a series of assumptions, including economic, moral and racial. Illustrative examples are the apartheid system in South Africa, National Socialism in Nazi Germany Slobodan Milosevich's Yugoslavian racial cleansing procedures.

**Personal power:** Personal power could be acquired through diverse avenues, as it could be obtained, developed or bestowed. In essence it refers to power which an individual centers around his or her person.

Therefore, without the individual, power would dissolve or revert to power of lesser magnitude. The individual is both the source and the manifestation of power. Mother Theresa of Calcutta and Adolf Hitler in Germany are illustrative examples.

To summarise, power is:

- A phenomenon that exists in the relationship between dominant and subservient individuals; and
- Frequently associated with the deferring of the subservient party's needs, wishes or desires.

## HUMAN RIGHTS

Within this framework, it becomes necessary to focus on the issue on human rights. Gregg<sup>[6]</sup> believes that the globe is experiencing a crisis of human rights and that:

- The concept of human rights evolved to buttress liberty by protecting people from excessive state power ... the beginning of a new century is always an opportunity to discern the lessons learnt over the past 100 years to speculate about the problems that may confront free societies of the future.

The 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights identified certain inalienable human rights: man has a right

to life, to freedom of association, to religious liberty to property. Although these enjoy widespread consensus and acceptance, certain pertinent problems remain with the notion of rights. In this sense, it is believed that the proliferation of human rights has led to the very idea of rights becoming dangerously diluted. In this regard, Gregg<sup>[6]</sup> comments:

- The number of people who suffered and died through the abuse of state power in the 20<sup>th</sup> century defies the imagination ... The free society has only the most fragile of defences against the desire of some to try and build heaven-on-earth through politics.

Similarly, in the foreword to the Amnesty International (AI) 2001 annual report, the secretary general, Pierre Sané, declares:

- The pressures of globalisation and fragmentation are indisputable ... the challenge for AI remains above all to hold states accountable ... it does mean insisting that states are bound by international human rights law and have no alternative but to uphold it (p. 1).

Given the ever increasing complexities of post-modern societies, human rights and the interpretation thereof are of critical importance if just and humane societies are to endure. To simply enumerate a list of rights is not adequate in both purpose and intent, as Patel and Watters<sup>[7]</sup> illustrate:

- What does the 'right to life' mean? Does it simply mean the mere physical existence of life? Or does it also embrace 'the quality of life'?

Within the context of this paper, it is judicious to consider certain of the paramount articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which were adopted and proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948, as found in Patel and Watters (1994):

**Article 1:** All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights...

**Article 3:** Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

**Article 4:** No one shall be held in slavery or servitude...

**Article 5:** No one shall be subject to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

**Article 12:** No one shall be subject to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence...

**Article 21(3):** The will of the people shall be the basis of authority of government...

**Article 30:** Nothing in this declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State... any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.

Individuals have certain rights the State has a fundamental responsibility to safeguard those rights under all conditions and circumstances.

Therefore, State or Government may not willfully and wantonly disregard these rights, including those States that were not signatories to the Declaration, even if this applies only in a moral and ethical sense.

Human rights treaties, protocols and declarations have proliferated during the course of the past decades. The peoples of the world appear to be of like mind committed to the protection of human rights. However, despite a vast number of human rights treaties which are supported (ostensibly) by the majority of nations, human rights are often disregarded and abused, leading to a perceived crisis in this context.

## **ECONOMIC SUPPRESSION**

Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as alluded to earlier, clearly stipulates that people should not be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The reality is clearly in contravention of articles such as this – a grim and distressing reality is pervasive throughout all human societies.

Rummel<sup>[8]</sup> argues that freedom and power stand in a non-reconcilable relationship to each other. He believes that democratic freedom generates individual and national wealth and prosperity. Rummel<sup>[8]</sup> claims that a complimentary relationship exists between freedom, human security and the absence of political violence. Conversely, if a government acquires too much power, the possibility of human insecurity and political violence increases, leading to a realization that power does not only impoverish, but also kills.

**Foundational characteristics of freedom include:** Freedom is a basic human right recognized by the United Nations and international treaties is the heart of social justice.

- Freedom is an engine of economic and human development scientific and technological advancement.
- Freedom ameliorates the problem of mass poverty.
- Free people do not suffer from and never have had famines by theory, should not. Freedom is therefore a solution to hunger and famine.
- Free people have the least internal violence, turmoil and political instability.
- Free people have virtually no government genocide and mass murder for good theoretical reasons. Therefore, freedom is a solution to genocide and mass murder; the only practical means of making sure that Never again!
- Free people do not make war on each other the greater the freedom within two nations, the less violence between them.
- Freedom is a method of non-violence-the most peaceful nations are those whose people are free.

When restrictions on democratic freedom are introduced within a society, the infrastructure of such a society experiences structural change, with definitive implications for the members of such a society. The end result of restriction of freedom is a totalitarian state, with its own particular characteristics, which could be described on a continuum, where the worst case scenario is a situation where a government willfully acts against its own people in a violent and destructive manner. Rummel<sup>[8]</sup> coined the term democide to describe this process (Greek dTmos and Latin Caedere).

The essential understanding behind the term reflects a government's intentional killing of an unarmed person or people, with the exclusive focus on the intention behind the act. As shown in Table 1 below, a total of nearly 170 million people were murdered by their governments in the period 1900-1987. Figure 1 which equates to more than four times the number of people killed in combat in all domestic and international wars during the same period.

Democide its counterpart, genocide, are concepts which are vehemently rejected by all societies across the globe. Its practice is prohibited by various treaties and articles modern society is unanimous in declaring any such manifestation as a crime against humanity.

The present author postulates that a more refined and subtle form of genocide/democide is prevalent and active in modern societies: that of economic suppression. The reality remains that the existence of particular economic doctrines results in economic hardship for untold millions of people. Globalisation and internationalization has become the defining reality of the present age. Direct

Table 1: 20th Century democide

Regimes	Years	(000) Total
Megamurderers	1900-87	151,491
Deka-mega	1900-87	128,168
USSR	1917-87	61,911
China (PRC)	1949-87	35,236
Germany	1933-45	20,946
China (KMT)	1928-49	10,075
Lesser	1900-87	19,178
Japan	1936-45	5,964
China (Mao Soviets)	1923-49	3,466
Cambodia	1975-79	2,035
Turkey	1909-18	1,883
Vietnam	1945-87	1,670
Poland	1945-48	1,585
Pakistan	1958-87	1,503
Yugoslavia (Tito)	1944-87	1,072
Suspected	1900-87	4,145
North Korea	1948-87	1,663
Mexico	1900-20	1,417
Russia	1900-17	1,066
Centi-kilomurderers	1900-87	14,918
TOP 5	1900-87	4,074
China (Warlords)	1917-49	910
Turkey (Atatuk)	1919-23	878
United Kingdom	1900-87	816
Portugal (Dictatorship)	1926-82	741
Indonesia	1965-87	729
Lesser murderers	1900-87	2,792
World total	1900-87	169,202

Source: Rummel<sup>[8]</sup>

characteristics of these processes are the dismantling of national economic barriers, the international spread of trade and commerce, as well as the ever-expanding power of transnational corporations and international financial institutions. This results in the fact that an ever-decreasing number of transnational corporations are gaining an ever-increasing proportion of world economic resources, production and market shares. Khor<sup>[9]</sup> declares that in 1982, the top 200 global corporations accounted for \$3046 billion of sales, which was equivalent to 24% of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP). These figures had risen to \$5862 billion and 26.8 percent respectively in 1992, with further increases in subsequent years.

Since the last decade of the previous century, various voices have been voiced in protest these voices have now become a strident clamour for attention. This is aptly summarized by Sklair<sup>[10]</sup>:

- However, by the beginning of the twenty-first century, in the aftermath of the battle of Seattle and many other challenges to capitalist hegemony, it is difficult to deny the centrality of the struggle 5 between the forces for and against capitalist globalisation.

In probability, it is simplistic and one dimensional to hypothesise that there is a causal link between power, globalisation and poverty. The total relationship is

characterized by a host of variables, factors and equations it would be somewhat fundamentalist to proclaim that there is an absence of other interlinked causative phenomena. It can therefore only be speculated that an active/passive process exists, where there might indeed be a linked relationship between power and poverty. Sociology, anthropology, international economics, as well as psychology, have over decades attempted to identify relevant factors the exact relationship, if any, remains hidden. Irrespective of the above, the reality of poverty continues to impact on billions of people across the globe.

The World Bank ([www.worldbank.org/poverty/mission/up2.htm](http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/mission/up2.htm)) stipulates that the commonly accepted definition of poverty centers around income and/or consumption levels that a person is considered poor if his or her consumption or income level decreases to some minimum level which is deemed necessary to meet basic needs (the so-called poverty line). The same organization claims that in 1999, 1.2 billion people world wide existed on consumption levels of less than \$1 per day, a figure which equates to 23 percent of the population of the developing world. Further, 2.8 billion lived on less than \$2 per day.

In 1995, the World Summit for Social Development declared that each country should set time-bound goals and numerical targets for reducing extreme poverty and implement national plans to achieve these<sup>[12]</sup>. In 2000 at the Millennium Declaration, 191 nations committed themselves to halving poverty levels by 2015, realizing that focused and intensified efforts would be required.

Despite these grandiose undertakings, poverty remains a pervasive reality, not only in least Developed Countries, but also in middle-income countries is also an expanding phenomenon in industrialized countries. Supporting statistics succinctly illustrate that for the United States alone, the richest 1% of the population possesses more wealth than the total wealth of 90 percent of the population that while 16 percent of the US population lived below the poverty line in 1974, this figure increased to 19% in 1997<sup>[13]</sup>.

It is conceivable that the present situation deteriorating at an ever-accelerating tempo this is illustrated by various reports and findings. Sklair<sup>[1]</sup> postulates that class polarization is assuming crises proportion and that this issue will remain the focus of increasingly radical critiques of capital ist globalization.

Figure 1 clearly illustrates the vast financial gluf which exist between global corporate advertising expenditure and Third word education

From the above, it is transparently clear to even the most casual observer t hat there is a fundamental

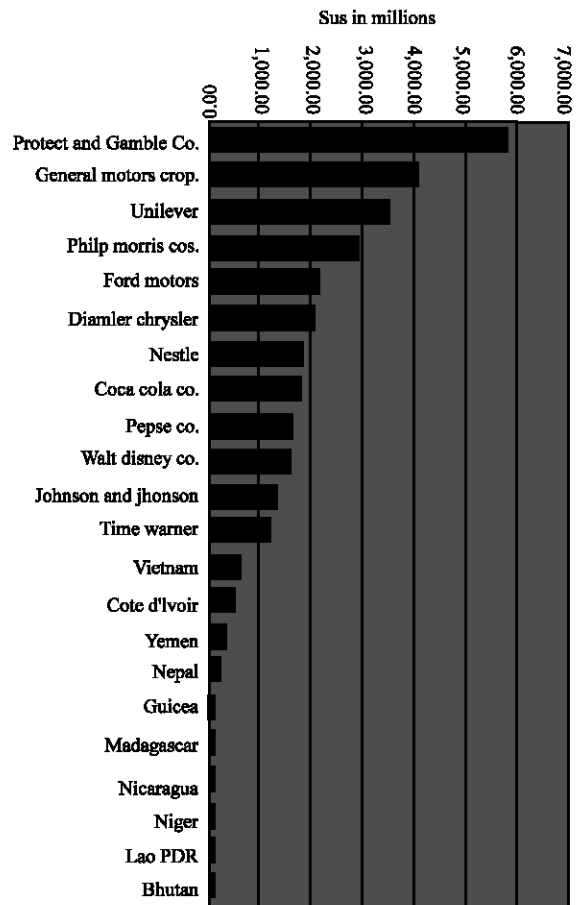


Fig. 1: Advertising vs. education<sup>[10]</sup>

economic divide among the inhabitants of the planet. Again, it must be concluded that there is no single factor responsible for this state of affairs, but it can also be assumed, with relative safety, that power can be classified as one of the causative factors. Whether that power vests in governments, transnational organizations (Fig. 1) or individuals, is largely irrelevant. As a direct manifestation, two distinctly separate worlds exist these are being polarized at an accelerated tempo. Therefore, the gulf between prosperous individuals or countries and indigent individuals or countries is widening, with an array of resultant disconcerting variables emerging.

Globalisation and internationalization are fundamental forces that cannot be denied. It permits obvious benefits to large numbers of people, but conversely threatens the livelihood, standard of living quality of life of innumerable more. The outcomes of this process of dichotomous polarization have become increasingly overt. Battlelines between governments and citizens are being drawn, as is evidenced in protracted street battles and violence in many major cities. For example, protest and

opposition to the activities of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are becoming increasingly difficult to contain. In Prague and Genoa authorities were forced to convene behind barbed wire and a strict security presence. The spectre of governing behind security perimeters, as a result of enforced isolation, is no longer a figment of the imagination.

The above scenario deserves more than casual observation. Indeed, an intensive analysis of these political and social parameters is indicated. A disturbing combination of social factors result from escalating disparity between groups, based on increasing poverty of alarming proportion which is allied with greater distance between governments and its subjects. Protracted civil disturbance and its logical consequence-violent revolution, cannot be ruled beyond consideration. Under these conditions, the probability of governments exercising their power to quell such behaviours develop into a tangible reality. Therefore, the corollary thereof, democide, could further destroy the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family. Freedom, justice and peace could conceivably dissolve into a quondam memory.

The renowned scientist Steven Hawking has on a number of occasions declared that the surface temperature of earth will equal that of Mars by the year 3000, rendering earth uninhabitable. It is apparent that globalisation, through this perspective, is a fundamental prerequisite for the survival of the human species. It is of paramount and essential importance that humanity unites initiates focused and directed efforts to counterbalance this pending catastrophe. On a scale of reduced magnitude, the various economic, social, medical and political afflictions of humanity can effectively be addressed.

Within this framework, governmental power should be magnified on the above issues, as power can and should be utilized for the benefit of all the globes' citizens. The reservation of power by a few individuals is unacceptable and borders on the realm of criminal insanity.

It is hypothesized that in the not-too distant future, globalisation and internationalization will manifest on diverse levels and dimensions, as is already evident in the formation of the European Union. In an ideal world, one central governing body for the globe would serve all its denizens. This body would be elected through a proven and objective humanitarian track record, based on a number of clearly elucidated parameters.

A central governing body would ideally revolve around an empirical secretariat and administration. The body's members would serve on various portfolios, on a rotational basis not be eligible for re-election after the expiry of a pre-determined time period, as per the

American constitution. The late Mother Theresa, as World President, is an image that does not warrant immediate and total derisive rejection. The utilization and application of power, as evidenced by the life of Mother Theresa, illustrates that it could benefit humanity in the striving for a better life.

With the above as premise, it is apparent that the five core principles underlying the development and implementation of poverty reduction strategies, as identified by the World Bank<sup>[1]</sup> will simply not succeed in its aim. A strategy which dictates that poverty reduction is the responsibility of the particular nation that it should be country-driven, involving broad-based participation by civil society and the private sector, is at best fanciful and devoid of realism.

The inescapable reality is that there is a darker force at play, i.e. power. If economic power continues to be exercised in its present context, hundreds of millions of people will continue to live and die in abject poverty. The death of these individuals is a crime of the most heinous proportions has no place in supposedly humane and civilized societies. If history exercises its right to judge humanity and those who wield power, what shall the verdict be in a century from now? Is present economic behaviour its postulated interrelationship with power, not an infinitely greater crime than genocide and democide as referred to earlier? Economic suppression of people should certainly assume a particular notoriety the term econocide could manifestly become classifiable as a crime against humanity. Are we, as exponents of this condoned/exercised power, willing to be subjected to the scrutiny of the lens of history?

Power in itself is neither noble or evil. Power is a neutral phenomenon, which derives its character from the manner in which it is utilized. Power can either be implemented constructively to propel the human race on the path to glory, or it can, as history conclusively attests, serve as a democidal vehicle to reduce humanity to a level of profound depravity and despair. The alternatives and the lustrous choice, remain the prerogative of humanity, as Alexander Solzhenitsyn<sup>[14]</sup> perceives:

And it was only when I lay there on rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of good. Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, not between classes, nor between political parties either – but right through every human heart.

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