

# Death of a Political Institution

by Bill Herbst

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Over the past eleven years, I've written around a quarter-million words about the Uranus-Pluto alignment, a configuration so deeply powerful and transformative that it stands alone as the primary astrological symbolism of the entire decade of the 2010s. One need not be an astrologer, however, to know that this decade is a seminal crossroads for civilization. Like so many people, I've waited for things to heat up to critical mass. It appears now that we're well on our way.

A fundamental interpretation of Uranus in the sign Aries making a first-quarter square to Pluto in Capricorn is that we are likely to see a revolution in the institutions of society, both in America and throughout the global community of nations that comprise modern civilization.

The way this will occur, according to the Uranus-Pluto symbolism, is two-fold: First, through the weakening or outright breakdown of social institutions, either because they cease to serve the common good in favor of feathering their own nests, or because they over-reach their charters through corruption or other abuses of power. In a nutshell, that's Pluto in Capricorn. Second, revolution may occur because of the arising of grass-roots movements based on common dissatisfaction on the part of many individuals concerning how society is run, either spontaneously in the mass or led by charismatic individuals who harness the discontent and ride to power on that basis. That's Uranus in Aries.

These two ways of challenging the status quo through the institutions of society are assumed to be complementary, tied together in mutual conflict: Both are likely to occur, and each will amplify the other to provoke change that will be increasingly dramatic. Some of these conflicts will probably involve violence; all of them will be shocking in one way or another.

Another part of the astrological symbolism of this Uranus-Pluto decade suggests that the challenges to institutional stability will seem sudden and unexpected when they initially arise, but once underway and gaining traction, what they target as unacceptable will turn out to have longstanding roots as common practices within the institutions under assault. Surprise and shock will give way to the deeper realization that the changes are necessary.

That's one meaning of a first-quarter square, to express in concrete reality what was begun when the cycle began, in this case 50 years ago, during the 1960s. The seasonal rhythms of earthly life suggest that seeds planted, fertilized, and watered will germinate in the spring, then grow into viable plants during the summer. We are at the beginning of the summer transition in the Uranus-Pluto cycle during the 2010s. The next three decades will represent increasingly conscious and careful weeding of the garden to protect the growing plants. The harvest will occur in the autumn, which begins in the 2040s. That's when we'll find out how well we did as gardeners.

Institutions at risk for radical change during the 2010s include those from every arena of social activity: governmental, commercial, financial, military, religious, educational, entertainment, medical, scientific, agricultural, racial, and philanthropic, plus others from less obvious or less powerful niches within society. Basically, all institutions are more vulnerable than at anytime in the past century to breakdown, collapse, or serious challenge, either from within or without.

### **What are Institutions?**

Institutions are group organizations founded for specific purposes. They form the skeletal structure of every society and serve to maintain stability and insure coherence in the ability of their societies to conduct all the business, affairs, and interactions that people deem essential. Whether public or private, institutions help to formulate standards and practices in the areas of their concerns. They act as clearinghouses to support the established laws and customs of their societies.

A significant percentage of the population of every nation around the globe is employed by institutions. These people earn their livelihoods in ways that vary little from the ordinary, where the work is akin to a regular office job, to executive levels, where policy is formulated and power conferred. Compensation for such employment reflects the stature of the position within the institution, from modest wages through extravagantly lucrative salaries.

The word that is commonly used to describe individuals who work within governmental institutions is *bureaucrat*, but that term applies just as well for those who work in institutions within the private sector. The word has come to have pejorative connotations, but its technical meaning is neutral. Congress is a political institution, and elected representatives are essentially bureaucrats, not fundamentally different from workers at the post office or DMV, although with higher status and compensation. Those who occupy the upper echelons of bureaucracy quite literally decide how society will conduct its affairs.

## **Political Parties as Institutions**

Examples of institutions in the political realm of American society include all formal political “parties,” such as Democrat, Republican, Libertarian, Socialist, Green, etc. In America, however, only the two major parties — Democrat and Republican — predominate, and by a large measure. All other political parties are marginal by comparison in both power and membership. That’s why we refer to the “two-party system” in America. Although millions of Americans consider themselves “Independents” politically, that is not an organized political party, and thus not an institution. Political independents are individuals without allegiance to a particular party.

The Republican Party emerged in the 1850s, founded by anti-slavery activists, ex-Free Soilers, and ex-members of the Whig Party, which was suffering its death throes because of the conflicts around slavery and was completely moribund by 1856. Modern Republicans are fond of pointing out that they are members of the party of Abraham Lincoln.

Over the following 160 years, the Republican Party came to be associated with conservatism in culture and economics. Conservatism in this context includes an emphasis on what are called “traditional American values,” which basically means the “Christian” morality embraced by white European immigrants who comprised the majority of the American population over our initial 150 years, as well as the concepts of American Exceptionalism, limited government, and strong national defense. The economic emphasis includes freedom of all commercial enterprises, large or small, to operate without governmental interference through regulations (i.e., “free markets”) or excessive taxes (i.e., the “trickle-down” theory of wealth distribution and job creation).

From the latter 19th century through the middle of the 20th century, many Democrats from southern states were social conservatives. That ended in the aftermath of the 1965 Civil Rights Act as many “Dixiecrats” shifted their affiliation to the Republicans.

The modern Republican Party that exists today was jump-started in the 1950s out of the anti-communist fervor of the Cold War, and solidified into a more aggressive stance in the 1980s with Ronald Reagan’s presidency. Since then, the Republican Party has undergone a significant shift to the right, pulled in that direction by an ideological movement that is more extreme in its conservatism. The result has been the near-takeover of the party from moderates by harder-core ideologues, with an accompanying schism of belief and attitude that was not fully in place until the events of 9/11. Since then, however, the two wings of the Republican Party coexisted under a single banner in a truce that was more pragmatic than united. Tensions within the party increased over the past decade.

## **The Political Revolution**

Now, however, the Republican Party is in danger of exploding, or perhaps imploding. The rise of Donald Trump as a candidate in the current presidential campaign, and particularly his unexpected success in becoming the heir apparent to the party's nomination, has caused the very real possibility that the Republican Party may be torn apart or even destroyed as a viable institution.

The power brokers within the Republican Party establishment, who almost uniformly scoffed at Trump's candidacy and predicted his early or eventual exit from the campaign, are now scrambling to figure out some way to stop Trump from further steamrolling through the primaries with victory after victory and prevent his nomination at their convention in Cleveland during mid-July, 2016.

Everything about this year's election defies the traditional wisdom. Pundits are wrong as often as not. Polls are wrong time and again. Strategies and tactics that have worked for decades to steer the campaign in a direction approved by the leaders of the Republican Party have proven irrelevant or downright useless.

Why? Because Trump is not part of the institution. He is a demagogue, a pitch man, a wild card, whose outrageous showmanship appeals to a sizable segment of not just Republican voters, but also Independents and some Democrats, all of whom are disaffected by the political process. These voters are royally pissed off at politicians and the powers-that-be in government for what they consider a betrayal of their birthright as Americans. Trump has galvanized that anger into a social movement. His supporters do not care about any of the thousand reasons offered by critics to invalidate Trump's candidacy. In fact, they revel in his status as an iconoclastic outsider who doesn't give a damn what people think. They love that Trump talks like them. He has become their voice. The more shameless Trump's performance becomes, the more his supporters are committed to following him anywhere. He is their Pied Piper, and they happily dance to his tune.

And yet, the bulk of Republican voters from the more moderate wing of the party are clearly horrified by the prospect of Trump becoming the Republican nominee. They may loathe President Obama and Hillary Clinton, his likely successor among the Democrats, and they sure as hell don't like Bernie Sanders, but they fear that Trump's nomination will result in either of two terrible outcomes — a defeat at the polls in November, thus giving the election to the hated Democrats, or an unlikely Trump victory that plants him in the White House. It's uncertain which outcome is more unpleasant to them. Trump is not a "true" conservative, they say, not in philosophy or policy. His unpredictability is anathema to the Republican playbook.

The specter of a “contested” convention now looms as a last-ditch effort on the part of Republican Party regulars and big wigs to stop the Trump juggernaut. Even that, however, offers little solace or much chance of saving the Republicans’ bacon. If Trump is somehow denied the nomination, the election is almost certainly lost, and perhaps control of the Senate as well.

We will know more a month from now, but, one way or another, Trump’s probable nomination threatens to rip the very heart out of the existing institution of the Republican Party. Like the Whigs in the 1850s, the modern Republican Party could easily go the way of the dodo bird by being shattered into irreparable factions. Trump is the hammer that could shatter the glass pane of the Republican Party into a million shards. No one knows what would emerge to replace it.

### **But Wait, There’s More...**

The supreme irony in this political melodrama is that the Republicans are not the only party in chaos. The Democrats are also at risk, if somewhat less obviously. Although Hillary Clinton seems to be fending off the serious challenge from Bernie Sanders — a set of circumstances that not even Bernie expected when he announced his candidacy almost a year ago — all is not resolved among the Dems.

Despite his poor showing in the March 15th round of primaries, Sanders has regrouped and now promises to stay in the race all the way to the Democrats’ convention in Philadelphia during late July, no matter what happens in the remaining primaries. A candidacy that began mainly as a symbolic appeal for fairness in politics and economics is now indeed a “political revolution.”

Like Trump, Sanders has tapped into a deep strain of discontent among American voters, although Bernie’s supporters are obviously of different stripes than Trump’s, both politically and socially. Each candidate represents the Uranus in Aries symbolism of our times. Bernie’s passionate but measured and rational appeal is not at all like The Donald’s scandalous performances, but both men feel total commitment to their respective causes, and each is more than willing to become the figurehead for a radical social movement based on a demand for sweeping change.

If Hillary Clinton is unable to secure the majority of Democrat delegates necessary to secure her nomination, Bernie says he will be there in Philadelphia to challenge her at the convention. Whether or not the unlikely event of Sanders’ nomination comes to pass, the possibility of another “open” convention is provocative, to say the least.

Although prospects for contested conventions often arise early in election campaigns, they actually come to pass very rarely. Usually, nominations are locked up months before the conventions. As far as I can determine, no presidential election in American history has ever seen contested, open, or brokered conventions for *both* major parties. That would represent an unprecedented event in American politics. Although the likelihood of such a coincidence is slim at best, it would be truly revolutionary, implying that the center has indeed given way, thus setting the stage for other, even more radical changes that would inevitably follow.

But even if neither party ends up holding an open convention, the handwriting on the wall is clearer than ever. With each passing year, the 2010s appear more and more to be precisely the kind of crossroads for civilization that the Uranus-Pluto symbolism suggests. Like Elvis, the status quo of business-as-usual has left the building. This decade is now breaking the mold of standard expectations in dramatic and unpredictable fashion, and we still have four more years to go.

That's four years where nearly anything could happen, and just might.

### **Update, 28 May 2016:**

Well, the shoe now appears to be on the other foot.

In their fervent wish for "anyone-but-Hillary," the Republican establishment has ignored its previous excoriation of Donald Trump and rallied around their now-certain candidate with ringing endorsements. A small number of stalwart Republican Party bigwigs have continued to refuse their support for The Donald, maintaining their anyone-but-Trump commitment and riding off in search of some third-party candidate they can stomach (Libertarian Party, perhaps?). Most significantly among the holdouts, Speaker of the House of Representatives Paul Ryan hasn't yet caved in to grant his grudging endorsement, but that will probably happen soon.

In general, however, Republicans have once again demonstrated an undeniable truism in politics, namely, that party loyalty is more compelling than either integrity or personal consistency. It's a little disconcerting but not particularly surprising to see someone like Marco Rubio, who aggressively painted Trump as the Anti-Christ during the primary campaign, now offering to do "all he can" to support Trump's bid for the White House. Such is the nature of politics.

Meanwhile, the Democrats have hit a potentially serious snag. The relatively polite discourse of a mere two months ago between Bernie Sanders and Hillary

Clinton has devolved into an Animal-House-style food fight. Or, at least it has from Bernie's side.

Hillary hardly mentions Sanders at all anymore. She's claimed the mantle of the presumptive Democratic nominee and moved on to focus on the general election and the sobering challenge of finding an effective way to neutralize Trump's attack-dog/3rd-grade-school-yard-bully tactics. So far, Trump seems to be winning the smear campaign, especially with recent help from the government's pronouncements about Hillary having violated State Department guidelines in the scandal-that-won't-die surrounding her use of a private email server when she was Secretary of State.

Bernie, however, seems not to have noticed (or, more to the point, doesn't care) that Hillary has taken off her boxing gloves and left the ring. While Sanders still lambasts Clinton, he's taken aim at a bigger target — the institution of the Democratic Party itself.

While Bernie's chances of winning the nomination as a Democrat are now effectively nil, he's demonstrating not only perseverance in continuing to campaign, but also proof that his call for a "revolution" in American politics is serious, and deeper than most people assumed. Bernie would like nothing better than to crack the very foundations of the existing power structure that makes up the Democratic Party hierarchy and pecking order.

So, as the power brokers of one dominant political party revert to the status quo, the other party appears headed for a confrontation, one that could be potentially very nasty.

For anyone who understands the archetypal symbolism of the Uranus-Pluto alignment that reveals the collective and personal zeitgeist of this decade, such developments are not surprising.

The fact that one candidate who is clearly an ego-maniacal narcissist and snake-oil salesman has beaten off all his more traditional and conservative competitors to win the nomination, will garner at least 30 million votes from Americans in the coming November general election, and might even manage to become president is entirely in keeping with the tenor of our times. Americans of many different stripes are pissed off at their institutions — most of all, government — and their motivating emotions are frequently closer to lynch-mob rage than to reasonable anger.

Donald Trump has tapped into that rage, feeds off it, and is making hay while the sun shines. Whether he would rise to the occasion of becoming president or turn out to be dangerously and tragically looney-tunes is beside the point for

now. People that vote for Trump will care later, but not now. What's important now is overturning the existing political and governmental status-quo power hierarchy.

Many people (myself among them) feel strongly that Trump does not represent any sort of forward-looking reform. Instead, we believe that Trump is effectively a throwback to stone age Strong Man days, which is no solution for what ails us. Trump's more rabid supporters don't see it that way, of course. They want to return to a fantasy America that never really existed, but for which they long fervently.

Bernie Sanders is another side of a similar coin. His call for a political revolution is more thoughtful than Trump's I-say-and-do-whatever-the-hell-I-feel-like-at-any-given-moment (as long as it gets him the support he wants. Much more than Trump, however, Sanders regards the existing status quo of power in America with disdain. Trump games the system to his advantage. Bernie wants to dismantle and rebuild the system for the greater good. Is that possible, given the inherent flaws of human nature? Maybe, maybe not. Is such an effort premature, given where we are in time? Probably.

Again, however, none of that matters. Where we are as a nation in 2016 is at the point of collectively screaming the famous line from the 1977 movie, **Network**: *"I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to take it anymore!"*

Two months ago, the Republicans appeared to be in trouble. Now it's the Democrats. In the astrological view, both political parties are entering the phase of breakdown accelerated by rebellion.

What will happen? I don't know. Time will tell.