



Who Poses the Greater Threat?

Bill Gates is the world's richest person, but what kind of power does he have over you? Can he force your kid to go to a school you do not want him to attend? Can he deny you the right to braid hair in your home for a living?

It turns out that a local politician, who might deny us the right to earn a living and dictates which school our kid attends, has far greater power over our lives than any rich person. Rich people can gain power over us, but to do so, they must get permission from our elected representatives at the federal, state or local levels. For example, I might wish to purchase sugar from a Caribbean producer, but America's sugar lobby pays congressmen hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions to impose sugar import tariffs and quotas, forcing me and every other American to purchase their more expensive sugar.

Politicians love pitting us against the rich. All by themselves, the rich have absolutely no power over us. To rip us off, they need the might of Congress to rig the economic game. It's a slick political sleight-of-hand where politicians and their allies amongst the intellectuals, talking heads and the news media get us caught up in the politics of envy as part of their agenda for greater control over our lives.

The sugar lobby is just one example among thousands. Just ask yourself: Who were the major recipients of the billions of taxpayer bailout dollars, the so-called Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP)? The top recipients of TARP handouts included companies such as Citibank, AIG, Goldman Sachs and General Motors. Their top management are paid tens of millions dollars to run companies that were on the verge of bankruptcy, were it not for billions of dollars in taxpayer money. Politicians preach the politics of envy whilst reaching into the ordinary man's pockets, through the IRS, and handing it over to their favorite rich people and others who make large contributions to their election efforts.

The bottom line is that it is politicians first and their supporters amongst intellectuals who pose the greatest threat to liberty. Dr. Thomas Sowell amply demonstrates this in his brand-new book, *Intellectuals and Society*, in which he points out that: "Scarcely a mass-murdering dictator of the twentieth century was without his intellectual supporters, not simply in his own country, but also in foreign democracies ... Lenin, Stalin, Mao and Hitler all had their admirers, defenders and apologists among the intelligentsia in Western democratic nations, despite the fact that these dictators each ended up killing people of their own country on a scale unprecedented even by despotic regimes that preceded them."

While American politicians and intellectuals have not reached the depths of tyrants such as Lenin, Stalin, Mao and Hitler, they share a common vision. Tyrants denounce free markets and voluntary exchange. They are the chief supporters of reduced private property rights, reduced rights to profits, and they are anti-competition and pro-monopoly. They are pro-control and coercion, by the state. These Americans who run Washington, and their intellectual supporters, believe they have superior wisdom and greater intelligence than the masses. They believe they have been ordained to forcibly impose that wisdom on the rest of us. Like any other tyrant, they have what they consider good reasons for restricting the freedom of others. A tyrant's primary agenda calls for the elimination or attenuation of the market. Why? Markets imply voluntary exchange and tyrants do not trust that people behaving voluntarily will do what the tyrant thinks they should do. Therefore, they seek to replace the market with economic planning and regulation, which is little more than the forcible superseding of other people's plans by the powerful elite.



Written by [Walter E. Williams](#) on March 3, 2010

We Americans have forgotten founder Thomas Paine's warning that "Government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil; in its worst state, an intolerable one."

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