**CONGRESS THE CORRUPT**

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The Christmas and New Year’s break allows university faculty not only to enjoy family and friends, but also it supplies a moment to do some nontechnical reading. After all, we don’t need that much time to look over our teaching notes. Faculty need something constructive to do during the three or four weeks we have off, and catching up on our reading fits in marvelously.

We read two interesting books during this break. The first is [*Throw Them All Out* by Peter Schweizer](http://www.amazon.com/Throw-Them-All-Peter-Schweizer/dp/0547573146). The subtitle tells it all: “How politicians and their friends get rich off insider stock tips, land deals, and cronyism that would send the rest of us to prison.” For example, the author discusses how Speaker Nancy Pelossi (Democrat) and her husband garnered Visa IPO shares in 2008 after intimating that she would introduce legislation which would prove very costly to Visa. Of course, Pelosi backed off her threat once she and her husband received those IPO shares. Schweizer also gives the example of Speaker Dennis Hastert (Republican), who used his knowledge of a proposed interchange for Interstate 88 to buy acreage on the cheap and sell it for its new market value. Hastert realized millions in profits.

Worse, the ethics rules of the House and the Senate allow these things to occur. In some twisted logic, Congress permits its members to engage in insider trading and land deals and regulatory intimidation. It has legalized what is criminal for the rest of us.

We also read [*China in Ten Words* by Yu Hua](http://www.amazon.com/China-Ten-Words-Yu-Hua/dp/0307379353). The text is part autobiographical, part historical, and part social commentary. Mr. Hua describes China in ten chapters, each titled with a single word. The words he chooses are people, leader, reading, writing, Lu Xun, revolution, disparity, grassroots, copycat, and bamboozle. With these words, he describes the incredible social and economic changes in China during his life-time, starting with the Cultural Revolution from 1966 until late 1970s, which was followed by the economic revolution to the present.

The description records incredible changes in China, such as the nation’s becoming the second largest economic power in the world. It also traces the failings of this transformation, such as ranking about 100th in the world in per capita income. The contradiction between these two measures foreshadows social conflict that must be dealt with sooner or later.

What proved serendipitous, even ironic, in this reading is to note the connection between the books. In certain ways the two countries show similar contradictions and shortcomings. Yu Hua discusses “today’s large-scale, multifarious corruption” in China; but the U.S. Congress engages in similar dishonesty.

During the Cultural Revolution, Yu Hua said the “people are Chairman Mao, and Chairman Mao is the people,” an empty and peculiar statement if we ever saw one. In the U.S. the phrase “of the people, by the people, and for the people” has become nearly vacuous as professional politicians employ the rhetoric but drain the phrase of real meaning.

Yu Hua explains that “a China ruled by politics has transformed itself into a China where money is king.” We aren’t sure when, but the U.S. also has participated in such an alteration. Maybe when we kicked out King George we bowed down to mammon. In both countries the very rich have married the very powerful and created paradise for themselves. The bias and the corruption are great in both countries so everybody else suffers.

Yu Hua tells a story that took place a few days after the 1989 shooting at Tiananmen Square. In a different part of Beijing approximately 10,000 people, many students, stood on a bridge yelling slogans such as “Arise, arise, arise!” and “United we stand!” Mr. Hua feels that this action holds promise for future renewal. We doubt it. While the army did not disturb them that night, the moment did not last; moreover, the people seem united only in slogans.

But is it any different here? In the U.S. the powerful take more power and the rich expand their resources, pretending to care for others via government entitlement programs. The average guy is left wondering whether he can find or keep a job, whether the pay will keep up with the expenses, whether it makes a difference in voting, and whether life makes sense.

We sympathize with these thoughts, but there is a solution, unless we turn it into another slogan. *Throw them all out!*

*This essay reflects the opinion of the authors and not necessarily the opinions of The Pennsylvania State University, The American College, or Villanova University.*