

Rage Against The Machine

I woke up in the middle of the night with a “Da Vinci Code” insight.

In a flash I understood it all, the ugly reality hidden behind this town’s benign facade, the conspiracy keeping the curtains closed on a truth-revealing window.

The Machine! It was controlling everything!

I’d had glimpses of this monster before. It took some deep sleep unconscious cognizing for my brain to form a coherent picture of how this town is in the grip of difficult-to-discern malevolent forces.

Leaders of the Salem-Area Chamber of Commerce. Executives at the Statesman Journal newspaper. High-ranking city officials, elected and appointed. Other members of Salem’s “1%.”

I doubt they conduct sinister rituals, have a secret society, or exchange coded messages aimed at achieving Salem domination. But The Machine is as dangerously dehumanizing as if they did.

Once The Machine was assembled and got rolling, it became a force that controlled its creators. As the saying goes, “Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

So much so, the corrupted in power become blind to what has happened to them. They believe they’re doing the right thing, when they aren’t.

The Machine’s core goal is to keep money and power flowing to the people in Salem who already have these things. Other values aren’t important to The Machine. Such as compassion, sustainability, citizen involvement, honesty, truth, social equity.

Lip-service is given to these virtues, but this is just a ruse so the citizenry doesn’t recognize how money and power actually rule in Salem.

Big bucks support The Machine’s carefully chosen candidates for Mayor and the City Council. Political action committees mostly fund their

campaigns, which, as happens everywhere in this country, makes the candidates dance to their donors' tune after being elected.

A Salem city councilor once told me, "The Chamber of Commerce runs this town." I hear that a lot. Because it is true. Money talks; politicians listen.

Just look at how the Mayor and City Council keep pushing ahead with an unneeded half billion dollar Third Bridge against intense community opposition. There's no good reason for the bridge. But what The Machine wants, it usually gets.

Largely because our community newspaper, the Statesman Journal, won't do any investigative reporting on how money and power are wielded in Salem.

The paper's executives are part of The Machine. They won't criticize the Chamber of Commerce or city officials, since they need advertising dollars and access to the powers-that-be to keep their Gannett bosses happy.

So citizens don't learn about how The Machine operates in Salem. Voters are left in the dark, swayed by PAC-funded campaigns. Elected officials keep doing what The Machine wants. Our daily newspaper fails to report about what's going on.

And so it goes...until us citizens rise up and rage against The Machine.

It's gears get blocked when people forcefully speak the truth, vote for the right candidates, and proudly stand up for human values when money and power say "sit down."

Strange Up Salem seeks to lift our city's Blah Curse. Give us a Facebook like. Brian Hines blogs at hinesblog.com

