

Trump's marching East

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Trump is demolishing the East Wing of the White House to build a privately funded \$300 million ballroom. It's being paid for by undisclosed corporate donors and is being built without proper regulatory approval. This isn't restoration or renewal. It's a hostile takeover of one of democracy's most symbolic buildings, and when money rebuilds power, citizens lose it.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Rc54skqD_Y?si=6P4cdE4NsU7ixjWs

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=riykt-19a22af-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=auto&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

This is the transcript:

Trump is marching on the East.

More precisely, Trump is marching on the East Wing of the White House at present, and that is deeply symbolic.

The White House is the symbol of American democracy in a great many ways. More than the whole of the Congress building, this symbolises to most of the world and probably most Americans, just where power lies in their country, and Trump is tearing it

down.

The East Wing of the White House, which has been there for a great deal of time and is fundamentally historic to the role of that building in American society, has already gone, and it's going to be replaced by a privately funded ballroom. This isn't just about bricks. This is about power and ownership, and who really controls democracy now. This is really important. Trump's march on the East Wing is already underway, but we need to think about what it means.

The 90,000 square foot ballroom that Trump is planning is apparently going to cost up to \$300 million. He says it's being funded by him and a pile of corporate donors, but as we'll note, we don't really know who they are as yet. And quite critically, Trump has started work on this project before any of the approvals that are required for the existing East Wing to be demolished have been put in place. He's just going ahead as if he has the right to do what he wants with what is, and let's stress this, incredibly importantly, a public building.

The East Wing of the White House is not Trump's, and yet he's declaring it to be his own. He's doing what he wants with it, and he's rebuilding it with private money. And yet the White House is a national institution. Its meaning rests on public ownership and oversight. Private money challenges that symbolism. The people's house, which is what the White House is, becomes a donor's ballroom. Power is moving from citizens to funders as it already has in a great deal of US politics, of course.

And who are these donors? We don't know. There is no full list as yet. There are reports that the list might include Lockheed, Amazon, and Palantir, but I'll be clear, we can't be sure because nobody's stepping up and saying so. And therefore, there's a lack of democratic accountability in this whole process that is going on. And oversight agencies whose job it is to make sure that buildings like the White House are maintained for public benefit have been totally sidestepped or ignored. Transparency has been replaced by private arrangements. The rule of money has displaced the rule of law.

Now, Trump calls this renewal, but it isn't, of course. It's theatre. This is about the politics of spectacle, and it's about standard oligarchical architecture - using buildings to project power and control, something that has been going on for millennia, right back to the Pharaohs, and maybe before.

It's about private wealth funding supposed political legitimacy, which may be built on decidedly hollow foundations.

This is a supposedly grand building, masking hollowed-out democracy.

When leaders build palaces, citizens lose voices.

And let's follow the money because philanthropy is very rarely free. Big cheques buy

access, and they buy expectation. What's the expectation? Of tax breaks, of contracts, of favours, of real returns. And we all know that American legislation is riddled with what are called 'Pork barrel clauses', which provide those who sponsor presidential favours with returns on their investment. We don't know that the ballroom has become a lobbying hall. But let's be clear, the fact that it's being funded by private investment in public power makes it look that this is the inevitable outcome.

And the consequences for democracy are significant. A precedent once set is hard to reverse. Future presidents could now do the same thing. There's nothing that's going to stop them trampling all over the White House to do their own fancy projects, claiming that they want to leave their own legacy for the future as well.

Institutions are being turned into corporate projects and vanity symbols for presidents who might go down in history as complete failures.

Public symbols are losing their legitimacy and meaning as a consequence, and democracy is starting to look like it's renting out its own identity. This is the state being eroded brick by brick. Money is replacing mandates of the source of power. And globally, the same story is being repeated.

So what must happen now? We need to know who every donor to this project is and what contracts they're getting as a consequence. We should be demanding - well, I can't, but anybody watching this in the USA can - demand independent oversight for all state buildings. There should be a ban on the private funding of national residences, and not just in the USA, elsewhere as well. We don't want a 'Sponsored by...' over the door of Number 10 Downing Street, for example. We have to protect the public ownership of the symbols of state. Democracy must quite literally own its own foundations.

There is a warning in what Trump is doing for every democracy.

When money rebuilds power, citizens lose it.

The White House ballroom is a ballroom for billionaires. The dance is almost over for democracy. It's time to reclaim the state for people and not donors. So what do you think? Should private money reshape public institutions?

Let us know. There's a poll below. I'll be interested to hear what you think.

Poll

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