

# Emergency Call for Political Action: We Must Dig out the Best in Ourselves and Obama — Now

by Doug Dowd

## Introduction and Summary

**A**s he belatedly pushed for the “New Deal” in the mid-1930s President Roosevelt (FDR) took the first step in what became a series of socio-economic reforms, noting that “people who are hungry and out of a job are the stuff of which dictatorships arise.” He had that right: As the decade ended, four of the six leading industrial capitalist countries — Italy, Germany, France, and Japan — had become fascist, and rightist movements were underway in the UK and the USA.<sup>1</sup>

History cannot repeat itself in detail, but as this is written the USA and other countries have been creeping toward a 21<sup>st</sup> century variation of that nasty stuff. Because of the many important differences between that past and today, it is unlikely that the dictatorships of FDR’s time will be created in the USA. Because there’s probably no need.

Here’s a sickening reason why not: Our already diluted democracy is increasingly swamped by the cultures, politics, and technologies of what has been aptly called “monopoly capitalism.” Its ongoing trends are all too likely to slide us into a *de facto* dictatorship: “friendly fascism,” a hypnotized society in which the sustained violence of historic fascism is not “necessary.”<sup>2</sup>

This call for building a strong political movement is going to be long. Many who receive it know at least as much or more than I do; but it is hoped that you will pass it on and use it to strengthen a badly-needed center-left movement, not only because the center-right is already strong, but because too many of us have been sitting on the sidelines grunting. So who's this talking, anyway? [Answer here<sup>3</sup>]

What's to worry? After all, we have just kicked Bush out of the White House and replaced him with an intelligent, knowledgeable and decent guy. But we need much more than that: Obama must become at least another FDR. But what became the reformist FDR did not just happen. The best in him was brought to life by always increasing political pressure from workers and a growing center-left whose support strengthened from 1934 until his death and then continued into the 1960s.

Beginning now and never ceasing, we must Obama's best, and overcome the now strong worst in the USA. We must awaken from our decades of political snoozing, politicize ourselves. There is much to do. As matters now stand, the center-right is already up and running; unless we get to work *now* the congressional election of 2010 is likely to intensify what is already dangerous (such as wars).

The dangers at home have many dimensions. First, there's racism. Obama's victory, far from signifying the end of racism in the USA has given it new life for those who cannot conceive of a black man in the White House (unless as a servant). The economy is all wrong and (unless we push hard) not likely to get much right. Then, there's the problem of the richest nation ever not providing basic needs — education, health care — for its citizens. Finally, corruption, always substantial, now soars to record-breaking heights.

We cannot fully right these wrongs ourselves in the near future, but we can and must reverse ongoing tendencies and move toward what's needed. The powers that be are hard at work to make Congress (and state and local governments) always more corrupted with their thousands of highly-paid lobbyists and billions of dollars of campaign subsidization. This activity is not in our interests. And it's our job to hold politicians' feet to the fire.

The dirty deeds of corruption are done in three overlapping sectors: Wall Street, the military-industrial complex, and — most disgustingly — the health care “industry.” The corruptors do their jobs all too well; we must do ours a great deal more and make the government in the USA *ours*.

That was true also as the 1930s began; then as now, the idea of having a more democratic society would have been — was — laughed at. But, as will be seen below, as thousands and then millions became politicized what would have been seen as foolish dreams in 1932 had by 1935 moved toward becoming realities. We can and must go and do likewise. What took hold in the 1930s was a “step at a time” toward meeting our basic needs of nutrition, housing, health care, education, opportunity. Indeed, they were no more than steps, but from Social Security in 1935 to Medicare in the 1960s, the USA was moving toward decency and away from “rugged individualism.” Well, for a while.

As the economy expanded and the lives of many improved, meaningful political involvement faded into memory, its place taken by what became hypnotic “consumerism” and borrowing. Already in 1969 we had become people “who want what they don't need, and don't want what they do.”<sup>4</sup>

Our political deterioration was soon utilized by the business world. It had become economically enriched and politically reborn by World War II, but

was mostly on the defensive until the 1970s. Since then, their strength has to the point of political control over Washington, D.C., and the states. Combined with the political indolence of the center-left, that has allowed them to create or worsen a set of increasingly serious problems both at home and abroad.

Obama inherited that mess. If the US is to “save itself alive,” we can and must take a lesson from our 1930s predecessors, create substantial pressure and support from below, and bring out the best in Obama. If we do not, the USA will continue to act in the ways that steer us to the edge of disaster. We must steer Obama toward becoming a center-left president. But is it possible? Yes, it is. And there’s a precedent in this regard.

## FDR Finally Gets It

**N**ow a look at the presidency of FDR. As with Obama today, in 1932 FDR inherited a mess. And like Obama, FDR was “in the middle.” When he became president in 1932 he had been a conventional governor of New York — which is to say, a good friend of Wall Street. His term began with a financial crisis (as has Obama’s), and for his first years FDR’s economic policies came from “the Street.” Also — just like today — not a month went by without some prominent economist, news pundit, or politician announcing that “prosperity is just around the corner.”

However!

While the White House and Congress strolled hand-in-hand with Wall Street, political activity was rising from the ground up. FDR’s advisors prodded him

to pay attention to reality if he wished to stay in office. He changed and memorably began to point to “the millions who are losing their jobs and suffering from hunger.”

The first priority of any politician is to stay in power. With both left and right political movements strengthened, FDR became convinced that he would lose the 1936 election unless he met the needs and demands of those “millions” rather than the desires of Wall Street. Thus, in 1935 he came up with his first step toward becoming “a liberal”: Social Security. Wall Street soon dubbed him a traitor, but their anger was soon offset by a steadily stronger and supportive majority from below. FDR, a changed man, was re-elected *three times*. The changed man was never defeated; he died in office in 1945.<sup>5</sup>

### A Change Is Needed

When FDR entered the White House he had even more to unlearn than Obama, but Obama must deal with problems even more difficult than those of the 1930s. If and when our potential majority comes to life, we can and must adapt today’s technologies to meet the needs of the majority. If and as we do so, we will convince the politician in Obama to become at least as progressive as FDR became.

## Disturbing 20th Century Domestic Trends

**O**ur needs at home are deepening as our problems abroad multiply. The domestic political situation today is more dangerous than it was for FDR. Why? Because the democracy that was much strengthened from the mid-1930s on has been twisted backwards since the 1970s by the politicization from top down, and the de-politicization of the middle by mind-

numbing consumerism and, over time and its obsessive indebtedness. Together, those have been the death knell of democracy.

### Consumerism

Although consumerism was “invented” in the 1920s, not until after World War II was even a dream for any but those with high incomes: credit cards, and all that jazz did not yet exist. The ugly realities of the 1930s depression meant desperation for most and rising anger for many, making the brains and muscles of what became the 1930s New Deal. Its modest achievements were substantially added to as a by-product of the second world war, when 16 million were in the armed services. That meant both stronger unions and an open door for women and black workers. War profits were so great that business went along with only a few grunts; but only for a while.

### Capital Fights Back

Then, from the 1970s on, capital easily resumed its efforts to control the politics of the USA. The center-left snoozed and grumbled, while the center-right, led and mostly financed led by big business and their media, vaulted into the driver’s seat, given a hoist by racists, gun-lovers, and some religious groups.<sup>6</sup>

The center-right leaders created numerous expensive (and [surprise, surprise] tax-deductible) research centers for the guidance of their armies of lobbyists; plus mountains of campaign finance. By the 1980s their triumph was in place, personified by Reagan’s election and re-election. Although openly anti-union, Reagan was popular with workers who welcomed his joke-slinging racism, his

hatred of the poor, and his phony *machismo* — including the need to drug him to get him into an airplane. [See Wills.] Macho man, indeed.

Enough of the past. Now we turn to today's ugly realities — first at home, then to our wars.

## Today's Troubles

Some in the USA attempt to live in a geopolitical vacuum, with the mighty USA at the center of the universe and all other places and beings somewhere in the distant periphery (perhaps outer space) and not worthy of consideration. To paraphrase Noam Chomsky, “When I walk down the street, I am not really thinking about the ants I am stepping on.”

Yet the world continues to shrink. And the continued (mis)rule of the USA by a greedy, solipsistic minority perforce causes manifold problems both at internally and around the globe.

### Big Problems at Home

At home we are faced with three sets of interacting troubles: (1) a poisoned economy, 2) a rich nation not meeting the basic needs of its people, and 3) deep and broad corruption making all of that possible. And the slope is slippery.

## 1. The Poisoned Economy

*Financialization* Globalization and the financial dominance of the US economy had their roots in the 1970s and were strong by the 1980s. Their dangers and faults were ignored and came to be symbolized by two interacting developments: 1) the rise of finance and Wall Street as a main element in both the economy and politics and Robert Rubin, Lawrence Summers, and Timothy Geithner as the economy's *de facto* decision makers. All financial regulations were dominant sector of the economy, and 2) the abolition of the spirit and substance of the New Deal. Thus it was that by the 1990s the "liberal" President Clinton's Treasury Secretary Summers (now Obama's economic advisor) torpedoed the financial reforms of the 1930s, et seq. (Between Clinton and Obama he worked for a large hedge fund, making more than \$5 million in one year (*NYT*, 2009-04-06). [*IHT*, *NYT*, *NYRB*, et al., will be decoded under "Abbreviations."])

The recession took hold 2–3 years ago, after lingering offstage for decades. No later than the 1970s, globalization had meant always more losses of good jobs as, in the same years, the US — and, therefore, the — world economy were becoming increasingly dependent upon bewitched borrowers and buyers, and galvanized by always wilder speculation.

And the world is connected. The first economies to fail as Wall Street collapsed were Ireland, and Spain, both in high unemployment by 2008. And China, now the healthiest economy in the world, became so by selling *and* lending to the USA. It now holds more than two *trillion* dollars.

Those follies threaten to do us in; there must be substantial changes within the USA and the structures of world production and power. Up to now, however,

both despite and because of Wall Street's greedy optimism and governmental acquiescence, we are more likely than not to be on the road to another depression. Why? Because the combination of today's technologies, globalization, and financial fevers (already recurring) mean that what begins with financial fun and games in the US soon whooshes around the world. That of course means reduced consumption, production and jobs in the US and elsewhere.

As with the "Crash of 29" we are told "worry not." What has been (conveniently) forgotten is this: In 1936–37, after a short period of recovery, New Deal policies were halted and reversed — *and the economy collapsed again*. Now — once more — we are told that recession is or soon will be history. Ancient history. Meanwhile, joblessness rises to over 10 percent, and Wall Street once more pretends it is Las Vegas. When will they even learn? And why should they?

But that's only Wall Street. What about the rest of us? Here a few answers with a closer look at jobs, a discussion of the unmet basic needs of education and health care, then thoughts about that which has helped to bring all that about, which is corruption.

*Jobs (for Some)* Among the several shortcomings of our government is how stingy it is in providing unpleasant data, not least as regards unemployment: if it were measured as in Western Europe, the rate would be 25 to 50 percent higher. Some ugly data:

September 2009's *official* unemployment rate (not even measured until 1939) was 9.8%. That's far, far too low. The number did not take into account that almost 600,000 workers had given up looking. It failed to note that one in

four families have suffered a job loss in the past year. Also missing was the a major lack: the 2.7 million missing new jobs needed for high school and college graduates. The official rate ignores the tragedy that unemployment benefits (which expire after 27 weeks) had already run out for more than a million discharged workers. It makes no mention of the “underemployment rate”: those let go, those with hours cut, and those working part-time to prevent being let go (which makes the jobless rate 17%” [Editorial, *NYT*, 2009-10-04; articles, 2009-10-06 and 2009-10-08]).

Add to all that the once-employed skilled workers who have also lost their health insurance and other benefits. Headline, *IHT*, 2009-10-20: “After a year, U.S. economy grows while jobs stagnate.” Such unemployment realities open the door for substantial reforms, but also for right-wing dangers as, meanwhile, “America’s income and spending drop, despite stimulus.” (*Christian Science Monitor*, 2009-10-30).

Then there are the old folks, like me: “Debt, decimated savings and reduced pensions mean fewer can retire; there are more Americans 65 and older seeking jobs than at any time history.” (*NYT*, 2009-10-24) Next day: “1 in 6 Americans living in poverty.”

*The Plight of the Underclass* The foregoing and much that follows refer mostly to those who are not poor. But of the many horrors of being poor is that, often unjustly, one is all too likely to end up in prison. Especially vulnerable are those who are not only poor but are also not “white”: The numbers of imprisoned are higher in the US than any other country, a very high percentage of whom are “non-white.” (And see “Prisons,” Note 7.)

And consider this: The USA has 5 percent of the world's population — and 25 percent of the world's prison population. Rather than use death squads to keep the underclass in its place, the USA simply removes its undesirables from society. In the USA the poor and the nonwhite have no significant possibility of upward mobility; all they can look forward to is incarceration, a disenfranchised social death.

Those who have poor jobs or none are doomed to suffer from inadequate nutrition and homelessness, and have been the worst victims of the collapse of the housing market. Not only the lives of “subprimers” have been ruined; so too have those of numberless middle-income families who giddily took out second mortgages for investments, vacations, etc.

All of that is bad enough; now, assuming that our people have enough to eat (which they don't) and are healthy (which they are not), we turn to the violation of what may be seen as the most vital basic need.

## 2. Unmet Needs of the People

*Education* It is not only a basic need for a sane and decent society, but for all us if we are to have a chance to pursue and realize our needs and possibilities. But all who are young (and their parents) are rapidly discovering that in the US education has become a luxury; that as budgets for public schools and colleges fall, those for the military and for prisons skyrocket. That tendency is harmful enough for those in the top third; it is life-ruining for the majority. And the dumbed-down nation? Some nuggets, beginning with grammar school:

“Neediest Schools Receive Less Money: As schools enter a new era....A report [by Education Trust] shows that in most states, school districts with the neediest students receive far less state and local tax money than the schools with the fewest poor children. (*NYT* 2002-08-09)

But what about “school voucher programs”? In Cleveland, “they provide less than a third of what it costs to educate [the students].” (*NYT*, 2002-08-05)

How successful are high schools? “The high school dropout in the US is 25 percent, six times that of Finland.” (*WSJ*, 2008-02-29)

Universities in decline? In 1970, 78% of university level teachers had received tenure in California. By 2000, more than 70 percent were part-time temps, paid at poverty levels (\$12,000–14,000/year), with *no* benefits. In 2009, the state system announced plans for 10 percent enrollment reductions (in human terms, that means 40,000 would-be students are out of luck.)

Headline, *IHT*, 2009-11-03: “23 college presidents are paid \$1 million plus. And headline, *IHT*, 2009-11-21: “Big tuition increase – 32 percent — approved at University of California...; [tuition is] now three times as much as 1999.”

The USA, more than all other societies has the ability to provide more and better education for all, but that has only rarely been made possible (e.g., after World War II, for GIs. Now, when the need is the greatest ever, “the ongoing recession will lead to 547,000 teachers without a ‘stimulus.’” (*NYT*, 2009-02-01) That is life thievery; now another set of social crimes.

*Healthcare* Doctors once began their careers with the Oath of Hippocrates. Now they — not all, but most — live by institutionalized hypocrisy. And they get rich. We proudly, and wrongly, see our “industry” (as it is shamelessly called) as a model for all countries, even though our doctors, hospitals, pharmaceutical and health insurance companies are grievously corrupted. That helps to explain why the people of this richest country have the shortest and most unhealthy lives of all rich economies.

The US ranks scandalously high on the list of infant mortality, right up there with the poorest countries, despite its highest expenditures. It is sadly in need of an overhaul. (Editorial, *IHT*, 2009-10-22)

We pay the highest health care taxes, but much of it is squandered: the wealthy get tax breaks and HMOs and drug companies pocket billions in profits....But the politicians claim we cannot afford the universal coverage of all other rich countries. We pay for it, but don't get it...over \$200 billion in paperwork for insurance companies, doctors, and hospitals which could be saved in national health insurance; plus \$150 billion for medications: 50% higher than Canada.<sup>8</sup>

Senate Finance Committee Chair Baucus (D, MT) joined with Republicans to oppose public option. He has collected \$4 million from the health care industry. He is one of the senators representing 10 percent of the US population who are likely to paralyze all needed health care. (See GK, *NYT* 2009-11-12)

Study finds that hospitalized children without insurance are more likely to die (*NYT headline, 2009-10-30*)

Early in November 2009 the House passed a weak health care bill by a narrow margin (with only *one* GOP vote in favor). It went to the Senate. There was some reason to expect a better bill, but it was blocked effectively by Sen. Lieberman of Connecticut (the center of the health care industry and its lobbyists). For a fine summary of what is needed, but will not be achieved, see David Leonhardt's "It's Now Time to get health bill right" (*NYT, 2009-11-12*).

Add to the foregoing 1) the already high and rising prices of prescriptions drugs and hospitalization; 2) the rising shortage of nurses; 3) the rapidly declining coverage of workers, 4) the unmet needs of the unemployed, aged and disabled, and homeless. Good going, Uncle Sam.

I now teach in Italy. I am not an Italian citizen, just "a resident." I have a family doctor who sends me to specialists when needed; I have more than six prescription drugs every month. Cost to me: zero. And Italy is not the most generous provider in Western Europe.

In his first six months or so, Obama's strategy was to put health care legislation in the hands of others; now that he is losing he is getting into the fight. Let's hope it's not too late. With the many concessions already made to the "industry," the new provisions are likely to leave the US health care system dangerously inadequate and the profits of the companies even higher.

*Did you know?* The giant drug companies sit on the top of the *Fortune 500* companies in their profits. This disgrace will continue unless we take some

time away from our TV's and shops and get out in the streets. That takes us to what *must be* undone in the process.

### 3. Corruption

To be corrupt is to do something you know is wrong, but do it anyway — to “earn” a reward of some kind. It is to betray your function (and betray yourself) — to succumb to the temptations of money, power, prestige, a dollop of praise, sex, drugs, alcohol, a better grade...name it.

All of us have been corrupted in one realm or another from childhood on, in small or large degree. Here we will be concerned only with the massive corruption of our local, state, and federal governments, emphasizing the contaminated politics of Congress and the White House, which go far to explain the inability of the majority in the USA to meet our basic needs.

Political corruption has many dimensions; the most harmful are those of lobbying and campaign financing. They succeed in bringing about favorable and blocking unfavorable legislation to the corruptors. In 2009, in Washington, D.C., alone, there were 12.5 thousand lobbyists, “earning” \$1.6 billion. Together with campaign financing, lobbyists make promises and threats. Those are the official numbers; who knows how much else goes under the table? In August 2009, for every member of the House and Senate there were six lobbyists trying to influence health-care legislation — about 500 legislators and about 3,000 lobbyists. On that one issue. Oy.

Campaign finance? Already in 2007 “the sticker price for presidential candidates and congressional elections was \$5 *billion*; the opening round in

Iowa was \$500 per voter...By the next election [2008] the price is expected to rise by at least 50 percent.” (NYT, 2007-12-14).

Those numbers, lobbying and campaign finance, began their rise in the 1970s. Who gets how much, and for what? A lobbyist’s annual take averaged \$250,000 already in the 1990s. The term “lobbyist” took hold when the drug company bribers sat in doctors’ lobbies; now the health care industry now third, is catching up with the top two. No. 1 is Wall Street and No. 2 the “military industrial complex” — the war industry.

The billions spent on political campaigns exceed the legal maximum in many ways; meanest is when companies “suggest” their workers to make contributions in their own names (often but not always) paid for by the companies. A large part of that goes to members of congressional finance committees with the implicit (or explicit) understanding that “in the next election, pal, we’ll remember—”) That helps to explain how over 90 percent of those in the House and the Senate in both parties have been there for a *very* long time, which helps to explain among other social crimes why the USA finds itself saluting its way into an endless string of wars.

## US Wars and Interventions

**A**mong all the nations in the world the USA has been unique in at least two realms: our unmatched natural resources and, until 1941, our protection from enemy attacks by two broad oceans. Yet it is difficult to find a period since 1776 when we were not at war for always more, beginning with “westward expansion.” That done by the 1890s, we began our

spread all over the globe for power and wealth: only World War II was defensive.

We have always seen ourselves as *the* democratic nation. However useful as propaganda, this vision is an exercise in self-delusion. A broadly participating democracy did not take hold until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was only then that most workers would, and any women or people of color could, vote. Except for the war in Vietnam, have our innumerable wars have not been substantially opposed. That exception was strong — and unique — but it ended as the draft ended. Then, although the bombing multiplied, the USA sank always further into defeat. Had Nixon not had to resign, it is probable he would have had the USA use atomic bombs: again.<sup>9</sup>

Since World War II there have been *no* geographic limits for the USA; and, although the war had strengthened us in every way, it weakened all others, both absolutely and relatively. After World War II almost all the societies controlled by the pre-war imperial powers had begun to achieve their independence. For the USA, that meant that Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and much of Asia were up for grabs.

The disguised or open US *grabs* in ex-imperialized societies are treated summarily in Note 11. Korea and Vietnam became declared wars; the rest were thinly disguised financial/military supports of conservative/fascist allies in internal conflicts (e.g., in Chile). [In all cases, references will be given.] In what now follows the focus will be on present or threatening wars, beginning with Afghanistan, then to Iran and Iraq and our ties with Israel.

## Afghanistan

As this is written in late 2009, the USA finds itself caught up in an always deepening, increasingly unwinnable conflict in Afghanistan, now spreading into Pakistan. What began as a stupid imperialist war (see just below) now threatens to become endless and bottomless. US involvement in Afghanistan took hold 30 years ago. It is important to show the insanity of that beginning. (And you can read the daily news to see how it continues.)

In 1979 Carter was President. His National Security Advisor was Zbigniew Brzezinski (who calls himself “Zbig”). The USSR bordered on Afghanistan. In July of 1979 “Zbig” persuaded Carter to have the CIA provide weaponry to a small and unknown group calling itself “the Taliban” [which translated literally is “student” or “searcher”]. We know this because Zbig told us in a boastful interview given years later (1998-01-15) to *Le Nouvel Observateur*. “Our stated intention,” he said, “was to draw the Russians into the Afghan trap. We didn’t push the Russians to intervene, but we knowingly increased the probability that they would.” Three months later, the day the Soviet Army entered Afghanistan, he wrote to Carter: “Now we can give the USSR *its* Vietnam.”

Thus it was that the Taliban was given a lasting life. “Zbig” was right. The USSR had “its Vietnam,” was defeated, backed out 8 years later, and the Taliban was there to stay. After a decline in numbers and power for some years after the mid-1980s, it brought itself back into always more power by an inspired but terrible combination. They brought out the worst in Afghanistan’s Muslims and, at the same time became independently strong — for a very good reason. It succeeded in having poor peasants grow opium instead of foodstuffs; now they grow over 90% of the world’s opium.

The Taliban have control over half of the country, and are now vigorously moving into thoroughly corrupted, atom bomb possessing and governmentally fragile Pakistan. Congratulations to Zbig and the USA: we've created our *second* Vietnam; harder to get out. Why did the USA ever have any interest at all in Afghanistan? (See Bacevich.)

There, as with the Middle East, it was location and oil, the latter initially pushed for by Unocal (a giant oil-connected US company). Afghanistan may or may not have great oil reserves, but it surely has the location for a long wanted pipeline through Central Asia. That, along with the probability of good oil deposits, keeps Unocal's lobbyists hanging out in Washington, D.C.

Such political and economic aspirations took the USA into Afghanistan decades ago, but one thing leads to another. In this case, we progressed — that is, escalated — from dirty tricks on the USSR to an unbeatable war against the US-fattened Taliban now controlling over half of Afghanistan; now it is moving into an unstable Pakistan. Congrats, Uncle Sam.

Obama is confronted with a dilemma: We're in trouble whether we leave or stay. Staying is more dangerous. In our 30 years of involvement in Afghanistan, our dangers have become always more intractable. A still-deeper involvement is unlikely to bring "victory." It is time to get out.

As with Vietnam, we never should have become involved in Afghanistan, but we did, always more deeply. Clearly, what has now become the "AfPak" war is considerably more complicated than Vietnam, and staying there is considerably more dangerous. And *staying there* is what Obama is letting himself be stuck with. Headline, *IHT* 2009-01-23: "Obama gives order for

39,000 troop buildup.” As of December 2009: US troops in Afghanistan — 100,000.

The descent of the USA into an always deeper and broader war will continue. Until we do something.

We must bring an antiwar movement back to life, make it always stronger, and get the USA to come home and stay here. That sounds difficult and is. But if “we the people” continue to do no more than sit back and grumble, the USA will almost certainly lurch into a war which could easily become a one against united Muslims — who (quite reasonably) see the West (with the USA its leader) as the destroyers of their cultures and the thieves of their lands. We must begin to see *them* as fellow human beings, lest we and they continue on the road to mass suicide.

We can’t win against them, nor can they win against us. It may be too late — or it may not be. As of now, it’s up to us, not them. Either we face our ugly history and reverse it, or remain arrogant and blow up.

## Iran

The US conflict with Iran began in the 1950s, before Iran’s present ruler Ahmadinejad was born. Why and how? Here’s some history. In 1925, when Iran was still Persia, Colonel Reza Khan pulled off a coup, installed himself as Shah, and changed Persia’s name to Iran. He ruled until 1941, when his son (Mohammed Shah-shah) took over. Between 1925 and 1941, Raza ruled with an iron hand. In the 1930s he found Hitler admirable: “Iran” = “Aryan.” Such leanings led to a joint Anglo-Soviet invasion and occupation of Iran (1941–1946). With both Britain and the USSR greatly weakened by World

War II, the stage was thus set for the entrance of the USA. The USA was interested 1) because of both all that oil and 2) because Iran's next-door neighbor was the USSR.

Mohammed also ruled harshly. In 1951, however, Iranians managed to sneak in a free election. It was won easily by another but very different Mohammed. He was Mohammed Mossadegh, a wise teacher whose political goal was the overthrow of the Shah-in-Shah and the nationalization of Iran's rich oil resources (which he also recommended for all oil-rich neighbors). Well, we showed him.

The CIA, the loyal servants of US presidential power, provided secret help for bringing the other Mohammed back to power, and plotted to overthrow and jail Mossadegh. The deed was done in 1953 with a four-day military coup. (It was a preview of what the USA would pull off in the Congo in 1961; see Note 11). The young shah was back in, and poverty and illiteracy and violence once again ruled the land.

But it was not to be forever: "In 1979 the Shah was deposed by a popular revolt fueled by nationalism, anti-American sentiment, and fundamentalist Islamic principles. During the coup, the American embassy was overthrown, US diplomats taken hostage for 440 days, were jailed, bound, paraded, etc. Those events may be seen as the central reason for Carter's defeat in 1980." (See Note 10.)

Reagan moved into the White House, made a deal (illegal and unknown to Congress) to sell arms to Iran (then at war with our designated ally Iraq) and to use the money for helping the Contras to overthrow the leftish government of Nicaragua. (See Nicaragua, Note 11.)

In 1979 a nationalist/fundamentalist government with good reason to hate the USA took over Iran. As matters now stand, we in the USA have been conditioned to fear and/or loathe the Iranians, and vice versa.

It doesn't help to take sides. What's needed is the dumping of our bad habits: the role of oil over our foreign policies, and our prejudice against people different from us in religion, and/or color and/or principles. We must make a set of moves to convince the Persians that we've changed.

## Iraq

If this had been written 20 years ago, the warning would have been "Stay out of Iraq, oil or no oil." Now we see Saddam Hussein as the beast we had to get rid of (with all the usual claptrap, "worse than Hitler," poised to unleash numerous nukes on our innocent heads; in pushing for invasion, C. Rice, my old debating opponent, thundered, "We don't want the smoking gun to be a nuclear cloud."). But it wasn't always so. In the Iran/Iraq war he was *our* beast, despite the secret deals noted above. I mean, there's all that oil...

Petty tyrants can get uppity. They can delude themselves that they actually have some power and not follow US orders any more. Thus, during Daddy Bush's presidency, when Saddam began to get regionally feisty and grabby, we decided we'd better get rid of him and put in a oppressive right-wing regime to carry out only *our* interests.

But Iraq was not like the lands of our celebrated "westward expansion"; nor is Iran, nor is Afghanistan, nor any place, anymore. Uncle Sam never had to give a serious thought about being history's biggest land thief; we took what we wanted when we wanted. But that was in the days when

colonialism/imperialism were *de jour*; when, that is, the economies, politics, cultures, *and* weaponry of Euro/Americans were sitting in the catbird seat. But since World War II that seat has had nails sticking up on it. Iraq and the rest of the Middle East and Asia, most of Africa, and Latin America are no longer up for grabs. Of that, some has been said above, and more will be below, but let us stay with Iran for a moment; a hot moment which, unless we grow up, could be the beginning of the end for all of us. And we must now bring Israel into the picture.

## Israel

This is one of those matters in which history is primed to kick us in the face. Say “Israel” and the air fills with passion. Here the concentration will be upon the relationships between Israel, Jews, the Holocaust, Palestine, the USA, oil, and wars. What could be simpler? (And, given anti-Semitism, where does the Irishman Douglas F. O’Dowd fit in?<sup>12</sup>)

The history of Jews for millennia was horrible enough; but what was done to them just before and during World War II went beyond horror; that it was done (mostly but not only) by Germans, Poles, French, and Russians, makes one wonder about “modern civilization.” But surely we have learned our lesson? Not quite; since World War II some people of China, the USA, Russia, Africa, and/or among others, Israelis, have come too close to repeating earlier horrors. But surely we as a species have learned our lesson? Or have we merely learned how to keep such crimes hidden; or taught ourselves to murmur to ourselves that “the butler did it”? Is it possible that the Israelis — all too many of whose families suffered fearful and fatal cruelties — would, could, behave inhumanly against others to any serious degree? Ask the Palestinians who have been imprisoned, and/or lands taken, and all too much else.

Had I been in Germany in the Hitler years, I would have “reasonably” been put in a gas chamber. I know that. *Of course* the Jews who made their way into what became Israel had a strong reason for “never again!” But what about Palestinians? There have not been nor will there be “gas chambers” for Palestinians, but the strengthening of Israel has cost countless thousands of Palestinians to lose their lives, their lands, their livelihood, their freedom, their dignity, a good future for themselves and their children. The Jews were seen as less than human by the Nazis (Poles, French, Russians, et al.); do the Israelis not see Palestinians in much the same way? Do not all too many (*not* all) Israelis view Palestinians as sub-human? Are they not mimicking Hitler, upside down?

The US government, except for a few moments, has gone along with Israel and indirectly financed its military. Israel is not only among the world’s strongest in weaponry, it is also the world’s leading beneficiary of US financial assistance; it also possesses nuclear weapons (which neither they nor the USA admit). It continues its record-breaking robbery of land and freedom of movement from the millions of Palestinians who, it should be noted, never stole land from them.

Now hate and bombing and killing rule; on and on and on. Nor can one overlook that the animosity between Israel and Iran is all too likely to bring about a war between them. Such a war *cannot* be won by Israel without US participation, without – perhaps – Israel’s use of its atomic weapons; cannot be won at all. See the substantial – and frightening – article of Agha and Malley in *NYRB*, 2009-12-03)

Enough already. The USA and Israel *must* find the ways toward an assured peace and accessible well-being for both Israelis and Palestinians. The path tread up to now has been a disaster for the Palestinians; if it is continued, it could well mean a larger disaster for all. Obama may or may not yearn for what we see as sanity and peace, but we must push him, scare him, pave the way, and take him with us.

## Obama and Us

It is worth repeating that Obama ranks high among US presidents in terms of both decency and intelligence. That by itself is not very flattering; we still must shudder thinking of Bush II or his Daddy, or Clinton, or Reagan (ugh!, or almost all others except FDR). Add how important and hopeful it is that putting a black in the presidency will serve to reduce racism; even though it has also energized hot racists.

That said, it is up to us to push and support him to take the USA toward meeting our socio-economic needs at home and a cessation of our arrogance and militarism abroad. I begin with meeting our basic needs at home.

As discussed at length earlier, not only is our educational system already inadequate and getting worse, the same must be said about housing for literally millions, meeting widespread malnutrition, and, not least, making health care available to all. We win the booby-prize hands down in all those respects when compared with Canada, the UK, and Western Europe: none of them as rich as the USA.

There is no excuse for such delinquency, but there is an explanation which belongs in the realm of criminality; profiteering hospitals, drug and insurance companies and, most disgracefully, doctors. Since the 1970s we have left the doors wide open for them. It will not be snapped shut by Obama and Congress unless we convince them to “do the right thing” and that in doing so, they will strengthen themselves.

Where does Obama stand on these matters now? Even though he is unusually bright and decent for a president, that’s not enough. As with the newly-elected FDR in his first years (see above), Obama has been too acquiescent with the rich and powerful. To be sure, there is a difference: FDR had never worked for social decency for the poor; Obama did so in Chicago.

Fine — but that was past. We’re concerned with the present and future. To be elected to the US Senate Obama began to bend backwards; to say in the White House we must give him strong reasons to bend in the direction of a decent society for *all*; not just MORE! for the handful. Since becoming a Senator he has changed and, once made President he (as discussed earlier) *all* of his financial advisers: Rubin — Summers, Geithner, et al. — had been among Wall Street’s big shots in the very processes which had produced the financial breakdown of 2007–2008.

That’s bad enough; worse is that his political strategy up to now has been to spend little time listening to the center-left and too much time wooing those in and out of Congress who created or have supported the socio-economic and foreign) policies pushing us toward a cliff. What we need is a president who has been taught by “the People” to work for a decent, safe, and sane society. Obama will not, cannot, change for the better unless and until we let him understand that he’s not going to be re-elected unless he does.

As matters now stand, it appears almost certain that in the critical congressional elections of 2010, the center-right is going to be strengthened. If that happens, it will be the fault of all of us. We “know better” but have done too little or nothing to get it.

## What Must WE Do?

All of us “who know better” must set forth to spend at least a few hours *every* week doing political work of one sort or another, with respect to one or more issues. First, at home. Work for what? Some would answer, “for democratic socialism”; others, myself included would say, that’s great as an ideal, but today’s realities require that we take as a beginning to work for something both essential and where we have a chance to succeed; namely, meeting the basic needs of our people: make an FDR out of Obama.

FDR was a functional conservative when elected in 1932; by the time he made his last address to the Congress in 1945 he had become a strong liberal. It was there and then he argued that the USA badly needed what he called “A Second Bill of Rights”; that we *all* have the same needs, and all should have:

*The right to a useful and remunerative job*

*The right to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing and recreation*

*The right to a decent home for every person*

*The right to adequate health care and medical care*

*The right to adequate protection from the economic fears of old age, sickness, and unemployment*

*The right to a good education*

FDR died soon after that speech. Some of what he listed was well on its way by then and up through the 1960s more was added (e.g., Medicare). But from the 1970s on, there were two interacting developments: as the center-left dwindled away toward shopping centers, the center-right took over the White House and the Congress, assisted by lots of money from the top and lots of work from the rightist bottom (racists, et al.). (See Zinn, Krugman.)

Both Democrats and Republicans have since been lobbied into taking their orders from Big Business and the center-right, for both domestic and foreign affairs. To the latter we now turn.

Obama frequently shows signs of understanding the need for meaningful improvements in our socio-economic system at home; but when it comes to our insane foreign policy he goes along, setting aside what we and the world desperately need: peace. US aggressiveness is ingrained; it was always bad for others; now it's bad for all, ourselves included. Apart from any other considerations, not to comprehend and adjust to that reality has become suicidal.

That should have been made clear by World War II – with or without its atomic bombs. Unfortunately it was not, and for an obvious, for a disgusting reason: except for those killed and wounded, our wars have always been like manna from heaven. Now, can't win at all, except seemingly; for a while.

Of the many wars on today, but the leading combatants today are the USA, the Muslims, and their growing allies. Neither “side” can win; now “it’s one world or none.” There can be no peace, until the powerful nations take the lead: and by one set of means or another, “make amends.” To whom, how? To those we have weakened or worse by centuries of enslaving their people, of stealing their precious “natural” resources, shattering their cultures and then discriminating against them in both their lands and ours. Meanwhile, the majority of the people of the thieving countries are ignorant and/or indifferent to the centuries of those crimes.

It is time to wise up. On every continent the exploited peoples are now organized in some degree to break loose from the hold of the rich and powerful of Europe and North America. Despite what may have seemed as victories, there has yet to be, nor can there be, a *lasting* victory, whether in Chile or China or, least of all, in Afghanistan.

We must see to it that the USA cease its efforts to rule other societies; that requires that the USA itself must be ruled by its own people, rather than by the one or two percent now in charge.

That cannot be done until “we the people” organize ourselves, make the demand for decent politics an integral part of *our* lives: organize ourselves. As we do that, Obama will come to understand that he cannot win without us, and be pleased with that knowledge: as with FDR was in his second, third, and fourth terms in the White House.

## Or Else?

If we don't wake up, politicize ourselves and push Obama into the needed policies, then what — more of the same? That would be bad enough; but the probability is something much worse. Modern societies now move either to the right or the left in response to ongoing political movements. The “ongoing” politics of the USA have come almost entirely from the right since the 1970s. Then how did Obama win in 2008? It was through a lively, mostly young, popular movement that grew out of his Chicago years and, just as much or more, from the economic convulsions which, taking hold in 2007, exploded in 2008. Then there those, like us, who were inspired by the hope of a black in the White House; too many of whom are now blaming Obama for heading in the wrong direction as regards the economy.

Despite the daily news telling us the recession is over, the official – and understated – unemployment rate is over 10 percent and rising. Obama is losing support from many who voted for him as, also, resistance and anger increase from those who didn't. All that, plus big increases in lobbying, and center-right campaign financing: a dangerous and worrisome scene.

As matters now stand the probability is high that an already dangerously corrupted Congress will become more by the 2010 elections. That would mean the end of any possibility for a better Obama, let alone a better society. But that's not all. Worrisome is the probability that the USA will lurch into what has been called “friendly fascism.”

Something of that kind was foreseen by Bertram Gross in his book *Friendly Fascism* (1980), just before Reagan became president. He used that ironic term

to distinguish between the massive brutalities of, e.g., German and Italian fascism and what he feared was slowly but surely on its way in the USA: Minimal domestic *violence* in a false and dying democracy where the wholesale violence common to historic fascism would not be necessary to control a population hypnotized by consumerism and terrorist fears. Such a public has been and can increasingly be exploited culturally, economically, and militarily with relative ease. Gross:

A 'friendly fascist' society is one without the need a charismatic dictator, one-party rule, glorification of the state, dissolution of legislatures, termination of multi-party elections

or attacks on rationality... One of the greatest dangers is the slow process through which friendly fascism could come into being for large part of the population, unnoticed until it is too late.

Concentration camps would be unlikely except for a very few. But there is another major difference between past and present. The fascism of the 1920s and 1930s led to the most disastrous wars in all of history, but they were followed by unprecedented socio-economic improvements for a few decades (if also at the expense of those in the poor countries).

Today, we stand in sharp contrast: not only are most of rich *and* the poor countries struggling economically, but led by the USA we are also grunting our way toward a war which, because it is likely to become nuclear, will end all wars: at least ten countries now possess nuclear weapons, and one of them, ours, used them in an already won war with Japan and, under Kennedy, almost against Cuba. Another country — Israel — will not admit that it has them, but it is the most likely to use them against an Iran which, "understandably" is

doing its damndest to be ready. And then? Then, as a Tom Lehrer's maniacally cheerful 1960s song had it: "We will all go together when we go." [More lyrics, from the verse: "No more ashes, no more sackcloth / And an armband made of black cloth / Will someday never more adorn a sleeve / For if the bomb that falls on you / Gets your friends and neighbor, too / There'll be nobody left behind to grieve."]

History is often boring, but it can be instructive. As suggested in an earlier quotation from FDR, and as more people in the USA and elsewhere become hungry and desperate, this is one of those times.

What's to worry? The USA has been seen (especially by our people) as a model for the rest of the world; so? It is relevant and worrisome to note that as the 20<sup>th</sup> century began, Germany and Italy were viewed in the West as among the strongest contributors to the leading virtues of western civilization: art, literature, technology, and science; the least likely to ever become fascist. I agreed. But no — instead, they were among the *first* to become fascist.

In the 1930s Sinclair Lewis wrote the ironically titled book *It Can't Happen Here* (but it did, in the USA of the book) As things now stand in the USA, the socio-economic conditions for a majority of the people must be seen as scandalously inadequate: their basic needs are unmet.

We must now organize ourselves politically and get to work to see that Obama sees the success of our efforts as essential for his career (and soon after, as good in itself.) He can and must become the second FDR. But if he does not—

## Abbreviations

<i>NYT</i>	<i>New York Times</i>
<i>IHT</i>	<i>International Herald Tribune</i>
<i>NYRB</i>	<i>New York Review of Books</i>

## Notes

1. For the most relevant study of the transformation of capitalism into fascism see R. Brady (1943) He provides a thorough examination of the relevant years of the six leading capitalist nations: Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the USA. In 1937 he provided a thorough study of Nazi Germany that remains relevant for studying today's fascist tendencies.

2. For "friendly fascism" see Gross and the end of this work. For German fascism see Brady (1937). For "monopoly capitalism," see Baran and Sweezy.

3. I was born in San Francisco in 1919 and became politically involved after 1934, when striking longshoremen were killed. Year by year I became more politically involved, seeking a fuller democracy and, ultimately, democratic socialism. The consequences were funny and sad, encouraging and discouraging. Both before and after World War II, those efforts made my life worth living, even though their *very* few victories were short-lived. Was I a Communist? No, we didn't want each other but I worked with them when it made sense. That was often enough: when, in the 1970s, I asked for the FBI pages on me, there were well over 2,000 of them (and I had to pay 10 cents a page to see them).

4. Baran, “Theses on Advertising,” in *The Longer View*.

5. See Soule for the 1920s; Mitchell for the 1930s; Zinn for the whole story.

6. See the books by Phillips and by Krugman for those dire economic and political developments.

7. *Prisons* The decades since the 1970s have meant large-scale socio-economic deterioration for all but especially for those lives were difficult even in the “good times” before the 1970s. Among them, the hardest hit were (and still are) the black/brown/poor who ended up in prison. David Cole summed it up:

In the 1950s, African-Americans comprised 30 percent of the prison population; now, they and Latinos make up 70 percent, and the prison population has sky-rocketed, making the US the cruelest in the world: we jailed just under three million, more than any other country, with a percentage rate 6 times greater than Canada, 8 times greater than France’s, 12 times that of Japan and a 40 percent lead on our nearest competitors, Russia and Belarus....In the 1950s, African-Americans comprised 30 percent of the prison population; now they (and Latinos) are 70 percent and skyrocketing.... Until 1975, the US criminal justice system was in line with much of Europe....with an incarceration rate of 100 inmates per 100,000; now it is over 700 per 100,000, most of the increase involving drug offenders, white offenders by 110 percent, blacks by 465 percent, with blacks spending much more time in prison – about the same for drug offenses as whites do for violent crimes.” That’s cruelly unfair enough. Add this, taxpayers: “A new prison opens somewhere in

the US every week, and each prisoner costs at least \$20,000 for each prisoner a year, far more than tuition at our state universities.” David Cole, “Can Our Shameful Prisons be Reformed?” (*NYRB*, 2009-11-19).

8. For what’s wrong with US health care see Himmelstein and Woolandler, and Phillips (2002).

9. See Ellsberg.

10. See Pitt-Reider and Bacevich.

11. In this lengthy are brief discussion of post-World War II wars and interventions, followed by snapshots of the post-World War II presidents who allowed or savored them, beginning with the Vietnam war. There it will be seen that it began in *1945*; but the consensus is it didn’t begin until the *1960s*. In fact, the USA planted its seeds only weeks after Japan gave up in 1945. As will now be seen, I saw the seeds being watered.

*Vietnam: 1945–1975:* As the war with Japan ended in August I had been in New Guinea and the P.I. for more than three years. In October, as I was standing on the Manila docks waiting for my trip home, I saw a dozen or so U.S. Merchant Marine ships being loaded with armed soldiers. When I asked who was going where, an official said they were (ten thousand) French soldiers, on their way to Saigon. That and then was how the USA entered what became the war in Vietnam (which we did not “officially” enter for 20 more years). When it ended in 1975, the death toll of US GIs was in the tens of thousands (multiply that for wounded); the death toll for Vietnamese, Laotians, and

Cambodians was in the millions, not counting the wounded, the destroyed lands, “and so on.” (See Young)

*Korea:* 1950–2009: Having been tortuously and murderously exploited by the Japanese for decades, the Koreans were bent upon having a country of their own after the war. But the Cold War was underway, so the USSR and the USA were determined to keep each other out. The consequences included been millions of dead and wounded, “two Koreas” and almost endless turmoil between them. Tens of thousands US soldiers still serve in South Korea). (See Cumings, and Stone)

*Cuba:* 1899–1902; 1960–2009: “In 1897 Theodore Roosevelt wrote to a friend: ‘In strict confidence... I should welcome almost any war, for I think his country needs one.’ In 1898 he got his wish. By then the Cubans had been fighting against the Spanish for their independence for several years. Mysteriously, and furnishing a reason for US intervention, the US Battleship Maine was sunk in Havana harbor. The USA jumped into the war, claimed its victory, and from then on effectively ruled over Cuba with one fascist or another: until Castro. And then? We did all we could to overthrow him, not least in our tragic-comic support of the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion by US-trained and -armed Cubans. Since then, we have done all we can (and sought to force our European allies to join us) in boycotting Cuba, etc. (See Zinn.)

*The Congo:* The country is an area equal in size and resources of the USA east of the Mississippi. It was taken over in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by King Leopold of Belgium for his own gains — from slavery, ivory, and rubber. He was responsible for the deaths of 10 million Congolese. This unrepentant mass murderer (talk about “worse than Hitler”), who died “in office” in 1909 to this day has his statues sprinkled around Belgium.

Finally, by 1960 Belgium had to get out. The Congo's first elected Prime Minister was Patrice Lumumba. He called for the Congo (and all of Africa) to become economically and politically independent. A year later, with the help of the CIA, he was kidnapped, beaten, tortured, and murdered. For the next 35 years the Congo was ruled by Joseph Mobutu, who had participated in and been paid for Lumumba's murder. He was characterized by the CIA as "someone who will look out for our interests." At his death he was a billionaire, and had been a White House guest of Pres. George H. W. Bush. (See Hochschild.)

*Chile.* It is a country blessed by its rich mineral deposits and cursed by investors from the USA (including Guggenheim, Anaconda, and Kennecott) which have never left Chile's domestic politics alone. When in 1970, Salvador Allende (a doctor and a socialist) was elected to be president, the CIA went after him: "Declassified documents show that the Nixon administration (which had tried to block his inauguration) began plotting to bring him down just 72 hours after he took office. Along with thousands of others, he died during the US-assisted takeover." (*NYT* Editorial, "The other Sept. 11," 2003-09-11.) See Hersh and Uribe.

*Nicaragua:* Here we examine only one more of the US crimes in Latin America. As with the others, it was murderous, with its harmful effects still going. It had been freed from Spain in 1821, then taken over by Mexico, then the Central American Federation, then the British: then, in 1912, the USA invaded and occupied them until 1933. We were kicked out by Sandino and Nicaragua enjoyed democracy until 1937. Then the USA pulled off a coup and put one of history's prize brutes in charge: Somoza. His gang murdered and exploited the Nicaraguan people until 1979, when the Sandinistas took power. But when Reagan took over the White House "he signed the secret

National Security Directive 17, which had the CIA equip rightist Nicaraguan exiles – “Contras” – to overthrow the elected government. The CIA had trained them and shipped them through Honduras into Nicaragua, destroyed oil refineries, mined harbors, and attempted assassinations. When Congress finally discovered all this, under public pressure they cut off the financing of arms supplies for the Contras. That led to what came to be called “the Iran/Contra” scandal. Its many dimensions included the sale weapons by the USA during the Iran/Iraq war((supposedly our an enemy at the time) the profits which used to have the Contras buy arms.” Pres. Reagan was instrumental in all of this, lied about it in public, and so it went. (See Zinn, and La Feber, and Weaver for Central America as a whole.)

In sum: In the foregoing, and/or other such US doings in the ex-imperialized world, the presumed democratic ideals of the USA were violated, presided over by post-1945 presidents. When done by others we see the foregoing and what follows as “Ugh! For example:

*Truman:* He was put into the US Senate by the powerful Pendergast gang that ran St. Louis. In the 1944 election he was made V.P. to FDR by Pendergast and the still “Solid South” to get rid of the liberal Henry Wallace. (When Pendergast finally went down, Truman almost resigned from the House, figuring his career was over. Later, Truman — as president — *did* go to his former boss’s funeral.) Now Truman did have his good points, but the puppy of a tough gang is unlikely to be much of an idealist. (A related Haitian saying comes to mind: “The little dog is very brave in front of his master’s house.”) Truman was also a dyed-in-the-wool militarist who went along with the Cold War, Korea, and our critical first steps toward the Vietnam war without a blink. He *loved* saluting people (and being saluted).

*Eisenhower.* He had been a good general and, all things being relative, he wasn't a bad president; he got us out of Korea (sort of; there are still thousands of US troops there); but then he went along with our early steps toward the Vietnam war.

*JFK.* Considering that he was the son of an execrable right-wing multi-millionaire, he wasn't *too* bad. The huge sorrow that followed his assassination was more because he was so likeable than because he had done much for the nation. He hadn't. He kept US imperialism going strong in Asia (Vietnam, particularly) and he went along with big business without a grunt; but he was at least (belatedly) opposed to the Bay of Pigs attempt to overthrow Castro. His brother Bobby, who had been a de facto rightist before the assassination, was transformed and on his way to becoming a liberal president — until he too was assassinated.

*Nixon.* Tricky Dick had a bottomless need for power, power, always more power. Interestingly enough, he was so obsessed with power that he supported more than one reasonably decent (and popular) policy that the GOP itself opposed. But he was done in by his passions, and got the heave-ho because of "Watergate" and related crimes. And yes, I was on his "enemies list."

*Carter.* He has been "a good guy" working for peace since leaving the White House, but not as President, partially because he inherited troubles such as the captured US men in Iran and, not least, a serious recession. But he also supported the murderous regimes of Indonesia and Nicaragua right to the end. And he instituted some economic policies that helped set the stage for the US (further) turn to the right. Then after Carter – ugh! — we come to the Bushes.

*Bush I.* He became president because his oil giant Daddy put him there (after having put in as head of head of the CIA, seen as a heroic pilot in World War II. Not quite: He was a US Navy pilot in the Pacific, with a crew of two. I was a also pilot in the Pacific, and pilots live by this rule: if your plane is hit and out of control, your crew gets out *first*. Not Bush I: he parachuted down and left his mates to go to a flaming death. That incident was well known in the Pacific, even though he was then “unknown.” As President? He was in the White House when the great descent into the hells of US wars intensified and the economy was taking its first big steps toward becoming a gambling casino. If he tried to stop any of that it was kept a secret.

*Clinton.* He’s easy to like, if you like macho guys, but he was and for me still is hard to admire. Oh, of course his inheritance was a worsening of what Bush I left behind. But nobody forced him to have as his economic pals Rubin, Summers, Greenspan and the like. All were heavies, all got Clinton to go along with the demolition of the essential financial protections created after the financial mess of 1929 et seq.; thus paving the road to the crackup of 2007, et seq. However, and in comparison with the Bush II who was on the way, Clinton – *anyone* — seems as a genius dropped from down from heaven. Now hold on to your nose:

*Bush II.* He’s easy to despise. We of the USA should be ashamed of ourselves, and not only because we allowed such an insult to humanity to take over the White House, clearly having stolen it with the fraternal help of Governor Bush of Florida. That was bad enough; that he could be re-elected for a second term in what was possibly a reasonably honest election tells us something awful about our nation Ah, sure, there was a war on, and all that. But there was abundant evidence that the rationale for that war was a set of lies. He should have been tried in court as a traitor.

That a fool and a crook such as Bush II could be President should serve as a warning; in the USA (and elsewhere) anything can happen in what have been seen as democratic societies. (See my closing pages.)

*Obama?* Up to now he's been a disappointment. That could become a disaster and not only for himself, considering how poorly he has dealt with both domestic and foreign affairs. He makes good speeches, as though that's his main job. It isn't. He's losing supporters for doing too little that's needed and gaining enemies both because of his speeches and his color. Only we can make him into the president could (and for our sakes, must) be.

12. My original family name was "O'Dowd. Who's gonna trust what a Mick says about Yids? How about a Mick/Yid: My father's Catholic parents fled Ireland in the famine of the 1840s; a few decades later my mother's Jewish parents fled the Russian pogroms. The main reason, they married was that they had been forbidden to see each other. They were headed toward divorce before you could say Oy! (or its Irish equivalent). From age 4 until age 19 I lived only with my Jewish (but not religious) "Muh." From a poor family, she never went beyond grammar school, but she was wise and decent. My father was an athletic macho and a right winger who, happily, I never saw more than a few dozen times. *Item*; During World War, when I in the war in both New Guinea and the P.I. he wrote to me asking for a photo to show his pals. In the letter, he made some of his usual Jew-hating remarks and I wrote back and told him to fuck off. My first political involvement was in the mid-1930s working with a group of rich Jewish merchants in San Francisco who paid me and others to politick against racial and religious prejudice.

13. See Bacevich.

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