

# **Toward a Second and Stronger New Deal**

**by Doug Dowd**

*This article is concerned with the political efforts “We the People” must make in order to halt and reverse the ongoing social and political tendencies in the USA.*

## **From Nothing to New Deal**

The ongoing economic mess which became obvious in 2007 is popularly seen as “a financial meltdown” and a repetition of the Wall Street “Crash of 1929.” But it’s not a straight replay. There are similarities, but there are also differences. Plus, there’s a larger perspective to consider. It is all too probable that both financial collapses were consequences, instantiations, of a broader and deeper set of socio-economic problems. Joseph Stiglitz has put that well in a recent article:

The fact is the economy in the years before the current crisis was fundamentally weak, with the bubble and the unsustainable consumption to which it gave rise, acting as life support. Without these, unemployment would have been high. It was absurd to think that fixing the banking system could by itself restore the economy to health; bringing the economy back to ‘where it was’ does nothing to address the underlying problems. The trauma we are now existing resembles that of 80 years ago, during the Great Depression, and it has been brought on by an analogous set of circumstances: the breakdown of the banking system, then as now, was a in part a consequence of deeper problems. Even if we correctly respond

to failures of the financial sector it will take a decade or more to achieve full recovery. Under the best of conditions we will endure a Long Slump. If we respond indirectly, as we have been, the 'Long Slump' will last even longer, and the parallel with the Depression will take on a tragic new dimension. (Joseph Stiglitz, "The Book of Jobs," *Vanity Fair*, January 2012)

I concur with that analysis and will add to it. When the 1929 crash hit, President Hoover (Republican) was in charge. A classic conservative and friend of Wall Street, his response to "The Crash" was, in effect, "Be patient, it will resolve itself." And let things ride as he (and Wall Street) assured the public that "Prosperity is just around the corner."

Hoover was replaced by Franklin D. Roosevelt ("FDR"), Governor of New York, a Democrat — but just as much a friend of Wall Street as Hoover. Elected in 1932, for three years FDR did nothing to contain or reverse what was becoming The Great Depression. As one might expect from a patrician president, he refused to help out The People. Until...until—

Until his advisors told him that if he wanted to be reelected in 1936, he would have to finally do something: He would have to undertake policies providing jobs. In this regard, his advisors were stimulated by a string of protests in 1933–34, most dramatically the general strike of San Francisco, which shut the city down. (That event was what awakened me from my prepolitical teen-age slumber. For that period and both its differences and similarities with today, see my "Tough Times" article.)

Thus it was that in 1935 the very limited New Deal was born. Its first and main policy was the creation of Social Security, which of course, assisted only the aged. In 1936 a little more was put forth for jobs and education, but already by 1937 the New Deal policies had been too much for Wall Street. They persuaded FDR to close the door on the New Deal because, they asserted — loudly, indignantly, but utterly incorrectly — it was “inflationary.” It was far from being that, but (then, as now) Wall Street got what it wanted. The New Deal became an artifact of U.S. history, until in some respects it was reborn as the USA became involved in World War II.

To the degree that the USA has created decent and badly-needed socio-economic policies, one should remember that they were mostly created during the second world war, then added to up into the 1960s. In addition, the political work essential to that set of improvements was much assisted by the participation of war veterans. Unfortunately, as the 1960s ended, they and those they had worked with became less involved in politics and more involved in buying (and borrowing) as, at the same time and up to the present, the business world, chose to become increasingly politicized. Business was guided and much assisted by the trained professionals of the “FIRE” (Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate) sector and their billions of political contributions:

From relative peanuts in the early eighties, the money contributed to federal politics by FIRE \$109 million in the 1992 cycle to 162 million in the 1996 cycle and to a walloping 297 million in the 2000 cycle....The congressional tax-writing committees were a particular target. (Kevin Phillips, *Wealth and Democracy*, 2002)

This a tip of the iceberg description of but one realm of FIRE's activities in the past century. Those "contributions," which should more properly be called *bribes*, were made in the period in which all restrictions on Wall Street had been abolished by President Clinton's famous financial advisors, who also became the main advisors of President Obama. My, what a coincidence.

## **What's Wrong Now**

I will outline the socio-economic policies needed to prevent from becoming even nastier what been a serious tragedy for millions of our people; and show what government can and must do to become "our" government. In other words, here's how to transform a tragedy into what is needed if the USA is to become a sensible, safe, and enjoyable society for all instead of a playground for the few.

To be discussed are the domestic economic and social reforms that are essential if we are to move toward a functioning — as distinct from a hollowed out, make-believe — democracy. Yes, toward a society actually "of the people, by the people, and for the people." (Instead of the rich, by the rich, and exclusively for the rich.)

In a brief essay such as this one can only provide a summary outline of the several dimensions involved. I do that with discussions of the elements of four interacting social realms:

- 1) The economy
- 2) Politics
- 3) Our wars
- 4) Our unmet social needs

All of those regions are dominated and controlled by an interacting and interdependent minority of the rich and powerful. They are supported — dreamily or viciously — by what now threatens to become a self-destructive majority.

## **1. The Economy**

Because ours is a capitalist society, I will begin with its power center: the economy. With reason. The economy is simply the inherent, most vital, painful, and disgusting element of U.S. capitalism. And at the heart of capitalism and the economy is its defining shibboleth...

**Inequality** Let me caution you: What follows is a teaspoon out of the ocean. A fuller discussion of this subject by me can be found in my 2009 book *Inequality and the Global Economic Crisis*.

The inequality of income, wealth, and power is the heart and blood of capitalism, but there have been and are different *degrees* of inequality in the capitalist nations. Thus, inequality in the USA today has become substantially greater than it was in the 1960s, while the inequality in capitalist Western Europe' since the 1970s has been reduced substantially. Moreover, what has been worse in the USA is now galloping.

In late 2011 the news wires ran the following hed: "Census Data: Half of U.S. poor or lower income." The went on to quote Prof. Sheldon Danziger of the Univ. of Michigan:

The prospects of the poor and the near poor are dismal. If Congress and the states make no further cuts we can expect the

number of poor and low income families to rise for the next several years. (Associated Press, 2011-12-15)

In 1997, Danziger commented trenchantly about the growing inequality in the USA. He noted that the “golden age” of 20<sup>th</sup> Century capitalism was a kind of rising tide:

[T]he poverty rate was cut in half between the late 1940s and the early 1960s and cut in half again by the early 1970s.

But times have changed.

The experience of the past two decades has been dramatically different. Many of the current generation of young workers lack the economic security of their parents. Their jobs pay relatively low wages. Fewer jobs now provide health insurance and private pensions. Both white-collar and blue-collar workers have higher rates of unemployment. In many families both husband and wife must work to support the family and to cover the higher costs of owning a home....Most important, although the tide has risen slowly, it has become uneven and no longer lifts all boats. We see the recent period as one in which the large yachts, moored in the safe harbors, rose with the tide, while the small boats ran aground. No matter how it is measured, inequality...has increased over the past twenty years, and poverty has remained high.

This pattern was particularly strong during the 1980s and early 1990s. In contrast to the American dream, those whose

incomes grew during this period were highly concentrated at the top of the income distribution. Inequality widened both between demographic groups and within them. The most disadvantaged benefited least....Poverty remained high and equality of earnings and of family income increased. (*American Unequal*)

“Congress and the states” (as mentioned in the AP squib above) are on their way to make further cuts in needed social policies. As Jim Hightower would put it, “It’s time to get the pigs out of the trough.” That’s our job. It is up to us to work politically in city, state, and national politics to see to it that our governments move in just the opposite direction. In that regard, here are some [what used to be called] non-negotiable demands. Plus, those reading this and their political friends will surely have some additional proposals for what can and should be done about our heartless inequalities.

Government(s) must once more do what was at least touched upon in the 1930s; namely, have a humane setting of the poverty level and a program to assist financially and otherwise the many millions whose incomes are low (or zero). The assistance can be financial, the provision of jobs, or both. The cost of the desired programs — as with all other governmental programs — should be financed through income taxes, the amounts of which must be in accord with income levels.

In the early post-World War II years, the tax rates on the rich and on corporate profits were reasonably high, but since the 1980s they have been pushed down: on the rich down from up to 90 percent down to less than 30 percent; on corporations from a high of 30 percent down to less than 5 percent. To which it needs adding that both the rich and the corporations

pay a lot to tax experts whose machinations allow them to pay nothing; or even, as has been the case with some of the real biggies, to get money back.

Low income levels are bad enough, but they are accompanied by other dangerous realms: poor health, housing, and education.

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*PERSONAL SIDEBAR*

Here a personal note: My parents ere divorced when I was 4, and I then lived with my mother. She had lowly paid jobs; she had not gone beyond grade school and my absentee father gave no financial assistance. In my low teens I went to work cleaning houses and delivering papers, neither challenging nor fun.

My life was qualitatively improved when, after World War II, all who had been in the military were able to be supported — for shelter, school costs, books, and more — when going to school. And this was all the way from grammar school to a PhD. Thanks to the GI Bill I was easily able to become a prof, because all universities had expanded. That program worked in the past, and it is needed now. We will never know how many men and women who are struggling in their lives could have much better lives for themselves and others, had they been given a chance. We must see to it that our government does for today's poor what was done for war veterans.

In the well-known words of biologist and polymath Stephen Jay Gould:

I am somehow less interested in the weight and convolutions of Einstein's brain than in the near certainty that people of equal talent have lived and died in cotton fields and sweatshops.

We must see to it that our government does for today's poor what was done for war veterans.

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Low income people suffer from poor (or no) housing. A governmental house building program would furnish both jobs and inexpensive housing. In turn, that would of course add jobs with those who supply the lumber, cement, and tools.

Of course there is much more to be said in this realm. Suffice it to say here that *if* the governments of the cities, the states, and the nation were *ours* rather than those now ruling, the lives of the non-rich would be enhanced. But none of that can or will be done until and unless we make them ours, by becoming seriously political. That means dropping a lot of silly stuff and becoming a democrat. (Note the small "d." The Democrats aren't going to go to bat for anybody but Big Business. At least until some other constellation attains more power than the corporations. Their bread is buttered on the same side as the other team. The big "d" Democrats are just more circumspect about it.)

And now (drum roll) — The People's Enemy...

**Big Business** As has been discussed in detail in my earlier articles (see “Wall Street” and “Now or Never”) the “big business” of the past, say 50 years ago, was a circus of midgets compared with what they have come today — by one giant taking over others.

It’s urgent for us to get to work politically to bring back to life legislation which prohibited the creation of the gigantism of a Citigroup, a Bear Stearns, a Lehman Brothers, and other financial giants, which became giants by taking over — gobbling up — bundles of producers. That set of processes expanded in the 1920s, but was made illegal in the modest reforms before and, especially after World War II. And the slope was slippery. Expanding on the Reagan (Rep.) years, the most sweeping “do-as-you-wish [or do-anything-at all-before- somebody-else-does-it-first]” politics took hold in the 1990s, when Clinton (Dem.) was President. So, what must we do now?

We have laws to set limits on how fast we can drive. We can bring back to life the our former laws on how big a company can be. We can limit not only size but *product* and *process*. A steel company should not also be a coal company or an engine-producing company; nor should an industrial company also be a financial company...and so on.

In sum, we need legislation which sees to it that a company cannot be what General Electric is much more than a hardware maker. It has four different general businesses: (1) energy, (2) technology infrastructure, (3) capital finance and (4) consumer and industrial. As the No. 6 firm in the USA, the 13<sup>th</sup> most respected, and the 14<sup>th</sup> most profitable [all as of 2011], GE is an idol — maybe *the* idol — of the business world. Why? Because it is so

“helpful?” No. Because it is so powerful and so profitable. Period. And GE makes more than half its profits from finance. Some manufacturer!

One place to start raising hell about Big Business is in your econ classes, whose profs more admire than analyze Big Biz (done with the approval of the university rulers, who want more, more, still more dollars from the top corporations.)

## **2. Politics**

If you are reading this it is probable that you already know plenty about the deep corruption of both parties, at all levels. Ah! the politicians whine, “But how else are you going to get elected and then keep your job?” That rotten system will continue and worsen unless — excuse me, once more — “We the People” get off our butts and push aside their money with our political efforts. Only some who read this will be old enough to remember that in the 1930s and again in the 1940s and 1950s the main basis for being elected and staying in office was provided by the political activities and support of *us* — the people.

But increasingly in recent decades those who once were involved politically have lessened or given up being so. The reasons for the flagging efforts are several, but the major one seems to be that the earlier achievements, having made life more livable, eased memories of the prior political pain. That would have been troublesome enough in itself, but our diminishing politics was in the same years (and especially since Clinton’s 1990s) increasingly shoved aside by the business world’s always more clever “mind management” for their products, their ideology, and their purchased

politicos. And their politicians were working hard while we were tranquilized — just coasting, snoozing, shopping.

The main sources of the political transformation were also the beneficiaries. Big Business and its pal, the military, disenfranchised the populace and in so doing “did well by doing good.” (*Pace* Tom Lehrer.) Thus, the process becomes circular, feeding upon itself to make things ever worse.

The USA has been a militaristic nation from its beginning. After all, how did it become a 48-state nation without taking it — and keeping it — from others? Nor should one overlook the fact that our robberies were energized by the intrinsic U.S. passion for more, more, more!

So, when we ran out of dozens of neighbor states, we elbowed our way into Hawaii, Alaska, and the Philippines. All too many of us happily joined World War II, nodding thanks to the Japanese for giving us an acceptable reason. That assertion could be criticized as anti-Americanism. It is “anti” American Legion-brand Americanism, but what it is, is anti-American imperialism and its blood brother militarism. And anger and disappointment at the loss of what we might have been.

### **3. Our Endless Wars**

In my article “Tough Times” I provided a sustained critique of U.S. militarism and its numerous wars since World War II. Here I will draw upon some of its most relevant segments. Note first the many military operations after World War II which were not declared, but in which the USA used military force to have its way: Angola, Bolivia, Bosnia, Cambodia, Chile, the Congo, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Greece,

Grenada, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Indonesia, Iran, Korea, Laos, Libya, Lebanon, Macedonia, Nicaragua, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Philippines, Puerto Rico, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, The Sudan, Syria, Uruguay, Vietnam, Virgin Islands, Yugoslavia, Zaire. Our military intervention in Vietnam began in 1945 [in some of which I was involved], but we did not “declare” war until the 1960s.

For a full and acute discussion of the Vietnam war (and other military excursions of the USA) the best source is Marilyn Young, *The Vietnam Wars: 1940–1990*, published in 1991.

Let’s take a look at two recent declared wars.

**Afghanistan** That war was publicly acknowledged about 10 years ago, but we had taken steps to become militarily involved more than 30 years ago. It was then that the USA armed and financed a then small group calling itself “The Taliban.” Our aim was to draw the USSR into a hopeless war. It worked. The USSR was caught up in a fight; they lost and quit after almost nine years. The USA has now been fighting the Taliban for almost ten years. Why is it we are fighting there? And what are we fighting for?

**Iraq** We went to war there when the White House was occupied by King Bush II. His father had been the head of the CIA before president. He had been able to keep his son out of the infantry, fixing him up in a much safer branch, the air force, and seeing to it that Son Bush didn’t have to leave the sweet boundaries of the USA while the war in Vietnam was roaring. So, instead of dodging hostile ground fire, Son Bush flew around the serene skies of Louisiana and Texas during the day and screwed around the bars at night. A proud scion of the Bush dynasty, he.

When the attacks on Manhattan took place as the 20<sup>th</sup> century and young Bush's presidency began, he was already all set to declare a war on Iraq. (Never mind that the attackers were Saudis. I mean, everybody knows the Saudis are our *friends*.) The justification for the U.S. invasion was a powerful lie. It was officially announced that the Iraqis had — or would soon have — nuclear weapons; and, furthermore, they were planning to use them to widen their power in their oil-rich region; and furthermore perhaps use their vaunted arsenal of nukes against the USA when appropriate.

Son Bush, now Pres. Bush, got away with the “rationale” and the USA went to war. This monstrous U.S. assault — a clear violation of accepted international law — killed tens of thousands of Iraqis and U.S. GI's, and ruined the lives of millions of Iraqis. Of course, the USA doesn't recognize international law — unless it wants to. After all, the sovereign USA *is* the law. According to Bush I, it's the new world order. (Or to paraphrase R. M. Nixon, “If the USA doesn't it, it isn't illegal.”)

Here's a revealing and comment from someone who was involved at the top: R. Nicholas Burns, Undersecretary of State during the Iraq war.

We must never forget the human costs of the war....When it became clear that the stated reason for our invasion was blatantly wrong, we lost any hope of international support....*But* [emphasis added] — they will need our help in the years ahead as they confront continuing sectarian and tribal divisions...We have a moral responsibility to stay engaged politically and economically so that Iraqis are not left alone to nurture the seeds of freedom and democracy in the Middle East. (*International Herald Tribune*, 2011-12-22)

As he said that, the thousands of U.S. troops withdrawing from Iraq were settling down within a few miles, ready to go back to Iraq or to Iran. Or both. As this is written in late December 2011, all hell is breaking loose in Iraq, and the chances are all too strong that the USA will use that as an excuse to wiggle back in for “decency’s sake” (*not*, of course, for oil.) In addition to the awful numbers of Iraqi dead and wounded were 4,500 dead and 33,000 wounded U.S. military, nearly \$1 trillion in direct spending, and enormous increases in oil prices.

Neither Daddy Bush nor his nitwit son have ever come close to admitting the foregoing truths. Until we get to work to push Obama on a saner path and help him to get there, we will have left the door open for something much worse, not least as regards wars. As of now, it is all too possible that we will continue with one or more wars, using the time-tested rationale of “responsibility” or “they asked us.” It’s time that we recognize that the White House — no matter who is in it — thinks that war and peace are none of your [our] business. They never will even waver until we make them sweat. The USA will always be at war in *somewhere* unless stopped — by us.

Vietnam — and Iraq and Afghanistan — should have been, but weren’t, a lesson. Now a new and even worse insanity awaits our ongoing silent nod of OK to anything Israel wants to do. Recently, it has been clear that they wish to begin a war with Iran, using the justification that Iran has nukes. They don’t, yet but they certainly have reasons to get them, given the high probability that Israel is going to make war on them with *its* nukes. If and when they do, they know that the USA will pick up the pieces, pushed by the strong Zionist-Jewish political organization in the States. We must make the USA stop supporting Israel’s militarism, and give Iran a diminishing cause for its hostility toward the USA.

In the same spirit, we must put political pressure on the Congress and Obama to move the USA toward becoming a great global peace-maker, instead of the most heavily armed and militarily involved nation. In doing so we would also get rid of the ongoing White House basis for the following insanities.

### **“Milex” (Military Expenditures)**

The National Security Budget for 2012 presented by Obama has many dimensions but they all are concerned with past, ongoing, and future military expenses. Here a summary listing of the Department of “Defense,” as put together by Christopher Hellman (Truthout blog, 2011-03-01):

\$558 billion	‘base budget’
\$118 billion	military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan
\$27 billion	nuclear weapons and ‘miscellaneous’
\$72 billion	‘homeland security’
\$53 billion	‘national intelligence’
\$129 billion	veterans hospitals and disability
\$19 billion	‘foreign-linked’ homeland security
\$68.5 billion	military retirees
\$185 billion	defense personnel

(Note: The “defense personnel” entry represents 39 percent of the total interest on the national debt.)

That \$558 billion “base budget” is 59 percent of the total Federal Budget of “Discretionary Spending,” and the total of all of the above items is more than half of the “milex” in the entire *world*. The U.S. milex expenditures are

a little under \$1 million a minute. And there are 1,440 minutes per day. Seven days a week, 365 days...

As I write in December 2011, Congress is debating over the budget for next year. In both the House and the Senate, as the quarrels begin, it is quite unlikely that there will be any significant cuts in the military budget, but very likely that there will be severe cuts in the budget for education, housing, and other realms already rent by problems because they are already stingily financed. To them we now turn.

## **Our Unmet Social Needs**

These days, people are not too big to fail — which is to say, profits are the name of the game in the richest country in the history of the world. And they are the only game. Banks are richer than ever, and people are failing. There are many social problems, but I will discuss only those that are both essential and disastrously managed:

1. Health care
2. Education
3. Housing
4. The environment

The *world* is not always considered as a “social” matter, but it should and will be here. In the USA the environment is considered to be property. When you buy property here, you automatically get the right to ruin it. Forever, if you like. This stupidity is known as “property rights.”

Not everyone is so barbaric. Ecuador is quite enlightened in this regard. There an ecosystems is deemed to be a person, with an enforceable "right to exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its vital cycles, structure, functions and its processes in evolution."

Here in the USA, we get corporations as persons, with all the rights of a real person — except that corporations are spared the bloodthirsty U.S. piece of work: Capital punishment is reserved for people decidedly poor, usually black. Corporations can live forever in luxury.

## **1. Health Care**

The USA takes great pride in its health care. Indeed, in the press it is often portrayed as being the best in the world. It may be so for the rich, but for the rest of us, which is almost everybody, the USA is way down on the list. Best are the West Europeans, Scandinavians, Japan, and New Zealand — who make us seem medieval. Why? Is that because the government of the richest nation in all of history cannot *afford* to provide health care? No, not at all. The USA ranks low — and its people suffer and die — because the medical profession, hospitals, and pharmacy manufacturers make obscene amounts of money from their high prices. We the people get swindled out of decent, affordable health care, but these monsters get to be No. 1: They are the world's champion profit seekers. (See my "Now or Never," and "Wall Street" for details.)

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*PERSONAL SIDEBAR*

This story will partially explain my deep anger with the disgraceful health care realities of the USA. The first step toward my disgust was created in a hospital. A student during the day at San Francisco Junior College. At night I worked as an assistant in the surgery department of the City of San Francisco Hospital. My shift was from late afternoon to midnight, when most of the surgeries were emergencies. When the ambulances came in with emergency patients I would rush downstairs to take them for surgery.

One night when I got downstairs to receive a patient, there was a hot discussion going on. The patient's English was weak; made more so by his condition; made worse as the hospital staff was arguing with him about his income: "Do you have any money in the bank?" ["I don't understand."] "Money — how much money do you have saved?" ["Money? I- I must have money?"] After several back-and-forth salvos, the poor guy finally understood and said he had \$300 dollars in the bank. Aha! He was put back into the ambulance and taken to a private hospital.

I saw him again a week or so later. His \$300 used up, he had become eligible for the city hospital. I was on my way toward becoming an enemy of the U.S. health care system.

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The U.S. medical profession and its associates have been disgusting for decades and will become more so unless and until we take strong political steps to force them to serve rather than rob us. These are steps that have

already been taken in all the other industrial nations, not by the profit makers themselves, of course. They were compelled, coerced — by strong democratic pressures. We in the USA have every reason to envy our counterparts in, say, the UK, France, or Italy.

In the recent decades I have been teaching alternating semesters in Italy and the USA. Of the nations just noted, Italy is farthest from the top in its provisions. Nonetheless, although as an old geezer lurching through his 70s and 80s and now in his 90s with this and that going wrong, I have never had to provide more than an identity card to get treatment, whether surgery, hospitalization, or medicines. All included. Maybe it's better in Finland or Iceland or New Zealand, but it's still sure as hell way, way better here in Italy (where I now live full-time) than in the USA. It's time for us Yankees to straighten up and become politically very active, if we are to have a healthier life.

## **2. Education**

I began to teach in 1949, as I turned 30. As noted earlier, in recent years I have been teaching alternate semesters in both the USA and Italy. Now that my age is slowing me down, I decided to retire before I got fired, but in my 60 plus years of teaching, I started teaching first where I had also learned the most: UC. Berkeley. Since then I have taught in severall universities in the USA and two in Italy. Here are my conclusions about what must be understood and must be done in the USA; as soon as possible: Education must be seen as a main factor — *the* main factor — in our lives (given our families and good health). Not only because it helps us to get a better job than we would otherwise have — although that is vital — but because it is the realm in which we can discover what and who we are would like to

become. Forgive me for going into my personal history once more, but I do so because I believe it to be relevant and revealing.

I lived with my divorced mother until I was in my late teens. Her education had not gone beyond grammar school. Mine would have stopped at high school, except for San Francisco's free "junior college" and, after World War II, the "GI Bill," which paid for all costs: tuition and books, room and board, etc. for vets, from grammar school through the Ph.D. I had been a court reporter before the war (enabled by my junior college training the "shorthand": necessary in courtroom trials (now done with "machines.")). I went from freshman through the Ph.D. at UC Berkeley and, because there were so many vets also taking courses, I was put on the junior faculty. It is no up to me to say whether or not my addition to the university teaching world was good or bad for the nation, but I can say that it was wonderful for me, and that such financial support for education would be valuable for all its recipients *and* the society.

### **3. Housing**

What percentage of our population has inadequate — that is, poor and indecent — housing? We don't know, because we live in a society in which too high a percentage of its people don't give a damn about anybody except themselves. If you were part of that majority, it is unlikely you would be reading this (or anything like it). That indifference is not only inhuman, it is also stupid, for at least two reasons:

1. If our society were one which could and did meet housing needs, it would be both able and likely to meet all other basic human needs.

2. If our government saw to it that all had decent housing, the building and improvement required would also provide millions of jobs and associated production and be better business for all of us.

The USA is economically able to do that now, but all too many of our people have been hypnotized into believing that what is or is not produced and consumed should be determined “by the market.” Along the way, the most powerful elements of the business world have succeeded in tricking the other 90 percent of our people that “this is the best of all possible worlds.” Just as that isn’t true as regards health and education, it is a disgusting assertion about housing. So what do we do?

As suggested earlier, we must persuade our governments at all levels to take the political and financial steps needed for decent housing for all. The process would include financing, research, and a production program. The financing — as with much else discussed earlier — would require a substantial change in the tax structure, a particularly significant one of having the tax structured on the principle that the higher the income, the higher the tax rate. It may be hard to believe today, but in the 1950s the tax rate was 90 percent for highest incomes. That was the law of the land in USA then. As of now, the functional principle is just the opposite: the higher the incomes the more numerous and ingenious the ways to lower, or even fully avoid, taxes.

The financial aspects of housing have become increasingly complicated, as the financial sector has pushed through Congress always more ingenious means of loosening up regulations. The most disgusting and for the housing financiers most profitable has been the creation of lending procedures that have allowed relatively poor families to “buy” houses but not to begin

paying for years. Fine — except that the interest is sky high and, in today's economy, impossibly so for millions of buyers. Whatever else is done, ways should be found to protect the borrowers and let the fancy lenders take a much-deserved loss. This robbery-with-a-fountain-pen would not exist if we worked politically to have the government create a broad set of housing projects whose aim is to see that all of our people have access to decent housing. That would be costly indeed, but it would also mean many good jobs for the building and supply workers. How to pay for it? Partly by the better incomes of those providing labor and products for the building, partly by seeing that the rich have their taxes raised to where they belong.

The U.S. economy's realm of borrowing and lending for housing has been made into a playground for gang of speculator hotshots. They should be punished financially and, where possible, a kick in their behinds.

#### **4. The Environment**

As was discussed at some length in my article “Now or Never,” unless we (the USA first and foremost, but not only) make great changes in what and how we produce and consume, the world will sink into increasing and irreversible dangers to our air, water, and much else upon which our very existence depends. As Foster has put it:

It is no secret that today we are facing a planetary environmental emergency, endangering most species of the planet, including our own, and that this impending catastrophe has its roots in the capitalist economic system. (John Bellamy Foster, *The Ecological Revolution*, 2009)

That system will be with us for a long while, even if we began this minute to replace it. Thus, what we must do beginning today is to work hard politically to reduce our suicidal production and consumption activities. Such “reduction” requires laws which term environmentally dangerous activities as criminal, as much as setting fires. Those wasteful activities have taken hold in all realms of our social existence, not least in our always increasing military expenditures and the product sales effort’s product variations, planned obsolescence, model changes, and advertising. If a sane being from Mars were to take a close look, the thinking extraterrestrial would conclude that this planet is ruled over by suicidal madmen.

What must we do? The answer to that may be the most demanding and difficult to achieve than anything else discussed above, To reverse and undo our ongoing suicidal actions requires the undoing of the modern world’s “mind managing” and its success in creating societies which accept suicidal waste. That has been done in the same era in which the lives of always rising millions of people — in both the poor and the rich societies — have been distorted, twisted, and shortened by the ways in which we have “learned” to take for granted what is environmentally and humanly insane.

What we must do has two steps:

1. We must convince ourselves that allowing our present ways and means of living to continue is insane for ourselves and murderous for our descendants.
2. We must do our best to support and create a strong political movement which takes the steps needed to change our suicidal habits as consumers and our acceptance of militarism as citizens.

In these times of easy and rapid communication, a few minutes on your computer will let you identify and work with those who are already working for a decent to.

## **Conclusion**

In my long life there have been many periods combining social anger with daily worries — dangers, depression, wars, totalitarianism, and disgust. Whatever my troubles and fears in those years in those years, I have never been as worried about the future as I am now. Nor, because I am in my 90s, is that concern been only for myself, my family, and friends. It is for all living creatures, human and otherwise. Our mental strengths could have produced a world in which all could live safe and sane, productive, and satisfying lives. Instead we have produced a world in which the poor majority lives desperate lives, and almost all the rest of us have foolish lives of consumerism, institutionalized waste, and take constant wars for granted.

Now it is up to us to become politically involved; seriously. Up to us to turn our society toward decency, and sanity and have urged that although Obama has been at best a disappointment (to put it mildly), if we do not get to work substantially and soon, the Republicans will take over the White House, the Congress, and many more state and local offices. Although I am a severe critic of Obama, I urge that we get to work seriously to keep him in the office. To do so soonest is vital. As we work for him – and others – we must let it be known why and on what terms: He — and they — must understand that to take today's political power back from the rich and the racist. As noted earlier, when that was done to and for FDR in the 1930s, he became democratized to reverse the rightward shift. It may or may not be too late.

It is better for us to make that effort and fail, rather than to sit back and await disaster.

