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(If you sign up for a monthly donation and want to get Don's DVD, remember to contact us at consortnew@aol.com. If you prefer, we can substitute "The Election Held Hostage" or "The Made for TV Election." Just ask.)

Third option: if you can't afford a donation right now, you can also help us reach our fundraising goal by taking advantage of our deep discount for the two-book set of Robert Parry's *Secrecy & Privilege* and *Neck Deep* (co-authored with Sam and Nat Parry). The sale price for the set is only \$19, postage included. For details, [click here](#).

Fourth: you can help us close out our warehouse space by buying full boxes of *Secrecy & Privilege* or *Neck Deep* for only \$59. Each carton contains 28 paperbacks, or you can ask that we give you a mix of half and half, 14 of each.

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For details about this bulk book order, [click here](#) and scroll down to the \$59 offer.

As always, thanks for your support.

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. He founded Consortiumnews.com in 1995 as the Internet's first investigative magazine. He saw it as a way to combine modern technology and old-fashioned journalism to counter the increasing triviality and timidity of the mainstream U.S. news media.

Beyond the Debt Limit Fiasco

The dispiriting battle over the debt ceiling has set many to wondering how America's profoundly dysfunctional political/media system can and must be overhauled to serve the interests of the broad population, not just the privileged elites and their deluded defenders. Poet Phil Rockstroh addresses that dilemma.

By Phil Rockstroh

At present, most of us negotiate our days so distracted, disillusioned, dazed,

buffeted, bought or marginalized by the corporate state/mass media hologram – the multi-headed, awareness-addling Hydra that guards contemporary precincts of perception (apropos, the “debate” involving the so-called debt ceiling “crisis”) – it is difficult to apprehend what we are up against i.e., the forces of consolidated and calcified power that degrade almost every aspect of life in the nation.

In contrast, throughout this past year, popular uprisings of varying scope and degree of success have been unfolding worldwide. And the genie is not going back in the neoliberal bottle.

The global power elite might not like it, but (unlike the general population of the U.S., whose view of life has been conditioned by the inundating, thus internalized, narcissism proffered by media age hyper-commercialism, and who have come to exist as self-involved consumer state dystopias of one) – large numbers of the people of the world are declaring to their overlords: We’ve had enough of the world you’ve created ... time to make it our own.

With this in mind, let us take a moment to pity our own poor, little, economic despots from the start, so misunderstood they only built the U.S. on the bones of African slaves and watered the soil with the blood of murdered Indians, and, from that time on, proceeded to pile corpses to the sky, only so they could climb atop and look out for us lesser folks.

And from the soil rose a culture of kitsch, unhealthy food, and creepy, over-priced banal distractions. Consequently, the U.S. seems an over-priced, downscale theme park – Six Flags over Denial and Decay – a grotesque, kitsch-bewitched land of negative enchantment unprepared for the gathering, denial-sundering storm that, from all indications, will leave the nation devastated.

What are the forces and factors that have wrought this circumstance?

One progenitor of the defiant idiocy of the general population of the U.S. can be traced to the tendency of the consumer state to induce impulsivity rather than reflection, i.e. rendering individuals self-involved, infantilized monsters of the id dazzled by and perpetually reaching for the next bright and shiny.

Antithetically, if a critical mass of the populace of the nation ever gained a semblance of self-awareness that included traits of foresight, critical thinking, empathy, self-restraint and a sense of conviction regarding, for example, the dire state of the planet on an ecological basis, as well as an apprehension as to their position as wage slaves/debt serfs to their corporate overlords – the corporate/consumer paradigm would be in danger of collapse.

While it is true, government is often behind assaults on common sense and common

decency, the slickest, most self-serving ploy monopolistic capitalists pulled off against the tenets and foundation of a just, equitable society has been in their cunning framing of the situation e.g., the sales pitch of one of their most effective salesman, that “government is the problem, not the solution.”

Ronald Reagan was half right; only, he conveniently left out the following: In particular, when the politicians who operate the system are beholden, as he was (and, at present, Barack Obama is) by game-rigging operatives of the moneyed elite.

Ergo, the so-called “debt crisis” involved a similar dance of deceit and distraction. As was the case, early into the Obama presidency, with the healthcare “debate,” the deal was struck before the faux rancorous music began. The fix was in.

The moneyed class works the system and those without power and influence get worked over.

Regarding the persistent, liberal fallacy: Obama needs to stand up for his convictions. Correction: Throughout his presidency, he has been standing upon his convictions i.e. standing on the throats of the powerless as we’re being mugged by his elitist benefactors.

Moreover, how does he or anyone “change the tone” of political polarization so evident in the nation, when the Right is a walking landfill of noxious arrogance and inexplicable self-regard?

If contemporary conservatives showed any indication of harboring even a molecule of humanity or self-awareness then a dialog might be possible. But we’re dealing with grownups who believe God is some kind of cosmic CEO – folks who are certain if one listens closely, one can hear him counting his money.

Therefore, we’re warned: not voting for Democratic Party (lesser-of-two-evils) candidates is a treacherous decision, and we’re advised we must goad President Obama to govern as the man he sold himself as during the 2008 presidential election campaign.

Given the realities of political life within the age of corporate dominance, in which reality is defined and distorted by the media hologram, hasn’t the thought occurred to progressive types that the sales pitch is, in fact, inseparable from the product, and, consequently, to the most media-savvy mountebank will go the spoils?

O.K. then, you’ve been betrayed. Good. Such a turn of affairs serves as a good vehicle for clearing away toxic innocence.

"We would rather be ruined than changed;

We would rather die in our dread

Than climb across the moment

And let our illusions die."—W.H. Auden

(Excerpt from: The Age of Anxiety: A Baroque Eclogue)

Next step: Let the Democratic Party die and allow a true progressive party to rise from the ashes.

Although, first, the hidden in plain sight, inverted totalitarian powers at large need to be drawn into the open e.g., as Dr. King did in regard to Jim Crow in the U.S. Deep South in the 1950s and 60s.

There is so much more at stake than simply a "debate" regarding the alleged debt ceiling.

To cite one collective peril: The oceans of the earth are the matrix of life on our planet. As did all life on land, we human beings emerged from ancient seas. And we will not survive for long by dramatically altering its nature by the short-sighted greed and hubris of the present time.

We will be pulled to our death by its destruction, like Ahab lashed to Moby Dick.

Given the degraded quality of life in the nation, why do the people of the U.S. stand for this culture of exploitation and diminished prospects?

We resist the dread incurred by an attempt to climb our way past the proliferate distractions of the moment thus avoiding this extant state of affairs: Beneath the shimmering sea of the media hologram, a monstrous virulence glides.

Belying our consumerist habit of mind (evinced in traits of feigned insouciance and blithe disregard) yawns a system sustained by the blood and treasure-depleting apparatus of militarism and economic exploitation – a system that is reaping vast destruction upon the ecological balance of the earth, the foundation of community, and upon individual psychological wellbeing.

Accordingly, a gnawing emptiness is the constant companion of the denizens of the corporate/militarist/consumer state.

This emptiness is the progenitor of its destructive nature. In a vain attempt to sate the hollow ache and banish the gathering dread, the rapacious appetite of empire rises and is perpetually reinforced.

There is the banality of evil and then there is the evil of banality. Witness: The present banality of our ecocide-inflicting mode of being – one that reduces the world to only those things that can be commodified and thus reduces earth, sky and psyche to controllable (dreamless and dead) bits.

We stare at our appliances as exquisite things are extinguished, forever ... mistaking configurations of pixels for the breath and brilliance of the world.

On a personal basis, the present system levels this dismal legacy upon the nation: Minds made of internalized shopping malls; bodies built by junk food; libidos informed by celebrity porn; agendas driven by a crass, good versus evil, winners and losers, cartoon cosmology.

Congratulations, America, we've done the architects of the republic proud.

Some people are fragile, and the system breaks them for life. In contrast, others are resilient, but will grow callous and conformist. Yes, life is a fistfight and a marriage and a dull evening of laundry and a trundle through trivia and a flight of the sublime.

The point: Be alive within life don't submit to any ass-backwards, assembly line-modeled mode of being, gridded by comforting casuistry, maintained by hierarchies of bullies, and settled for due to fear or convenience.

"When truth is replaced by silence, the silence is a lie." –Yevgeny Yevtushenko

Insulated in our landscape of silence, we demand the ground beneath us be salted with deceit, begetting the bone-dry wilderness of ignorance and duplicity we know as late, neoliberal empire.

Otherwise, fiery incantations of outrage would bloom from within us – a combustive wildfire immolating to ash our tinderbox rationalizations perhaps, leaving an ash-fall to nourish sleeping seeds of renewal.

"What is to endure light must endure burning." – Victor Frankl

Yet, this writer is bereft of a plan to redeem humankind. Who can afford such hubris? In contrast, I negotiate the world with my heart and head, and I sing of its joys and sorrows.

Apropos, within the kingdom of this breathing moment, I hear arias rising ... auguring the decay of this nation. In short, I am a poet and an essayist not a civic planner.

Accordingly, here are a few heart-wrought observations from the personal ash heap of my poetically archaic sensibility and sent out to the fear-bandyng

cynics of the elitist political and economic classes – to those who reduce all of life to the economic sophistry of Disaster Capitalism (who have been disingenuously warning, “run for your lives; the debt-ceiling is falling”) – who just can’t envisage a world that is not as degraded as their own mindset – to those in positions of insular, arrogant power who inflict great harm upon those bereft of privilege and then proclaim, “this is just the way things have to be.”

False, that is merely the way things exist in the confines of your miserable cosmology. To the contrary, the world is a vast, ever-changing tapestry ... that you merely perceive as a dung rag for your exclusive use.

“The most intense conflicts, if overcome, leave behind a sense of security and calm that is not easily disturbed. It is just these intense conflicts and their conflagration which are needed to produce valuable and lasting results.” – Carl Jung

We have a daunting struggle ahead of us. Therefore, I proffer the following short message to those purer-than-thou souls who counsel that art (including the arts of political resistance) should only be uplifting, moderate, and beautiful:

Art (reflecting our world) is often sublimely ugly, monstrously so. The image of a monster opens the soul to awe.

Note: The word “awe” is the prefix for both awesome and awful. Often, creating ugliness carries as much purpose as creating beauty.

Everything has been figured out, except how to live.

Jean-Paul Sartre

Sartre’s words notwithstanding, I am often asked by readers “practical” questions such as: “You view the empire to be in a state of profound decay, beyond repair and reclamation – then how should we proceed from here?”

I answer, appropriating a phrase from James Hillman: simply proceed into “the thought of the heart and the soul of the world.” The problem contains the solution. The poison serves as its anecdote. The vastness and complexity of life that (seemingly) endeavors to destroy me (in contrast) renders me more like myself, and therefore I become more fit for the struggle ahead.

Accordingly, Rainer Maria Rilke, from the opening stanza of the Duino Elegies:

Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the Angelic

Orders? And even if one were to suddenly

take me to its heart, I would vanish into its
greater existence. For beauty is nothing but
the beginning of terror, that we are still able to bear,
and we revere it so, because it serenely disdains
to destroy us.

Phil Rockstroh is a poet, lyricist and philosopher bard living in New York City. He may be contacted at: phil@philrockstroh.com Visit Phil's website <http://philrockstroh.com> /And at FaceBook: <http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100...>

Obama on the Backs of the Poor

Exclusive: The painful resolution of the debt-ceiling crisis shows that Republicans and the Right know how to play hardball and that the Democrats and President Barack Obama know how to get rolled. Former CIA analyst Ray McGovern is thinking about other options.

By Ray McGovern

What are we to make of the Obama-brokered deal on debt and spending? It was certainly what the Germans call *eine schwere Geburt* (a difficult birth); it was one of the few times I would have favored abortion.

I am reminded of a sermon that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave during the turbulent 1950s, in which he peered into the future and issued a prescient warning:

“A nation or a civilization that continues to produce soft-minded men purchases its own spiritual death on an installment plan.”

In promoting and then signing the so-called “deficit reduction” legislation, President Barack Obama has definitively confirmed that he stands in the ranks of those spiritual-death-dealing, “soft-minded” men about whom Dr. King warned so ominously.

In my view, even dyed-in-the-wool Obama supporters will now have to let the scales fall from their eyes. The new one-sided “compromise” so clearly promotes the interests of the wealthy over those of the poor that, in Biblical terms, it

can readily be seen as a Goddamned deal.

I want to share some thoughts with those among us, believers and non-believers alike, who shudder at the prospect of our children and children's children inheriting a country far different from the one promised by the American Dream, a nation approaching "spiritual death."

If you are not greatly concerned with the growing disparity between the rich and poor in this country, take another minute to ponder another warning from Dr. King in the same sermon:

"Passively to accept an unjust system is to cooperate with that system, and thereby to become a participant in its evil."

It is a bitter pill and a great disappointment that the President has turned his back on those about whom the Hebrew and Christian scriptures express the deepest concern, the anawim. This frequently used Biblical word denotes not just those on the margins, but the despised, hated, poor, often said in Scripture to include the widows, the orphans, the strangers.

My atheist friends regularly remind me to widen my perspective. The scriptural mandate to care for the widows, the orphans and the strangers springs from the highest of human instincts, and neither requires nor presupposes a faith perspective.

In modern American history, it also has been shown that having a vibrant middle class is good for business, while a society of a few rich and many poor is prone to destructive boom-and-bust cycles.

A huge majority of economists concede that America has been sliding into a land of haves and have-nots for the past several decades and that the "deal" Obama signed into law on Tuesday will do little, if anything, to improve the lives of our fellow citizens deprived of work, shelter, medical care and other necessities.

In sum, Obama again put in a corner by Republicans who appeared ready to force the United States into default if they didn't get their way reneged on a promise not to let the burden for coping with the economic/fiscal mess fall primarily on the backs of the poor.

The immediate deficit-cutting plan excludes any additional tax revenues from the rich, a line in the sand drawn by Republicans who were determined to protect even an extravagant tax loophole for corporate jet owners and special tax breaks for oil companies recording record profits.

And Republican leaders have made clear that they will be equally adamant against any new tax revenue from the recommendations of a special congressional committee, meaning that the United States will soon face another budget crisis in which the Republicans will demand even deeper spending cuts.

Demons and Scripture

Scripture contains a lot of stories about demons. These texts were always a stretch for me, until I found myself investigating my country's use of kidnapping, torture and black-site prisons, not to mention targeted assassinations. No longer could I make light of the demonic.

Lessons from the various indignities visited on many of my friends in inner-city Washington have served as confirmation. Ex-offenders are especially prominent among the anawim of our nation's capital.

If we are to follow Dr. King's mandate to avoid participation in unjust systems and practices inevitably exacerbated by the legislation signed by the President on Tuesday, we need to decide how to react. Ideally, we will choose to move forward in a wide, justice-and-peace oriented community.

From what is known of Jeremiah Wright, Obama's pastor in Chicago, and the United Church of Christ's reputation for faithfulness to Hebrew as well as Christian scripture, it is a safe bet that the social gospel was preached again and again in the hearing of an attentive Obama.

There is no way he could have escaped the insight that the ancient Hebrew concept of social justice was something that many in the U.S. power elite today would decry as an un-American activity.

This Hebrew concept of justice, which Jesus strongly embraced, challenges modern America and its economic inequality at almost every turn.

Take, for example, the Biblical concept of the Jubilee Year, which mandated widespread redistribution of wealth every 50 years. (See what I mean about "un-American?")

I think we can assume that, if Obama were paying attention, he would have assimilated the starkly countercultural Hebrew concept of the Jubilee Year, an inspiration that rejected the idea of accumulated wealth and the outsized power that goes with it.

The Bible was dead serious about the redistribution of wealth. The Jewish sense was that, over time, the community would inevitably see immoderate wealth and immoderate poverty co-existing.

In other words, it was a given, for a whole bunch of very human reasons, that there would be mal-distribution of wealth, and the concept of Jubilee was to squash it all back down, essentially requiring everyone to return to the same starting point every 50 years as a matter of law.

Granted, it was a primitive idea for a simple economy, but the Jubilee spirit was the spirit of the God of the Hebrews who insisted time and again through the Biblical writers and prophets "there shall be no poor among you." And for that to happen, there had to be periodic sharing of wealth.

It would be perhaps too much to expect that President Obama would have broached something along these lines to House Speaker John Boehner.

Still, would it have been too much a stretch to expect some mutual concern from Republicans and Democrats alike over the growing disparity between rich and poor in this country?

Boehner is fond of advertising that he is a Catholic. Me too.

The House speaker is a little younger than I am, but I would be surprised if he had not learned that the first thing Jesus of Nazareth said in his inaugural speech was that he had come to "bring good news to the poor." There was only bad news for the poor from the debt-limit "compromise."

Chastened by the Right

In Obama's public appearances, there have been a few times when he showed some sensitivity to the problem of an extreme accumulation of wealth at the top.

Remember campaigner Obama's brief chat with Joe (the Plumber) Wurzelbacher in Toledo, Ohio, on Oct. 12, 2008.

"My attitude is that if the economy's good for folks from the bottom up, it's gonna be good for everybody," Obama said. "I think when you spread the wealth around, it's good for everybody."

The Republicans and the right-wing news media pounced on the comment, accusing Obama of running for "redistributionist in chief."

Fox News played up the following snide statement from a spokesman for John McCain: "If Barack Obama's goal as President is to 'spread the wealth around,' perhaps his unconditional meetings with Hugo Chavez, Raul Castro, and Kim Jong-Il aren't so crazy, if nothing else, they can advise an Obama administration on economic policy."

A chastened Obama quickly learned his lesson. Since the "Joe the Plumber"

incident, Obama has avoided any clear suggestion that he sees a benefit in a more equitable sharing of wealth.

On Feb. 7, 2011, the President volunteered to undergo a TV grilling by Fox's Bill O'Reilly prior to the Super Bowl and was prepared for O'Reilly's when-did-you-stop-beating-your-wife-type question on the topic:

"Do you deny that you're a man who wants to redistribute wealth?" asked O'Reilly.

"Absolutely. Absolutely," Obama responded.

O'Reilly himself is an interesting case study. A graduate of Catholic grammar and high schools on Long Island, he in 1971 earned a B.A. in history from Marist College, which was founded by the Catholic order of Marist Brothers in Poughkeepsie, New York. He then taught briefly in a Catholic high school.

There is no indication that anywhere along the line anyone told him of the Jubilee Year concept, or even that Jesus of Nazareth said he would be, and his followers should be, "good news for the poor. "

Fox has been very good news for O'Reilly; Wikipedia records his annual salary at \$20,000,000.

Given how Obama facilitated "resolving" the manufactured crisis over raising the debt ceiling and other fiscal measures, he seems determined to prove his declaration to O'Reilly.

Backs of the Poor

At a Town Hall meeting at Facebook headquarters in Palo Alto, California, on April 20, the President inadvertently (and ironically) gave a hint regarding how easy it would be to do what he actually ended up doing even while criticizing Republican attitude of neglect of the poor.

Here's what Obama said to applause from the well-heeled folks at Facebook: "Nothing is easier than solving a problem on the backs of people who are poor, for people who are powerless and don't have lobbyists or don't have clout."

Then, to avoid an unprecedented default on the payment of U.S. debts, Obama ultimately opted for this "easier" course of action, exempting the wealthy and corporations from pitching in to solve the debt problem and bowing to Republican demands that everything come from spending cuts.

The outcome of the debt-ceiling battle has left many disillusioned Democrats and progressives now certain that it's foolhardy to expect Obama to behave any

differently, even though he continues to promise a vigorous debate on the proper role of government in American society but then never delivers.

That means the next course of action for Americans who want a different outcome may be to knock on the doors of rectories, synagogues and mosques to see if there's anyone home and if anyone cares about what is happening to those on the margins.

Ask if these religious leaders are aware of what happened in Germany during the Thirties, when Catholic and Lutheran church leaders could not find their voice, and ended up acting as a force of stability for a fascist regime. See if it's possible to wake anyone up in the religious institutions tied to the Establishment.

Inform other citizens that 58 cents of every dollar in federal "discretionary spending" now go to the Pentagon. It might be worth noting that the Soviet Union America's "great enemy" imploded 20 years ago. Despite the lack of a threat from a major power, the U.S. military spending equals that of all the other countries of the world put together.

It's also worth recalling President Dwight Eisenhower's famous warning about "the military-industrial complex" and the words of Gen. Douglas MacArthur ten years earlier. (Neither of these military men was exactly a "dove.")

On May 15, 1951, MacArthur said: "It is part of the general pattern of misguided policy that our country is now geared to an arms economy which was bred in an artificially induced psychosis of war hysteria and nurtured upon an incessant propaganda of fear."

Since the Obama administration and Congress cannot be counted on to pursue traditional American justice (not to mention Biblical Jubilee justice) toward the poor and since American religious institutions mostly are riding shotgun for this inequitable system we might do well to heed the admonitions of popular theologian Annie Dillard; Cesar Chavez, co-founder of the United Farm Workers; and Mario Savio of the Berkeley Free Speech Movement of the 60s:

Dillard: "There is only us; there never has been any other."

Chavez: "There are already enough of us. But without action, nothing is going to happen."

Savio: " There comes a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part, you can't even passively take part; and you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels,

upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop."

Some Americans plan to express their repudiation of the dysfunctional political system with a U.S. version of "Tahrir Square" beginning Oct. 6, the tenth anniversary of the U.S. attack on Afghanistan. (See: <http://october2011.org/statement.>)

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He was an Army Infantry/Intelligence officer in the early Sixties and then served as a CIA analyst for 27 years. He is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).
