

On Occupying the New Year

For many people around the world, 2011 was a very tough year, as millions lost jobs, suffered foreclosures and faced austerity, while the rich did fine and corporations hoarded trillions of dollars in cash. But there were glimmers of hope in the emergence of resistance, writes Danny Schechter.

By Danny Schechter

Out with the old. I would say good riddance to 2011 even as I fear 2012 may be worse, given the financial trends, social chaos and political idiocy that we confront every day. Every time, I believe it can't get worse, it does.

It seems so clear that the political system is moribund and paralyzed and the economic system may be in worse shape.

A tiny sliver of the 1 percent may be in charge although not in control. Their own short-term greed makes it unlikely that they can stabilize the system or do any longer-term planning. Their Titanic has hit its iceberg. Some new technologies may keep it afloat for now, but for how long? We lurch from crisis to crisis in an atmosphere of deep denial.

Barack Obama clearly has no new ideas, and the Republican candidates for the most part don't know what an idea is, as they pander to a know-nothing base to prove that they can be as crass as they are. Television dutifully reports all this as if we should take it seriously. No wonder only 7 percent of the people approve of the money-dominated Congress.

The Republicans can't get any nastier with each other and now the Democrats are moving in the same direction with the announcement that Dennis Kucinich, whose been gerrymandered out of his district, is now oh, no going after progressive Marcy Kaptur's seat.

As I think about the year ahead, I am reminded of what I said at this time last year about what I called the year of the "Crumble." Sound familiar? It's not a long distance from "crumble" to collapse as democracy gives way to plutocracy.

I wrote then: "The economy continued to crumble for ordinary people with little hope for a quick turnaround, even as some markets surged. The hopes of the jobless for employment crumbled. The faith of the so many homeowners that they will find a way to stay in their homes facing foreclosure is crumbling.

"And so have the hopes of so many of us that our new 'change is coming' president would fight for us, would end the wars, would close Gitmo, would

abandon torture, would make healthcare more affordable, would give us a government we could believe in; that, too, has crumbled.

“Look back at the devastation of the year gone by: its ugly election, bought and paid for by U.S. Supreme Court-sanctioned special interests; oil spilled by the Gulf-full; wars escalated; climate change unabated; and Wall Street unchecked, and we have to scratch our heads and wonder who is crazier, them or us.

“A year after the earthquake, rubble is still piled up in the streets of Haiti, which has received only two percent of the money raised to reconstruct it. We now have six active military operations underway, rating less and less coverage, only four percent of the network news fare, by one count.

“In contrast, the partisan wars are all TV news covered over and over again, with Fox charging, MSNBC responding, and Jon Stewart joking. There seems to be nowhere to go, but down.

“The pragmatic compromisers of the democratic center may convince themselves they are ‘getting it done’ in D.C., but they are also alienating the Democratic Party base and disgusting all those who believed it would be or could be different.

“Already, there are new escalations in Afghanistan, a rising military budget that goes uncommented upon, and more repressive laws on the way. There will be a price to be paid for their legacy of spinelessness and corporate complicity.

“The media still remains at the center of our conundrum, as we argued ten years ago when we founded the media issues network, Mediachannel.org (now Mediachannel1.org) to advocate for fundamental media change. So we are left where we started, as David Swanson argues, with the need to support independent media, arguing:

“‘[W]e need an alternative not only to Fox News but also to the rest of the corporate media. This is the easiest and most important project anyone can work on. The dream of persuading the labor movement (which can’t even strongly oppose corporate trade agreements when the president is a Democrat) to invest in a new television network should be abandoned. If the George Soros’s of the world haven’t figured out that there’s a communications problem, they never will. But we already have what we need; we just need to make it bigger, and we can do so. We should invest in TheRealNews.com, Thom Hartmann, Free Speech TV, Link TV, GRIT TV, Democracy Now, Pacifica Radio, community radio stations, blogs and web sites.

“‘We should make use of foreign outlets that, for their own reasons, are willing to provide decent coverage of U.S. politics: Al Jazeera, ATN, RT-America, etc.

Unsubscribe from the New York Times, stop contributing to any purchasing of ads in it, stop reading it, and read the Guardian online instead. Get connected online, and people will send you the occasional good article or video that all lousy outlets produce. Share that one further, but promote a good website that's hosting it, not the corporate source.'"

And let's also get behind WikiLeaks as they fight for transparency and accountability by governments and media. We need to support not only Mediachannel1, but Pacifica Radio, Progressive Radio, Bill Moyers and Laura Flanders' new shows and sites like OpEdNews.com, CrooksandLiars.com, Disinformation, Firedoglake.com, Global Research, ConsortiumNews, Real News, ZNet, Reader Supported News, etc., etc.

At the same time, we have to go back to an old idea for which online interaction and an email barrage is no substitute: organizing real people. There are more of us than there are of them, but they are organized and focused and we are mostly reactive and emotional.

As James Kwak wrote on The Baseline Scenario, there is a reason for this. Progressives are captured by symbolic politics while the Right is committed to substantive goals. He cites the view of Murray Edelman who divides the political sphere into insiders and outsiders.

"Insiders are basically special interests: small in number but well organized and with specific goals. Outsiders, or the 'unorganized masses,' are the rest of us: we have some interests, but we are poorly organized to pursue them and therefore are generally unsuccessful. In particular, Outsiders suffer from poor and limited information, and therefore are especially susceptible to political symbols."

He cites Arnold Kling's summary of Edelman's insights:

"Given these differences, the Insiders use overt political dramas as symbols that placate the masses while using covert political activity to plunder them. What we would now call rent-seeking succeeds because Outsiders are dazzled by the symbols while Insiders grab the substance."

Happily, this year which seems to be ushering in a year not of a crumble but a collapse, is also the year when Occupy Wall Street and its offshoots emerged so powerfully to capture the national imagination and create a force based in the 99 percent willing to fight the Wall Street crimesters and stand for social justice and equality.

I have been having a happier news year ever since OWS emerged. I have been following its bold initiatives in print and in the streets. I have just finished

a new book called OCCUPY collecting my reporting for AlJazeera and other websites as well as my News Dissector.com blog.

Despite all the depressing things that are happening and the economic depression that so many of the wisemen of the punditry admit is arriving I am more hopeful than I have been in years. It feels good to be fighting back, and, not just online. The fact that this movement received the media attention it has is a sign that the people of this country are open to something new and will, if well communicated too and organized, join in to make the changes we need so desperately.

In 2012, we have to continue to occupy the high ground and occupy the mainstream. When people lead, others follow. Adelante! Forward! Or, As, Martin Luther King put it, "Tomorrow is Today"

News Dissector Danny Schechter writes daily at NewsDissector.com. Information on his latest film is at Plunderthecrimeofourtime.com. Comments to Dissector@mediachannel.org

A Brief Narrative of Consortiumnews

From Editor Robert Parry: As we struggle to raise the money to keep Consortiumnews.com alive in the New Year, ex-CIA analyst (and peace activist) Ray McGovern suggested I write a brief narrative to explain our history and our goals. (If you just want to donate to our end-of-year fund drive, click the Donate button.)

In 1995, after more than two decades in the mainstream news media (AP, Newsweek and PBS), I founded Consortiumnews.com as a home for the serious journalism that no longer had a place in an American news business that had lost its way.

At the time, I was the lead journalist on what had become known as the Iran-Contra scandal, and I had watched first-hand as senior news executives chose to squelch that inquiry apparently out of fear that it would cause another impeachment crisis around another Republican president, Ronald Reagan.

Such a possibility was deemed "not good for the country," a view held both inside Congress and in the boardrooms of the elite national news media. But I refused to accept the judgment. I continued to pursue the many loose ends of the scandal, from evidence of drug trafficking by Reagan's beloved Nicaraguan Contras to suspicions that the arms-for-hostages deals with Iran started much

earlier, possibly even during the 1980 presidential campaign.

My insistence on getting to the bottom of this historically important story alienated me from my senior editors at Newsweek and from many of my journalistic colleagues who simply wanted to keep their jobs and avoid trouble. But it offended me that the national press corps was signing off on what amounted to a high-level cover-up.

The era of Watergate had come full circle. Instead of exposing crimes and cover-ups, the Washington press corps' job had changed into harassing and mocking serious investigators the likes of Iran-Contra special prosecutor Lawrence Walsh who stayed on the trail.

Consistency and persistence were oh so passé. The Washington news media had drifted into a culture of careerism where top jobs paid well into the six- and even seven-figures. Your hair style and glib presentation on TV were far more important than the quality of your reporting. And the most important thing was to avoid the wrath of right-wing attack groups who would "controversialize" you.

By the mid-90s, it had become clear to me that there was no feasible way to do the work that had to be done within the confines of the mainstream media. The pressures on everyone had grown too intense. No matter how solid the reporting, many issues were simply off limits, particularly scandals that reflected badly on the admired duo of Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush.

Even when I obtained highly classified government documents in 1994-95 shedding light on how U.S. policies toward Iraq and Iran had evolved at the start of the Reagan-Bush era, this information could find no home even in the liberal outliers of the mainstream media.

So, on the advice of my oldest son Sam, who told me about this strange new phenomenon called the Internet, I started this Web site in fall 1995.

Besides seeing Consortiumnews.com as a place for serious journalism, I also envisioned it as a refuge for quality journalists who faced the same frustrations that I did. I thought we could provide editing and financial support, as well as an outlet that would distribute their stories to the public. Hence, the rather clunky name, Consortiumnews. At the time, I thought I could raise a significant amount of money for the project.

However, during my initial contacts with public-interest and liberal foundations, I was told that a major objection to funding journalism was the cost. The feeling was that information was an expensive luxury. But I thought I could prove that assumption wrong by applying old-fashioned journalistic standards to this new medium.

To start the Web site the first of its kind on the Internet I cashed out my Newsweek retirement fund and we began producing groundbreaking reporting original to the Web. Over time, we showed that quality journalism could be done at a bargain-basement price. (Even today, as Consortiumnews.com has grown into a daily news operation, our annual budget is only about \$120,000 a year. We get an extraordinary bang for every buck.)

Yet, despite our journalistic success, foundations and large funders remained skittish. We became an IRS-recognized 501-c-3 non-profit in 1999 (as the Consortium for Independent Journalism) and received some modest grants, but we have never been funded at the level that I had hoped.

Indeed, at the start of the crucial 2000 presidential campaign, our financial situation had grown so dire that I was forced to take an editing job at Bloomberg News and put the Web site on a part-time basis. We still published some important stories about the campaign, including how unfairly the Washington press corps was treating Al Gore and how outrageous the Florida recount was, but we didn't have the impact that we could have had.

During the run-up to the invasion of Iraq in 2002-03, we also challenged Washington's conventional wisdom, which was solidly behind George W. Bush's case for war. But again our voice was muted.

Finally, in early 2004, I felt it was important to pull together our volumes of original material about the Bush Family before that year's election. For personal financial reasons, I couldn't leave Bloomberg News until April (and I must admit it wasn't easy stepping away from a six-figure salary). But I felt I had no choice.

After quitting, I accelerated the pace at Consortiumnews.com and got to work on a book that became *Secrecy & Privilege*, the history of the Bush Dynasty.

After George W. Bush got his second term, we still kept at it at Consortiumnews.com, contesting his claims about the Iraq War and his broader neoconservative strategy, which combined violence in the Middle East with an assault on civil liberties at home. I felt it was especially crucial to explain the real history of U.S. relations with Iran and Iraq, a narrative that had been grossly distorted by the cover-ups in the 1980s and early 1990s.

To my great satisfaction, we also began developing what might be regarded as unlikely relationships with former CIA analysts, such as Ray McGovern, Peter Dickson, Melvin Goodman and Elizabeth Murray. Though these CIA folks had been trained not to talk to journalists like me, it turned out they also were looking for places to impart their important knowledge.

I found that our experiences had run on parallel tracks. In the 1980s, as the Washington press corps was facing intense pressure to toe the Reagan-Bush line, the CIA analysts were experiencing the same thing inside their offices at Langley. It became clear to me that the Right's central strategy of that era had been to seize control of the information flows out of Washington.

To do so required transforming both CIA analysts and Washington journalists into propagandists. The crowning achievement of that project had been the cowering CIA "analysis" and the fawning "journalism" that had been used to whip up popular support for George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq in 2003.

And that is where I fear we still stand, stuck in a dangerous swamp of disinformation, spin and lies.

Though the election of Barack Obama in 2008 showed that the Right's propaganda machine is not all-powerful, it remains the most intimidating political force in the United States. It can literally create scandals out of nothing, like the "birther" controversy that persuaded many Americans that Obama was born in Kenya despite clear evidence to the contrary. On economic topics, millions of Americans are convinced to oppose their own best interests.

Today, the Right along with much of the Washington mainstream media is reprising the propagandistic treatment of Iraq regarding Iran, with a new conflict increasingly likely as the American public again gets whipped up into a war frenzy.

Still, my hope remains that we can finally gain the financial backing that we need at Consortiumnews.com to be a strong voice for truth and a way to maintain the best principles of journalism in order to counteract the exaggerations and hysteria that are again taking hold in America.

If you want to help us, you can make a donation by credit card at the Web site or by check to Consortium for Independent Journalism (CIJ); 2200 Wilson Blvd.; Suite 102-231; Arlington VA 22201. Or you can use PayPal (our account is named after our e-mail address "consortnew@aol.com").

Since we are a 501-c-3 non-profit, your donation may be tax-deductible. We appreciate any size donation that you can afford.

We also are offering thank-you gifts. For a donation of \$100 or more, you can get a copy of the late Gary Webb's book, *The Killing Game*, published this year by Seven Stories Press. (If you want this or any other thank-you gift, just follow-up your donation with an e-mail to consortnew@aol.com).

For donations of \$75 or more, you can get an autographed copy of one of my last

three books: *Lost History, Secrecy & Privilege* or *Neck Deep*. (Just ask by e-mail.)

For donations of \$60 or more, you can get a DVD of the 1991 PBS "Frontline" documentary "The Election Held Hostage," which I co-wrote. It explores Republican skullduggery with Iran prior to the pivotal 1980 election. (Again, just ask)

Here are some other ways you can help us continue our work:

If you'd rather spread out your support in smaller amounts, you can sign up for a monthly donation. With contributions of \$10 or more a month, you can qualify for war correspondent Don North's DVD, "Yesterday's Enemies" about the lives of former Salvadoran guerrillas. For details, [click here](#). (If you sign up for a monthly donation and want to get Don's DVD, remember to contact us at consortnew@aol.com.)

You can also help us reach our fundraising goal by taking advantage of our deep discount for the three-book set of Robert Parry's *Lost History, Secrecy & Privilege* and *Neck Deep* (co-authored with Sam and Nat Parry). The sale price for the set is only \$29, postage included. For details, [click here](#).

Or you can help us close out some warehouse space by buying full boxes of *Secrecy & Privilege* or *Neck Deep* for only \$56. Each carton contains 28 paperbacks, or you can ask that we give you a mix of half and half, 14 of each. At \$56 for a carton, each book only costs you \$2. And for U.S. orders, we'll pay for shipping.

Mostly, we need to get the books out of the warehouse, so we don't have to destroy them. For details about this bulk book order, [click here](#).

As always, thanks for your support.

Robert Parry

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 of the mainstream U.S. news media.
