

Why the Rich Keep Getting Richer

Mitt Romney, who wants talk of income inequality confined to “quiet rooms,” admits he’s spent the last decade living mostly on investments and paying less than half the taxes that would apply to a salary, just one more example of why the rich keep getting richer, as Bill Moyers and Michael Winship observe.

By Bill Moyers and Michael Winship

If you’re part of the one percent, even getting fired comes with a cushion made of eiderdown. GMI, a research company that gets paid to keep an eye on such things, just issued a study headlined, “Twenty-One U.S. CEOs with Golden Parachutes of More than \$100 Million.” That’s each.

The report’s authors, Paul Hodgson and Greg Ruel, write, “These 21 CEOs walked away with almost \$4 billion in combined compensation. In total, \$1.7 billion in equity profits was realized by these CEOs, primarily on the exercise of time-vesting stock options and restricted stock.”

This news came the same day as another report, this one from Indiana University, titled, “At Risk: America’s Poor during and after the Great Recession.” Its researchers conclude:

“The number of people living in poverty is increasing and is expected to increase further, despite the recovery. The proportion of people living in poverty has increased by 27% between the year before the onset of the Great Recession (2006) and 2010 Poverty is expected to increase again in 2011 due to the slow pace of the economic recovery, the persistently high rate of unemployment, and the long duration of spells of unemployment.”

In fact, the white paper finds that we now have the largest number of long-term unemployed people in the United States since records were first kept in 1948 four million report they’ve been unemployed for more than a year. Not necessarily counting the former CEO’s gently floating to earth from those golden parachutes.

So no, Mitt Romney, when we say that Americans are waking up to the reality that inequality matters, we’re not guilty of “envy” or “class warfare,” as you claimed to Matt Lauer on NBC’s *Today*. Nor are we talking about everybody earning the same amount of money that’s the straw man apologists for inequality raise whenever anyone tries to get serious.

We’re talking what it takes to live a decent life. If you get sick without health coverage, inequality matters. If you’re the only breadwinner and out of

work, inequality matters. If your local public library closes down and you can't afford books on your own, inequality matters. If budget cuts mean your child has to pay to play on the school basketball team, sing in the chorus or march in the band, inequality matters. If you lose your job as you're about to retire, inequality matters. If the financial system collapses and knocks the props from beneath your pension, inequality matters.

Neither one of us grew up wealthy, but we went to good public schools, played sandlot ball at a good public park, lived near a good public library, and drove down good public highways all made possible by people we never met and would never know. There was an unwritten bargain among generations: we didn't all get the same deal, but we did get civilization.

Now the bargain's being shredded. The people we met from Occupy Wall Street get it, you could tell from their slogans. One of the younger protesters wore a t-shirt emblazoned with the words: "The system's not broken. It's fixed." That's right rigged.

And that's why so many are so angry. Not at wealth itself. But at the powerful players who win by fixing the game instead of by honest competition; at the crony capitalists who resort to tricks, loopholes, and cold cash to make sure insiders prosper and then pull up the ladder behind them.

Americans are waking up to how they're being made to pay for Wall Street's malfeasance and Washington's complicity paying with stagnant wages and lost jobs, with slashing cuts to their benefits and social services. To how our financial system profits by moving money around in exotic ways instead of supporting real economic growth.

Waking up to the ludicrous Supreme Court decision defining a corporation as a person, although it doesn't eat, breath, make love or sing or take care of children and aging parents. Waking up to how unlimited and often anonymous campaign contributions corrupt our elections; to the fact that if money is speech, no money means no speech. As one demonstrator's sign read: "I couldn't afford a politician, so I bought this sign."

So while police have cleared many Occupy encampments, a collective cry, loud and clear, has gone up from countless voices across the country: Enough's enough.

We won't know for a while if what we're hearing is a momentary cry of pain, or whether it's a movement like the abolitionists and suffragettes, the populists and workers of another era, or the civil rights movement that gathers forces until the powers-that-be can no longer sustain the inequality, injustice, and yes, immorality of winner-take-all politics and a winner-take-all economy.

Bill Moyers is managing editor and Michael Winship is senior writer of the new weekly public affairs program, "Moyers & Company," airing on public television. Check local airtimes or comment at www.BillMoyers.com.

In Case You Missed...

Some of our special stories in December reflected on the end of a long war in Iraq and the potential for a new one in Iran; reported on developments in the Republican presidential race; warned of new encroachments on civil liberties; and noted the truth-telling courage of Bradley Manning; and more.

["The Lost Opportunity of Iran-Contra"](#) by Robert Parry, describing how history turned when the Iran-Contra scandal was covered up. (Dec. 1, 2011)

["Three Pillars of a Revived Republic"](#) by Robert Parry, suggesting what's needed for American democracy to rebound. (Dec. 2, 2011)

["Are Americans in Line for Gitmo"](#) by Ray McGovern, warning about dangerous language in a military spending bill. (Dec. 3, 2011)

["Bringing the War on Terror Home"](#) by Coleen Rowley, exploring new congressional encroachments on civil liberties. (Dec. 4, 2011)

["Cleansing Wall Street of Blame"](#) by Phil Rockstroh, noting how big media has shifted the narrative of a financial collapse. (Dec. 7, 2011)

["Is Gingrich Fit to Be President?"](#) by Robert Parry, assessing the risk of a divisive megalomaniac reaching for the White House. (Dec. 8, 2011)

["The Warning in Gary Webb's Death"](#) by Robert Parry, recounting the tragic destruction of a brave journalist. (Dec. 9, 2011)

["The Danger of Politicizing Terror"](#) by Coleen Rowley, finding lessons in how the 9/11 failures tied into politics. (Dec. 13, 2011)

["Liberating America's Worldview"](#) by Phil Rockstroh, noting how many Americans stubbornly oppose their own interests. (Dec. 15, 2011)

["Will Iraq Debacle Prevent Iran War?"](#) by Robert Parry, wondering whether painful lessons will stick. (Dec. 15, 2011)

["The Christmas Truce of 1914"](#) by Gary G. Kohls, reflecting on an inspirational moment in the trenches of World War I. (Dec. 16, 2011)

[“Occupying Jesus and His Church”](#) by Rev. Howard Bess, pointing out the deep contradictions between right-wing ideology and the teachings of Jesus. (Dec. 18, 2011)

[“Is Iraq War End a New Day?”](#) by Robert Parry, reflecting on the bitter experience of George W. Bush’s war of choice. (Dec. 19, 2011)

[“Pvt. Manning and Imperative of Truth”](#) by Ray McGovern, discerning why Bradley Manning has served his country bravely. (Dec. 21, 2011)

[“The Bush/Obama War Against Truth”](#) by Melvin A. Goodman, tracing the cruel treatment of Pvt. Manning back to hostility toward public awareness. (Dec. 21, 2011)

[“Republican Tradition of Hostage Taking”](#) by Robert Parry, showing how the GOP has often got its way. (Dec. 23, 2011)

[“America’s Debt to Bradley Manning”](#) by Robert Parry, describing the value of the ground truth found in the WikiLeaks documents. (Dec. 24, 2011)

[“Slip-Sliding to War with Iran”](#) by Robert Parry, warning that the momentum toward war with Iran may prove unstoppable. (Dec. 29, 2011)

[“Urging Obama to Stop Rush to Iran War”](#) by Ray McGovern and Elizabeth Murray, citing reasons to show caution. (Dec. 30, 2011)

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Obama Signals Israel on Iran War

President Obama postponed a military exercise with Israel out of concern that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was drawing the U.S. into war with Iran, Gareth Porter and Jim Lobe reported. Obama took the step despite pressure from Republicans and Congress to line up behind Israel’s desires.

By Gareth Porter and Jim Lobe

The postponement of a massive joint U.S.-Israeli military exercise appears to be the culmination of a series of events that has impelled President Barack Obama's administration to put more distance between the United States and aggressive Israeli policies toward Iran.

The exercise, called "Austere Challenge '12" and originally scheduled for April, was to have been a simulation of a joint U.S.-Israeli effort to identify, track and intercept incoming missiles by integrating sophisticated U.S. radar systems with the Israeli Arrow, Patriot and Iron Dome anti-missile defense systems.

U.S. participation in such an exercise, obviously geared to a scenario involving an Iranian retaliation against an Israeli attack on its nuclear facilities, would have made the United States out to be a partner of Israel in any war that would follow an Israeli attack on Iran.

Obama and U.S. military leaders apparently decided that the United States could not participate in such an exercise so long as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu refused to give the administration any assurance that he will not attack Iran without prior approval from Washington.

The official explanation from both Israeli and U.S. officials about the delay was that both sides agreed on it. Both Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman and Mark Regev, spokesman for Netanyahu, suggested that it was delayed to avoid further exacerbation of tensions in the Gulf.

The spokesman for the U.S. European Command, Capt. John Ross, and Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told Laura Rozen of Yahoo News on Sunday that the two sides had decided on the postponement to the second half of 2012 without offering any specific reason for it.

However, Rozen reported Monday that "several current and former American officials" had told her that the delay had been requested last month by Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak. One official suggested privately that there is concern that the alleged Barak request could be aimed at keeping Israel's options open for a strike on Iran's nuclear facilities in the spring.

But it would make little sense for Netanyahu and Barak to commit Israel to war with Iran before the shape of the U.S. presidential election campaign had become clear. And Barak would want to have knowledge gained from the joint exercise in tracking and intercepting Iranian missiles with the U.S. military before planning such a strike.

Moreover, the Israeli Air Force was still touting the planned maneuvers as recently as Thursday and, according to Israeli media, was taken by surprise by Sunday's announcement.

The idea that the Israelis wanted the postponement appears to be a cover story to mask the political blow it represents to the Netanyahu government and to shield Obama from Republican charges that he is not sufficiently supportive of Israel. Nevertheless, the signal sent by the delay to Netanyahu and Barak, reportedly the most aggressive advocates of a strike against Iran in Israel's right-wing government, could hardly be lost on the two leaders.

Obama may have conveyed the decision to Netanyahu during what is said to have been a lengthy telephone discussion between the two leaders Thursday night. Iran policy was one of the subjects Obama discussed with him, according to the White House press release on the conversation.

The decision to postpone the exercise may have been timed to provide a strong signal to Netanyahu in advance of this week's visit to Israel by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Martin Dempsey, who reportedly expressed grave concern at a meeting with Obama last fall about the possibility that Israel intended to carry out a unilateral Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear facilities without consulting with Washington in advance.

Obama has been quoted as responding that he had "no say" in Israel's policy, much to Dempsey's dismay.

The coincidence of the announced delay with Dempsey's mission thus suggests that the new military chief may inform his Israeli counterpart that any U.S. participation in a joint exercise like "Austere Challenge '12" is contingent on Israel ending its implicit threat to launch an attack on Iran at a time of its own choosing.

This apparent rift between the two countries comes in the wake of a series of moves by Israel and its supporters here that appeared aimed at ratcheting up tensions between the U.S. and Iran.

In November and December, U.S. neoconservatives aligned with Netanyahu's Likud Party and what is sometimes called the Israel lobby engineered legislation that forced on the Obama administration a unilateral sanctions law aimed at dramatically reducing Iranian crude oil exports and "collapsing" its economy.

The administration's reluctant embrace of sanctions against the oil sector and the Iran's Central Bank led in turn to an Iranian threat to retaliate by closing off the Strait of Hormuz. The risk of a naval incident suddenly exploding into actual military conflict suddenly loomed large.

Netanyahu and Barak are widely believed to have hoped to provoke such conflict with a combination of more aggressive sanctions, sabotaging Iranian missile and nuclear facilities, and assassinations against

individual scientists associated with the nuclear program.

Amid tensions already reaching dangerous heights, Iranian nuclear scientist Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan was assassinated in Tehran in a bombing on Jan. 11. Both Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and National Security Council spokesman Tommy Vietor immediately condemned the assassination and vehemently denied any U.S. involvement in that or any other violence inside Iran.

It was the first time the U.S. government had chosen to distance itself so dramatically from actions that mainstream media has generally treated as part of a joint U.S.-Israeli policy. U.S. officials told the Associated Press on Saturday that Israel was considered responsible for the killing, and the London Times published a detailed account of what it said was an Israeli Mossad operation.

The killing of the nuclear scientist also came in the context of what appears to be an intensification of diplomatic activity that most observers believe is designed to lay the groundwork for another P5+1 meeting (the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council and Germany). It has been widely assumed for the past week or so that here another P5+1 meeting will be held with Iran by the end of this month or early next.

While recent published stories about Washington's communicating with Tehran through intermediaries stressed U.S. warnings about its "red lines" in responding to any Iranian move to close the Strait of Hormuz, those same communications may also have conveyed greater diplomatic flexibility on the nuclear issue in the hope of achieving some progress toward an agreement.

Mossad is believed to have assassinated at most several Iranian nuclear scientists not enough to slow down the Iranian program. And the timing of those operations has strongly suggested that the main aim has been to increase tensions with the United States and sabotage any possibility for agreement between Iran and the West on Iran's nuclear program, if not actually provoke retaliation by Iran that could spark a wider conflict.

The assassination of nuclear scientist Majid Shariari and attempted assassination of his colleague, Fereydoon Abbasi on Nov. 29, 2010, for example, came just a few days after Tehran had reportedly agreed to hold a second meeting with the P5+1 in Geneva on Dec. 6 and 7.

A major investigative story by Mark Perry, published Friday on the website foreignpolicy.com, quoted former CIA officials as saying that Mossad operatives had been impersonating CIA personnel for several years in recruiting for and providing support to the Sunni terrorist organization Jundallah, which operated

inside Iran. That Israeli policy also suggested a desire to provoke Iranian retaliation against the United States.

Gareth Porter is an investigative historian and journalist specializing in U.S. national security policy. The paperback edition of his latest book, *Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam*, was published in 2006. Jim Lobe's blog on U.S. foreign policy can be read at <http://www.lobelog.com>. [This story was published by Inter Press Service.]

Americans Fed Up with Neocon Wars?

Mitt Romney and other Republican presidential hopefuls (with the exception of Ron Paul) are touting tough-guy global strategies that sound like George W. Bush, circa 2002. But recent public opinion polls suggest that Americans are leery of new neocon adventures, Lawrence S. Wittner reports.

By Lawrence S. Wittner

Are American politicians out of sync with the public when it comes to foreign policy? There is considerable reason to believe so.

Throughout the scramble for the Republican presidential nomination, the major candidates have certainly been rabidly nationalistic. In a major foreign policy address on Oct. 7, 2011, Mitt Romney proclaimed that “the twenty-first century can and must be an American Century.”

Championing a vast military buildup, he argued that, to secure this “American Century,” the United States should have “the strongest military in the world.” By contrast, he assailed the “shameful” role of the United Nations and other international institutions and declared that he did not see any reason to obey them, or the international law they represented, when it did not suit the U.S. government.

Romney's newly-anointed top competitor, Rick Santorum, says nothing about the United Nations, international cooperation or international law in the “10 Steps to Promote Our Interests Around the World” posted on his campaign website. Instead, he argues that the United States is “inherently better prepared to lead than any other nation.”

The former Pennsylvania senator adds: “I truly do believe that we are ‘the last best hope of earth,’” but, alas, under President Barack Obama, “we have been

weak where we should have been strong and we have been appeasing of evil." Naturally, then in Santorum's view, Americans should be "increasing our military preparedness."

By contrast, polls show that most Americans favor a more cooperative world order based on international law, a stronger United Nations, and a less dominant role for the United States in world affairs.

In a World Public Opinion poll of 16 nations in 2009, 69 percent of Americans supported the view that nations are obliged to abide by international law even when doing so is at odds with their national interest.

Furthermore, a 2010 poll by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs found 82 percent of Americans favored ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (rejected by the GOP-dominated Senate in 1999), 70 percent favored participation in the International Criminal Court (rejected by President George W. Bush), and 67 percent backed a new international treaty to combat climate change. In December 2008, a World Public Opinion poll found that 77 percent of Americans backed an international treaty abolishing nuclear weapons.

Furthermore, most Americans favor expanding the role of the United Nations in world affairs. Polling in 2010 by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs found that majorities of Americans favored creating a standing UN peacekeeping force (64 percent), giving the United Nations the authority to enter countries to investigate human rights violations (72 percent), creating an international marshals service with the power to arrest leaders responsible for genocide (73 percent), and empowering the United Nations to regulate the international arms trade (55 percent).

Overall, as public opinion studies show, Americans want a smaller, rather than a larger, global footprint for their nation. According to a 2010 poll by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, only 8 percent favored the United States playing the role of the preeminent world leader, while 71 percent favored a cooperative approach.

Gallup polls have turned up similar results. In 2011, Gallup reported that only 16 percent of Americans endorsed the option of the United States playing "the leading role" in world affairs. According to Gallup, 32 percent of Americans favored "a minor role" or "no role" at all for the United States, while 50 percent wanted the United States to "take a major role, but not the leading one."

Much of this opposition to U.S. dominance in the world is undoubtedly based on distaste for the overseas U.S. military intervention of the past decade. In

recent years, polls have found substantial public opposition to the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2010, a poll by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs found that 79 percent of Americans agreed with the statement that “the U.S. is playing the role of world policeman more than it should.”

Of course, during the frenzy of an election campaign, it is tempting to whip up nationalist sentiment through high-flying rhetoric about an “American Century” and America’s allegedly unique virtue. How many times have we heard, in these circumstances, that America is the greatest nation in the history of the world?

But, in the end, Americans might prove more committed to an internationalist policy than this year’s flag-waving politicians think.

Lawrence S. Wittner is Emeritus Professor of History at the State University of New York/Albany. His latest book is *Confronting the Bomb: A Short History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement* (Stanford University Press).
