



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE **NEWSLETTER #38 — DEC. 20, 2011**

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Ayn Rand Was a Hypocritical Monster

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Dec. 20, 2011)

I am done with the monster of "we," the word of serfdom, of plunder, of misery, falsehood and shame. And now I see the face of god, and I raise this god over the earth, this god whom men have sought since men came into being, this god who will grant them joy and peace and pride. This god, this one word: "I."—Ayn Rand

Ronald Reagan admired her. Rep. Paul Ryan loves her. So, apparently, does much of the American Right, the Tea Party, Ron Paul, Clarence Thomas, and Mark Sanford (the former governor with the Buenos Aires mistress).

Ayn Rand and her followers, including her Republican followers, feel that the individual is supreme. The individual, in all his glory, is hindered by society, crippled, used for its own ends. The individual owes nothing to this society which abuses him. No debt. No gratitude. Society is nothing. There is no morality except what is right for the individual, apparently any individual, no matter how evil—like Ayn Rand herself.

This is the philosophy that now dominates the Republican Party—selfishness as a virtue, the glorification of the few, and the demonizing of the many. This is exactly where we stand. No wonder we are in such trouble!

Do they really believe they owe nothing to society or others, only to themselves? Yes! The only thing Ayn Rand could conceive as correct was going all the way to this extreme. She allowed no compromise (for others, at least). I believe there is a middle way that allows the respect and consideration the individual is due, without denigrating society to nothing.

I could go on and on about the interconnectedness and interdependence of mankind, especially at this point in time. It's all so obvious. But, to refute her stupid "philosophy," let me just say this: I would love to hear any of these individuals stand before their mothers, fathers, families, friends, teachers, the businessmen which serve them, and the farmers who grow their food...and tell them that they don't owe them a damned thing and will, in fact, grind them into the dirt as if they are nothing if it advances the cause of the self. RIDICULOUS!

I mean, let's get real here! Does anyone out there really think that mankind has ever had a problem with people not being selfish enough? Did you have to tell your children that they needed to start working harder at being selfish when they played with other kids? Have you had experiences in the streets of major U.S. cities where people came up to you to give you things instead of sticking a gun in your back to rob you? Do we really have to worry about bankers and brokers taking money out of their own pockets and giving it to their clients, rather than stealing them blind? It just does not seem like there is a dearth of selfishness and narcissism in the world I know.

Any crackpot can take an extreme, illogical position, and defend it and all its ramifications to the hilt in black and white terms. Even the Nazis were able to do this. It's also what Ayn Rand did. But just because our minds can be permitted to dwell in these cul de sacs way out there on the fringe, does not mean that this is the way to happiness or mental health. It certainly wasn't for Ayn Rand herself.

The greatest gift Ayn Rand gave us was not when she sat and thought and wrote her novels, but rather it was when she hypocritically took money from social programs she violently opposed—Social Security and Medicare. When she was in need, her principles became nothing. I think this means that it is time to stop calling these programs "entitlements," because even this heroine of the Right realized that she had contributed to the system—against her selfish will, of course.

Henry Ford had the right idea. When he started his first factory, he doubled the wages of his workers to \$5 per day. His competitors thought he was crazy. He was brilliant. He knew he needed customers. By paying a living wage, his workers could have decent lives and afford to buy Fords. Henry Ford realized he needed customers! More than his customers needed him! He understood the connectedness of all our lives—rich and poor. He understood that life itself is a chain.

Ayn Rand and the Republicans apparently do not.

"How Ayn Rand Seduced Generations of Young Men and Helped Make the U.S. into a Selfish, Greedy Nation" by Bruce E. Levine, AlterNet

Dec. 15, 2011, (<http://www.alternet.org/story/153454/>)

Ayn Rand's "philosophy" is nearly perfect in its immorality, which makes the size of her audience all the more ominous and symptomatic as we enter a curious new phase in our society.... To justify and extol human greed and egotism is to my mind not only immoral, but evil.— Gore Vidal, 1961

Only rarely in U.S. history do writers transform us to become a more caring or less caring nation. In the 1850s, Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896) was a strong force in making the United States a more humane nation, one that would abolish slavery of African Americans. A century later, Ayn Rand (1905-1982) helped make the United States into one of the most uncaring nations in the industrialized world, a neo-Dickensian society where healthcare is only for those who can afford it, and where young people are coerced into huge student-loan debt that cannot be discharged in bankruptcy.

Rand's impact has been widespread and deep. At the iceberg's visible tip is the influence she's had over major political figures who have shaped American society. In the 1950s, Ayn Rand read aloud drafts of what was later to become *Atlas Shrugged* to her "Collective," Rand's ironic nickname for her inner circle of young individualists, which included Alan Greenspan, who would serve as chairman of the Federal Reserve Board from 1987 to 2006.

In 1966, Ronald Reagan wrote in a personal letter, "Am an admirer of Ayn Rand." Today, Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI) credits Rand for inspiring him to go into politics, and Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI) calls *Atlas Shrugged* his "foundation book." Rep. Ron Paul (R-TX) says Ayn Rand had a major influence on him, and his son Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY) is an even bigger fan. A short list of other Rand fans includes Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas; Christopher Cox, chairman of the Security and Exchange Commission in George W. Bush's second administration; and former South Carolina governor Mark Sanford.

But Rand's impact on U.S. society and culture goes even deeper.

The Seduction of Nathan Blumenthal

Ayn Rand's books such as *The Virtue of Selfishness* and her philosophy that celebrates self-interest and disdains altruism may well be, as Vidal assessed, "nearly perfect in its immorality." But is Vidal right about evil? Charles Manson, who himself did not kill anyone, is the personification of evil for many of us because of his psychological success at exploiting the vulnerabilities of young people and seducing them to murder. What should we call Ayn

Rand's psychological ability to exploit the vulnerabilities of millions of young people so as to influence them not to care about anyone besides themselves?

While Greenspan (tagged "A.G." by Rand) was the most famous name that would emerge from Rand's Collective, the second most well-known name to emerge from the Collective was Nathaniel Branden, psychotherapist, author and "self-esteem" advocate. Before he was Nathaniel Branden, he was Nathan Blumenthal, a 14-year-old who read Rand's *The Fountainhead* again and again. He later would say, "I felt hypnotized." He describes how Rand gave him a sense that he could be powerful, that he could be a hero. He wrote one letter to his idol Rand, then a second. To his amazement, she telephoned him, and at age 20, Nathan received an invitation to Ayn Rand's home. Shortly after, Nathan Blumenthal announced to the world that he was incorporating Rand in his new name: Nathaniel Branden. And in 1955, with Rand approaching her 50th birthday and Branden his 25th, and both in dissatisfying marriages, Ayn bedded Nathaniel.

What followed sounds straight out of Hollywood, but Rand was straight out of Hollywood, having worked for Cecil B. DeMille. Rand convened a meeting with Nathaniel, his wife Barbara (also a Collective member), and Rand's own husband Frank. To Branden's astonishment, Rand convinced both spouses that a time-structured affair—she and Branden were to have one afternoon and one evening a week together—was "reasonable." Within the Collective, Rand is purported to have never lost an argument. On his trysts at Rand's New York City apartment, Branden would sometimes shake hands with Frank before he exited. Later, all discovered that Rand's sweet but passive husband would leave for a bar, where he began his self-destructive affair with alcohol.

By 1964, the 34-year-old Nathaniel Branden had grown tired of the now 59-year-old Ayn Rand. Still sexually dissatisfied in his marriage to Barbara and afraid to end his affair with Rand, Branden began sleeping with a married 24-year-old model, Patricia Scott. Rand, now "the woman scorned," called Branden to appear before the Collective, whose nickname had by now lost its irony for both Barbara and Branden. Rand's justice was swift. She humiliated Branden and then put a curse on him: "If you have one ounce of morality left in you, an ounce of psychological health—you'll be impotent for the next twenty years! And if you achieve potency sooner, you'll know it's a sign of still worse moral degradation!"

Rand completed the evening with two welt-producing slaps across Branden's face. Finally, in a move that Stalin and Hitler would have admired, Rand also expelled poor Barbara from the Collective, declaring her treasonous because Barbara, preoccupied by her own extramarital affair, had neglected to fill Rand in soon enough on Branden's extra-extra-marital betrayal. (If anyone doubts Alan Greenspan's political savvy, keep in mind that he somehow stayed in Rand's good graces even though he, fixed up by Branden with Patricia's twin sister, had double-dated with the outlaws.)

After being banished by Rand, Nathaniel Branden was worried that he might be assassinated by other members of the Collective, so he moved from New York to Los Angeles, where Rand fans were less fanatical. Branden established a lucrative psychotherapy practice and authored approximately 20 books, 10 of them with either "Self" or "Self-Esteem" in the title. Rand and Branden never reconciled, but he remains an admirer of her philosophy of self-interest.

Ayn Rand's personal life was consistent with her philosophy of not giving a shit about anybody but herself. Rand was an ardent two-pack-a-day smoker, and when questioned about the dangers of smoking, she loved to light up with a defiant flourish and then scold her young questioners on the "unscientific and irrational nature of the statistical evidence." After an x-ray showed that she had lung cancer, Rand quit smoking and had surgery for her cancer. Collective members explained to her that many people still smoked because they respected her and her assessment of the evidence; and that since she no longer smoked, she ought to tell them. They told her that she needn't mention her lung cancer, that she could simply say she had reconsidered the evidence. Rand refused.

How Rand's Philosophy Seduced Young Minds

When I was a kid, my reading included comic books and Rand's *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*. There wasn't much difference between the comic books and Rand's novels in terms of the simplicity of the heroes. What was different was that unlike Superman or Batman, Rand made selfishness heroic, and she made caring about others weakness.

Rand said, "Capitalism and altruism are incompatible....The choice is clear-cut: either a new morality of rational self-interest, with its consequences of freedom, justice, progress and man's happiness on earth—or the primordial morality of altruism, with its consequences of slavery, brute force, stagnant terror and sacrificial furnaces." For many young people, hearing that it is "moral" to care only about oneself can be intoxicating, and some get addicted to this idea for life.

I have known several people, professionally and socially, whose lives have been changed by those close to them who became infatuated with Ayn Rand. A common theme is something like this: "My ex-husband wasn't a bad guy until he started reading Ayn Rand. Then he became a completely selfish jerk who destroyed our family, and our children no longer even talk to him."

To wow her young admirers, Rand would often tell a story of how a smart-aleck book salesman had once challenged her to explain her philosophy while standing on one leg. She replied: "Metaphysics—objective reality. Epistemology—reason. Ethics—self-interest. Politics—capitalism."

How did that philosophy capture young minds?

Metaphysics—objective reality. Rand offered a narcotic for confused young people: complete certainty and a relief from their anxiety. Rand believed that an "objective reality" existed, and she knew exactly what that objective reality was. It included skyscrapers, industries, railroads, and ideas—at least her ideas. Rand's objective reality did not include anxiety or sadness. Nor did it include much humor, at least the kind where one pokes fun at oneself. Rand assured her Collective that objective reality did not include Beethoven's, Rembrandt's, and Shakespeare's realities—they were too gloomy and too tragic, basically buzzkillers. Rand preferred Mickey Spillane and, towards the end of her life, "Charlie's Angels."

Epistemology—reason. Rand's kind of reason was a "cool-tool" to control the universe. Rand demonized Plato, and her youthful Collective members were taught to despise him. If Rand really believed that the Socratic Method described by Plato of discovering accurate definitions and clear thinking did not qualify as "reason," why then did she regularly attempt it with her Collective? Also oddly, while Rand mocked dark moods and despair, her "reasoning" directed that Collective members should admire Dostoyevsky, whose novels are filled with dark moods and despair. A demagogue, in addition to hypnotic glibness, must also be intellectually inconsistent, sometimes boldly so. This eliminates challenges to authority by weeding out clear-thinking young people from the flock.

Ethics—self-interest. For Rand, all altruists were manipulators. What could be more seductive to kids who discerned the motives of martyr parents, Christian missionaries and U.S. foreign aiders? Her champions, Nathaniel Branden still among them, feel that Rand's view of "self-interest" has been horribly misrepresented. For them, self-interest is her hero architect Howard Roark turning down a commission because he couldn't do it exactly his way. Some of Rand's novel heroes did have integrity, however, for Rand there is no struggle to discover the distinction between true integrity and childish vanity. Rand's integrity was her vanity, and it consisted of getting as much money and control as possible, copulating with whomever she wanted regardless of who would get hurt, and her always being right. To equate one's selfishness, vanity, and egotism with one's integrity liberates young people from the struggle to distinguish integrity from selfishness, vanity, and egotism.

Politics—capitalism. While Rand often disparaged Soviet totalitarian collectivism, she had little to say about corporate totalitarian collectivism, as she conveniently neglected the reality that giant U.S. corporations, like the Soviet Union, do not exactly celebrate individualism, freedom, or courage. Rand was clever and hypocritical enough to know that you don't get rich in the United States talking about compliance and conformity within corporate America. Rather, Rand gave lectures titled: "America's Persecuted Minority: Big Business." So, young careerist corporatists could embrace Rand's self-styled "radical capitalism" and feel radical — radical without risk.

Rand's Legacy

In recent years, we have entered a phase where it is apparently okay for major political figures to publicly embrace Rand despite her contempt for Christianity. In contrast, during Ayn Rand's life, her philosophy that celebrated self-interest was a private pleasure for the 1 percent but she was a public embarrassment for them. They used her

books to congratulate themselves on the morality of their selfishness, but they publicly steered clear of Rand because of her views on religion and God. Rand, for example, had stated on national television, "I am against God. I don't approve of religion. It is a sign of a psychological weakness. I regard it as an evil."

Actually, again inconsistent, Rand did have a God. It was herself. She said:

I am done with the monster of "we," the word of serfdom, of plunder, of misery, falsehood and shame. And now I see the face of god, and I raise this god over the earth, this god whom men have sought since men came into being, this god who will grant them joy and peace and pride. This god, this one word: "I."

While Harriet Beecher Stowe shamed Americans about the United State's dehumanization of African Americans and slavery, Ayn Rand removed Americans' guilt for being selfish and uncaring about anyone except themselves. Not only did Rand make it "moral" for the wealthy not to pay their fair share of taxes, she "liberated" millions of other Americans from caring about the suffering of others, even the suffering of their own children.

The good news is that I've seen ex-Rand fans grasp the damage that Rand's philosophy has done to their lives and to then exorcize it from their psyche. Can the United States as a nation do the same thing?

(Bruce E. Levine is a clinical psychologist and author of *Get Up, Stand Up: Uniting Populists, Energizing the Defeated, and Battling the Corporate Elite* (Chelsea Green, 2011). His Web site is <http://www.brucelevine.net>)

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"Ayn Rand Railed Against Government Benefits, But Grabbed Social Security and Medicare When She Needed Them" by Joshua Holland, AlterNet

Jan. 29, 2011, (<http://www.alternet.org/story/149721/>)

Ayn Rand was not only a schlock novelist, she was also the progenitor of a sweeping "moral philosophy" that justifies the privilege of the wealthy and demonizes not only the slothful, undeserving poor but the lackluster middle-classes as well.

Her books provided wide-ranging parables of "parasites," "looters" and "moochers" using the levers of government to steal the fruits of her heroes' labor. In the real world, however, Rand herself received Social Security payments and Medicare benefits under the name of Ann O'Connor (her husband was Frank O'Connor).

As Michael Ford of Xavier University's Center for the Study of the American Dream wrote, "In the end, Miss Rand was a hypocrite, but she could never be faulted for failing to act in her own self-interest."

Her ideas about government intervention in some idealized pristine marketplace serve as the basis for so much of the conservative rhetoric we see today. "The reason I got involved in public service, by and large, if I had to credit one thinker, one person, it would be Ayn Rand," said Paul Ryan, the GOP's young budget star at a D.C. event honoring the author. On another occasion, he proclaimed, "Rand makes the best case for the morality of democratic capitalism."

"Morally and economically," wrote Rand in a 1972 newsletter, "the welfare state creates an ever accelerating downward pull."

Journalist Patia Stephens wrote of Rand:

[She] called altruism a "basic evil" and referred to those who perpetuate the system of taxation and redistribution as "looters" and "moochers." She wrote in her book *The Virtue of Selfishness* that accepting any government controls is "delivering oneself into gradual enslavement."

Rand also believed that the scientific consensus on the dangers of tobacco was a hoax. By 1974, the two-pack-a-day smoker, then 69, required surgery for lung cancer. And it was at that moment of vulnerability that she succumbed to the lure of collectivism.

Evva Joan Pryor, who had been a social worker in New York in the 1970s, was interviewed in 1998 by Scott McConnell, who was then the director of communications for the Ayn Rand Institute. In his book, *100 Voices: An Oral History of Ayn Rand*, McConnell basically portrays Rand as first standing on principle, but then being mugged by reality. Stephens points to this exchange between McConnell and Pryor.

"She was coming to a point in her life where she was going to receive the very thing she didn't like, which was Medicare and Social Security," Pryor told McConnell. "I remember telling her that this was going to be difficult. For me to do my job she had to recognize that there were exceptions to her theory. So that started our political discussions. From there on – with gusto – we argued all the time.

The initial argument was on greed," Pryor continued. "She had to see that there was such a thing as greed in this world. Doctors could cost an awful lot more money than books earn, and she could be totally wiped out by medical bills if she didn't watch it. Since she had worked her entire life, and had paid into Social Security, she had a right to it. She didn't feel that an individual should take help."

Rand had paid into the system, so why not take the benefits? It's true, but according to Stephens, some of Rand's fellow travelers remained true to their principles.

Rand is one of three women the Cato Institute calls founders of American libertarianism. The other two, Rose Wilder Lane and Isabel "Pat" Paterson, both rejected Social Security benefits on principle. Lane, with whom Rand corresponded for several years, once quit an editorial job in order to avoid paying Social Security taxes. The Cato Institute says Lane considered Social Security a "Ponzi fraud" and "told friends that it would be immoral of her to take part in a system that would predictably collapse so catastrophically." Lane died in 1968.

Paterson would end up dying a pauper. Rand went a different way.

But at least she put up a fight before succumbing to the imperatives of the real world – one in which people get sick, and old, and many who are perfectly decent and hardworking don't end up being independently wealthy.

The degree to which Ayn Rand has become a touchstone for the modern conservative movement is striking. She was a sexual libertine, and, according to writer Mark Ames, she modeled her heroic characters on one of the most despicable sociopaths of her time. Ames' conclusion is important for understanding today's political economy. "Whenever you hear politicians or Tea Partiers dividing up the world between 'producers' and 'collectivism,'" he wrote, "just know that those ideas and words more likely than not are derived from the deranged mind of a serial-killer groupie....And when you see them taking their razor blades to the last remaining programs protecting the middle class from total abject destitution—Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid—and bragging about how they are slashing these programs for 'moral' reasons, just remember Rand's morality and who inspired her."

Now we know that Rand was also just as hypocritical as the Tea Party freshman who railed against "government health care" to get elected and then whined that he had to wait a month before getting his own Cadillac plan courtesy of the taxpayers.

But, as I note in my book, *The Fifteen Biggest Lies About the Economy*, that's par for the course. A central rule of the U.S. political economy is that people are attracted to the idea of "limited government" in the abstract—and certainly don't want the government intruding in their homes—but they really, *really* like living in a society with adequately funded public services.

That's just as true for an icon of modern conservatism as it is for a poor mother getting public health care for her kids.

(Joshua Holland is an editor and senior writer at AlterNet. He is the author of *The 15 Biggest Lies About the Economy (and Everything else the Right Doesn't Want You to Know About Taxes, Jobs and Corporate America)*.)

FotM NEWSLETTER #38 (Dec. 20, 2011)—HYPERTEXT INDEX

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20111219-02	15:19	Art	Re: "Perry Double Dips State Salary & Pension" (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #37)
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20111219-01	12:04	SteveG	"Congress Blocks Light Bulb Efficiency Standards with Spending Bill"
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"Congress Blocks Light Bulb Efficiency Standards with Spending Bill" by Jennifer Mueller, Care2.com

Dec.18, 2011, (<http://www.care2.com/causes/congress-blocks-light-bulb-efficiency-standards-with-spending-bill.html#ixzz1h4XYDob7>)

Under a 2007 energy law signed by President George W. Bush, the United States. was poised to cut energy use and climate pollution equivalent to 17 million cars by retiring the incandescent light bulb. Last week, Congress blocked those regulations from going into effect as planned next month by inserting language into the spending bill that averted a federal government shutdown on Friday.

While Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.) referred to the rider as "another poke in the eye" and Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) credited the postponement of efficiency standards to "...the power of Michele Bachmann and the presidential campaign," the rider only preserves the 100-watt incandescent temporarily, until October 2012.

According to The Wilderness Society, the irony of defending the 135-year-old incandescent technology is that light bulb manufacturers supported the new regulations. Consumers could have saved \$15.8 billion in energy costs annually by full adoption of the new, more efficient, but still incandescent, bulbs the industry has introduced.

"In the real world, outside talk radio's echo chamber, lighting manufacturers such as GE, Philips and Sylvania have tooled up to produce new incandescent light bulbs that look and operate exactly the same as old incandescent bulbs, and give off just as much warm light," Republicans for Environmental Protection Policy Director Jim DiPeso told Politico. "The only difference is they produce less excess heat and are therefore 30 percent more efficient. Same light, lower energy bills. What's not to like?"

Whatever the presidential campaign about the light bulb uprising out there, most American's actually support efficiency standards, with 61% regarding them favorably according to a *USA Today*/Gallup poll. "Of those surveyed, 71%, said they have replaced standard light bulbs in their home with more efficient options, and 84% said they are "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with the alternatives," the paper reported.

20111219-02	15:19	Art	Re: "Perry Double Dips State Salary & Pension" (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #37)
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Thanks SteveG, I also will not support MOAA and others who want to draw a line in the sand on TRICARE increases. But then, I also actually paid for Blue Cross/Blue Shield while I worked and used that as my insurance. That does not make me any hero, I just thought it made sense.

20111219-03	15:57	SteveB	Worrisome Rick Perry Advertising (Wink!)
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Rick Perry's "Strong" ad:

<http://www.funnyordie.com/videos/2cd51d335b/bad-lip-reading-rick-perry-s-strong-ad>.

Another version of Rick Perry's "Strong" ad:

<http://www.funnyordie.com/videos/772554004b/rick-perry-weak-strong-parody>.

Jesus responds:

<http://www.funnyordie.com/videos/e23d1c26d4/jesus-responds-to-rick-perry-s-strong-ad>.

20111219-04 16:04 SteveB Photo: Newt 3.0

Newt took a cue from his third wife and upgraded his face to better connect with today's youth:



(<http://www.funnyordie.com/pictures/ac581f8dba/newt-3-0>)

20111219-05 16:27 Art Re: Photo: Newt 3.0 (reply to SteveB, above)

The left strikes back???? I loved the Perry alternate ad, but unfortunately we are not dealing with tea baggers, so I suspect most of your readers will recognize that this is a parody.

20111219-06 16:50 Art "8 Stories Buried by the Corporate Media That You Need to Know About" (incl. "Our Planet Saw the Largest Increase in Carbon Emissions Since the Industrial Revolution")

Can't exactly vouch for this one 100% but it sounds right and should send a chill down everyone's spine:

"8 Stories Buried by the Corporate Media That You Need to Know About" by Rania Khalek, AlterNet

Dec. 15, 2011,

(http://www.alternet.org/story/153455/8_stories_buried_by_the_corporate_media_that_you_need_to_know_about?page=entire)

1. Our Planet Saw the Largest Increase in Carbon Emissions Since the Industrial Revolution

Global emissions of carbon dioxide increased 5.9 percent in 2010, the largest increase on record, according to Global Carbon Project, an international group of scientists tracking the numbers. This increase, reports

the *New York Times*, is "almost certainly the largest absolute jump in any year since the Industrial Revolution, and the largest percentage increase since 2003."

Another study, published in the journal *Nature Geoscience*, traces an estimated three-quarters of the planet's warming since 1950 to human activities. On top of that, the World Meteorological Organization warned that 10 of the hottest years ever recorded have occurred in the last 15 years, with temperatures this year registering as the 10th highest on record.

It's obvious that the world is getting warmer at an accelerating rate and it's our fault. What are world leaders going to do about it? Wait another eight years to cut emissions.

These statistics were released before last week's United Nations Climate Change Conference in Durban, South Africa, which ended with an agreement to kick the can down the road – they will negotiate a new climate treaty by 2015, which would postpone emission cuts until 2020.

To avoid the most devastating effects of climate change, we must limit the earth's warming to 2°C. For that to happen, emission volumes cannot exceed 450 parts per million (ppm) of carbon dioxide. Since emissions have already reached 390 ppm, higher than any other time in recorded history, the International Energy Agency warns that action cannot be delayed past 2017. Based on the Durbin agreement, emissions won't be cut until 2020.

Unless something drastic pushes our leaders to change the destructive path we're on, 2011 may go down in the history books as the year that humans irreversibly screwed themselves and the planet.

[Continue reading at AlterNet...](#)

20111219-07	19:30	Pam	Loss of Our Rights & Freedoms
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Read an article today about how the 20 biggest U.S. banks hold 90% of the wealth, and the top 3 hold 44%. This article said if we had competition among banks some would succeed and some would fail, and that's how it should be. As it is, the huge banks won't be allowed to fail (as we have seen), and in fact have made huge profits during the past three years. Smaller banks don't get the same breaks. It also said hedge funds are mostly unsuccessful after a few years and are more like crap shooting than investing (my interpretation). When I consider how completely North Koreans are controlled by their totalitarian, cult-led government, it seems very, very unlikely that the people will ever rise up. As I watch our rights being whittled away and fewer and fewer people getting more and more power, I wonder if we have a chance in hell of reversing global warming, income inequality, and all the other stuff that's going on. I hope we don't end up in that vanishing point of light that used to blink out when you turned off your TV.

20111219-08	19:35	Dennis	Re: Loss of Our Rights & Freedoms (reply to Pam, above) & "There Goes the Republic"
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Here are a couple of interesting observations I just came across in a libertarian publication.

We used to be so happy when we got to the US," said another European. "We felt we could breathe more freely. The country was so big...so prosperous...and so open.

That was what I remember from about 20 years ago. But now it is quite different. I dread coming to the US. We came through US customs in Atlanta a few weeks ago. My wife had a half-eaten sandwich in her bag...which she had forgotten about. They put us in a special room and treated us like we were criminals. It was ridiculous...and humiliating.

But there's always something. Someone is always yelling at you. Everything is illegal or forbidden. It just doesn't seem like the same country it was a few years ago. So, we only come here when we have to for business reasons.

"There Goes the Republic" by Robert Scheer, TruthDig

Dec. 15, 2011, (http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/there_goes_the_republic_20111214/)

Once again the gods of war have united our Congress like nothing else. Unable to agree on the minimal spending necessary to save our economy, schools, medical system or infrastructure, the cowards who mislead us have retreated to the irrationalities of what George Washington in his farewell address condemned as "pretended patriotism."

The defense authorization bill that Congress passed and President Obama had threatened to veto will soon become law, a fact that should be met with public outrage. Human Rights Watch Executive Director Kenneth Roth, responding to Obama's craven collapse on the bill's most controversial provision, said, "By signing this defense spending bill, President Obama will go down in history as the president who enshrined indefinite detention without trial in U.S. law." On Wednesday, White House press secretary Jay Carney claimed "the most recent changes give the president additional discretion in determining how the law will be implemented, consistent with our values and the rule of law, which are at the heart of our country's strength."

What rubbish, coming from a president who taught constitutional law. The point is not to hock our civil liberty to the discretion of the president, but rather to guarantee our freedoms even if a Dick Cheney or Newt Gingrich should attain the highest office.

Sadly, this flagrant subversion of the constitutionally guaranteed right to due process of law was opposed in the Senate by only seven senators, including libertarian Republican Rand Paul and progressive Independent Bernie Sanders.

That onerous provision of the defense budget bill, much discussed on the Internet but far less so in the mass media, assumes a permanent war against terrorism that extends the battlefield to our homeland. It reeks of a militarized state that threatens the foundations of our republican form of government.

This is not only a disaster in the making for civil liberty but a blow to effective anti-terrorist police work. Recall that it was the FBI that was most effective in interrogating al-Qaida suspects before the military let loose the torturers. Under the newly approved legislation, that bypassing of civilian experts will be codified as a routine option for a president.

As *The New York Times* editorialized, the bill "would take the most experienced and successful anti-terrorism agencies—the F.B.I. and federal prosecutors—out of the business of interrogating, charging and trying most terrorism cases, and turn the job over to the military." Not only has FBI Director Robert Mueller III opposed this shift in the law, but so has Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, who previously ran the CIA.

What's alarming is not just that one pernicious aspect of the defense spending bill, but the ease with which an otherwise deadlocked Congress that can't manage minimal funding for job creation and unemployment relief can find the money to fund at Cold War levels a massive sophisticated arsenal to defeat an enemy that no longer exists.

Throwing \$662 billion, plus hundreds of billions more in non-Pentagon "security" programs, at what that other great-general-turned-president, Dwight Eisenhower, condemned as the "military-industrial complex," with its tentacles in every congressional district, is an act of absurdity in a world bereft of a serious military challenge to the United States. Not even the best-funded terrorists can afford aircraft carriers.

There is simply no militarily significant enemy in sight, yet we spend almost as much on our armed forces as the rest of the world combined, and are already ludicrously superior in military might to any rogue power, like Iran, that might threaten us. The hawks who attempt to justify Cold War levels of spending on advanced weaponry by

reviving “Red China” as a formidable enemy are undermined in their argument by China’s sharply limited regional force projection. The real leverage that China exercises over U.S. policy options is not military but rather economic and derives precisely from the fact that we have gone into debt to those same communists in order to fund our irrational military spending.

Military spending is rationalized with patriotic froth, but it is driven by the unfortunate fact that it is the most reliable source of government-funded profits and jobs. It is an obviously inefficient use of resources as a means of lifting the overall economy compared with building infrastructure and training workers for the jobs of the future, but don’t count on Congress or the president to change that dynamic anytime soon. The White House’s five-year projection of defense spending aims not at the one-third budget cut initiated by the first President Bush in response to the end of the Cold War, but at a “flattening” of military expenditures between 2013 and 2017.

We had every right to expect President Obama to stick to his word and veto this bill, not as a means of forcing a much needed bigger cut in government waste, but more urgently because its assault on the Constitution’s requirement of due process represents a direct threat to the freedom of the American people every bit as menacing as any we face from foreign enemies.

[20111219-09](#) 20:28 Art Re: Loss of Our Rights & Freedoms (reply to Dennis, above)

Thanks, Dennis, I would still like to know more about this. I don't want to turn into an NRA zombie who immediately goes into battle stations every time someone even proposes the most reasonable gun restriction. The concerns may well be valid but the President is a pretty savvy guy, so if he signs it, there must be a bit more to it than perhaps I at least understand. Just say'n.

[20111219-10](#) 21:22 SteveG Re: Loss of Our Rights & Freedoms (reply to Pam, above)

Several banks fail annually, the last I saw was 79 in 2011. All small banks of course and customers or banks absorbed by the larger banks. Washington Mutual went belly up in 2008 I think – FDIC took them over and then sold them to CHASE for \$1.9 billion. Same thing happened to another bank in Florida. Piranhas waiting in the wings.

Agree with the dwindling of our rights and seemingly a handful (comparatively speaking) care – most people don’t and rationalize with “that would never happen”. I really don’t know what if anything will wake people.

Forgot about that vanishing point of light

[20111219-11](#) 21:32 Pam Re: Loss of Our Rights & Freedoms (reply to SteveG, above)

Indefinite detention, military custody for criminal suspects—this doesn't make you uncomfortable?

[20111219-12](#) 21:38 SteveG Re: Loss of Our Rights & Freedoms (reply to Pam, above)

Makes me extremely uncomfortable.

Panetta saying no options are off the table in regards to stopping Iran from getting a nuclear weapon makes me uncomfortable.

The change in leadership in Korea makes me uncomfortable.

Citizens United makes me uncomfortable.

All of the conservative right make uncomfortable.

The GOP choices for president make me uncomfortable.

I think I am becoming more paranoid and need medication.

20111219-13	21:41	Pam	Re: Loss of Our Rights & Freedoms (reply to SteveG, above)
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You and me both.

I believe it's going to take a few outspoken political leaders to man the barricades—like Elizabeth Warren and Alan Grayson, my two current favorites. It will have to be someone with some inside connections. Ralph Nadar and Ron Paul are too much on the fringe. Michael Moore is right, but a joke. We need another Ted Kennedy, Barney Frank, or even Lyndon Johnson. Someone who can kick a*s and be on the right side.

20111219-14	22:45	SteveG	"House Ethics Panel Asked to Probe Discounted Loans to Four Lawmakers"
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"House Ethics Panel Asked to Probe Discounted Loans to Four Lawmakers" by Larry Margasak, AP/ *Washington Times*

Dec. 19, 2011, (<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/dec/19/house-ethics-panel-asked-to-probe-discounted-loans/>)

(WASHINGTON) Four House lawmakers received VIP discounted loans from the former Countrywide Financial Corp., the lender whose subprime mortgages was largely responsible for the nation's foreclosure crisis, according to congressional investigators.

Rep. Darrell E. Issa, California Republican and chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, declined to name the four but has told the House ethics panel that it should investigate the lawmakers.

Congressional sources said three of the four are Republicans. The sources spoke on the condition of anonymity, because they were not authorized to publicly discuss the investigation.

In 2009, Democratic Rep. Edolphus Towns of New York was identified in the media as having two loans that went through the Countrywide VIP program. On Monday, Mr. Towns insisted he was not involved in a VIP program of the lender and did not receive benefits that weren't available to every customer of the lender.

Mr. Issa, in a letter dated Friday and released Monday, said there could be additional lawmakers who received discounted loans.

The most favored customers of Countrywide were known as "Friends of Angelo," who were given discounts in a VIP section under control of the company's CEO, Angelo Mozilo. However, Mr. Issa said his investigators discovered that other sections of Countrywide also processed VIP loans to public officials and others in position to help the company.

Countrywide was taken over by Bank of America, which has given Mr. Issa's committee 100,000 documents in response to subpoenas.

Mr. Issa's letter to ethics Chairman Jo Bonner of Alabama and ranking Democrat Linda T. Sanchez of California said that between 1996 and 2008, "Countrywide used the VIP program to build relationships with government officials and others positioned to advance Countrywide's business interests.

It was previously revealed that Sens. Kent Conrad, North Dakota Democrat, and Christopher Dodd, Connecticut Democrat, while still in office received VIP loans from Countrywide. Both said they did not know they were getting unique deals and Mr. Dodd maintained he received no preferential treatment.

Others named as recipients of the VIP program were James Johnson, former head of Fannie Mae who later stepped down as an adviser to Barack Obama's first presidential campaign, and Franklin Raines, who also headed Fannie Mae. Still other "friends" included retired athletes, a judge, a congressional aide and a newspaper executive.

The Senate's ethics committee looked at the Dodd and Conrad cases and cleared them of wrongdoing, but warned that they should have exercised better judgment.

—Friends of the Middle,
Steven W. Baker (SteveB), Editor/Moderator

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<http://www.FriendsOfTheMiddle.org>
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