

***The Demise of Democracy in America—
(Implications for UUs Everywhere?)***
By Bob Huntley, 5 July 2015

First a short note about my military background. I received my Commission as an Ensign, United States Navy, in June 1954 and was flown to Sasebo, Japan to join my ship as 1st Lt. That meant I had Command of the roughest, toughest crewmen whose job was to maintain the ship and man the lines in re-fueling and tying up—they were affectionately called the “Deck Apes.”

On my 1st day my Second Class Boatswains Mate informed me my men “eat Ensigns for breakfast.”

Over the next 3 years I served as Navigator, Anti-submarine Officer, and finally Gunnery Officer in charge of all weaponry.

On my last week aboard ship we were competing for our Battle-readiness award. One target was a tank halfway up a hill on an island. Moments before launching our first salvo from the 5”38 turret, I was informed our automatic sighting system was out, and that I would have to make like an army artillery officer and bracket the target by sighting shell bursts with binoculars.

I had been a Unitarian for five years, and had been informed I would not qualify as a real honest to goodness UU unless I possessed psychic powers.

We fired the first shot, and I could not spot an explosion, because the round likely went clear over the Island and into the ocean beyond.

Thereupon, drawing upon my psychic powers, I calmly gave three commands: 1) Drop 2,000 yards; 2) Left 200 yards; 3) Fire Two!

We hit the tank smack-dab square on, the Captain shouted: “Atta boy, Gunner,” and I thereby validated my credentials as a Unitarian. Hi, folks. I am one of you. (*Ich bin ein Unitarian*)

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Today’s service, honoring our military, finds its roots in the last words of the ***Declaration of Independence***: “*And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our Sacred Honor.*”

Those were not idle words—those signers were subjecting themselves to loss of their lands and homes and possible conviction for treason and death!

Our forefather’s pledge of their Lives, Fortune, and Sacred Honor, taken together with the sacrifices since made by our military personnel and their families, is a challenge to us today to do our utmost for Social Justice.

Our conducting Memorial Services, or saying “Thank you For Your Service” are only beginning gestures, which make us feel good. They are reminders for us to do more.

War is never a healthful enterprise, we owe our soldiers — and innocent civilian victims, a duty to use war as a last resort. We should stop creating yet more casualties, both to our troops and to the citizens of the countries we invade.

- ❖ Our soldiers sign up to defend American interests, not to satisfy politically motivated causes.
- ❖ A word about the Tonkin Gulf Resolution which congress passed to authorize the Korean War. The War Department issued a press release, reported in the New York Times, that a US destroyer reported its **Radar** detected Korean torpedoes coming toward it. I wrote the Times that Radar does not work under water, only **Sonar detects torpedoes**, and thus the rationalization for war appeared to be phony. Later credible analysis indicates there were no such torpedoes, only fish.
- ❖ Our Government first dubbed our invasion of Iraq “Operation Iraqi Liberty—O.I.L. Changed to Operation Iraqi Freedom.
- ❖ Too many veterans still suffer from joblessness and injuries. There is no doubt that many veterans die years before they should because of Agent Orange and other exposures and physical and mental trauma. Our health care service for veterans is shockingly deficient.

The provision of proper medical care is not a Matter of Public Charity, rather it is a matter of Social Duty. Today, I would like to take our considerations beyond the “feel good” bromide of “Thank You For your Service,” beyond our expressions of gratefulness for the Freedom we enjoy, to a deeper consideration of the fact Freedom has its foundation in a true democracy.

Democracies, in the centuries since ancient Greek civilization, have been a rarity in human experience.

We must recognize that democracies continue to exist only if its citizens continually demand and effectively fight for Social Justice.

Benjamin Franklin told the people: “We have given you a Democracy—let’s see if you can keep it.”

- ❖ In the past 30 years, we in America have permitted the growth of an unconscionable and destructive Disparity between Rich & Poor.
 1. As Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz points out, the richest 1 percent of Americans now own 40 percent of the nation’s wealth. How much does the bottom 80 percent own? Only 7 percent.
 2. The Top 1 Percent Of Americans Take Home 24 Percent Of National Income: While the richest 1 percent of Americans take home almost a quarter of national income today, in 1976 they took home just 9 percent — meaning their share of the national income pool has nearly tripled in roughly three decades.
 3. The Top 1 Percent Of Americans Own Half Of The Country’s Stocks, Bonds, And Mutual Funds: The Institute for Policy Studies illustrates this massive disparity in financial investment ownership, noting that the bottom 50 percent of Americans own only 0.5 percent of these investments.
 4. Using 2007 figures, sociologist William Domhoff points out that the top 1 percent have 5 percent of the nation’s personal debt while the bottom 90 percent have 73 percent of

total debt.

5. The Top 1 Percent Are Taking In More Of The Nation's Income Than At Any Other Time Since The 1920s: Not only are the wealthiest 1 percent taking home a tremendous portion of the national income, but their share of this income is greater than at any other time since the Great Depression.

- ❖ At the beginning of the recent recession, our economy was largely controlled by thirteen financial institutions. They have now been consolidated into nine considered too big to fail.
- ❖ Congress represents the special interests and not the people—people have little effective voice in the halls of Congress on Social Justice issues.
- ❖ Corporations are not democratic in their governance in any real sense. The stockholders exert very little pressure for environmental or social justice issues, their God being the short-term bottom line. There is little loyalty to employees.
- ❖ Even in Idaho, the privileged and special interests control the reins of power. For example, in the Idaho Legislature, powerful Committee Chairman steal the franchise from our elected Representatives by holding BILLS in their desk drawer, this without a peep of protest from their cowered colleagues.
- ❖ In the recent Meridian School election, only six tenth of one percent (0.6%) of the qualified electors voted.
- ❖ In short, we no longer have a Democracy wherein the People have meaningful control. Instead, we have descended to a circumstance where the reins of government are held by an Oligarchy of the rich and well-connected.
- ❖ The Oligarchy throws us citizens just enough crumbs to keep us satiated so that we do not take to the streets with pitchforks to recapture our country.
- ❖ We are witnessing and participating in the desecration of that democracy which our Armed Services have been sacrificing to preserve, largely because we as citizens do not adequately assume the duties and responsibilities required of us to maintain a democracy.
- ❖ We, here at BUUF, can be proud of our work and orientation toward social justice. We nurture and support such “stand out” leaders as, for example, Sue Philley, Roger Sherman, Debra Smith, Rick Goff, Jeanette Ross, Tom von Alten, Debbie Espen, Wanda & Bryan Jennings, to mention a few.

All of us, whether we work directly in a social justice endeavor or not, can justly take pride in the fact that by participating in BUUF thru our attendance here, by our financial contributions, and by participation in the many programs that keep BUUF rolling, we are together providing Idaho with a Shining Beacon for social justice

Nevertheless, we, the citizens of today, as we proclaim our dedication to Social Justice, must constantly ask ourselves:

- 1) Are there new and additional areas and issues where BUUF can and should mobilize our considerable talents to provide enhanced community leadership?
- 2) Do our efforts and our work in Social Justice attain that level which adequately pays honor and tribute to the service men and women who have sacrificed mightily to preserve our freedom?

Ours is the challenge to **do our part** to meet the calling articulated at Gettysburg by President Lincoln, that is, to ensure that: **“government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”**

Do any of us here today think Lincoln meant: government over the masses, by the richest 10%, for the richest 10%?

Those citizens, who adhere to right-wing attitudes, generated the Tea Party movement, which greatly influenced the 2014 elections. Why do we not see equal organization and fervor by Liberals and moderates?

We tend to despair about the difficulty or futility of attempting to make a difference on some of the larger issues facing us, both State and Federal.

Some are reluctant to tackle issues before the Idaho Legislature, either because they deem them to be complex, such as taxation, or because they think Churches should not be involved in “Politics.”

To that, I remind you, that the civil rights movement in the 1960s involved both (a) complex human relationships, and (b) political action.

A Church’s 501(c)(3) status is not jeopardized by participation in the great issues of the day which do not directly involve the election of a particular candidate.

Margaret Mead admonished us:

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

By working to preserve Democracy, we indeed pay honor and tribute to those whom we salute today.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, speaking to the American people in 1932 articulated the call to Greatness in these Words:

“There is a mysterious cycle in human events. To some generations, much is given. Of other generations, much is asked. This generation of Americans has a Rendezvous with Destiny.”

We, you, me, all of us, both as individuals, and as a Religious Institution seeking to promote Social Justice, must rise to meet to that challenge.

Namaste

READING:

JUDY

This reading from “*The Greatest Generation*” by Tom Brokaw

BOB

“At a time in their lives when their days and nights should have been filled with innocent adventure, love, and the lessons of the workaday world, they were fighting in the most primitive conditions possible across the bloodied landscape of France, Belgium, Italy, Austria, and the Coral Islands of the Pacific.

JUDY

They answered the call to save the world from the two most powerful and ruthless military machines ever assembled, instruments of conquest in the hands of fascist maniacs. They faced great odds and a late start, but they did not protest. They succeeded on every front. They won the war; they saved the world.

BOB

They came home to joyous and short-lived celebrations and immediately began the task of rebuilding their lives and the world they wanted. They married in record numbers and gave birth to another distinctive generation the Baby Boomers.

JUDY

A grateful nation made it possible for more of them to attend college than any society had ever educated, anywhere. They gave the world new science, literature, art, industry, and economic strength unparalleled in the long curve of history.

BOB

As they now reach the twilight of their adventurous and productive lives, they remain, for the most part, exceptionally modest. They have so many stories to tell, stories that in many cases they have never told before because in a deep sense they didn’t think that what they were doing was that special, because everyone else was doing it too.