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**Western Washington Fellowship of Reconciliation
Spring Assembly**

**May 18, 2024
9 am to 12:30 pm**

“Supporting Movements for a Just and Peaceful World”

Everyone welcome. Join us for a Zoom meeting with Speakers, workshops, and discussion.

Details will be posted at wwfor.org.

Info 206-789-5565 or wwfor@wwfor.org

Democracy is In Our Genes

by John M Repp

Many people assume that groups of animals follow the lead of dominant individuals called *alphas* when the group has to make decisions. For example, when a herd needs to move to another area for feeding, how do they decide? That question had never been examined until two scientists decided to take a closer look. Their subjects were herds of red deer, social animals with dominant individuals.

Obviously, the deer cannot vote and count votes when they make a collective decision. But what the scientists, Conradt and Roper, observed was nevertheless democratic behavior. As the herd was lying down chewing its cud, when more than half the group stood up, the group was ready to move. Conradt and Roper clarified by explaining that sometimes, there is a small group of animals that do follow an *alpha*. This may happen when the difference in information is large, for example, when an older *alpha* knows the territory better. But in larger groups or herds, democratic collective decisions are the norm.

Other scientists studying African buffalo observed that when fifty percent plus one had pointed their heads in one direction, the group moved in that direction toward the next waterhole in the direction they were pointing.

The research on collective behavior of social

insects is more advanced. Anna Dornhaus challenged the popular idea that the natural world is ruled by dominance and violence. She also questioned the assumption that great cognitive ability is needed for democratic behavior.

So, from honeybees to primates, clouds of gnats to flocks of birds, in nature, democracy works better than autocracy. Like Thomas Jefferson wrote in the first paragraph of the Declaration of Independence, “the Laws of Nature and Nature’s God” requires “a decent respect for the opinions of mankind”. In other words, as we would say today, democratic behavior or following the consent of the governed in large groups, a tribe or a nation is “in our genes”.

Finally, Conradt and Roper found that democratic decisions are more beneficial for the group **because less mistakes are made**. Oligarchies follow the decisions of the politically active wealthy and ignore the needs and desires of the majority. That may be why oligarchies have declined and collapsed so many times in history.

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Democracy in the New World

by John M Repp

Many of our founders, like Franklin, Jefferson, and John Adams had extensive experience with native Americans as boys and young men. Adams in 1813 wrote to Jefferson that when he was a kid he used to go over to a native family's wigwam where they gave him berries, apples, plums, and peaches. Native leaders visited Adam's father's house often. (From Thom Hartmann. The Hidden History of American Democracy: Rediscovering Humanity's Ancient Way of Living (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2023, pp10-11)

Jefferson's father was a map maker, and a famous Cherokee Ontassetě often visited his house from the time Thomas was nine until age fourteen when Jefferson's father died. They conversed long into the evening, and young Thomas was invited to join them. When Jefferson was nineteen, he heard Ontassetě give his "great farewell address" in 1764 just before the native left for England to try and negotiate a permanent peace treaty with King George II. The Cherokee man was not sure he would return safely after a long trip across the ocean. Jefferson could understand only a few words of Ontassetě's speech, but he understood the heart of the problem. The recurrent smallpox epidemics and a series of betrayals in 1721, 1754, and 1759 after peace talks with British colonists made the native leader want a more lasting treaty of peace. He thought the king of England could make that happen.

Our founders were amazed that the natives were able to have functioning societies without police or prisons. Franklin wrote in 1770: "Happiness is more generally and equally diffus'd among Savages than in civilized (i.e. European societies) societies. No

European who has tasted savage life can afterwards bear to live in our societies." (Hartmann, p. 7) "White Indians" were a common phenomenon in America, and this was widely reported in Europe. These were people who somehow ended up living with natives, and then refused to return to white society. Sometimes, they were even "rescued" by whites but then they repeatedly ran back to the natives, preferring to live with them.

The earlier theory put in most history books was that our founders got their main inspiration to set up a democratic republic from the European Enlightenment, also called the Age of Reason, with thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Locke. The Enlightenment was an intellectual movement in Western Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries catalyzed by the scientific advances of Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) who proved the earth revolved around the sun and Isaac Newton (1642-1727) who described the law of gravity.

But after the publishing of The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity by David Graeber and David Wengrow (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2021) we learned that the European Enlightenment itself was heavily influenced by reports that were coming out of the new world **about native societies**. A best seller in Europe entitled Curious Dialogues with a Savage of Good Sense Who Has Traveled, written by Baron de Lahontan, came out in 1703. Lahontan recorded dialogues and conversations with a Native named Kandiaronk. Kandiaronk was critical of European society, saying they were obsessed with class and wealth. The poor people were acting like slaves vis-à-vis the rich in their society.

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He suggested that when Europeans were **more concerned about their families and friends than about someone they don't know**, they could not be wise, reasonable, and fair. Self-interest as the motivation of each individual is taken for granted as normal in European society. Kondiaronk was critical of men whose main motivation in life is their own self-interest. (Hartmann, p.30) To us having grown up in American culture, a colony of Europe before 1776, this is a very radical point of view.

To quote Kondiaronk: "I have spent 6 years reflecting on the state of European society and I still can't think of a single way they act that is not inhuman and I generally think this can only be the case as long as you stick to your distinctions of "mine" and "thine." I affirm that what you call "money" is the devil of devils, the tyrant of the French, the source of all evils, the bane of souls and slaughterhouse of the living. To imagine one can live in the country of money and preserve one's soul is like imagining one can preserve one's life at the bottom of a lake. Money is the father of luxury, lasciviousness, intrigues, trickery, lies, betrayal, insincerity—of all the world's worst behavior."

Thomas Paine whose pamphlet *Common Sense* (1775) kicked off the American Revolution, wrote in the book Agrarian Justice (1797) "To understand **what the state of society ought to be**, it is necessary to have some idea of the natural and primitive state of man, such as it is at this day among the Indians of North America. There is not, in that state, any of those spectacles of human misery which poverty and want present to our eyes in all the towns and streets of Europe."

In short, the contact between the British/French and native Americans in America changed the world. It set off a series of democratic revolutions starting with our own in 1776 followed by the French Revolution in 1789.

Dark Money and the Supreme Court

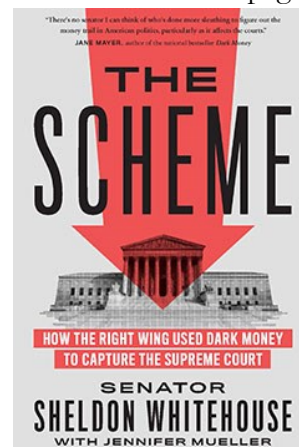
by John M Repp

Senator Sheldon Whitehouse was elected to the U.S. Senate from Rhode Island in 2007. He wanted the Senate to act to mitigate climate change. Every month for nine years, when the Senate was in session, he spoke to the **empty chamber** making two hundred and sixty nine speeches, that are all available on YouTube. Here is the first one: [Time to Wake Up | US Senator Sheldon Whitehouse | TEDxProvidence - YouTube](#) where he talks about what is going to happen in Rhode Island as a consequence of climate change, specifically, the flooding of parts of the small state as the sea level rises.

Sadly, the normal condition of the Senate chamber is to be empty because much of each day the Senators are on the phone asking the big donors for money. There is very little actual debate going on in Congress. Whitehouse's concern was how come the Senate and the House was turned around on that most important issue of our time, climate change. He tells us there was in 2007 a bipartisan concern in Congress to mitigate climate change. For example, when Senator John McCain ran for President in 2008, he had a strong climate plank in his platform.

The change started with the appointment by George Bush of John Roberts and Sam Alito in 2005 to the Supreme Court. Sadly, we remember that the first Bush "election" was decided by the Supreme Court itself when they stopped the vote counting in Florida and declared Bush the winner. We learned a few months later that Al Gore actually got more votes in Florida.

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Then five years later, in 2010, the Supreme Court delivered the *Citizen's United* decision which is the **legalization of bribery in our elections**. After that, there was little serious action at the highest level of our government to deal with climate, or if there was, there were still more permits issued to allow oil and gas drilling on public lands. Bribery is still illegal in other situations. If an employee of a company offered his boss a barely used car from his father's used car lot in exchange for a promotion on the job, that would be illegal. But bribery is now legal in politics after *Citizen's United*.

Whitehouse quotes a journalist's description of the language in the *Citizen's United* decision: that "ruling contains some of the silliest, wackiest, most preposterous pronouncements in the tens of millions of words extruded by the Supreme Court in its 229-year



history." This quote can be found on page 54 of *The Scheme: How the Right Wing Used Dark Money to Capture the Supreme Court* (New York: The New Press, 2022, written with Jennifer Mueller), Senator Whitehouse's latest book.

Here is the text that elicited that journalist's comments: "(W)e now conclude that independent expenditures, including those made by corporations, do not give rise to corruption or the appearance of corruption... The fact that speakers [i.e., donors] may have influence over or access to elected officials does not mean that these officials are corrupt... The appearance of influence or access, furthermore, will not cause the electorate to lose faith in our democracy." (p.54)

On what planet were these justices living? The whole point of large campaign donations for election campaigns and the work of lobbyists is to influence the thinking and the votes of Congress persons and Senators. This was **the Supreme Court making up facts** that are completely false, facts contrary to what political

scientists have found over and over: money does corrupt politics. To be clear, a court case usually has two parts: deciding the facts of the case and then deciding how the law applies to the facts. Whitehouse tells us that too often this Roberts Court makes up facts.

To explain further, in the case of electoral campaigns, "independent" means an organization separate from the election campaign organization directly controlled by the candidate. There are some regulations concerning the actual candidate's organization, like limitations on the amount of money it can get from any one individual donor. The problem is that an "independent organization" can accept donations from other organizations that do not have to reveal the source of the donations or who the donors are. It is **the layering of organizations** and the sheer number of such organizations that makes the money dark. Whitehouse writes his new book as if it were a legal brief. He says there is massive evidence

for his claims, but just one gap in his argument. The gap is the amount of money and the names of the donors. That is exactly what the layers of organizations are designed to hide.

The focus of the book, which is clear from the subtitle of his book, is the use of dark money to influence the composition and the decisions of the Supreme Court. Before that effort was made, the oligarchs learned how to control executive agencies, by getting their people appointed to positions in and even leaders of those agencies. For instance, they could promise good positions to the executives after their government service, if they "did the right thing". But at that time, no one thought anyone would try to control the court system and even the Supreme Court.

And then "the scheme" began. The first speech Whitehouse made in this series named "The Scheme" focused on the famous Powell memo: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mApIGu1RxPg> The Scheme Speech 1: The Powell Report - YouTube.

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The Powell Memo, written in August 1971, was a response to the concern of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce about the “unrest” of the 1960’s that indicated a serious loss of legitimacy of American corporations. Whitehouse thinks that is the place to start describing the history of “the scheme”, which played out over a number of years, with many players.

A key institution in the “scheme” was the Federalist Society, founded in 1982, to challenge what some right-wing law students perceived as the dominance of “liberal” ideology in the legal profession. Bringing the story forward into our time, it was the Federalist Society’s Leonard Leo who advised Trump on his three nominations to the Supreme Court, that consolidated the right-wing control of the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court is now controlled by six Republican appointees, what we still call the Roberts court. **On June 24, 2022, that court disregarded fifty years of precedent when it overruled Roe v. Wade.** And lately we have gotten many press reports about how some of the justices are taking expensive vacations paid for by right-wing political operatives. No one takes seriously the new ethics code they recently proclaimed. There is no enforcement mechanism. We can only conclude that SCOTUS (the Supreme Court of the United States) is corrupt, and they know it. Our CIA ran many covert operations over the years to overthrow foreign governments that wanted to control their own natural resources or had a too democratic government. Now one reporter for The Guardian wrote on February 22, 2022 that what Senator Whitehouse calls “the scheme” was **“a massive covert operation in and against their own country.”**

Attributed to Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis who died in 1941. **“We can have democracy in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both.”**

The Annihilation of Gaza.

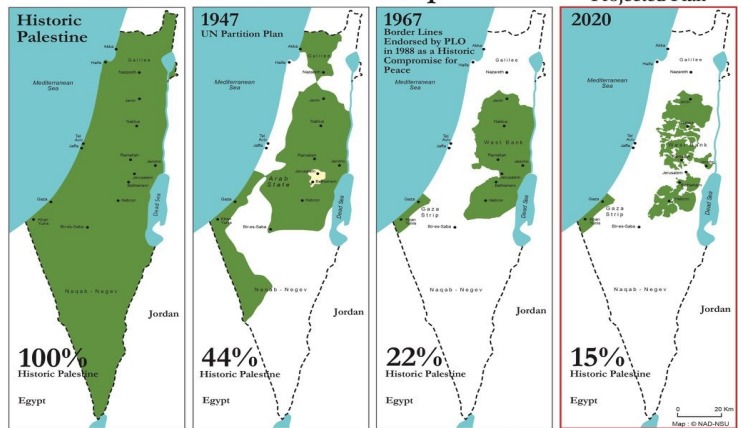
by Marjorie Prince

When my brother and I were children and arguing about who started it, our mother always said: “two wrongs don’t make a right.” Surely this concept applies to Hamas and Israel. The Hamas October 7 attack on Israeli civilians is deplorable. The Israeli genocide of over 29,000 civilians (as of Feb 19, 2024) including thousands of children as reported by the Hamas Health Ministry is an unwarranted brutal act of revenge. Worse yet, the U.S. government is funding this genocide by supplying Israel with weapons of mass destruction (e.g. two-thousand pound bombs). President Joe Biden can tell Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to limit the revenge assault on Gazans, but words have no effect on Netanyahu. Cutting off our taxpayer money to supply Israel with military weapons would save more Gazan lives and halt the expulsion of Palestinians from their ancestral lands. An immediate ceasefire is necessary.

Netanyahu seeks elimination of all Palestinians in order to assume control of the entire region. Although the Palestinian/Israeli conflict is popularly portrayed as a dispute between Jews and Muslims, religion is a cover for a struggle to control land and resources. This struggle underlies most conflicts. Look at Russia’s invasion of the “breadbasket” Ukraine or Venezuela claiming part of Guyana after oil was discovered in that area.

The Palestinians Historic Compromise

Trump’s Projected Plan



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For 75 years Palestinians have been waiting for a two-state solution to the territory. No progress has been made as Israel has been allowed to usurp more and more land and resources by demolishing Palestinian homes and establishing illegal “settlements” in the West Bank, leaving little contiguous land for Palestinians. A two-state solution now seems impossible.

The U.S. providing more weapons of war only intensifies the suffering of both Palestinians and Israelis. If freeing the hostages still held by Hamas were really a priority, Netanyahu and Biden would call for an immediate ceasefire. There are no real winners in war – only too many lives lost, habitat destroyed, climate change hastened, and enormous sums of money needed to rebuild wasted. Many Americans are still fighting our Civil War and enacting racist laws that overturn all the legislation making us a more equitable and inclusive country. I am very afraid that Biden’s unconditional support of Israel, no matter what it does, will cost him at the polls in 2024. If Trump is re-elected, we can kiss democracy good-bye.

Addendum by John M Repp

I became curious about why the United States is giving unconditional support to the state of Israel in its massacre in Gaza. I had always heard that AIPAC, American Israel Public Affairs Committee, was a powerful lobbying organization. I took a look at the

website Open Secrets: Following the Money in Politics. To my surprise AIPAC ranks 214th out of 9,458 lobbying organizations. It is true that AIPAC is a very wealthy organization, ranking 20th out of 26,562 organizations in the amount of its contributions. **Can you believe the number of organizations involved in lobbying and contributing to candidates? No wonder our democratic process is so compromised!**

So, the reason for the Biden administration giving diplomatic and military support to the Netanyahu government is **not just** the wealth of AIPAC. The Biden Administration must think there are good reasons for supporting Israel. It must be about projecting American power into the Middle East. Most of the world thinks they are wrong. We await the decision of the International Court of Justice (ICJ). South Africa has filed a brief there charging Israel with genocide. Cases before the court take a long time to be decided and the court has no enforcement mechanism.

More than 29,000 Palestinians have been killed as of February 19, 2024, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. 69,000 have been injured. 1.9 million Palestinians have been displaced. 250,000 housing units have been damaged.



If there is still a roof, that will be home for the night.

Testimony on Nuclear-Free Bellingham Resolution January 29, 2024

by Nicholas Mele

Good evening, my name is Nicholas Mele and I spent most of three decades as a U.S. Foreign Service officer. At times, I held security clearances which gave me access to highly secret information about our nuclear weapons. Currently, I am an adviser on nuclear issues to Pax Christi USA, a faith-based movement dedicated to nonviolence and reconciliation. I also serve on the nuclear disarmament committee of Pax Christi International, which includes roughly 100 member organizations from countries around the world. Why should our city, or any city, pass a resolution on nuclear policy? The national government of this country pays lip service to nuclear disarmament but last year spent about 40 billion dollars on developing, maintaining, and deploying nuclear weapons.

According to the National Priorities Project, the nuclear weapons tax burden on Bellingham totals 6.47 million dollars, money that could be spent on education, healthcare, housing, infrastructure and/or sustainable energy. Over and above the financial burden of nuclear weapons, there is the threat of them. Last week the Union of Concerned Scientists updated its Doomsday Clock, a graphic measure of how close we are to destroying human civilization. It is ninety seconds to Doomsday according to leading scientists and policy makers. That threat of total destruction ought to motivate our leaders to take action, but they are busy with political posturing and election campaigning. We the people need to grab their attention and give them saner priorities.

We must generate a grassroots movement for nuclear disarmament, like the mass movement which inspired Ronald Reagan to negotiate the largest reductions in nuclear warheads ever 40-some years ago. One way to create the movement is to make known the



cost and the potential destruction of our fascination with nuclear weapons.

Beyond taking a public stand against nuclear destruction with this resolution, I also ask that the Council disinvest the city government from any financial institutions and corporations which invest in nuclear weapons. The information on those financial institutions and other businesses that invest in nuclear weapons can be found at the website of Don't Bank on the Bomb, A complete list of investors and companies is updated and available on their website:

<https://www.dontbankonthebomb.com/investors>

On the positive side, there are some actions we can ask the federal government and national security establishment to take to reduce risks of nuclear war. One is to begin taking steps to acknowledge the Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons, which became international law three years ago only last week. There are provisions of the treaty which the U.S. can implement almost immediately, especially compensating victims of our nuclear programs, victims like the Hanford downwinders and Marshall Islanders, which impact our community.

In closing, I urge the City of Bellingham to join the 76 other local governments across the country which have passed versions of this resolution. Our future depends on it.



Letters to the Editors

Dear **The Seattle Times** Jan 12, 2024
 Re:” In Israel-Hamas war, where are the voices of the healing profession?” [Jan 4, 2024, Opinion]

Op-ed author Alice Rothchild described the many examples of when medical colleagues have not spoken up in regard to the war in Gaza. I can’t imagine the reasons for silence given that not only are Palestinians in Gaza experiencing the bombing with no safe place to go but also having virtually no access to food, fuel, medicine and clean water while hospitals and ambulances are targeted.

In the meantime, the United States continues to provide Israel with the weaponry that allows this tragedy in Gaza to continue. I fully support Rothchild’s appeal for a long-term cease-fire, restoration of water, fuel, electricity, and adequate humanitarian aid. However, if we fail to understand and deal with the reasons behind uprisings by Palestinians over the past 75 years, there is little hope for security for either Israelis or Palestinians in the future.

Louise Lansberry, Seattle

Dear **The Seattle Times** Feb 2, 2024

Braving cold and steady rain in Seattle on Jan. 22, nine senior activists — myself included — celebrated the third anniversary of the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. We held banners on an Interstate 5 freeway overpass from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The banners stated “93 Countries Have Signed the UN Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapons” and “Nuclear Weapons Are Illegal, Get Them Out of Puget Sound.” Literally thousands of drivers on the busy interstate saw these messages.

Talking, smiling, waving, joking, laughing, singing and shivering, we enthusiastically weathered the cold and rain to inform many

people in the Puget Sound area about the enormous threat posed by nuclear weapons, in particular the Trident missiles in submarines at Naval Base Kitsap in Bangor, a short 20 miles from Seattle.

Most people may think of such actions as an exercise in futility. Yet our group of activists believes that it is important for the people of the world to know that international law forbids the U.S. and other nations from possessing these horrific weapons that threaten virtually all life on Earth.

Tom Krebsbach, Brier



Physicians for Human Rights

Dear **Pacific Call**,

Please tell your readers, that according to Physicians for Human Rights, Feb 6, 2024, last week, PHR and their partners released a report documenting **the staggering misuse of solitary confinement** by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) over the past five years. **“Our investigation shows that ICE placed people in solitary confinement for 27 days on average, exceeding the 15-day period of solitary confinement that constitutes torture as currently defined by the United Nations.”** PHR team members are gearing up for a significant advocacy effort on Capitol Hill to seek an end to the barbaric use of solitary confinement in immigration detention.

We need Co-sponsors for HR4972/S3409 “End Solitary Confinement Act” and “Dignity for Detained Immigrants Act” HR2760/S1208. If detained immigrants matter to you, urge your Congressperson to help. Thanks.

Bruce Radtke, Bellingham