

**STEPHEN BEZRUCHKA**

Toward A Healthy Society  
*Federal Way, WA 29 October 2011*

Stephen Bezruchka is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Global Health at the University of Washington. He worked for many years as an emergency physician in Seattle. His particular areas of research are population health and societal hierarchy. He has spent over 10 years in Nepal working in various health programs, and teaching in remote regions. He is author of numerous articles and essays. He is a contributor to "Sickness and Wealth," a book on the effects of global corporatization on health.

We all know something about vital signs of a person, that is their blood pressure, their temperature, their pulse and other measures that are typically taken when you see a doctor or go to the clinic. I worked as an emergency doctor for thirty years and a person's vital signs told me how fast I had to act. If I were told that a person was brought in with a blood pressure of 260 over 140 and was comatose, I'd be there in a heart beat. If the nurse told me that someone was in the next room with a normal temperature, pulse and blood pressure and was complaining of dizziness for six months, I could take my time. We have a sense of vital signs for a person and what normal means. They are called vital signs because they say something vital about that person in a medical setting.

We are not taught in this country to understand the vital signs of a nation, that is to ask about the health of its inhabitants. It is not discussed in high school, nor in the coursework that trains us to work in a medical setting. But there are standardized ways of looking at the health of a country, just as there are for an individual person.

What are the vital signs of a nation? One is the average length of life, how many years people live. That is called life expectancy and can be applied to any population, be it a country, or a city, or a county. All you need to calculate that is knowing when someone is born and when they die. If we know everyone's birth and death days, we can determine age specific mortality rates and calculate life expectancy.

Another important national vital sign is the infant mortality rate, namely what fraction of babies born die before reaching the age of 1. We also look at how many children born die before the age of 5. The child mortality rate.

What about the chances of dying in the prime of life after you have survived childhood? There is a statistic, 45q15, that represents the probability of someone who has reached his or her fifteenth birthday dying before reaching age 60. Given all these numbers, we should ask what is a normal life expectancy, or a normal infant mortality rate, or a normal chance of a fifteen year old dying before age 60? What does normal mean in that context?

If we take the example of vital signs for a person, blood pressure for example, today normal is 120/80 or lower. When I was a medical student in the early 1970s

we didn't consider someone having high blood pressure unless the first number was over 130. And then we thought that normal blood pressure rose as someone got older. Back in the 1940s we considered having a high blood pressure as a sign of a healthy heart being able to push blood stronger. President Roosevelt died from the consequences of very high blood pressure in 1945 that caused a stroke when he bled into his brain. These days we don't want people to have high blood pressure so we give them drugs to lower it.

What is a normal life expectancy for a country like the U.S.? The United States spends almost half of the world's health care bill, and health care spending represents about 18% or almost a fifth of our total economy. So we might think we have a long length of life. We do live longer than we used to. To know how long we live, we could go to the Central Intelligence Agency's World Rankings website. Our CIA has great intelligence and displays that online. On that site, under life expectancy, we find U.S. life expectancy is 78.37 years. That is really high. So we must be getting good value from our health care dollars, which amount to about \$9000 per person.

But when you go to that website, you have to scroll way down to find the United States. We are at number 50 there. Many other countries have higher numbers for life expectancy, that is their people live longer lives. Gibraltar for example lives longer than we do. It is just a rock so it should be around for a long time. But keep scrolling up and there ahead of us is Bosnia and Herzegovina. Wasn't there a war in Bosnia and Herzegovina that started in 1991 with the breakup of the former Yugoslavia and before it ended in about 1996 there were unspeakable atrocities committed with huge losses of life. Yet they are healthier than we are as are all the other rich nations.

The sad truth is that we die younger than people in close to fifty other countries, at least according to our CIA. What about infant mortality? Go to those tables and the ranking is not much different. More babies die in their first year of life compared to over 40 other nations in fact three times as many infants die as in the healthiest countries. Even Cuba does better.

For the chances of dying in the prime of life, 45q15, it is the same story. You have to sleuth a bit more to find the numbers, using data from the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, or *Lancet* the world's leading medical journal and do some spreadsheet work. You find for men we rank 44th and for women 48th. A boy aged 15 in Peru has a better chance of living to age 60 than a boy in America. A girl in Sri Lanka has a better chance than a girl in the U.S. I'm glad for Peru and Sri Lanka, but sad for our nation. If you want to be healthy the numbers suggest it is better to live in another country than the United States.

You may say that you don't want to live long, you just want to live a happy fulfilled life. To you quality is more important than quantity. But since we spend so much money in the last few years of life trying to live even a few days longer, we really do value the length of life in the U.S.

When it comes to quality, in happiness rankings, we don't do much better than we do in health rankings. In fact happiness in the U.S. has been declining ever so slowly over the last forty years and women have suffered the greatest declines. That is true for so other indicators on quality of lives lived, or our well-being, namely things aren't so good here, again if the standard is comparing ourselves with others.

Why do we die so young? Turns out that medical care doesn't do that much in helping people in a country live longer. I tell people to ask, "Do you want health or health care?" Turns out we don't have either in the U.S.

Our health has more to do with the stress in our lives, especially stress in early life, from the time you were conceived and before you go to school. As we go from the erection to the resurrection, it is the first thousand days from conception to age two that are most crucial for being healthy. In those early years about half of our health as adults is programmed. As a nation we don't have policies to make those first thousand days healthy ones. We don't have paid leave policies for pregnant women. All the other rich nations do. That is for women who are pregnant and working at a job for pay they get paid time off. Because of the stress working at low wage jobs without control, pregnant women are more likely to deliver a low birth weight or premature baby or to require a Caesarian section delivery. What about paid leave after your baby is born? There are only four countries in the world without paid parental leave policies. They are Papua New Guinea, Liberia, Swaziland and guess who else? Every other country has a law guaranteeing paid leave for mothers. We don't. Instead we preach family values. Just tell the mom and dad to work hard at their job, if they have one, and be good parents. Moms and dads have to work, many often at very stressful low paid jobs just to make ends meet. We have the most poverty of all rich nations and today we have a higher proportion of people in this country in poverty than at any time in our history. It is the poorer

people who die younger for the most part because their moms and dads don't have the time to parent. Poverty kills. Remember that.

Another way of looking at why we die so young is that we tolerate incredible economic inequality in the United States. That is the reason we don't want to spend money on families and children or on poorer people in America. The rich, who call the shots here, say that everyone should have to work hard to support their families. We have the most inequality of all rich nations and the worst health. The two are closely related. Economic inequality is bad for our health. A study from Harvard University published in 2009 suggested that one death in three in this country is caused by our big income gap. One in three! That means 880,000 excess deaths a year because we have so much inequality. That is a killer fact, namely we have 880,000 deaths a year in the United States linked to our income inequality. It is like have a 911 tragedy happening every 30 hours, every day and a quarter, continuously throughout the year. The violence of the Twin Towers collapsing haunts us, yet we are unaware of how economic inequality is killing us. It is a form of violence that is invisible, there is no smoking gun and people die from the usual illnesses. It's called structural violence. Let's explore inequality the cause of this form of violence.

How unequal are we? What was the income of the highest paid person last year? We all know what the minimum wage is but hardly anyone can tell you the maximum wage or the amount the highest earner makes. We are not supposed to pay attention to that. Last year the highest paid person made about \$10,000 every 15 seconds. Or about \$2,450,000 per hour, or \$4.9 billion dollars a year. That is nice work if you can get it and as the Gershwin song says, you can get it if you try. We believe if we work hard we can achieve anything including making billions of dollars a year. That belief is killing us.

Inequality is at record highs. Some people in this country are starting to question whether so much inequality is good for us. Presidents, starting with Reagan, have preached to us that we should let the rich make all the money they can and they will invest it and create jobs for the rest of us. The trickle-down concept. About the only thing that is trickling down on us is the yellowish liquid coming out of rich bladders. That isn't producing health in America.

The frenzy that has had us helping the rich get richer than they ever dreamed possible may be coming to an end. That is the second point I want to make, namely that we are in the midst of a political revolution, not a rapid violent revolution where we see people dying from gun shots, drone missile strikes or bomb blasts but one proceeding at a gentler pace, with the violence coming from the unequal structure of society. The world order as it has been since the Second World War is no longer serving the needs of we the people, whether we live in the

U.S. or in Greece, or in Egypt or in Pakistan. The old world order is collapsing. In various parts of the world people are massing together and protesting in ways they haven't done before. Just as we are behind in our health status, compared to other nations, we are late in entering this revolution. But we have started.

Our protests today started on Wall Street where the crisis began in 2008. I was surprised that it took so long for us in the U.S. to begin to question our political structure and the capitalist hysteria that was giving everything to the rich even when Wall Street was on the verge of collapsing. Remember just those few years ago when we abandoned any concept of the free market and turned to socialism as we bailed out the rich. It is difficult to calculate how much we gave the rich as part of their bailout package because those hogs are still feeding at the trillions trough. As we gave them trillions they paid themselves billions in bonuses and we didn't bat an eyelash. The free market didn't apply to the rich. The rich always need our help to stay rich. But that is changing.

A small group of protestors known as Occupy Wall Street began in New York, New York. At first the media paid no attention. But protests are growing and spreading around the country. Occupy Seattle with thousands protesting in solidarity with Occupy Wall Street and other cities has resulted in police crackdowns. That is the nature of protest at this stage. If you draw attention to your issues by the police becoming involved the media then report the demonstrations. The protests are using social media in the same way the Spring Awakening in the Middle East did. At this point there is no sense of where the protests are heading. But one has to understand that there is a limit in the U.S. to the amount of democracy that will be tolerated. We see this all the time, most obviously during the Battle of Seattle 12 years ago when police were brutal.

The last time there was this big a crisis of capitalism was 75 years ago, and the response was to create mechanisms by which the government took care of ordinary people. The reason that happened is that people organized, unions were vibrant, there was an excess of democracy. This resulted in progressive legislation such as Social Security and the New Deal.

That previous big crisis of capitalism was preceded by the biggest polarization of wealth perhaps ever seen when the richest 1% held close to half of all the wealth in the country. The response to the New Deal legislation and economic justice policies that followed was that the richest 1%'s wealth declined to having only 23% of all the wealth by 1975. The rich saw it coming, so they began organizing back in the 1960s to get their wealth share back. Keep that number, 1% and its difference, 99% in your mind since we are in the 99%. There is a global 99 too. The problem just isn't in the U.S.

Back in 1946 the highest tax bracket in the U.S. was 96%, hard to believe but true. I sometimes show students

front pages of *The New York Times*. On April 28, 1942 the headline read: \$25,000 income limit asked by President. Roosevelt proposed a 100% tax on all incomes above \$25,000. That didn't pass, but a 94% tax passed that was later raised to 96%. Today it is 35%. What has happened to the values in our nation since then?

The key values in this country in the 1950s produced the GI bill and low cost housing loans and went as far as the Family Assistance Plan in 1969, which made the lead headline in *The New York Times* on August 8. It was to provide a guaranteed income for every American family. Imagine a Republican, President Nixon, proposing that. That legislation passed the House and languished in the Senate and when Nixon got embroiled in Watergate it never became law.

We are now back to greater levels of wealth inequality than back in the 1920s. How did they do that in the U.S. They distracted us into thinking of individual pursuits rather than organizing together. We got in line to be one of the first to buy an iPad instead of demonstrating on Wall Street. That is changing today.

President Reagan said we should help the rich get richer and something will trickle down to us. I remember in the 1980s how crazy this seemed. By preaching taxation as a bad thing, and the idea that we can all become rich some day, we bought into this. Many workers today believe the rich shouldn't pay taxes because they believe they will strike it rich before they die.

What happened with our crisis that burst forth 3 years ago is the result of processes set in place 4 decades ago as the richest 1%'s wealth share plummeted and the 99%'s wealth share increased. In the last forty years our wages have not increased in inflation adjusted dollars. The rich said their wealth share had declined so much that they weren't going to pay us more in wages and they accomplished this in a variety of ways:

- they automated production, using technology and computers

- after WWII, the U.S. was almost the only producer, but as other countries got up to speed, U.S. companies faced competition. So they got legislation passed to offshore production to remain competitive which is why it is hard to find a made in USA label anymore. The only big thing we've made recently is the global economic crisis. It is definitely made in the USA. We no longer make useful things here anymore. About the only thing we make and export are military weapons. The lack of a manufacturing base will make any economic recovery jobless unless we rethink work in our society.

- the rich supported waves of immigration of people who would work for less to under cut wages

- and women entered the work force in huge numbers and now outnumber men.

To understand the scale of the changes, back in 1970 the median family with 2 parents and 2 children had only one parent working outside the home had more disposable

income, that is more money to spend on vacations or entertainment than a median 2000, that is a y2k, family with two kids and both parents working. Besides putting more family members to work, another way to cope was to use consumer credit that became very easy so in effect you could borrow your salary. You paid yourself from home equity loans that led to the housing bubble bursting and from credit card debt which reached record levels.

During this period the U.S. went from being an industrial economy to a service economy, and financial services became prominent. Many U.S. corporations got into banking. Back in the 1950s and 60s organized labor was one of the biggest financial contributors to the election process, but now the biggest contributors are big corporations so they have much more influence, while ordinary people have come to have very little sway, and the same is true of organized labor.

Political lobbying has become a huge industry as the number of lobbyists since the 1970s increased over ten fold. Yet ordinary people, or the homeless, or the poor don't have their own lobbyists. They can't afford them. So the poor or homeless get no benefits. Only groups with highly paid lobbyists get noticed in D.C.

Our democracy has become transformed so that corporate lobbyists masquerade as elected officials and we have the best democracy money can buy. We should call our system a corporatocracy.

An example is General Electric a company I remember as a child. "We bring good things to light" was their slogan then. Today their line is "Imagination at work." How does their imagination really work? GE has grown immensely and last year made worldwide profits of \$14.2 billion with \$5.1 billion of that from its U.S. operations. Yet their U.S. tax bill for last year was a credit of \$3.2 billion. They made \$5.1 billion in U.S. profits and we paid them \$3.2 billion as their tax credit. GE doesn't do much business with light bulbs anymore. Much of its profit stems from the banking business. It has offshored many tens of thousands of jobs. Last year it spent \$4.1 million on lobbyists. That is what the invisible hand does, it gets lobbyists to wave it so GE doesn't pay any taxes. Furthermore, their CEO is the chairman of President Obama's Council on Jobs and Competitiveness. Our vote is no match for the power of the corporations.

Neoliberal reforms came into being in the last decades that privatized something once it became profitable. Massive subsidies for many industries and technologies were put in place that benefitted the rich both directly and indirectly. Unprofitable research has been paid for by the government and when it becomes profitable, it is handed over to industry. A prime example is the computer industry. I worked with computers in the 1960s at a time that IBM and Control Data were heavily subsidized by the military because no profit could be made. By the late 1970s the technology, whose development we paid for through our taxes, came to be

used by visionaries such as Steve Jobs who could take that technology free of charge and create Apple Computer to make computers work for us. The internet was similarly developed by the U.S. army and in the late 1980s given away to industry, so today Google makes obscene profits. The modern commercial passenger airliners are basically modified military bombers that were developed entirely at taxpayer expense and now Boeing makes huge profits. Costs are socialized, profits are privatized. Neither Apple nor Boeing had to pay license fees to we the people who paid for developing the technology they used to made fantastic profits.

These neoliberal reforms have required cuts in spending for social services such as education, public transportation, and national parks. At the University of Washington where I teach increased tuition fees and pay as you go programs are now becoming more common.

Another reform has been to deregulate, since the market and the invisible hand is considered the best regulator. Among key deregulations were those of policies put in place back in the last great crisis of capitalism, especially the Glass-Steagall Act. It was passed in 1933 to separate investment banking from commercial banking and was designed to limit speculation. These important protections were slowly whittled away with major emaciation in 1980, and ending with a bill that repealed the Act in 1999 signed by President Clinton. Now banks could gamble with depositors money and create new instruments such as derivatives, credit default swaps and many others that allowed enormous amounts of virtual wealth, on the order of hundreds of trillions of dollars, to be generated.

The housing bubble that came crashing down in 2008 was just the tip of the iceberg of a crisis of capitalism. Capitalism has this remarkable ability to sell us its mistakes. What we have been doing since then is giving the rich ever more and making sure that they don't pay for any of the problem that they created.

Naomi Klein wrote *Shock Doctrine, the Rise of Disaster Capitalism* in 2007 saying that during a crisis the rich can push through all sorts of legislation that benefits them. You saw that happen during the made in America global crisis beginning in 2007. Banksters received the bailouts, not you.

Another example of the Shock Doctrine at work was the Extreme Court's 2010 decision on Citizens United that allowed corporations unlimited spending to influence the political process in the United States. The corporate influence in the future will become ever more powerful and opaque, since now they don't have to disclose their spending. What happened after the crisis in the U.S.? We have bailed out the rich to a huge amount, estimates range around 10-11 trillion dollars. But somehow that was not enough and so we now are being told we need more austerity in order to lower the national debt. The rich want

everything and they are willing to gamble even their security and health in that quest.

Capitalism is selling its failures back to us. Some people wanted to hedge their bets on the bubble and profit from it. So last year's highest income earner made \$4.9 billion dollars as a hedge fund manager. He bet on the falling housing market and made tons of money. Compared to the minimum wage in Washington State, that is an income gap of almost 400,000 to 1, a world record. Yet nobody is upset at that. All of you in this room likely paid more tax last year than the highest income earner did. Capitalism will come out on top of all of us. We thank the invisible hand for this providence. We need to rethink whether or not we want to be slaves of the market and of capitalism.

Limits are emerging in the U.S. In February in Wisconsin there was the biggest support for organized labor since the 1960s and now Occupy Wall Street and Occupy Seattle and Occupy Tacoma and so many other places throughout the country. These demonstrations will grow as we generate crises to our advantage instead of to the rich.

Today people in this country are confused, and not knowing where to turn while the rich are trying to hold the front of the battle by any means they can. These include getting the corporations to spawn the Tea Party to distract people from core issues. We have corporate astro-turf where corporations pay companies to blog and tweet as individuals with extreme right wing views. People think this is what others believe so they began to change their perspectives.

The media continues its focus on individual stories, singling out the unfortunate and distracting us from the big process going on. Celebrity gossip holds sway. Telephone hacking, while symptomatic of corporate malfeasance in Rupert Murdoch's empire, becomes a scandal of individuals rather than being presented as an example of the decay of capitalism.

There is a transition in the commercial media from major analyses of what is going on to focusing on bringing consumption back to its previous levels. I read *The New York Times* every morning. It has changed immensely so that now a more accurate name for it would be "Better Homes and Gardens for ultra-rich New Yorkers." They had a special twelve page section ten days ago titled: "WEALTH." It was all about how the rich can get more wealth. Maybe it should be renamed *The Wealth Times*. Independent journalism is fast disappearing, so now we have a press corpse.

People say the Internet is replacing the press corpse, but search engines tailor what you get when you search to your own proclivities. Two people sitting next to each other making the exact same search get different results that are designed to please each of them separately. Most of us get news from the Web and that comes from aggregators, secondary sources, who give us information

tailored to our personal interests. So Google News or Huffington Post employ computer algorithms to troll the Web and give us the stories that contain key words appearing in the first 25 of the story. We are more limited now in how we see the world than when we used to turn the pages of a newspaper and glance at various headlines. Social media has become incredibly popular but in this country it is not being used for progressive purposes the way it is elsewhere. That may change. What is happening elsewhere?

In Latin America beginning in the 1980s, people began to question the neoliberal perspective and started popular organizing so today the most progressive governments and activism are taking place there. They did not suffer so much from the economic meltdown in 2008. We should look to them for ideas.

In Europe the rich saw their situation deteriorating. In the U.S. the rich were just doing so much better, so the European rich decided to craft policies that were bound to fail, especially in Ireland, Spain, Portugal and Greece so they could profit. Then the rich began preaching austerity to the less fortunate in various ways. They wanted to raise the retirement age in France from 60 to 62. In Europe people work to live and want to enjoy life, whereas here we live to work. Now that our unemployment rate is so high, we are unhappy, whereas in Europe people expect benefits from their governments when they don't work. Germany is a country whose economy hasn't tanked because they were not focused on consumerism. The people have pushed to have green power by 2022 and not depend on any nuclear plants. Greece with their pensions and civil service jobs, is presented to us as people with crazy demands because our pensions are so low or even non-existent. We laugh at their demands and ignore the massive demonstrations. In England college tuition used to be free and now they are charging tuition at universities and that produces massive protests.

Debt in Europe is seen as something taken on to invest in the future, something we used to do as well, but the rich there see the opportunity to cut benefits to ordinary people as a means of paying back the debt. But Europe's ordinary people say to the rich: "You brought us the crisis but you are not going to make us pay for it." Millions take to the streets in France, Greece and England, while our media downplays these efforts.

How the so-called debt crisis will be resolved is unclear. European banks outside of Germany are pretty shaky right now. The ones in the U.S. should have followed market principles and collapsed but they were too big to fail so capitalism sold us that fiasco. We are fitting in the epileptic seizure of a new world order.

In North Africa and the Middle East there have been massive uprisings linked to the repression of the last 30-40 years. The rich and powerful are scheming to get their power back. The military in Egypt are in control today and it is unclear if elections will happen in the next few years.

Libya will continue to fester for years but there is business euphoria about moving in to profit there.

Japan had a disaster in March producing the nuclear meltdown from the tsunami. Because Japan had been trying to get the economy out of recession for a long time, they were planning to give corporations there a tax holiday. But after the tsunami, the corporations said they would forgo the tax breaks so the government could use the money to rebuild. Can you imagine such a thing in the United States?

What is happening to rethink capitalism? I used to believe that people in the U.S. were lugubrious and not looking at what is going on but that isn't true. We aren't buying stuff we don't need with money we don't have the way we used to. Having all the latest gadgets, or the newest clothes we only wear once or twice, or cosmetics promising hope in a jar, or two garage cars, isn't what life is all about. Because we are not spending money we don't have frivolously, business has less demand and thus less reason to produce goods that we don't need. No one is hiring workers, at least poor workers. This is today's rut. Americans are smartening up and realizing that it isn't stuff that makes you happy or helps you live the good life. But we don't know where to turn.

The world is unstable, climate is changing, human populations are growing, food production is tenuous, and we are running out of water where it is needed. In rethinking capitalism we must recognize that economic growth has raised our standard of living as much as will benefit our health and well-being. More growth will not be better for us, nor better for the planet.

We desperately need to start thinking of a post-capitalist system, or structuring an economy that benefits our lives. The economy as it has existed over the last 40 years doesn't even benefit the rich and powerful in this country. Recall in June the media big event in the U.S. was that a congressman shared pictures of his crotch on the Web. However the most important information came out the same month from the University of Washington's Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation and showed that length of life is now declining for women in close to a third of U.S. counties. Their study was shared with over 1000 media outlets, yet no one has heard that our health as people within this nation is at this crossroads. They found that even our healthiest populations were no match in the health Olympics for whole nations. Think of it: you believe that whatever matters to other people doesn't affect your health if you do all the right things: eat healthy choices, exercise, have a personal trainer, take supplements, and see your doctor. You think those are the critical factors affecting your health. But whatever you do pales in comparison to what happened to you in those first thousand days. You can't change that. It is programmed into the expression of your DNA so that you will have type 2 diabetes, or hypertension, or coronary artery

disease, or breast cancer or most of the chronic diseases of aging that plague us.

It is hard to see what is happening during our major revolution that will take a long time. Only afterwards will the history books tell us what has happened. To understand this think of past scientific revolutions:

The media revolution began by changing the copying of manuscripts by hand to using the printing press. That was strongly resisted and it took hundreds of years to take hold. Now we are in a new state of that revolution as we transition from printed pages to digital format.

The Copernican revolution, where we came to see the sun at the center of the planetary system rather than the earth, also took hundreds of years to be accepted though it didn't matter to us except conceptually until we tried to launch rockets to the moon and other planets.

Capitalism took hold with the industrial revolution hundreds of years ago. The focus on economic growth really only began 75 years ago when Simon Kuznets created a new measure, the GNP or Gross National Product, as a new goal for the U.S. government in the 1930s to increase economic output. The GNP became the indicator that was followed. We got what we measured, a focus on economic growth producing more goods and services. That might have been a good idea back in the 1930s, but it isn't what we should be looking at now.

What should we be measuring today? That should be the topic of global discussion. Where do we want to go as a species on this finite earth? The measure should be for everyone to have enough of the basics for a good life, one that is sustainable, and doesn't create havoc for the planet. We need to focus on measures of economic justice. We will see a post-carbon economic transformation.

This requires rethinking many aspects of society, namely how we organize ourselves and what we focus on. Among concepts that require rethinking are:

- the nation state as a unit of organization, does it serve human welfare? I don't think so.

- corporations as entities, especially now that corporations have the rights of individuals forever whereas our rights are gone when we die. We don't live that long as individuals in the United States compared to other countries so that needs fixing. Locally controlled enterprises may be the answer to corporations.

- We need to rethink the small units we associate with, the family, the community and society. The community and society needs to scale down in size in order for our voices to be heard and for manageable decisions made. We need to become societalists.

- how our time gets used, and whether technology is making our lives better, and what sorts of technology really matter for that. We need time to interact face to face with one another.

- money and finances, since money today is really debt held by banks, is that in our best interests? Future

transactions may need to be locally based perhaps on barter.

Latin America is soundly rethinking capitalism, which produces a lot of tension between those who are too rich and those who don't have enough. Economic inequality is declining in Brazil and some other Latin American countries. It is healthy to be engaged in these ideas there. Europe will be better able to engage in this revolution because there is more vibrant political discussion there, both on the streets, in the workplace, and in homes.

In the United States we have people in my age range who can remember the turmoil of the 1960s and the sense of a purposeful society dedicated to creating the good life for all of us. In the 60s demonstrations supported the Civil Rights movement, the opposition to our military engagement abroad and asked what the purpose of democracy was. Today we have a large segment of young people who sense that their lives may not be as good as those of their parents. They are trying to figure out what the world will be like and what they have to do to survive. Perhaps we need those like my age-cohort to interact with the youth and work together. Old and young together, and then sweep in the middle.

Consider our health condition in this country as a water faucet. Being sick is like the faucet dripping. In our nation the faucet drips a lot. Water drops are constantly coming out. We have a vast profitable medical care system to wipe up the drips. That is what doctors are trained to do. They take a tissue and wipe up a drip. As soon as they do so, there is another drip that needs to be wiped up. Doctors are taught in medical school to decide how best to catch the drip before it lands in the drain. The United States sick drops are big and heavy and it costs a great deal to mop them up.

What we need is another strategy that stops the drops, rather than cleans them up. You know what the solution is. Don't just work under the faucet but reach up and turn off the tap. Then the drops stop. So what is the handle to turn off the faucet? It turns out to be the strategies that make the first thousand days healthy for the mother, the fetus and the family that raises the infant. The mother is key. A girl is a mother from the time of her own conception. What matters for our health is the health of our mothers before we were conceived. Turns out your grandparents are important too. So are dads, but their influence, once you are conceived, tends to be less, since we all spend the first 270 of the thousand days inside our mothers. We can't escape that. What are those strategies to turn off the faucet?

To improve our health in the United States so that we don't die so young we have to focus on early life issues, on the first thousand days. We need time to be under less stress while we are inside of our mothers. Our parents need time to parent us without all the stress we have in the United States which has some of the highest levels of

stress of all countries. How can we lessen the stress for our mothers while we are inside, and for our parents after we are born? Do what other countries do. We can only understand our country by considering it in relation to other nations. A person who knows only one country knows no country. That is a critical idea: a person who knows only one country knows no country.

We can learn from countries that have better health than we do. What do they do to be healthier? I have already mentioned paid maternal leave policies. Let only Swaziland, Liberia and Papua New Guinea be the only countries without a paid maternity leave policy. All the other rich nations give paid antenatal leave, namely pregnant women who are working outside the home get paid leave for several weeks and up to twelve weeks. Studies show it makes those first nine months healthier. We need to focus on early life and paid time off to be pregnant or to parent as the first major medicine we need. Some people call this social medicine. I see it as vital medicine. It is vital for a healthy society.

How are we going to pay for that? Many possibilities. We could tax corporations at the rate they used to pay in the 1960s, about five times the rate now. We shouldn't have to compensate GE \$3.2 billion dollars as their tax credit. We could increase taxes on the rich who pay proportionately much less tax than they did when we were healthier compared to other countries. We could introduce a progressive consumption tax. We need to begin discussing strategies.

There are only two superpowers left in the world. One is the rich and powerful that control huge military might and awesome weapons of both mass destruction and mass distraction. They number at most a few million. The other superpower is vast, numbering seven billion. I'm talking of all of you here and around the world. We have to recognize our collective superpower status that will only come when we work together. Being physically together as in Tahrir Square in Egypt was a good example of sensing superpower status. Other countries in the Middle East have responded as well as do people in Europe. We are a threat to the rich and powerful.

What can we do? We have already started by not moving the consumer muscle as much as we used to. Next we need to exercise the citizen muscle. You can start by becoming involved in Occupy your city demonstrations. Besides just going there, letter a big sign about something that is important to you, be ready to speak to reporters about your sign, consider wearing a costume, dress up your dog, take pictures of what is going on, and post them on your sites. Talk to others about what you did.

We need to understand what is going on. There are three levels of understanding. Most of us perceive there is a problem. We need a rationale, a way of understanding what the core problem is and why it has happened. Then we need to respond, to use some strategy to deal with the problem.

We need to develop a response-ability. We need to have the ability to respond. Our ability to respond, our responsibility, can take a variety of forms. We can talk in our families, at work, in our communities, in places such as this one, and especially face to face. We can demonstrate in public places. Despite all the technologies at our disposal, acting face to face is the most effective response.

We need to ask the right question. Far better an approximate answer to the right question, which is often vague, than an *exact* answer to the wrong question. If you don't ask you don't know, and if you don't know, you can't act.

We can blog, we can tweet, and we can use social media. But these media won't help us work together unless we also have face to face discussions. We need to use both in new ways. There is no recipe for success here.

We are drowning in information, yet starving for wisdom. Mark Twain said: "It ain't what people don't know that worries me, it's what they know that just ain't so." To paraphrase Twain, don't believe everything you think. Consider things not with a grain of salt, but with a bucket of salt. Misinformation abounds. Use your critical thinking skills.

Seek out those who can synthesize, those who can put together the right information at the right time, and can think critically about how to make important choices wisely. Great things always begin from inside. Think of an egg. If an egg breaks from an outside force, the life inside ends. But if it breaks from inside, life begins. So great things happen from the inside. We need to get inside of the issues and break out.

Today's crisis is a terrible thing to waste. The rich and powerful have been using it for their ends. We can create a new crisis for our own ends by amassing in public places in huge numbers. We need to use such a made in USA crisis for the benefit of we the people on this earth.

We can't rely on hope. Hope is an opiate, like heroin. We have to rely on ourselves to work together. Solidarity is the best medicine. The way to fight organized money is with organized people. The way forward will depend on acting, that is doing something and then doubting whether or not it works, then acting again perhaps differently and doubting whether that works or not. The metaphor of the political right or the political left may not serve us. You can't fly a plane with just a right wing. Or just a left wing. We will always be setting a correction as we move forward.

Gandhi said you may never know the results of your action. But if you do nothing there will be no results. We won't know what has been the outcome of this process for a long time. The history books will write it up. But in the meantime don't be missing from the action. Demonstrate or die. Thank you.

Other AR Stephen Bezruchka programs –  
 #BEZS006 Dying Younger Than We Should  
 #BEZS005 Capitalism & Health  
 #BEZS004 Is America Driving You Crazy?  
 #BEZS003 Damaged Care  
 #BEZS002 From the Womb to the Tomb  
 #BEZS001 Health & Wealth

*For information about obtaining CDs, MP3s, or transcripts of this or other programs, please contact:*

David Barsamian  
 Alternative Radio  
 P.O. Box 551  
 Boulder, CO 80306-0551  
 (800) 444-1977  
 info@alternativeradio.org  
[www.alternativeradio.org](http://www.alternativeradio.org)  
 ©2011

