

Nothing Bad Happens in This Story

Written by Bob Alexander

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It all started back in 1944 when a group of high-powered Democratic hacks couldn't pressure FDR to drop vice-president Henry A. Wallace from the ticket. The corrupt Democratic machine knew Roosevelt wouldn't survive a fourth term and they wanted their favorite weasel Harry Truman in the number two slot ready to carry out their agenda the moment the president dropped dead. But Roosevelt held firm, kept Wallace on the ticket, and easily won the party's nomination and then the national election.

In his last State of the Union address Roosevelt introduced a "Second Bill of Rights" which would complete the Founders' vision of ensuring all Americans equality in the pursuit of happiness. Millions were listening spellbound when Roosevelt said, "In our day these economic truths have become accepted as self-evident. We have accepted, so to speak, a second Bill of Rights under which a new basis of security and prosperity can be established for all regardless of station, race, or creed.

Among these are:

The right to a useful and remunerative job in the industries or shops or farms or mines of the nation;

The right to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing and recreation;

The right of every farmer to raise and sell his products at a return which will give him and his family a decent living;

The right of every businessman, large and small, to trade in an atmosphere of freedom from unfair competition and domination by monopolies at home or abroad;

The right of every family to a decent home;

The right to adequate medical care and the opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health;

The right to adequate protection from the economic fears of old age, sickness, accident, and unemployment;

The right to a good education.

All of these rights spell security. And after this war is won we must be prepared to move forward, in the implementation of these rights, to new goals of human happiness and well-being."

Four months later Roosevelt was dead, Germany was defeated, and with Russia now fully able to join the war in the Pacific, Japan quickly negotiated its surrender. World War II was over.

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Americans, weary from years of war and eager to focus on the domestic front, demanded their representatives quickly pass the Second Bill of Rights. Congress complied and delivered the series of bills to President Wallace who signed them into law at the beginning of his second term.

Over half of the returning veterans used the education benefits provided by the G.I. Bill. This, in combination with the Second Bill of Rights, set the stage for an unparalleled growth of prosperity for all Americans for the next two decades and beyond.

The newly formed United Nations peacefully negotiated the separation of colonial countries from aging empires. The culmination of The American Dream was visible to everyone around the globe ... and everyone wanted it for themselves. Newly liberated countries used the American First and Second Bill of Rights as the foundation of their democracies. The transition was peaceful because for the first time in modern history it was inarguably true that there was more money to be made pursuing peace than war. Prosperity for everyone meant everyone was a customer for The American Dream.

The successes of Henry Wallace and the Progressive Democrats marginalized the Conservative Republicans and left them with little to squawk about. Domestically the country had never been in better shape. Unemployment was at historical lows. The marginally higher tax rates never became a wedge issue because they paid for the social safety nets that benefited everyone. On the international scene the threat of Communist World Domination failed to materialize. It was the Russian effort that primarily led to the defeat of the Nazis and sped the war in the Pacific to a close. America's most valued ally in the war effort became one of America's largest trading partners. Every four years Americans continued to vote with their pocketbooks, and within a few election cycles, without real or imaginary enemies to rant about, the Republicans and their out-of-sync Conservative values became irrelevant.

Thirty years after the end of World War II the world had been completely transformed. The Second Bill of Rights had been adopted by every country on Earth. Everyone was living the American Reality ... Not a dream: Employment with a living wage, Housing, Medical care, Education, and Social Security. Because of universal health care infant mortality rates plummeted and life expectancy rose. The human race as a whole was healthier, more educated, and more prosperous than in any time in history.

And now to be true to the title, Nothing Bad Happens in This Story, we have to end the story here.

Because if it goes on for just a couple of more sentences we'll see what quickly happens when billions of people achieve the typical American lifestyle. The world's resources are more rapidly depleted, more fossil fuels are burned, and overpopulation, hyper consumption, and global climate change take the planet more quickly beyond the point of no return.

The Second Bill of Rights was an amazing concept. And Conservative opposition wasn't surprising because the Conservative mantra has always been, "Don't Give Poor People Any Money." But the Second Bill of Rights was flawed. Roosevelt also called it an "economic bill of

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rights." It seemed as if the goal was to get everyone housed, healthy, educated, and employed, in order so they could buy things. His "economic bill of rights" would indeed lead to a Capitalistic Shangri La but not to a sustainable paradise.

The point of this exercise was for me to see that all unsustainable paths lead to ... here. Even the "nicer" more benign ones. We need a Third Bill of Rights which in actuality should be the basis of everything to follow. It should start like this:

The needs of the natural world are more important than the needs of the economic system. --
Derrick Jensen