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10 steps to a nation of true justice and peace

John Dear | Feb. 7, 2012 On the Road to Peace

One of the nation's sharpest, clearest and brightest voices for justice and peace is Loyola University-New Orleans law professor Bill Quigley, who is also associate director of the Center for Constitutional Rights. Besides teaching, Bill volunteers with the Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti (IJDH) and the Bureau de Avocats Internationaux (BAI) in Port au Prince as well as with disenfranchised people in New Orleans and anti-war activists on trial, such as the recent Creech 14 trial in Las Vegas.

Recently, Bill published on CommonDreams.org an essay on what he considers to be the top 10 steps needed right now to move our nation toward true justice and peace. I found his list of urgent national priorities to be startling, provocative and right on target, especially when compared to the drivel of current presidential campaign talk. I thought they were worth sharing, in case readers hadn't seen them. Here are his words and 10 national priorities:

> "**One:** Human rights must be taken absolutely seriously. Every single person is entitled to dignity and human rights. No application needed. No exclusions at all. This is our highest priority. (Credit: WagingNonviolence.org)
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> **Two:** We must radically reinvent contemporary democracy. Current systems are deeply corrupt and not responsive to the needs of people. Representatives chosen by money and influence govern by money and influence. This is unacceptable. Direct democracy by the people is now technologically possible and should be the rule. Communities must be protected whenever they advocate for self-determination, self-development and human rights. Dissent is essential to democracy; we pledge to help it flourish.
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> **Three:** Corporations are not people and are not entitled to human rights. Amend the U.S. Constitution so it is clear corporations do not have constitutional or human rights. We the people must cut them down to size and so democracy can regulate their size, scope and actions.
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> **Four:** Leave the rest of the world alone. Cut U.S. military spending by 75 percent and bring all troops outside the U.S. home now. Defense of the U.S. is a human right. Global offense and global police force by U.S. military are not. Eliminate all nuclear and chemical and biological weapons. Stop allowing scare tactics to build up the national security forces at home. Stop the myth that the U.S. is somehow special or exceptional and is entitled to act differently than all other nations. The U.S. must re-join the global family of nations as a respectful partner. The U.S. is one of many nations in the world. We must start acting like it.
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> **Five:** Property rights, privilege, and money-making are not as important as human rights. When current property and privilege arrangements are not just they must yield to the demands of human rights. Money-making can only be allowed when human rights are respected. Exploitation is unacceptable. There are national and global poverty lines. We must establish national and global excess lines so that people and businesses with extra houses, cars, luxuries, and incomes share much more to help everyone else be able

to exercise their basic human rights to shelter, food, education and healthcare. If that disrupts current property, privilege and money-making, so be it.

Six: Defend our earth. Stop pollution, stop pipelines, stop new interstates, and stop destroying the land, sea, and air by extracting resources from them. Rebuild what we have destroyed. If corporations will not stop voluntarily, people must stop them. The very existence of life is at stake. We respect the human rights and human dignity of others and work for a world where love and wisdom and solidarity and respect prevail.

Seven: Dramatically expand public spaces and reverse the privatization of public services. Quality public education, health and safety for all must be provided by transparent accountable public systems. Starving the state is a recipe for destroying social and economic human rights for everyone but the rich.

Eight: Pull the criminal legal prison system up and out by its roots and start over. Cease the criminalization of drugs, immigrants, poor people and people of color. We are all entitled to be safe but the current system makes us less so and ruins millions of lives. Start over.

Nine: The U.S. was created based on two original crimes that must be confessed and made right. Reparations are owed to Native Americans because their land was stolen and they were uprooted and slaughtered. Reparations are owed to African Americans because they were kidnapped, enslaved and abused. The U.S. has profited widely from these injustices and must make amends.

Ten: Everyone who wants to work should have the right to work and earn a living wage. Any workers who want to organize and advocate for change in solidarity with others must be absolutely protected from recriminations from their employer and from their government.

We work for a world where love and wisdom and solidarity and respect prevail. We expect those for whom the current unjust system works just fine will object and oppose and accuse people seeking dramatic change of being divisive and worse. That is to be expected because that is what happens to all groups which work for serious social change. Despite that, people will continue to go forward with determination and purpose to bring about a radical revolution of values in the U.S. [See "Ten Steps for Radical Revolution," Jan. 23, 2012] [1]"

I called Bill at home in New Orleans the other day to ask him about his 10 steps and what hope we might have of actually seeing these changes come true.

"I think the challenge to any social justice person or organization is always, What can we really do?" Bill said right off the bat. "People are working on each one of these steps. In my experience, though, when social change comes about, it comes about swiftly and unexpectedly, but only after many people have engaged in a variety of activities for a long time to make it come about.

"For example, many people fought for decades against slavery, long before slavery ended," he continued. "The work they did was critically important to bring about that change. The same thing holds true for the other movements -- labor, civil rights, women's rights, disability rights and curbing domestic violence.

"The first thing to remember is that people have to carefully nourish hope," Bill said. "Hope is not some sort of Hallmark card optimism. It is the deep hope in the goodness of people and the necessity of treating others as sisters and brothers with the hope and the action that there's a real possibility and probability that change will happen. Most of these issues are so terrible that if change doesn't happen, it will end the world as we know it. So we have to invest time and creativity in making the world better. And history shows that social change can

happen. It's happening in the Arab world, among women, everywhere."

"So what can we do?" I asked.

"There is no solo social justice act," Bill said. "First, you have to work with other people. Second, the history of social change shows we have to work on several different levels. Some take direct action through personal risk to raise the profile of the problem. Others educate, and education is critical. Most are appalled when they learn about what is happening. Then, we need to create opportunities through organizing so that people can engage the issue. Then there's outreach to be done -- to legislatures, to the media, to the churches. Social justice advances happen when many people are committed to this and work on all these levels. Right now, all of these 10 points have people working on them. We just need more people working on them.

"We have to liberate our own thinking," he continued. "If we are looking just to the next election, or the next few years, then it's hard to see how significant change will come about. If we look back a hundred years and see how much has changed -- for women, civil rights, labor, etc. -- and then look a hundred years from now and see what can change -- the abolition of nukes, the death penalty, environmental degradation and so forth -- we can go ahead and do this work, even if we don't see the results in the short term.

"I don't think there's one strategy," Bill said. "I think there are lots of strategies. The civil rights movement had a national strategy to force the agenda upon the government and the media. But a lot of change is based at the local level. We see it with the Occupy movement, with the Tar Sands movement, with the work of anti-war people. People are trying to push the questions on to the national agenda. The Republican debates show that the Republicans are trying to go backward, not to push for the transformation of the nation, but the restoration of the way the U.S. was years ago. It will take a lot of people to put in a lot of work to get our agenda out there. For most of us, that means working at the local level, but we need to be connected to national and international work."

"It's worthwhile spending out time and energy on this," Bill concluded, "because it's the right thing to do and because we may be able to make some significant changes."

Thank you, Bill, for your vision, hope and encouraging words.
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John will speak Feb. 12 in Kenwood in California's Bay Area; Feb. 16 at Dominican University in San Rafael, Calif.; Feb. 17 at Newman Hall at U.C. Berkeley; and Feb. 18 in Half Moon Bay before heading to Los Angeles. His new book, *Lazarus, Come Forth!* [2], explores Jesus as the God of life calling humanity (in the symbol of the dead Lazarus) out of the tombs of the culture of war and death. To see John's 2012 speaking schedule, go to John Dear's website [3]. John is profiled with Dan Berrigan and Roy Bourgeois in a new book, *Divine Rebels* [4] by Deena Guzder (Lawrence Hill Books). This book and other recent books, including *Daniel Berrigan: Essential Writings* *[5]*; *Put Down Your Sword* *[6]* and *A Persistent Peace* *[7]*, are available from Amazon.com.

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