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Fabian Socialists and Red Light Traffic Cameras: An Interview with Dr. Robert Warren

Philip Barnes¹

After a 53-year career in higher education and following 38 years of continuous academic and professional service to the School of Public Policy and Administration at the University of Delaware, Professor Robert Warren will step back from his teaching responsibilities.

Dr. Warren's urban studies courses – Governance, Planning & Management, Contemporary Issues in Urban Affairs & Public Policy, and Planning Theory & Urban Policy – have been staples of the School's graduate curriculum for decades. His wide-ranging and deep concern for the marginalized and the oppressed is evident in his teaching and mentoring. Never one to shy away from disclosing his feelings on governmental or political matters, Dr. Warren is the embodiment of C. Wright Mills and Aaron Wildavsky's challenge to follow the Quaker dictum, "speak truth to power."

In a wide-ranging interview with *New Visions for Public Affairs*, Dr. Robert Warren – who will continue to advise his Ph.D. students and work on publishing journal articles – talked about his views of the past, present and future. People familiar with Dr. Warren will readily acknowledge his capacity to articulate connections between seemingly unrelated aspects of political and social reality. In this interview, he demonstrates this intellectual ability by pointing out a hidden relationship between H.G. Wells and red light traffic cameras. More fundamentally, Dr. Warren succinctly exposes the complex dynamics between theory and practice in critical social inquiry.

The editorial board of *New Visions for Public Affairs* would like to thank Dr. Warren for participating in this interview. We thank him for what he has done for his students, the School of Public Policy and Administration, the University of Delaware, and for his contribution to the development of a more just and equitable society.

In the Beginning...

PB: *What is it about your personal life history that led you to develop an interest in urban policy and governance?*

RW: Well, I was always interested in public affairs and policy issues. As a kid in grammar school, I wrote a seventh grade paper on why Russia was our best ally.

PB: *What year was that?*

RW: It was in '45 or '44, when it was proper to say such things. I majored in political science as an undergraduate at UCLA and then went into the political science program at the graduate level. I spent a year in law school, decided I didn't like it, and went back into political science and got my graduate degree at UCLA.

¹ Philip Barnes is an editorial board member for *New Visions for Public Affairs*. He interviewed Dr. Warren on January 24, 2013.

PB: *What attracted you to political science?*

RW: I had been active in politics. California at that time was democratizing the political process and we had democratic clubs all over the state. So there was a parallel Young Democrats, and we had a Hollywood Young Democratic Club that I was actively involved in when I was at UCLA.

PB: *Is there anyone from that time who heavily influenced the way that you think about politics?*

RW: I really don't think so, because in a lot of ways, my thinking initially was sort of what progressive thinking was in the 1950s and 1960s, and since then, my concerns have jumped out of the box. They are following the opposite pattern of what is supposed to happen. As one advances in age, you are supposed to become more conservative, and I think that as I've advanced, I have become less conventional and more radical in my thinking.

PB: *How has our thinking and understanding of policy changed since you first began studying political science at UCLA in the 1950s?*

RW: Well, it's changed in a number of ways. The basic institutional emphasis on what the parties were or weren't doing, what kind of administrative policies were desirable and how well they were being carried out, the structure of government. The initial revolution was the quantitative one. Then the political orientation moved from the focus on institutions to what the actual politics were, and to who is seeking and gaining what within the political system. This shift was a great debate for a brief amount of time in the late 1950s and the early 1960s. The great irony was that I got my first job because I had done well in statistics at UCLA, and the University of Washington believed it was getting a new recruit who fit the quantitative orientation.

"As one advances in age, you are supposed to become more conservative, and I think that as I've advanced, I have become less conventional and more radical in my thinking."

Much more recently, I think there have been a number of critical changes. One is not interdisciplinarity so much as it is a merging of non-mainstream thinking, for example, out of geography, out of economics, out of political science, that don't fit the traditional social science view. You've also got a change in the relationship between urban scholarship and funding sources. In the 1960s, you needed an umbrella to protect yourself from all the federal money that was available for urban research, and by the 1970s, there was starting to be a cutback in research funding as well as in federal programs that were aimed at improving, rebuilding, and enhancing cities. So I think that has been a factor as well, which is also reflected in our program here, where there has been a substantial shift from a basic urban focus to [a focus on] policy and administration.

Operational Citizenship

PB: *One of the core concepts that you espouse in your governance pro-seminar is this idea of "operational citizenship". Can you explain what that concept is about?*

RW: It's one that has taken an increasingly important role. Operational citizenship is a normative concept, although in some cases we describe it as if it were accepted. What it basically tries to do is identify those aspects that would be involved if ever an individual were able to live adequately – have a good education, health care, housing – and be able to develop and pursue their talents and capacities. Period. And so one of the things that this responds to is that if in

administration, if in policy analysis, if in research, we initially look at problems or whether or not the governmental structure is appropriate, we have a series of unstated norms involved that don't involve operational citizenship.

One of the basic things that comes out of this [is the foremost question] – not who exercises power, or how this program can be used to slice up our analysis so that we are looking at very small portions of what actually affects an individual or community. Instead, we ask, “OK, in Newark, for example, what is the status of everyone who lives here in terms of operational citizenship regardless of the governmental system, regardless of the policies?”

And if we find out, which I'm sure we would, that there is tremendous differentiation and tremendous inequality, and if there are a lot of people with poor housing, health, education, then the question is, “How do we organize ourselves collectively to create operational citizenship for everyone?” And then we start to ask, “OK, well if that is true, then how do we design this program, that program, and the overall way in which the institutions are organized?”, as opposed to looking at the institutional arrangement or

"Operational citizenship is a normative concept ... What it basically tries to do is identify those aspects that would be involved if an individual were able to live adequately – have a good education, health care, housing – and be able to develop and pursue their talents and capacities. Period."

the real politics to identify who rules. That doesn't tell you anything about the ruled.

PB: *So why is it that despite policy intervention to provide services and resources to people, some are not able to realize their operational citizenship?*

RW: Well, basically because the system is intentionally rigged.

PB: *In what way?*

RW: Well it depends. Sometimes it is legally rigged. For the United States – the beacon of democracy, the shining city on the hill which had the honor of being the first democracy in the modern world – who were the citizens? Wealthy white males. That's hardly a reflection of operational citizenship. Then there is tremendous power that private institutions have, and the extent to which financial groups were able to overwhelmingly and illegally engage in profit-generating behavior that ruined the lives of millions of people by forcing them out of their homes, in most cases illegally, and in other cases because they gave them mortgages which were known to be unworkable. And then we've got a carceral system in which the government has policies that result in a situation where a quarter of all Black males have some kind of involvement in the criminal justice system that makes it impossible for them to exercise operational citizenship. The drug laws in the country are clearly, by any rational or empirical analysis, totally dysfunctional, and impose costs on everyone, but particularly on low-income people that are swept up into the criminal justice system. If you are obviously gay, the possibility that you're going to be beaten up or beaten to death still exists. And if you're in India and you're a woman, to be raped and killed in the process generally has no negative consequences for the perpetrators.

PB: *Would you agree with the claim that “inoperational citizenship” has become normalized?*

RW: Very much so.

Operational Citizenship, continued

PB: *If that is the case, what does effective action look like in a world where inoperational citizenship has become normalized?*

RW: Well, it's the old logic. You fight battles and you fight the war, so on the one hand a whole series of efforts to modify particular negative aspects need to be undertaken where you don't challenge the system per se, but at the same time, you need to also be attempting to change the overall system. So it's not a matter of only assuming you have to overthrow the system, but [also having] to move on several levels. One is to fight specific current issues while at the same time attempting to change the overall system. So the first case, especially from an academic perspective, is about having some opportunity in the educational process to have people become aware of reality. And what they do with it then, as they go into a professional career, or teaching and research, will hopefully take that into account. But at least they have an opportunity of knowing that reality is different from what the media and government says, and even different from what is presented in many of their courses. And so if they have got a clue that there might be other ways of understanding what is going on, at least it creates the possibility that they might take that into account as they go along.

PB: *That's in specific relation to academics and people in the education system. But with regards to those outside of the education system, what does effective action look like?*

RW: It's all over the place. There is an incredible array of groups that are organized to pursue things on a limited basis that relate to operational citizenship, or freedom, or the ability to speak in ways that are not acceptable. The Internet is mind-boggling and a part, in contrast in many ways to the academic world is that so much is accessible and so much is created on there. It's startling. You've got hackers and all sorts of things in social media. You've got stuff going on that allows various groups to organize, articulate

ideas and join with others. This idea that we've destroyed space and time is largely an empty statement because it doesn't really get at all of the things that are being created as possibilities. But then you've got the example of Aaron Schwartz, who, at 14 invented new RSS Internet capacity, and at 26 killed himself because the government— and this gets a bit involved – was prosecuting him for things that shouldn't have been the basis of prosecution. They were threatening him with 35 years in prison for things that were basically trivial.

[O]ne of the things that is particularly important, and that I am particularly interested in, is again relating to reality, because you've got the government increasing the amount of information that is classified [and] increasingly attempting to limit the distribution of information on the Internet that it doesn't wish to be made available to the general public. On the other hand, you've got individuals and organizations that are able to – because of the technology – make information and actions available to millions of people.

Now, whenever there is a public demonstration, the first thing the police tend to go after are the media with cameras and people with their cell phone cameras. Going back to campus situations, at UC Davis where you had students protesting over, if I recall, a draconian increase in tuition, they were peacefully sitting on the lawn, and the police were coming by, spraying them in the face with pepper spray. This was photographed

“... I'd be interested to see if anyone is teaching a course on the illegal behavior of government, which is extensive and widespread.”

and put on the Internet, and it caused a tremendous response, and ultimately the campus police chief had to resign. So you've got this ability to make reality – what is actually going on – available that otherwise under normal circumstances would not be available to people. The police would have claimed they were defending themselves, or [that] they were keeping or preventing these people from doing something illegal. Without the video they probably would have prevailed in court. So you've got this increasingly complex play between the government in general, the police, and citizens. It goes back to Rodney King where this person living in the apartment building next to the police beating up Rodney King videoed it. That has been accelerating as an area of conflict [namely as to] what is real and what is censored and manipulated.

PB: *In your teaching you consistently mention race and racial marginalization as being an inseparable feature of the urban experience. Is full racial equality in American cities attainable?*

RW: Yeah, it could be. There's no reason why it couldn't. But this gets back to another basic issue which we talked about, and that is that academics, especially in public administration and urban affairs, never tend to give any attention in what we teach or the policies we pursue [to what is assumed about human nature]. I think there is no question that there tends to be a natural tendency to discriminate or negatively respond to “the other” that doesn't fit your own color, ethnic background, so on and so forth. Minorities – and at times majorities – everywhere are discriminated against, and so it takes a particularly extensive effort to create the conditions where this doesn't occur. But it's a quirky thing. If you look at human behavior over history, there has always been this kind of behavior.

PB: *If that's the case, if it's human nature, then how do we achieve more equitable outcomes?*

RW: Well there are ways to act, but it's almost an unending undertaking. You can abolish slavery, but then you can

economically subordinate the people who are liberated and you can provide inadequate education. We have done a number of things which have eliminated visible and obvious forms of discrimination without eliminating the overall discrimination or creating variations of it. Now, if you are a wealthy upper-to-middle-class African American, you're generally in pretty good shape. If you're an impoverished African American male teenager, you're likely to get picked up as a matter of course for no good reason by the police, and in one way or another probably wind up in the prison system.

Education

PB: *I'd like to talk about your thoughts on the education system in general and the university in particular. We've already talked about it a little bit.*

RW: Yes.

PB: *What role is academia currently playing in society?*

RW: It's playing a number of roles. Below the university, we've got the educational system being made more and more dysfunctional by policies rhetorically designed to turn everybody into a genius. “Leave No Child Behind” or the “Race to Excellence” are resulting in increasingly dysfunctional ways in which public schools are organized, the ability of minorities and low-income kids to get adequate education, and particularly the ability of teachers to organize as unions. You've got a multiplicity of motives that are dominating what is going on. Some are based on political advantage, some are continuing racial segregation, some are to make sure that workers cannot organize or bargain effectively with those they work for.

Education, continued

PB: *What role is the university system playing?*

RW: Obviously that's a gigantic question, but the mainstream critique is that it's becoming more and more a part of the corporate structure.

PB: *A degree mill?*

RW: A degree mill on the one hand, and on the other, it is undertaking programs and emphasis that will connect the university with corporations and their funding and support.

PB: *Is it losing its ability to critically engage in social development?*

RW: Or critique, or to generate new knowledge that isn't of obvious interest to corporations.

PB: *Specifically within the discipline of urban affairs, what is happening at the university level today?*

RW: That's certainly a good question, and I'm not sure I could claim to be so much on top of the basic journals and what people are doing. My general impression is that the vast majority is focusing more and more on urban administration as opposed to critical analysis of what is going on. At the same time, as I have attempted to reflect in my courses in recent times, there is an increasing distance between reality and an understanding of what is actually happening in cities. Also, in urban affairs, there is an issue in the way course content is taught, in that there is a tendency to focus on a particular problem without incorporating it into the larger system of which it is a part.

PB: *It sounds like you are saying that the practice of critical social and urban research is declining in quality.*

RW: Yes.

PB: *What can be done to resurrect it as a meaningful endeavor?*

RW: Somehow funding [must] be found for hiring more and more tenured-track faculty. This is another kind of problem because, in many ways, having tenure gives a unique capacity for faculty members to pursue the truth and not necessarily just do more of the same.

PB: *In what ways are faculty members outside of the tenure track prevented or discouraged from pursuing the truth, as you say?*

RW: On the one hand, they are usually underpaid, and maintaining the job is of particular importance. We've got a few cases that have been very visible where people like [Ward] Churchill at the University of Colorado was taken out because of his views on things. Or if you're anti-Israel, there are a few cases.

PB: *Norman Finkelstein.*

RW: More generally, if you don't reflect the mainstream and you're non-tenured, the likelihood that you'll be replaced exists, and it can be done without any great legal problem. Your ability to maintain your job is much more problematic if you don't have any legal basis to keep it, if, for one reason or another, the college or the department or the dean decides that you are not any longer teaching what is needed.

PB: *Are demands on faculty members for teaching becoming so great that they are losing their ability to engage in critical research and publishing?*

RW: I think that's true, but also, one of the things that is seldom mentioned is the extraordinary extent to which clerical work has been shifted to faculty. Not only that, but the clerical work has to be done on websites, which takes three times longer than paperwork. In the old days, faculty had access to secretaries, and now it is overwhelmingly been transferred to the faculty to do that. The format [that] is

supposedly more efficient and more speedy turns out to be exactly the opposite.

PB: *You mentioned earlier that a number of themes and thinkers are emerging from fields outside of policy – geography and economics, for example. Along those lines, can you name some current researchers or figures in those fields that are best able to articulate current urban problems, as well as offer meaningful solutions?*

RW: I think the question of meaningful solutions is chimerical. We are much more in need of understanding what is going on, and then figuring out what types of responses there might be [at] this point in time. This isn't directly related to people who are currently doing things, but I think that for my purposes, it is pulling together people over a long period of time. For example, John Dewey, among other things, basically said that democracy is always in flux; there is no end state. So we need to be aware, not that we have an end state to reach or that we [have achieved it] and have to protect it, but [that] requirements and conditions constantly change, and we need to be reinventing democracy constantly.

[Bent] Flyvbjerg, who is really a planner but has done some very interesting things, points out that democracy is never without its foes. Drawing upon work he had done on a city in Denmark, one of the important things he

"John Dewey, among other things, basically said that democracy is always in flux; there is no end state. So we need to be aware ... [that] requirements and conditions constantly change, and we need to be reinventing democracy constantly."

said is that we have to be constantly alert and concerned about the continuing attacks on democratic governance. It's not a case where this is a given state. Another strain is within democratic systems. We are constantly in conflicts over extending the actual rights and benefits that are supposedly universal to people who are systematically left out.

Ignorance and Urban Policy

PB: *You spoke a bit already about the lack of focus in current research into what is real and what isn't. What other considerations are academics and social inquirers missing or ignoring?*

RW: There is a great variety of things that need to be taken into account if we are concerned with policy, equity, equality, et cetera. Age is a factor. The urban affairs [field] pays almost no attention to age as a variable. What happens to citizens and how we define their status as human beings between birth and 20 years old is an extraordinarily complex and perplexing thing. The infant and young child have absolutely no capacity to act in their own interest and their own wellbeing, and development depends on society, government, and particularly the parents. The only time we talk about it is when we pay attention to the school systems. In many cases, the school systems now are turning into prisons with the merger of the police and the educational system. You've got the NRA solution to have an armed guard in every school, if not in every classroom. On the other hand, if a six year old accidentally brushes up against a teacher, they may wind up suspended.

There is, as I understand it, reasonable evidence that low-income minority kids are much better off if the policy is to integrate class rather than race because there is some evidence that when poor kids are put into a predominately working or middle-class school, they do better than when they are put into a racially integrated school.

Ignorance and Urban Policy, continued

Then there is the whole thing of the citizenship status of teenagers, where tremendous repression goes on. The assumption always is that the teenagers are on a fast ride to hell with all their bizarre behaviors. Every generation of teenagers is at war with their parents and elders. This is only looked at in terms of how you control these people instead of understanding what is going on. Between birth and 20, these creatures go through a whole series of relationships for power, control, creativity, and their status within society. But if you find any serious concern about what urban policy is towards children and teenagers, there are few people that do something. It's not part of the normal discourse. It's the same thing when we are concerned with elderly people because [retirement] takes a lot of money. If you are over 75, frail, and elderly – unless you've got really serious family members, or a lot of money – you've literally lost all control over your life and physical condition. But that's not taken into account. If we are talking about the city, the city is composed of this vast array of age-related conditions that are not part of our normal understanding.

PB: *What other aspects of cities are not part of our normal understanding?*

RW: The militarization of space within cities is another one. If we start to look at those spaces within cities where full civil liberties and free activity exist, they are increasingly small. When you step into the boundaries of airports, you lose your citizen's rights. If you are a Black or Latino teenager in New York City, in a number of neighborhoods you are likely to be stopped and picked up by the police for no reason at all. I've run into the comment a few times that if you are a parent of a Black male teenager in Manhattan, the first thing you do, if you want your kid to survive, is to teach them not to do anything that will rile a police officer.

PB: *So militarization is one phenomenon that is becoming more prominent in cities. You've also expressed concern with two other processes, namely the privatization of public space and the enhancement of surveillance. When these forces converge, what is the effect on the urban experience?*

RW: It creates conditions that violate the constitutional and legal rights of people systematically. In many of these cases, the authorities don't have the legal power to do what they're doing, but they go about doing it, and the courts are likely to allow them to do it in a number of cases.

PB: *For example?*

RW: Prosecutors withhold evidence that they should give to defense attorneys. Unless there is some unusual denouement where it is unavoidably [made] known, the courts won't do anything to prosecutors. So you get a variety of ways in which governmental officials engage in illegal if not criminal activity that the judicial system allows, or is very reluctant to provide prosecution for. Again, this goes back to our understanding of human nature. If you look at the actual use of public authority, there is extensive illegal and criminal use of it. There is a book that came out in the 70s, *How the Government Breaks the Law*, and it is a detailed and extensive identification of how cities, counties, and states violate the rights of women and children and engage in collusion with criminal organizations. In public administration, for example, I'd be interested to see if anyone is teaching a course in the illegal behavior of government, which is extensive and widespread. Going back to the question, if I can remember it.

PB: *Militarization, privatization, surveillance of cities....*

RW: Transportation security people continuously violate the rights of people as a matter of course. Again, teenagers get knocked around in a variety of ways with curfews and other kinds of ways in which they are prevented from engaging in what would be considered normal teenage activity in public places.

Or, if you want to hold a political protest within the city, there are all sorts of ways in which you are subject to restrictions. During the 2004 Republican convention in New York City, there were a number of public mobilizations, marches in the street. The police were trying to divert them and there were clashes between the police and the political demonstrators. Ultimately I think the City of New York had to pay four million dollars in damages, although the police claim they were just preventing illegal action or defending themselves.

This was one of the cases where a lot of people took videos of what was going on, and [when] these were introduced into the court, [they] showed that the police were totally fabricating what had happened. Again, there are an increasing number of cases where illegal police actions against individuals are caught on video, and that is why the police are so interested in preventing anybody from filming. In a few states, laws have been passed that make it illegal to film police in action. One of them, I think in Illinois, got tossed out by the courts. So no matter where you are, if you want to make a political protest, you've got a serious likelihood that the police are going to engage in illegal activity to contain [and prevent] you from doing it effectively.

"The drug laws in the country are clearly, by any rational or empirical analysis, totally dysfunctional and impose costs on everyone, but particularly on low-income people that are swept up into the criminal justice system."

Gargantua and Polycentrism Revisited

PB: *Let me take you back to 1961 for a second. In 1961 you coauthored a seminal paper with Vincent Ostrom and Charles Tiebout titled "The Organization of Government in Metropolitan Areas: A Theoretical Inquiry". In that paper, you evaluate two fundamentally different scales and organizational models for the governance and provision of public goods and services in urban environments. One model which is highly centralized, bureaucratic, and all-encompassing is referred to as Gargantua. The second model you call Polycentrism because it is a more decentralized form of decision-making where local authorities provide public goods and services.*

In this paper, you identify a potential shortfall of the polycentric model where negative externalities create conflicts between local governments. You conclude that Gargantua may grow in power and encompass Polycentrism by stepping in and settling these inter-community disputes when polycentric governments are not able to settle them amongst themselves (pp. 841-842). In the fifty-plus years since writing this paper, do you feel that this process has occurred?

RW: The idea of Gargantua was that it was really highly centralized. That was Vince Ostrom's term that he liked. The extent to which that analysis is still adequate, I think, has changed because of the way in which scale and globalization has occurred in general. It is no longer simply a question of the relationship between the smaller localities within a metropolitan area. It is more a question of if you are a city – Newark or Wilmington – what are the actual boundaries that produce negative spill-ins, and what do you produce as negative externalities? The ability of communities to form cooperative arrangements is more likely to occur for day-to-day operation of municipal-type services. In most metropolitan areas, they collectively create [larger scale systems] – garbage disposal, transportation – in which representatives of various communities sit on the boards making the decision. [I don't think] that the idea of metropolitan-scale governments imposing dysfunctional effects on otherwise independent cities has become a particular problem.

But the ability of cities to adequately meet the problems created by the larger system is an issue. You've got Detroit, which in large part has been done in by economic decisions totally outside the control of the city. In Michigan, you do have an example where the governor can appoint and impose managers on cities that, in his judgment, are declared financially in trouble, and literally eliminate democratically elected governance for the city.

PB: *And this is an example of Detroit being impacted by global forces, which, as you say, are totally outside the control of the city. So is Gargantua-Polycentrism a scale issue?*

RW: I think the obvious step is to shift from the idea of a large scale system which, within a metropolitan area, imposes things on smaller scale communities, to an understanding of multiple scales that can produce negative or positive spill-ins. At the same time, we need to think about how smaller communities can create positive and negative externalities.

PB: *Another interesting thing about this paper is that it argues that under a polycentric governance arrangement, private vendors – under contract with local authorities and subject to performance standards and regulatory oversight – can be efficient providers of public goods and services. Not without controversy, this particular topic is central to much of the political polarization we are experiencing today at both local and national levels. With respect to the urban context, what are your current thoughts on the provision of public goods and services through contract with the private sector?*

RW: Theoretically, there is no reason why it can't be done. One of the strange paradoxes in the use of private services was discussed and vetted by Fabian socialists around 1900. Ebenezer Howard, in his Garden City, had a chapter about whether or not all services should be controlled by the municipality or not. Basically he said that in some cases, private provision is more effective. H.G. Wells was arguing for a metropolitan government for London around 1900 and said he wouldn't object to private provision of some services if they met public requirements. This is in contrast to the assumption that private is always better than public provision of anything, which is part of the argument for turning services over to the private sector – things like highway systems and everything else under the sun, prisons and so on. Part of the problem now is the idea that there has to be a clear arrangement that ensures that public values are reflected as opposed to [the value of] profit maximization.

To show you how widespread my concerns are, one of the things that I'm interested in is red light surveillance cameras. They were extensively used on the assumption that they provide greater safety by preventing crashes. One of the debates is that they are tremendous generators of income for a large number of cities, but they are virtually all privately operated. The private company shares half of everything and so the increase in the number of tickets is of great benefit to them.

However, as I understand it, the key is the duration of the yellow light. If you have a longer yellow light, like four seconds, it will produce an equal or better reduction of red light crashes than the surveillance cameras but it won't generate any income. There is a tremendous debate all over the country [on] the privatization of this service. There is a place in California where the private company – and there are several that have a large number of contracts – will write contracts to guarantee them a certain income. In this particular case, they fought and tried to prevent a ballot initiative to get rid of red light surveillance cameras, which was perfectly legal under the charter of the city. You get this tremendous number of cases where the goal is clearly generating income instead of increasing safety, and the way you can enhance the safety without the tremendous technological and private profit is by not using them.

"... the extent to which multinational corporations control things from a global scale is immense at this time ... so unless you are the United States, or China or the EU, the fate and condition of many countries depends on corporate decisions and power ..."

Predicting the Future

PB: *Let's jump to the future. Urbanization accelerated dramatically in the past few hundred years and it shows no signs of slowing. How do you see this process unfolding in the future?*

RW: I don't think there is any way of knowing.

PB: *Right, but if you were to gaze into a crystal ball and make a prediction...*

RW: I'd turn to my real source of knowledge – science fiction – and see what they have to say.

PB: *And what do they have to say?*

RW: Nothing good ... all sorts of dystopian things. Part of the issue is not simply the tremendous concentration in population, but a shift in where the centers of gravity are. By 2050, China and India are going to be overwhelmingly dominant in a variety of ways, and the US is going to slowly decline as the imperial power dominating the world. If you look at the current status of mega-places in India, it is horrendously skewed, and you've got millions of people living on the streets. As the population grows, and as the number of megametropolitan areas over the globe is primarily developed outside of the existing leading industrial countries – again the internal dynamics of what occurs in China, in Indonesia, in Malaysia, in India, ... there [is] no way [the U.S. will remain dominant]. Then you've got Africa. It may get to the Orwell version where you have Oceania, and Eurasia, and East Asia constantly shifting war with one another rather than cities or mega-areas.

Predicting the Future, continued

There's this minor point that we haven't touched on at all, and that is that ecological sustainability is another thing which will obviously need to be factored into the growth and agglomeration of populations. And so now, not only global warming, but also food access and water access for this tremendous increase in population will require a quite different set of conditions and policies and understandings than we have now if we will have any chance of having a functional world in the future. But when you put them into the technological, ecological, race, and imperial aspirations, which is the next empire? Maybe China will regain its status as the center of the world. That's why simply a straight line projection of how we deal with the problem of more and larger cities and mega-areas totally underestimates the framework that needs to be in mind.

Quite seriously, a look at what science fiction is generating would be an important set of clues or ideas to incorporate into the discourse and dialogue. But it has to go beyond the question of how we organize a larger number of mega-metropolitan areas in less developed parts of the world.

PB: *Do you think the current systems of government are up to this challenge or will they have to be radically altered?*

RW: I'll just go back to what I referenced about Dewey. No, they are not adequate. We constantly have to reinvent and reconstitute the governing system, especially if it is to have a reasonable degree of democratic content.

PB: *On the one hand, you have this massive and rapid transformation in technological, ecological, and social environments. On the other hand, you have a governance arrangement which needs to change in response to these other transformations but is slow in doing so. Is there not some sort of paradox here, and how can that be resolved? Will it be resolved, or will it eventually reach, for lack of a better term, a breaking point?*

RW: Well, the human race is perfectly capable of reaching a breaking point. But a variety of adaptations have occurred. We've got the World Bank. We've got the International Monetary Fund. But the multinational corporations and the international governmental agencies like the World Bank have created an infrastructure that is manipulating, controlling, and distributing all sorts of resources unequally. The United States is intervening [with 500-odd] military bases in other countries around the world, and we support authoritarian regimes much more than we support emerging democratic regimes.

One of the science fiction visions is a world in which the nation-state disintegrates within globalization, [and the resulting] takeover is a sort of collusion of criminal cartels and multinational corporations. They become the infrastructure ruling what goes on in the world. I think this underestimates the capacity of armed power by the US now, or [by] China in the future. But the extent to which multinational corporations control things from a global scale is immense ... There has already been a significant shift, so unless you are the United States, or China or the EU, the fate and condition of many countries depends on corporate decisions and power at this time.

PB: *So we haven't heeded Eisenhower's warning to beware of the military-industrial complex?*

RW: Exactly.

PB: *Is capitalism sustainable?*

RW: As many people have pointed out, Marx was a little in error in his estimate of its viability. It has been constantly readapting itself. So the idea that multinational corporations have increasingly gained power and control over things is another adaptation of capitalism. Whether or not it can sustain itself if the environment starts to collapse, or if enough problematic conditions occur so [that] somehow there is a gigantic shift in the values of people around the world ...

PB: *The 'Occupy' movement, for example ...*

RW: Yeah. So there is no obvious evidence that it will necessarily collapse of its own weight. But you do have totally dystopian options with environmental or economic collapse which are possible. Unfortunately less likely, but far more preferable, is something like a global shift in human understanding and action that could take place.

Reflection

PB: *You have been a faculty member in the School of Public Policy and Administration, formerly the School of Urban Affairs and Public Policy, since 1975. Can you take a moment to reflect on the time you have spent here?*

RW: Only in part. I think the experiences have had a variety of great benefits, and the primary aspect of it is being able to work with an amazing array of bright and intelligent students. On the one hand, it's being able to interact and work with the graduate students here, which has been a greatly productive aspect. On the other hand, seeing the [decline in] emphasis on and resources for an urban focus ... has been perplexing and troubling, but that is hardly unusual in life. There are all sorts of things that could be dwelt on, but that's another undertaking.

