

## Conversation with Wendell Bell

**Richard A Slaughter**

### Introduction

Prof Wendell Bell is one of the most productive, articulate and respected members of the international futures community. Over several decades he has published many papers and books, culminating in his two-volume opus, *Foundations of Futures Studies*, which immediately became one of the foundational texts of the field. We'd met on numerous occasions at conferences around the world and developed both a continuing dialogue and an enduring friendship. While we do not see eye-to-eye on every single subject, we both subscribe to the view that FS has a vital role to play in an ever more threatened world. I began this email interview with reference to a book that dealt with various threats facing the US itself.

**S:** Is the United States, in your opinion, really as 'far gone' as James Howard Kunstler suggests in his book (*The Long Emergency: What's going to happen as we start running out of cheap gas to guzzle?*)? Kunstler basically portrays the collapse of the USA (in particular) due to its development patterns, over-dependence, oil addiction, poor leadership etc.

**B:** Although I haven't read Kunstler's book, I did read the summary of it that Kunstler wrote, which was published in *Rolling Stone*. It is indeed a dark picture of America "sleepwalking into the future" and most immediately facing "the end of the cheap-fossil-fuel era." It is a useful summary and reminder of the coming depletion of nonrenewable resources, which, since *The Limits to Growth* was published in 1972, has been researched, debated, re-researched, dissected, revised and revived.

Comparing *The Long Emergency* to other accounts, however, I think that it gives too little credence to the serious efforts to understand and find solutions to the energy crisis; too little credit to the future effects of conservation efforts and the increasing development of nonpolluting renewable sources of energy, such as solar, wind, hydroelectric, tidal, geo-thermal, and bio-waste-fed fuel cells.

So, no, I don't think that the U.S.A. is as far gone as he says. Thanks to several popular books and publications, as well as Al Gore's film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, most Americans today believe that global climate change and other environmental problems are real, that they result in part because of human behavior, that they seriously threaten the future well-being of life on Earth, and that we humans must take corrective action now.

Yet it is true that we in the United States have had inadequate, even hostile, leadership on environmental issues, most recently since the Bush administration has been in power. (As I write, the Bush administration is arguing before the U.S. Supreme Court that the Environmental Protection Agency lacks the power under the

1970 Clean Air Act to regulate carbon dioxide as a pollutant.) Also, there are still many Americans who discredit the climate and energy emergencies and who blithely continue to act as if the free lunch will continue forever with no thought of consequences for future generations. If Kunstler's book persuades a few of such people to be concerned and act more responsibly, his book will serve an important purpose.

Also, he calls attention to some aspects of the issue that are certainly correct. One that takes on new light since the American attack on Iraq in 2003 is the possibility of military occupation of the land of other countries for the possession of the oil beneath it. Convincing some leaders of the coming shortage of oil and its threat to a high level of living may not be a good idea if they decide to solve the problem by aggression and violence. For example, Kunstler points out that the "U.S. could exhaust and bankrupt itself trying to do this and be forced to withdraw back into our own hemisphere, having lost access to most of the world's remaining oil in the process." Clearly, peaceful negotiation, cooperation, fair and open dealing, and sharing are the only right answers.

To take a different example, he is certainly right, too, in pointing out that "America today has a railroad system that the Bulgarians would be ashamed of." (I've never ridden on a railroad in Bulgaria—for all I know they may be excellent—so my apologies if Bulgarians take offense.) But we have allowed the railroads in the United States to fall apart. And public transit within most American cities is inadequate as well. America in recent decades has depended on highways and the automobile and low density, land-wasting developments. The highways in some major cities are now often clogged, commutes have become longer, and total carbon emissions are intolerably high.

Clearly, we must change this to conserve energy as we switch to renewable sources. (His comments about the "extraordinary difficulties" facing New York City in this regard, though, seem contradictory, because New York has managed to combine high density development, public transit, and many local and pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods with integration in larger-scale economic, social and cultural networks. And many cities are making a comeback by rejuvenating their urban cores. Mark Twain famously said that, when the world came to an end, he wanted to be in Cleveland. Why? Because everything happens there ten years later. Today, he would have to pick some other city.)

From the brief piece I read, I'm not clear on what Kunstler's proposed solutions are. He speaks of cultivating "a religion of hope—that is, a deep and comprehensive belief that humanity is worth carrying on." And apparently he believes that the long emergency will help foster "close communal relations." With the recent unilateral acts of the Bush administration in mind, I think that the energy emergency could lead some misguided national leaders to conflict and war instead, as it may have already in Iraq.

I place my hope in conservation, more rapid development of renewable, nonpolluting energy sources, clustered residential settlements of a mid- to high-level density, much greater development of public transportation, and peaceful international negotiations and agreements.

**S:** Yes, I agree Kunstler is too pessimistic. But the book gave me a real headache until I realised it was effectively a kind of 'decline scenario'. On the one hand it tends to confirm some of our worst fears about the outlook for Western societies, the US especially. On the other he tends to overlook the many sources of vitality and (useful) innovation in the US and elsewhere. Seen from the integral viewpoint that I explored in *Futures Beyond Dystopia* his analysis is, typically, mainly 'Right Hand Quadrant' (an 'exterior collective' view) and that, alone, will never solve anything. But in some ways he confronts repressed truths that the US, Australia, Europe to varying extent, need to acknowledge. His work reminds me of Mike Davis in books like *City of Quartz* and *Ecology of Fear*. I believe that we need such writers as a partial antidote to the mindless marketers who are clearly dominant now. But we have, I think, to go way beyond their fairly negative and limited analysis.

In that connection I've been impressed by a substantial book edited by Will Steffan (et al) called *Global Change and the Earth System*. It largely deals with RH Quadrant phenomena as well, but the difference is that this reports on a huge scientific study of how human civilisation is impacting earth systems and pushing them a long way beyond their earlier states. As such I refer to this as 'the story that connects', in that it puts into a context a lot of the Earth issues that are before us in the public sphere.

Turning now to the futures field, do you think it has failed—or is it poised for its long-awaited new growth phase?

**B:** Good question and a tough one. My fervent hope, of course, is that the futures field is poised for a new growth phase.

Yet I wonder why we futurists have failed to establish futures studies more fully in colleges and universities by now (and perhaps we have even lost ground with the recent demise of some well-known futures programs in the United States and England). It is tempting to blame our lack of success on the existing domination and narrow-mindedness of the traditional disciplines, e.g. anthropology, economics, political science, sociology, etc. in the social sciences. Such departments are part of the mainstream, make strong and constant claims on the educational budget, and are well established in most countries of the world.

Yet, during the last forty years or so, that obstacle has not stopped other new programs from becoming established. We've seen, for example, the addition of many other departments or interdisciplinary curricula in universities, from African American Studies and Computer Science to Gay and Lesbian Studies and Women's Studies. They and other emergent fields managed to get a share of the educational budget. Why wasn't Futures Studies able to do as well?

I was one of the several founders of the Yale Program (now Department) of African American Studies and a member of its faculty for many years (joint with Sociology), so I am well aware of the persistence necessary for getting a new field created and established, especially against considerable and vocal opposition. Yet African American Studies succeeded at Yale, while Futures Studies had to be content with the Yale Collegium on the Future, which Harold D. Lasswell and I helped establish in the late 1960s, plus a few futures courses a year. It was a modest faculty seminar that met once or twice a month and had a small budget provided by Yale that allowed us to hire a part-time secretary/research assistant. It functioned for several years, but didn't fire up enough support to last or to become transformed into an educational program, center, or department.

Why not? I'm not sure. Perhaps because the future belongs to every field and is most compelling as a topic when it is focused on the future of something in particular—technology, education, health, environment, resources, population, whatever. It may be the subject matter, i.e. the content, of the future that most importantly provides the glue to hold a community of scholars together. Yet this explanation seems negated by the experience both of area studies with interdisciplinary focus on geographical regions and history with its divisions by both space and time. (Hope springs to life, however. A younger faculty group at Yale recently has begun two faculty seminars devoted to the future and technology.)

Sometimes I look for explanations for our lack of more academic success in us futurists ourselves. Is our collective work sufficiently rigorous? Is it sufficiently cohesive, blending the work of many people into a meaningful whole? Do we have a persuasive and solid empirical base for our work? Do our futures journals meet the standards of peer-reviewed journals in the social sciences? Do futurists have sufficient forums of criticizing each other's work?

Richard, both you and I and many of our futurist colleagues have struggled mightily to provide solid bases and foundations for the futures field. In my better moments, I believe that we have succeeded in making a good start. But at other moments, I worry that we futurists have not persuaded most of our social scientist contemporaries to even read—much less take seriously—most futurist works.

I know that this is an inadequate answer to your question. I wonder what your thinking is?

**S:** Well, you've covered some of the key points. I'd also add two or three others. One is that FS developed during the time of the ascendancy of the neo-cons and their associated market-oriented ideology with its brand of 'wild globalisation'. All of these are powerfully set against anything or anyone who questions the efficacy of the market to solve the world's problems. So, in many contexts, it's been very difficult for proposals involving futures thinking, applied foresight, to gain traction.

Another aspect was highlighted by EO Wilson when he argued that humanity was intrinsically short-term in its thinking, that it was effectively 'hard-wired' into our brains by evolutionary processes. (My reply to that, of course, was that this was a partial – Upper Right Hand Quadrant – explanation that left plenty of room for Lower Left – ie societal, cultural – solutions and strategies.) A third factor may be that, as you suggested, one of the main purposes of the pioneers of FS has already been fulfilled. That is, so many innovations, new fields and sub-fields, ways of thinking have 'taken off' in the last forty years, such that a great deal of futures-oriented capacity and work occurs under many different headings. As you say, most futures-related work concerns the future of something specific.

That said, I believe there's a vital role for an evolving core entity that further builds the knowledge base, evolves new methods, inducts and trains new entrants and carries the legitimization process further forward. It's only a matter of time before more universities 'come to the party' as it were, partly as a result of widespread market failure and also because the systemic problems facing planet earth are becoming increasingly obvious.

So, in the light of this context, how do you, as a long-standing figure in the field, look back and summarise the main things you've learned over your career?

**B:** Richard, I'll try to keep this short and give a brief summary. Focusing on what I think I've learned as a sociologist-futurist, I think the following are the main things:

1. **Skepticism**, including challenging my own beliefs. This is not to say that I have no strongly held beliefs. I do. But I also try to test them, to find out if, indeed, they are true. So much harm in the world seems to be done by "true believers"—religious, scientific, political, or whatever—who are unwilling to consider the possibility that their beliefs and the actions based on them may be wrong.

2. **Moral courage**. What I have in mind specifically is the courage to tell our best friends and other members of groups to which we belong (family, religious, ethnic, race, teammates, or whatever) that they are wrong, if in our judgment they are wrong.

Although we hear a great deal today about conflict between groups, I think that the most important struggles going on today are within groups. Within almost every group or collectivity, there is a struggle between people on one side who wish to deal with members of other groups with peaceful diplomacy, persuasion, and compromise; who seek justice tempered by forgiveness and restraint; who have empathy for "the other"; whose self-interest is moderated by concern for the well-being of others; who have respect for others; and who have some understanding of the unity of humankind; on the other side of the struggle (within the same group) are people who are prone to use violence against "the other"; who seek justice as retribution and revenge; who demonize their perceived opponents as evil-doers; who tend to be punishing, controlling, and domineering; who are intolerant of other

cultures and show scorn for what is foreign to them; whose narrow self-interest dominates their judgments and actions; and who have little, if any, sense of themselves as members of a common worldwide humanity.

It takes moral courage to stand up to our own ingroup members and speak in favor of freedom, well-being, and justice for all peoples.

**3. The importance of social order.** People take social order for granted—until they lose it. A key to any kind of peaceful and cooperative human interaction is social order, an “everyday life” that allows each and every individual to go about his or her life with a sense of dependability and security following their personal values, carrying out their chosen daily chores, and pursuing their life goals.

Contrary to what some of us futurists say when we are discounting prediction as our purpose, ordinary people living in most societies most of the time make mostly accurate predictions as they make their way through their routines and the daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly rhythms of social life. The time coordination of social interaction in and between communities and institutions is to me an amazing human achievement and the opportunities it allows for individual development, expression and accomplishment are enormous.

I know that not every social order is benign—totalitarian regimes for example. Yet the existence of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes in a perverse way underscores the importance of social order to perpetuate human cooperative efforts and the benefits to all that result from them compared to social chaos. Even some sort of order is often better than none.

What I have learned is that we ought to strive for a just social order, based on human freedom and well-being, equality of opportunity, inclusive participation in policy decisions, peaceful compromise and cooperation, tolerance of diversity (as long as no harm is done to others), negotiated settlement of disagreements, and healthcare and welfare guarantees for all, including the least well-off people in the society.

**4. The importance of hope.** If you are like I am, you have periods of doubt, disappointment, and discouragement about the state of the world. Frankly, I have had trouble concentrating on much of anything since before the United States attacked Iraq. I had given a talk at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. on March 9, 2003 just prior to the attack in which I opposed the decision to attack.<sup>1</sup>

To prepare my talk, I looked at available information on the web, in books, in newspapers and magazine articles and, it was clear that the reasons given by the Bush administration to justify their attack on Iraq were false. The evidence was all there, available to the public for anyone willing to take some time to take a look. A few days after my talk, still in Washington, my wife and I marched from the

Washington Monument to the White House with some hundred thousand or more other people to protest the coming attack—alas, to no avail.

Since then, my wife and I have had periods of anger and despair about the situation in Iraq. We watched the catastrophes of destruction; of mounting Iraqi civilian deaths and injuries; the American and other military casualties—the lost arms and legs, the sightless eyes, the damaged brains, and the useless bodies; we saw the tortures and other brutalities (including murder) inflicted by young Americans upon their prisoners (can we yet believe these violations of our hallowed American values and our humane standards of behavior took place? Where is our “America the beautiful,” the country we love? ); and we watched the growing disorder, the suffering, and the hate. We tasted our tears and we asked, when for God’s sake will this insanity end?

How do we maintain hope? I can only hint at an answer here, because it would take too long to explain fully. But one example is that we remind each other that the 20<sup>th</sup> century was one of the bloodiest in history—two world wars that killed and maimed millions, the Holocaust, the Gulags, the Korean War, Vietnam, the killing fields of Cambodia, the genocides—on and on it goes. And yet, even with all that killing, life expectancies at birth increased greatly during the same 100 years. In the United States, for example, life expectancy increased nearly 30 years, or more than 60 per cent. Some people were doing something right!

That fact (as well as many others) makes us stop and reflect on all the other things going on in the world—despite the hate and the killing that now try to monopolize our attention. All the time, there are doctors healing the sick; researchers finding new ways to improve human health and life; people building houses, educating children, planting trees, picking grapes, feeding the poor, caring for the aged, preaching kindness and understanding, sweeping floors, repairing roofs—and doing a thousand other things to contribute in some positive way to human well-being.

So, we take a deep breath, open our eyes to the wider world, renew our faith in people, and try to do what little we can to be worthy of these heroic legions of ordinary people who aim to live responsible and caring lives in the human community.

**S:** As I read these comments a number of further questions arose. For example: If we see the present time not so much as crisis and catastrophe but as a period of *fundamental transition* (from simpler, less impact-full societies to complex, unstable and earth changing ones), then what are the best ways of characterising that transition?

**B:** Without minimizing the human suffering that occurs during crises and catastrophes, yes, I do see a fundamental transition going on in human society—sometimes occurring despite the catastrophes and sometimes mixed up with them. I

would call the transition most broadly “an increase in scale.” Perhaps, more accurately, it is a cluster of more or less interrelated transitions, including:

increase in the sheer number of people on Earth;

increase in the average length of individual lives;

increase in density and geographical spread of humans throughout Earth and, eventually, into near and outer space;

increase in the scope, density, and speed of social interaction among people across time and space;

increase in social boundaries such that more and more otherwise diverse people are included and an increase in the mobility of people, resulting in increasing face-to-face contacts between people of different races, societies, and cultures;

increasing knowledge of the past, present, and future as well as the increasingly widespread sharing of that knowledge;

increase in the power of the human senses and capacities resulting from technological and genetic enhancements;

increase in the scope of individuals’ core self-identities to include “human being” as an important part, and, eventually, an even greater widening to include a sense of commonality with all living beings on Earth and, perhaps, even beyond that, a sense of mutuality with life forms of other planets if contact with extraterrestrials is ever made;

increase in the scope of people’s empathy and concern for the freedom and well-being of other people to include all human beings, both those now living and members of future generations and, eventually, an even wider future concern for all living beings;

and, thus, increase in shared human concern for the life-sustaining capacities of the Earth and, eventually, of other places in the universe into the indefinite future.

I think that we know quite a bit about the causes and consequences of the long-term trends toward increases in scale. In my opinion, the causes are largely evolutionary, because of the many positive feedbacks of increasing the scope of human caring and cooperation and negative feedbacks of social isolation, failure to cooperate, or conflict. As you know, I tried to explain this process in vol. 2 of *Foundations of Futures Studies*, showing how human bio-psycho-social needs and well-being function as selective processes, as do both the pre-conditions of human society and



the common features of the physical environment within which humans live on Earth. Of course, human values and actions help to shape the future as well, but they, too, tend to be shaped by the same evolutionary pressures.

On the down side, destructive powers of humans have also increased in scale and they could be used—both by states and nonstate groups—with devastating effects on the quantity and quality of human life and the life-sustaining capacities of the environment in which we live. Also on the down side, there have been negative reactions to this trend from many people who feel threatened by changes, both in beliefs and social structures, and struggle to prevent them, sometimes with great vehemence and violence.

Obviously, the trend toward increasing scale (and toward more fairness, cooperation, and human unity) doesn't happen simply as a result of impersonal biosocial and natural forces. It also is a product of human action interacting with such forces and may be derailed, not only by violence but especially by incompetence, crime, corruption, and cronyism. I fear that it will be a hundred years or more before people will become a functioning human community living in peace under legitimate systems of formal and informal social controls—a hundred years or more of periodic conflict, death and destruction, bumbling and malfeasance.

Constant and large-scale diplomacy (endless talking, understanding, and cooperation), fairness, financial aid to the short-term victims of change, international efforts to meet basic human needs and reduce poverty everywhere, and large-scale efforts to provide universal public health and education may be needed to reduce crises and catastrophes. Yet, even though they may be postponed by violence and opposition, trends toward increasing scale, I believe, will eventually continue and that a worldwide human community will be created, within which universal concern for others will be the norm.

**S:** In this newly-revealed context what might be the special role or roles of Futures Studies?

**B:** Good question. Perhaps a futurist first-responder should ask, “Indeed, are these the trends shaping the future?” “Are the possible futures foreshadowed by these trends desirable or undesirable? And why so?” “What alternative futures might the human community—or various parts thereof—be headed for?” “What are the causal factors that would produce alternative futures?”

Beyond that first response, it seems to be that futurists have collectively been defining such trends and such a future. Wouldn't you agree that many futurists have focused their studies on subjects related to this web of concerns? For example, futurists have studied peace and conflict resolution, resource depletion and the use of renewable resources, maintaining or restoring an unpolluted environment, population growth and control, the social implications of technological change, the information revolution, social networks, ethnotronic culture, the development of

trans- and meta-humans, space exploration and preparation for contact with ETs, social inequality including the empowerment of women, transcendence and expansion, among many related topics.

Futurists have provided important insights both about the future dangers and opportunities for the human community through the foresight they have provided. Moreover, by providing alternative futures and by showing what might be or what might have been compared with present developments as they are, futurists perform an important role of bearing witness, exposing some of the follies of public discourse and decision-making.

**S:** If we agree on the need for foresight strategies on the national level, how can we get them started when governments are beholden to the usual short-term priorities?

**B:** Speaking about my own small efforts, I have tried to do five things: First, when I am asked to serve as part of government or corporate efforts to provide information for decision-making, I accept (unless there is some stated purpose of the exercise which violates my sense of what is right, e.g. making torture more effective). Thus, I've accepted a variety of consulting jobs that ranged from national security in the 21<sup>st</sup> century for the U.S., the state of the environment for NAFTA countries, and keeping nuclear waste safe for 10,000 years to serving on the Commission for Connecticut's Future, attempting to profile for the FBI the Unabomber (who had written an anonymous treatise on "Industrial Society and Its Future"), the future of prison populations (trying to reform the system by reducing racism and increasing the deployment of law enforcement to detect and prosecute white-collar criminals), and a somewhat "far-out" job for me of being the national spokesman for a set of high-touch, baby-animal toys known as Puffalumps (in an effort to increase the sales of nonviolent toys).

Second, I've tried over the years to focus at least some of my empirical social research on topics of interest to policy makers in an effort to provide information that might lead to wiser decisions. Such topics have included why people move to cities and suburbs, how decisions were made in creating many of the new states in the Caribbean (Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Barbados, Grenada, St. Lucia, etc.) and how they shaped the future of local society and culture, the nature of good leadership and decision-making, how people decide how much inequality is fair or unfair in their society, the social factors that expand or limit the life chances of individuals, the causes of racial segregation and ethnic strife, comparative studies of social classes and human values, how national leaders decide on foreign policy, the determinants of attitudes toward democracy and civil liberties, how the liberation of women contributes to the well-being of future generations, among other topics. Of course, my motivation for doing futures work is a continuation of this same effort.

Third, where possible, I have incorporated foresight and ethical judgment into my teaching, including encouraging students to design their own research to deal with

important public issues. The Yale Comparative Sociology Training Program for graduate students that I directed, for example, supported research in foreign countries on topics of social policy and the future, especially relating to inequality, social justice, and decision-making. There are far too many examples of such research to mention here, but two are Menno Boldt's studies of self-determination and social justice of Indians in Canada (*Surviving as Indians* and *The Quest for Justice* with Leroy Little Bear and J. Anthony Long) and James William Gibson's analysis of technowar in Vietnam (*The Perfect War*), which contains a devastating critique of American decision-making and war management.

Fourth, when I have had organizational responsibilities, I tried to do what little I could to support change toward a more open, inclusive and fair society. Thus (to take only a few examples), over the years, I've helped establish the Yale Department of African American Studies (as I mentioned earlier), to open the formerly men-only Yale College to women undergraduates, and to encourage Yale to become an international university open to students from all countries, to provide international and comparative society experiences to all Yale undergraduates through a semester or year abroad, and to promote and support faculty research and teaching in other countries.

Fifth, both Lora-Lee and I try to play active roles as citizens in our community and in politics. Most important, we vote. But we also attend meetings, have marched in protest or support groups, contribute money to various political parties and other groups, write letters to the editors of newspapers, and speak out on public issues, etc. Although we play only a small part (and often feel that we are not doing enough), it is important to us that we do the modest amount that we do.

**S:** If the future is typified by a constantly moving balance that I think of as 'the dialectic of foresight and experience' how do we avoid social learning by such powerful 'learning experiences' as become contradictory due to their size, scale and destructiveness? We truly seem to be on a collision course, not only with each other but also with the planet itself!

**B:** Richard, I couldn't agree more with you when you speak of "the dialectic of foresight and experience." Ideally, we ought to be able to create a learning community or, as the social psychologist Donald T. Campbell used to call it, an "experimenting society."

One large-scale experiment that comes to mind is the New Jersey Income-Maintenance Experiment carried out in the late 1960s through the early 1970s. More than 1,300 families were involved in the experiment and more than \$30 million was spent. The question was, "Would a guaranteed income reduce recipients' desire to work?"

There were eight different experimental groups with different levels of income supplements plus a control group whose members received no extra subsidy. In a

nutshell, the results show that providing people supplemental money to bring them above the poverty line did not reduce their desire to work. But the income supplements did result in workers taking somewhat more time to find a new job when they were out of work. Yet that extra time usually resulted in their getting somewhat more satisfying jobs. There was also a totally unanticipated finding: women took the opportunity of a guaranteed income to divorce their husbands at a higher rate than women in the control group—perhaps a good thing if they were trapped in unhappy marriages. The experiment contributed to the development of a successful program. Launched under the presidency of Gerald Ford, the U.S. has had an Earned Income Tax Credit ever since (with some improvements made in later years).

If you asked Americans today, if there is a guaranteed income in the U.S. for the working poor, most would probably answer “no.” It was called a “negative income tax” for a time and then the “EITC.” In effect, it is a guaranteed income for workers. If they fall below a certain income, instead of paying an income tax to the government, the government pays a sum to them to bring them up to an income level above the poverty line.

But Campbell’s idea of the experimenting society goes well beyond even such a large-scale social experiment. What he had in mind was making day-to-day implementation of policies into ongoing experiments. Social policies would be designed to achieve certain goals. They would be implemented according to present knowledge and understandings of causes and effects. Then, the results would be constantly monitored to see if anticipated goals were being effectively met. If yes, then the policies would continue as established. But, if not, then changes would be made so as to better achieve the intended goals.

Monitoring would continue, improvements, if necessary, would be made. The monitors would also be on the lookout for unintended or unanticipated consequences and, if discovered, more changes would be made if the consequences were undesirable. It all seems so simple, so obvious, and so doable. The problems, of course, are that in real life situations, special interests, individual greed, out-and-out theft and fraud, and bureaucratic ineptitude—you know the litany—undermine the high-minded intentions and divert public monies from their intended purposes to create illicit private wealth. Thus, constant auditing, inspections, and oversight from independent agencies are necessary.

I recently read T. Christian Miller’s *Blood Money: Wasted Billions, Lost Lives, and Corporate Greed in Iraq* about the money that has been stolen or otherwise unaccounted for that was intended for the reconstruction of Iraq. It is a sad and tragic story. I wonder whether people have learned from the Iraqi experience how to carry out public policies competently and honestly or if, to the contrary, some people have simply learned more about all the diverse and possible ways that public monies can be stolen and the public trust violated with impunity.

We could share many other examples—including the American government’s incompetence in dealing with the hurricane threats and recent destruction in New Orleans and elsewhere in the Gulf Coast—but you already know these things. Yet we also know of large-scale projects that have been competently and honestly carried out. And we also know of projects that were not carried out in a fully competent way, but nonetheless ended up a success. (For example, the Sydney opera house?)

My hope is that we futurists might play at least a small role in reducing some of the fumbling, bumbling, diddling, and dissembling as we humans act to construct and perhaps deconstruct our future.

**S:** Wendell, thank you for your time and trouble. Let us hope that a Renaissance in Futures Studies occurs in time to fulfill at least some of our shared hopes and aspirations!

### Note

1. Bell, W. “How has American life changed since September 11?” *Journal of Futures Studies* 8(1) 2003: 73-80.

### References

- Bell, W. *Foundations of Futures Studies*, Vols 1 & 2, Transaction Press, NJ, 1997, revised 2003, 2004.
- Boldt, M, Bear, L & Long, J. *Surviving as Indians and The Quest for Justice, ??*
- Davis, M. *City of Quartz*, Vintage, New York, 1992. Also *Ecology of Fear*, Metro Books, New York, 1998.
- Gibson, J, *The Perfect War*,
- Kunstler, J, *The Long Emergency*, Atlantic Books, London, 2005.
- Meadows, D. (et al) *The Limits to Growth*, Universe Books, New York, 1972.
- Miller, T. *Blood Money, Wasted Billions, Lost Lives, and Corporate Greed in Iraq*,
- Slaughter, R. *Futures Beyond Dystopia: Creating Social Foresight*, Routledge, London, 2005.
- Steffan, W. (et al) *Global Change and the Earth System*, Springer Verlag, Berlin, 2004.

Published in the *Journal of Futures Studies* 2006/7