

Law and Order – a clarification

by Phillip W. Weiss

From time to time I share with others my thoughts on the top threat to the survival of the U. S. today, namely the breakdown of law and order and its inevitable byproduct, the scourge of violent crime that is now plaguing NYC and the rest of the nation. To date, I have received no replies indicating disagreement with me on this issue. Nevertheless, I want to clarify my position on law and order.

The breakdown of law and order does not automatically guarantee that you will become a victim of a violent crime. You can live and work in NYC and elsewhere and never be a victim of a violent crime. However, what the breakdown of law and order DOES is create a climate of fear generated by public policies that downplay or outright legitimize anti-social and other pathological behavior. This sends a clear message to the public, which includes the people who commit violent crimes, that it is okay to act out with impunity no matter how wanton the behavior, and that there will be no or minimal legal consequences for committing violent acts.

This lack of meaningful deterrence practically invites violent criminals to act out with impunity, thus placing the physical safety of everyone else in the community at risk. This does not mean, however, that every violent criminal living in the community will immediately respond to this invitation to act out. Like a

dormant volcano which shows no signs of erupting, a violent criminal can remain quiet and lead a law-abiding life. But there is nothing to deter that violent criminal from erupting into violence at any time and without warning. This lack of credible deterrence is what the breakdown of law and order is all about.

Although the breakdown of law and order is politicized, which is no surprise given the purpose of our political process which is to create statutes that govern conduct, the root cause of the breakdown of law and order has nothing to do with politics, which after all is a form of public theater playing to an audience. Instead, the breakdown of law and order is rooted in social and cultural processes that shape our collective attitude toward crime and punishment.

Ultimately, it is we the people who decide how we want our community to function. If we the people want law and order, then our community will have law and order; if we the people do not want law and order, then our community will not have law and order. It is up to everyone to decide on this matter and to make that decision known to others. My decision is emphatic - I want law and order. Now it's your turn to decide.