

Precarity

by Phillip W. Weiss

Nowhere is precarity more evident than in the world of professional sports. In professional sports every player is subject to being traded or being released outright at the slightest whim of the owners. If the player has a long-term contract, then the contract gets sold, along with the player. No player is immune from such treatment. Examples: New York Yankees traded Babe Ruth to the Boston Braves. New York Mets traded Tom Seaver, one of the greatest pitchers in the history of baseball, to the Cincinnati Reds. New York Nets sold basketball legend Julius Irving's contract to the Philadelphia 76ers. All franchise players; each one an icon, nevertheless, each one considered expendable. The Seattle Seahawks released their star cornerback Richard Sherman. The Cleveland Indians traded the immensely popular Rocky Colavito to the Detroit Tigers. New York Yankees fired the NY Yankee legend Yogi Berra. In 2013 the New York Yankees gave the tremendously popular 5-time World Series champion Derek Jeter a \$5 million pay cut. In 1961 the SF 49ers traded Y. A. Tittle, their quarterback who they considered washed up, to the New York Giants where he became a superstar. Now, if these players, all icons, people who produced money for their bosses, could be treated so summarily, then no one's job is secure. The Detroit Tigers declared their 12-time batting champion Ty Cobb a free agent. The Brooklyn Dodgers traded baseball legend Jackie Robinson to the New York Giants. One year later the Dodgers left Brooklyn, soon after followed by the Giants who left Manhattan. Both played in stadiums whose history did not save them from being demolished.

Precarity applies to businesses too. B. Altman's, Gimbels, Pennsylvania Railroad, RCA, TWA, Eastern Airlines, Woolworths, Pan Am, all icons of capitalism, are just a few of the almost countless number of businesses of all sizes that have succumbed to economic forces that force them to close. No one is immune. The Secretary of State just got fired. Kings are forced to abdicate, dictators are forced to flee, and power is fleeting. Governments collapse; new ones take their place. Countries disappear then are re-constituted. The Roman Empire lasted 1,000 years, now it is history. Generals get sacked. Elected officials lose power. The Soviet Union disappeared. The Berlin Wall was torn down. Who seriously believed that one day the Soviet Union would literally shut itself down (taking with it who knows how many jobs)? Vietnam and the US are now friends. Japan and Germany, once implacable enemies of the US, are now close allies. Jews were targeted for extermination, yet today there is a Jewish state. In 1960 Jim Crow was the law; in 2008, an African-American was elected POTUS. In 1988 Eastern Europe was communist; in 2017 a woman born in Eastern Europe became the FLOTUS.

The 1962 NY Mets lost 120 games; in 1969 they won the World Series. In 1985 the KC Royals won the World Series; they waited thirty years to win their next championship. In 1963 the New York Giants won their third straight NFL Eastern Division title; for the next eighteen years they were losers. Then they became winners again and then losers again. Winning teams stop winning; perennial losers become winners, e.g., Boston Red Sox and the Chicago Cubs. Same with countries. In the 19th century China was weak; today it is a world power. In 1900 the British Empire dominated the world; by 1960 the British Empire was history. In 1918 France dictated terms to Germany; in 1940 Germany dictated terms to France. In 1945 Germany was discredited and destitute; today it is a major power. In 1914 three empires dominated the European continent; in 1918 those empires were gone.

Digital replaced analog. The telephone replaced the telegraph. The cell phone replaced the telephone. The automobile replaced the horse. Today women have the right to vote. Slavery is abolished. Abortion is legal. Relationships change. Circumstances change.

My point: precarity is part of the human condition. In life nothing is permanent. Time is fleeting. It is relentless. Things DO change, and that includes economic relationships. Jobs are lost; new jobs are created. Why is that? Who knows? Let the sociologists try to figure it out.