
INSIDE: THE MINISTER OF POLICE: MY PART IN HIS
DOWNFALL ● SAYING 'NO' TO REAGANOMICS ● AN
AMERICAN NIGHTMARE ● THE LANGUAGE OF FORCE

ColdType
The **READER**

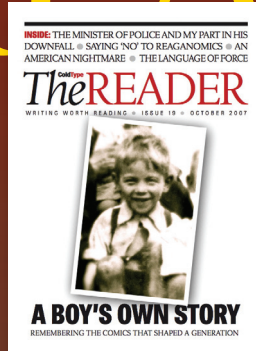
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A BOY'S OWN STORY

REMEMBERING THE COMICS THAT SHAPED A GENERATION

ColdType TheREADER



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A BOY'S OWN STORY

BY DAVID PRATT

The summers were always hot then. Long, sweltering days that melted the tarmac on pavements into a chewy blackboard on which we etched nicknames, obscenities and a roll-call of heroes. Girls' names would come later, but in those pre-teen times they didn't register on our collective mind's radar with quite the same resonance as a threatening flotilla of German destroyers or incoming Messerschmidt 109-Es.

Looking back now, they were days of endless possibilities. An era when, through a boy's eyes, the world really did seem there for the taking, as the chill of the cold war cast its menacing frost across the globe.

Such was the seemingly boundless energy we possessed that a tea and toast breakfast provided enough fuel to last an entire day. Only the pangs of late afternoon hunger would drive us home in retreat from the frontline of our imaginations. All this in a time when child abduction and paedophile predators barely crossed the minds of parents accustomed to their children

being absent and often locked in day-long play some distance from home.

During school holidays, endless hours were transformed into opportunities to recreate Captain Scott and Roald Amundsen's race to the South Pole; become Chindit jungle fighters evading Japanese patrols; or to imagine that our fleet of "bogeys" was in reality a squadron of Mosquito bombers on a raid deep behind Nazi lines to free imprisoned members of the French resistance.

The inspiration for such exploits almost invariably came from what we read. And what I read most of all was the adventure papers and comic books that in part shaped the world outlook of a generation of British boys in the two decades following the second world war

It is no exaggeration to say that I was obsessed with the tales that I found in copies of *Victor*, *Hotspur*, *Tiger*, *Eagle*, *Lion*, *Valiant*, *Warlord* and *Commando* – titles that would evolve through various reincarnations and mergers in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

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DAYS OF GLORY

Known as the "tough of the track" Alf Tupper was always seeing off the posh opposition and "toffs of the track"

My world, like that of so many boys of that time, was filled with characters such as Braddock VC, Alf Tupper and Sergeant Tough Luck of the Legion. To this day, there remains a picture of me straddling my tricycle and wearing a plastic skid lid in imitation of my fearless fictitious racing driver hero, Skid Solo.

All of them were the real deal: men for whom the danger and odds against success were never too great. It mattered little that there was something unmistakably nostalgic about these heroes who belonged to a bygone age, when duty, patriotism, honour and doing the right thing were a way of life.

In a strange way they chimed with the times in this turbulent and uncertain period, when the Cuban missile crisis and threat of nuclear annihilation were my first childhood memories of the nasty "real world" in which we lived.

Not that I was overly worried. After all, I knew for certain that men like Matt Braddock, VC and bar, must be out there ready to defend our freedom and liberty. Braddock, a fictional second world war bomber pilot, was by far my favourite comic book hero. Fearless and with few peers as an aviator, Braddock could fly anything, even though the Lancaster, F Fox was his main command.

Braddock made his debut in the *Rover* in February 1958, seven months before I was born, in a story entitled *I Flew With Braddock*, recounted by his fictional sidekick and navigator Sergeant George Bourne. Like other comic book heroes who stood the test of time,

Braddock fitted the ideal role model and could do just about anything he put his mind to, be it champion level darts or boxing.

Above all, he was a man's man, who refused a promotion on principle and was always standing up against incompetent superior officers or for his fellow crewmen. Braddock's adventures, such as shooting down a German fighter plane with a flare gun, or sinking an aircraft carrier, were all grist to our make-believe mill.

At one point, I even had my own version of his leather flying helmet complete with ear flaps. The "pilot's" headgear was topped off with a pair of welder's goggles liberated from the Ravenscraig steelworks in Lanarkshire where my pal's dad worked.

Working class hero

One of my other favourite characters in the *Victor* was himself a welder – when not running and beating all the opposition on the athletics track. Alf Tupper worked in Ike Smith's welding shop, which was located under a railway arch, where he slept on a mattress by his workbench and lived on fish and chips. Alf was also a member of Grey-stone Harriers: a terrific middle distance runner and the ultimate working-class hero and cold warrior. Known as the "tough of the track" he was always seeing off the posh opposition and "toffs of the track".

It didn't matter that Alf was knackered after a night shift or had missed his bus on the way to the stadium: he always managed to chest the tape just ahead of his scheming, privileged rivals.

A true Brit, Alf was also deeply suspicious of foreigners, especially those lantern-jawed “dodgy” Eastern Europeans from the same communist countries perceived by many at the time to pose a threat to world peace.

Braddock and Tupper were the kind of men any 10-year-old could look up to. With no airs and graces, they were often from working-class backgrounds like my own, and the rarified world of privilege never stood in their way or intimidated them in their life’s mission. Little did I know then that the adventures of such heroes, and the often far-flung exotic locations where they took place, were instilling in me a free spirit and curiosity about the world we lived in, which would shape my own adulthood.

But while I revelled in the geographical range of the adventures, a certain George Orwell, some years earlier in 1940, had voiced his concern about how the nostalgic feel of such tales and the old empire landscape in which they happened, rather worryingly excluded contemporary history.

“It is worth noticing,” he wrote in an essay in *Horizon* magazine, “that in papers of this type it is always taken for granted that adventures only happen at the ends of the Earth, in tropical forests, in Arctic wastes, in African deserts, on western prairies, in Chinese opium dens – everywhere, in fact, except the places where things really do happen. That is a belief dating from 30 or 40 years ago, when the new continents were in the process of being opened up.”

Orwell worried that stories in these comic books amounted to a form of po-

litical control, and were a de-facto apology for capitalism and imperialism. He also felt that they might deflect the attention of a generation of young men from political issues that should be addressed at home, by seducing them with tales of extravagant overseas adventures.

“There is being pumped into them the conviction that the major problems of our time do not exist, that there is nothing wrong with laissez-faire capitalism, that foreigners are unimportant comics and that the British empire is a sort of charity concern which will last forever,” Orwell concluded.

However, by the time I was reading the *Victor* and *Valiant*, much of that world had vanished and a new global order was in the process of being constructed.

Heroes and villains

It is certainly true that in many of the boys’ comics I read, foreigners were often stereotyped. The allies were easy to identify; usually, these were commonwealth types: Aussies and Kiwis in bush hats, or else “loyal” Indians in turbans. I learned that Japanese soldiers screamed “Banzai!” when attacking and “Aieeeee!” when they were shot. Brits, on the other hand, gave a much more guttural “Die, Tojo!” and cried “Arrrrgh!” when they were cut down by bullets or shrapnel.

Indeed, it is probably fair to say that my early exposure to foreign languages came from the pages of *Commando*. Years later, on my first school trip to Germany, I half expected everyone I met to be uttering “Hande Hoch”

Little did I know then that the adventures of such heroes, and the often far-flung exotic locations where they took place, were instilling in me a free spirit and curiosity about the world we lived in, which would shape my own adulthood

DAYS OF GLORY

By now, my own adult life had become a real-time re-run of those comic book stories from my childhood. A world of guerrilla fighters, spies, soldiers of fortune, gunrunners and wild tribesmen in a landscape of deserts, snowy mountains and frontier towns

(“hands up!), “Achtung” (“attention!”) and “Schnell” (“hurry up!”), or to tell me in broken English: “For you, Tommy, ze war is over.”

In the pages of my favourite reads and the Christmas annuals that brought together the best of my heroes’ adventures, there undoubtedly was a sense of imperial longing that spoke more to the past than to the urgent present.

But when the story of Lawrence of Arabia made its cover story appearance in the *Valiant* in 1962, around the same time that the celebrated David Lean film hit our movie screens, my life was transformed. I saw the film while on holiday with my parents one summer on the Northumberland coast.

After leaving the cinema speechless, I spent the next fortnight with friends, running around the beaches and sand dunes of our resort with a tea towel wrapped around my head, shouting: “No prisoners!” and making the long trek with an imaginary camel towards an imaginary Aqaba.

TE Lawrence would remain a hero, and after reading those accounts of him in the *Valiant*, and in the children’s educational magazine *Look And Learn* (a nostalgic collection *The Bumper Book Of Look And Learn* has just been published by Century, £18.99), I graduated in the years ahead to reading Lawrence’s *Seven Pillars Of Wisdom*.

In the 1980s, while journeying as a correspondent through the mountains of Afghanistan with the mujahidin guerrillas fighting the Soviet occupation, I only ever carried three books with me. One was John Buchan’s *Green-*

mantle, the second was a collection of Shakespeare’s sonnets. The third was *Seven Pillars Of Wisdom*.

By now, my own adult life had become a real-time re-run of those comic book stories from my childhood. A world of guerrilla fighters, spies, soldiers of fortune, gunrunners and wild tribesmen in a landscape of deserts, snowy mountains and frontier towns.

The truth about war

In important ways, however, things were very different. In the wars that I now experienced, dying men bore scant resemblance to those depicted in the startling graphics of *Victor, Valiant* or *Commando*. Once, during the battle for a gutted bus station in the Afghan capital Kabul, the fighters I was with found themselves caught in the open by a mortar barrage. It was a nightmarish scene. All around, in a maelstrom of noise and confusion, men were being hurled into the air, and coming down in pieces.

I found myself cowering alongside a low wall in a puddle of blood and muck, next to a man trailing his left leg from a string of tendon, his eyes bulging like those of a dying hen, as he reached out his hand to me. Before I could grasp it, another shell pushed me automatically on my feet, running, my chest heaving like a spent swimmer’s. To stay there was to end up like him. War has its emptiness, its zero-points during which men are simply glad about not being dead.

In these real wars, that was all it was about: not being dead. Yes, I encountered heroes, but few that stick in my

mind were military men like Braddock VC, or the tough-as-nails troopers from the pages of *Commando*. Most were simple people, civilians, trying to live ordinary lives in extraordinary circumstances. If the boys' comics of my childhood had sparked within me an insatiable curiosity about war, conflict and its effects on those caught up in such terrible events, they had also indelibly instilled in me values that today might seem old-fashioned or outdated.

Doing the right thing

My father and mother never tired of telling me that you should treat others as you would expect to be treated yourself. In them, there was something of those qualities I so admired in my comic book characters: a sense of fairness, decency and of doing the right thing. If these are old-fashioned qualities, then I am old-fashioned.

Today, in theme and content, the stories from those latter-day boys' publications might seem conservative, patriotic, even jingoistic. But it should be remembered that many of the values they espoused were the legacy of that great generation who fought and died combating dictatorship and fascism in the second world war. From such a generation as this there is much to respect and admire.

The classic *Victor*, *Valiant* or *Tiger* story was never about otherworldly fantasies such as men tainted by spiders

or elemental alien forces. It was resolutely rooted in the real world.

For most boys today, however, their dreams and imaginative worlds are stoked by televisual and computer-aided experience.

Yet, the recent appearance of wonderful books such as *The Dangerous Book For Boys* and *True Adventures For Boys*, are proof that the pursuit of earthly adventures and dreams still holds great appeal.

Looking back on my childhood friends and on our games of those fondly remembered days, I realise that we were all heroes once, and so much the better for it. If nothing else, it gave each and every one of us a momentary if elusive taste of just what is possible.

There is much to be said for being a dreamer. Who knows what adventures a boy might embark upon as a result of such a take on the world.

As TE Lawrence himself once wrote: "All men dream, but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that it was vanity: but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dream with open eyes, to make it possible." **CT**

David Pratt is foreign editor of the Sunday Herald, Scotland's leading national Sunday newspaper. His latest book is Intifada: Palestine and Israel – The Long Day of Rage

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WEATHERING THE STORM

BY JOE BAGEANT

By the second day it's beginning to look like we're far enough south to miss the eye of Dean, if not some torrential rains and high win

Two gecko lizards are staring at one another on the wall above my laptop, as the small TV in my cabana at Hopkins Village in Belize blares an update on the approaching Hurricane Dean. But the rain hammers the tin roof so loudly it's impossible to hear what is being said, even with the sound turned all the way up. So I watch the hot blonde, the satellite pics and blurry shots of storm-tortured palms and hope for the best.

Thanks to Hurricane Dean, for the next few days this Garifuna household of six, the Castillos, are sleeping several to a bed with the Rubio family, including this old gringo, who is most grateful to have drawn an older boy, not a little one still pissing on the sheets. The Rubios are a fishing family, evacuees from the black "bakkatown" (back of town) shacks out on the reefs, which usually get in such storms, even when not struck by the 'cane itself.

Every plastic jug, pot and pan is filled with fresh water and we cook the hell out of tortillas, beans, rice and everything else in an already near barren

cupboard, stretching food between us and waiting for the power to go out – which also shuts down our meager trickle of a water system – a certainty given that it happens a couple times a week without the help of a storm. So far, there is not a trace of panic. Between the hammering squalls, the sun cracks open brightly, the guy across the road goes back to work on his roof, and the lady of our house, Marzlyn, stands under the mango tree mashing plantains with a four-foot wooden mortar and pestle. And Hurricane Dean just blew through Jamaica and past the Cayman Islands at 150 miles per hour. Look out Cancun.

By the second day it's beginning to look like we're far enough south to miss the eye of Dean. With luck we will not get enough rain to blow out the four mile dirt road to the main highway (three-foot deep stretches forty feet across are not uncommon this time of year) and high winds will not strip our mango, lime, plantain, soursop and breadfruit trees – important staples – of their not yet ripe fruits. At the same

time we may get no more than a severe rain storm, severe here being in a whole other league than in the US. Picture eight inches in an hour.

Such is middle class life in the hundreds of Caribbean villages you never see on American TV, even when they are wiped off the map by hurricanes, places with names like Seine Bight and Monkey River Town. Places that provide the groundskeepers and table wipers for the destination resorts such as Caye Chapel island golf course (US\$200 and up to tee off) where the likes of Bill Gates fly in to enjoy round the clock concierge, what has got to be the most challenging windage factor in all of golfdom, and disciplined black or Hispanic attendance to their every whim, in a country where the minimum wage is US\$1.50 an hour for those lucky enough to find employment.

Among the Rubios staying with us until Dean passes is their 12-year-old adopted child, Julian. Through my high kitchen window I can see him joyfully helping his mom remove billowing bed-sheets from the clothes line. And when he is not doing that he is running to help his dad with every task. His adoptive father, Labon, is a stern one, hard as nails by American standards, quick to laughter and affection with his family. But what drives Julian's eager cooperation is his deep admiration for his adopted father, as his model for a strong manhood. Boys think about becoming men here, the same as everywhere else I suppose, but much more so. I've spent time with the Rubios on a solitary atoll out in the reefs and watching the interplay of Julian and his

adopted parents. Normal as it is to them, it remains one of the most beautiful family experiences I've witnessed.

Nor is it particularly unique. His cousin in our household, Kirky, does the same. To Kirky, his smiling, hard laboring father, Luke, who admonishes me for buying the kids such things as soccer balls, "Spoil the pickney, spoil de man." (Pickney is not a derogatory term here among the Garifuna, who were never enslaved.) Luke represents for Kirky, as Labon does for Julian, all the dignity any man can ever hope to possess. Being allowed to sit among his father and other grown men late into the evenings is an achievement, proof of one more small step toward manhood. During the day when Kirky is not riding herd on the toddlers for his mom, Marzlyn, he voluntarily rakes the sandy yard clean, flat and white because it needs to be done every day and because it will save his dad an hour of doing the same when he returns home from his job at the resort. And because it is what a grown man does – works, serves and honors family blood.

Blood is thick here. When Julian showed up with his family to wait out Hurricane Dean, both boys were movingly overjoyed to see each other because, "He mi iduheil!" (cousin). And from what I can hear through the floorboards of my cabana as they linger in the shade below, they share the secrets of young boys' souls. Then go running off to shoot marbles in the wet hot sand. Tradition, community and clan, though rapidly declining, is the animating force of what's left of the old Garifuna culture that still exists along this

Being allowed to sit among his father and other grown men late into the evenings is an achievement, proof of one more small step toward manhood

VILLAGE LIFE

This is also a place where sooner or later, with no small help from global warming, the village's tiny houses will be blown off their stilts and tumble into a hurricane's deep "surge waters," rolling over once, maybe twice, before becoming a pile of splintered boards

Joe Bageant is the author of Deer Hunting With Jesus: Dispatches From America's Clas War

coast, mostly in the villages. It's stubborn stuff. Right now I can hear the drumming of a Dugu (the traditional ancestor based African religion of the Garifuna) coming from the long grass temple on the beach, not because there is a 'cane approaching but despite that there is one coming. Luke says they already had a ceremony planned and a little thing like a hurricane threat would never stop them. "The old ones, dey are stubborn!" he laughs. Stubborn or not, all of us feel how the drumming animates this night with the traditional Garifuna spirit.

This little village in this little country is not paradise, not even close. This is the land of the agonizing sand flea, the scorpion and the swarming sting rays of the night tides. It is a place where no wallet can be opened in a store without a dozen covetous eyes locking onto its contents and where dogs fight brutally in the yards. Last month our dog Hero killed a neighbor's dog in front of the whole family. And amid the screaming and crying, not even the powerful bodied Luke could break Hero's death grip on the intruding dog's throat, brutally demonstrating the truth of planetary flesh from Palestine to the Sudan, and even in America for several millions in the ghettos of the national machinery.

This is also a place where sooner or later, with no small help from global warming, the village's tiny houses will be blown off their stilts and tumble into a hurricane's deep "surge waters," rolling over once, maybe twice, before becoming a pile of splintered boards, while the palm frond houses of the poorer families are atomized into grassy

shreds amid the airborne cooking pots, baby clothing and cheap Taiwanese boom boxes. It also is where cocaine is dirt cheap for the minority who use it, and where at least a couple of crack-heads dwell and several more drift back and forth between here and Dangriga, 35 miles up the only paved road on this side of the country.

Yet the village is still a place where matrons bake coconut birthday cakes, kids shoot hoops by the sparse street-light and adolescent couples walk bashfully holding hands under swaying palms and a silver pie pan moon.

Since I started this Dean has become a cat five 'cane. So the whole family has packed for that evacuation mountain that won't be here because it is stuck in already traffic-jammed road to hurricane-proof Belmopan. Generously, the brawny resort guard, who lives in a concrete house next door, has taken our family in for the night.

As I said, it ain't paradise. Just a spot on the planet where a man has time to think and peck at a keyboard and pour bedtime orange juice for sleepy, well scrubbed kids just before the moon comes up. Dean will come and go. But some things are eternal.

The day after

Hurricane Dean spared the village of Hopkins entirely, and miracle of miracles, even the power and water were back on by noon next day. It may be simply my writer's imagination, but I could swear there was a knowing twinkle in the eye of the old Dugu drummer down at the vegetable stand this morning.

CT

A DOG TO ITS VOMIT

BY FRED READ

I have just returned from two weeks in Washington and find myself almost giggling with despair, or perhaps chortling at the madness. I need a bottle of Padre Kino, maybe laced with Haldol.

I figure the whole country must be smoking dope, because they've all got the fears. Or so it appears at first. In stations of Metro, the city's subway, a recording told us over and over that Metro had new secure trash cans and — I think this is verbatim — “You can now put your trash where it belongs without fear.” Yes, brethren and cistern, you can throw away that newspaper in a state of calm.

We're afraid of trash cans? What would Davy Crockett think?

As best I can tell, Homeland Security thought, or pretended to think, that a wily terrorist might put a bomb in the trash cans. So they built blast-proof cans after taking out the vulnerable old cans. Some company made a fortune supplying them, Homeland Security being a richly flowing monetary teat. Personally I feel much safer.

The city is like an acid trip gone bad. On electronic signs on overpasses one sees that the Threat Level is Orange — kind of scared, but not yet with the

screaming shaking gollywoggles. What does that mean? What do you do in Condition Orange that you don't do in Condition Green? (Actually Green seems not to exist. The point appears to be to keep people in a constant state of moderate anxiety.)

At National Airport, my plane had minor maintenance problems and the repair crews had the engines opened. The announcer or whatever you call him repeatedly told us “not to panic.” Oh. I'm going to panic because they're putting a new valve in the de-icing generator? Meanwhile, everywhere the government can insert its fingers, the recorded warnings: Watch everybody else and call this number if...report suspicious behavior...look for abandoned packages...lift your feet when using the escalators...Threat Level Orange.

I looked for indications that anyone was paying the slightest attention to this twaddle and couldn't find any. I half expected people to approach a trash can on tiptoe, from behind, so that it Wouldn't Suspect. No. They just stuffed things into it. The passengers didn't watch each other, instead burying themselves in the sports section or bouncing to whatever was on the iPod.

On electronic signs on overpasses one sees that the Threat Level is Orange — kind of scared, but not yet with the screaming shaking gollywoggles. What does that mean? What do you do in Condition Orange that you don't do in Condition Green?

When I am dictator, I will strap the mothers of the graduating class of Harvard to the front bumpers of Humvees in Baghdad, and see how long support for the war lasts

A lot of people think that all this fearaganda springs from some closely calculated plot to make people support the wars, or give the feds unlimited power so they can protect us. Well, it looks that way. Perhaps a few in government take it seriously. You know, eternal vigilance is the price of freedom, rather than a good way to lose it.

I don't know. But it is a bureaucratized terror, coated with a sort of Madison Avenue inanity. Terror by Disney. I get the impression that it is a response more to boredom than to peril. Life is pretty tedious going to the cubicle farm every day.

Living in an imaginary war zone relieves the ennui. The Homeland Security people, not exactly a scintillating crew, get to feel important, have a sense of mission and maybe even be noticed. In a meaningless life, the chance to go mano a mano with bin Laden, even if only by tilting at trash cans, is better than nothing.

The disjuncture between the wars of Mr. Bush and the country as a whole was striking. While the wars are a topic of conversation, there is little passion. In the absence of a draft, no one is affected by them who doesn't want to be. Washington's sophisticated send few of their sons to Iraq voluntarily or otherwise.

Being savvy and therefore cynical, they know the wars are politically driven spasms in which they have no stake. They don't know soldiers and would have little in common with them. Thus they view the conflicts as they might an earthquake in Peru.

On this trip I spent several hours at

Walter Reed Army Hospital, where guys with one leg hobbled around on crutches. Having passed a year as a patient at Bethesda Naval Hospital as a consequence of another witless war, I knew what I would find should I visit the wards at Walter Reed: the blind, the faceless, the hopelessly gutshot, and the quadriplegics who would spend the rest of what can't quite be called a life being turned at intervals to avoid bedsores.

War's human wreckage

I do not know today's soldiers, having left the military beat midway through the Nineties. How many of them know they were suckered as we were, and how many still buy the patriotic hoopla favored in small towns, I don't know. Theirs is a very different world from that of the intimate blues bars of Upper Connecticut Avenue. I wonder what the spindly milquetoast hawks of National Review would think if they saw the human wreckage of the military hospitals, which they won't.

When I am dictator, I will strap the mothers of the graduating class of Harvard to the front bumpers of Humvees in Baghdad, and see how long support for the war lasts.

Washington is a curious city, separated from most of the rest of the United States by a gaping cultural chasm. It is probably the nation's best educated town, and it is certainly a place where people know the score. The population consists of politicians, reporters, beltway bandits attached to Uncle Sucker's well-worn mammaries, wonks from policy shops, or outfits sup-

plying all of them with one thing or another. In a country that doesn't, they travel. It doesn't make them better people than others. It means that they know it's all a game, a matter of whose rice bowl gets filled by what contract and who gets re-elected how. Things are dirty and rigged and one either hides things from the public or misrepresents them to gull the rubes. This, of course, is no secret. It doesn't have to be. It works anyway.

One night I sat in the Zoo Bar, across Connecticut Avenue from the entrance to the zoo, with friends just back from Yemen. The Zoo Bar isn't upscale, running to burgers and Bud. Washington is more about power than glitter. Important staffers from the Hill will show up in jeans for blues and brew.

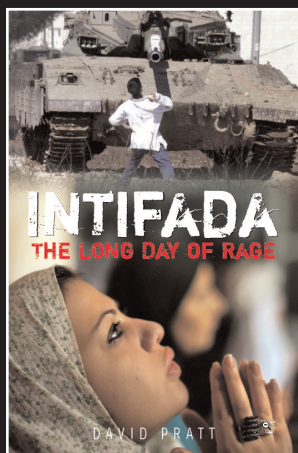
At the next table two guys were talking of some contract with DoD, talking in detail of RFPs and set-asides and who on what committee on the Hill had to be sold. That's DC. Meanwhile the subway reassured riders about the safety of trash cans and, only a few stops away, soldiers from other worlds learned to use their wheel chairs. An acid trip gone bad. **CT**

Fred Read has worked on staff for Army Times, The Washingtonian, Soldier of Fortune, Federal Computer Week, and The Washington Times. He has worked as a police writer, technology editor, military specialist, and authority on mercenary soldiers. He is by all accounts as looney as a tune. Fred's web site is <http://fredoneverything.net>

Things are dirty and rigged and one either hides things from the public or misrepresents them to gull the rubes. This, of course, is no secret. It doesn't have to be. It works anyway

"This is eyewitness reporting at its best – clear, well-observed, fair. Read it, and you'll understand why most of what you read about Israel and the Palestinians is nonsense"

– Charles Glass, former ABC News Chief Mideast Correspondent



INTIFADA

THE LONG DAY OF RAGE

By David Pratt

Published in the UK by Sunday Herald Books
Published in North America by Casemate

ISBN: 978-1932033632 / 304 pages

Read a chapter at <http://coldtype.net/Assets.07/Essays/0707.Pratt.Wall.pdf>

ABU GHRAIB: FIRST SHAME, NOW FARCE

BY SAM PROVANCE

Shortly after photos of the torture at Abu Ghraib were published, I found myself being interviewed by Fay on May 1, 2004. It was a surreal performance, with Fay seeming to take his cue at times from Peter Seller's Inspector Clouseau

The Army officer in charge of the interrogation/torture operation at Abu Ghraib in late 2003 is being court-martialed. My first thought was: Finally an officer is being held accountable. In view of the repeated rebuff to my own attempts to stop the torture and identify those responsible, however, you will perhaps excuse my skepticism that justice will be done.

An Army intelligence analyst, my job at Abu Ghraib was systems administrator (“the computer guy”). But I had the bad luck to be on the 2000 to 0800 night shift. And so I saw the detainees dragged in for interrogation, heard the screams, and saw many of them dragged out.

Watching Act I of the faux-trial of Lt. Col. Steven Jordan in the middle of August at Fort Meade, Maryland, confirmed my worst suspicions. I know Jordan; I was in place for his entire tenure at Abu Ghraib, including when prisoners were being tortured; he was my immediate boss.

Enter from the wings reserve Maj.

Gen. George Fay. MG Fay was hand-picked to run interference for then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld by conducting the same kind of “full and thorough investigation” that former President Richard Nixon ordered for Watergate.

With Fay, too, I speak from personal experience. Shortly after photos of the torture at Abu Ghraib were published, I found myself being interviewed by Fay on May 1, 2004. It was a surreal performance, with Fay seeming to take his cue at times from Peter Seller's Inspector Clouseau.

Except it wasn't funny then; and it is not funny now. To me, Fay showed himself singularly uninterested in what really was going on at Abu Ghraib. I had to ask him repeatedly to listen to my eyewitness account. Whereupon he said he would recommend action against me for not reporting what I knew sooner for, if I had done that, I could have prevented the scandal. Right.

In my view, it was clear that Fay's job was to quiet any discordant notes from

noncommissioned officers like me and help Rumsfeld push the responsibility down to “rotten apples” at the bottom of the chain of command.

When Maj. Gen. Taguba’s Abu Ghraib investigation report was leaked to the press on May 4, 2004, I was very surprised to find myself listed as the only military intelligence soldier to witness to the truth. And for my conscientiousness, the Army imposed a gag order on me 10 days later; a week after that my top-secret clearance was suspended, and eventually I was reduced in rank.

Memory loss

So it came as no surprise to me that Fay would continue to play a disingenuous role at the court-martial of Lt. Col. Jordan.

Jordan is the only officer and the last of the 12 persons charged in the scandal to go to trial. Eleven enlisted soldiers have been convicted of crimes, with the longest sentence, 10 years, given to former Cpl. Charles Graner, Jr., in January 2005.

Two of the charges against Jordan (together punishable by eight years in prison) were obstruction of justice and lying to Fay.

On the day before Jordan’s trial began, Fay contacted Army prosecutors to claim that he “misspoke” in earlier testimony that he had advised Jordan of his rights before interviewing him in 2004. The Army judge was quick to approve a defense motion to dismiss the false-statement and obstruction of justice charges.

Eight years off a possible sentence

even before the trial begins! Not bad.

The next stiffest possible sentence was five years for disobeying Fay’s ban on discussing the investigation with others. But not to worry. Testifying in court, Fay could not remember when he had told Jordan to avoid discussing the investigation.

Enter Defense Attorney Maj. Kris Poppe: (To Fay) “Today you testified you gave a specific order not to discuss – to speak to no one. And that testimony is based on your memory, is it not, sir?”

“It is,” Fay replied.

So, presumably, we can now strike five more years off a possible sentence.

What’s left of the charges? Cruelty and maltreatment of detainees punishable by one year in prison.

But the Army prosecutor amended that particular count by reducing its scope from three months to a single day. The only other charges are failure to obey a regulation (a possible two-year sentence) and dereliction of duty (six months).

It seems a safe bet that Jordan, like his immediate supervisor, Col. Thomas Pappas, will get off with a reprimand and a minor fine.*

According to press reports, other witnesses will be called to testify at the Jordan court-martial. Strange. Although I was at Abu Ghraib for the entire time

Although I was at Abu Ghraib for the entire time Lt. Col. Jordan was there, for some reason the Army does not seem interested in my testimony

** Provenge bet was corect: The military jury convicted Jordan on August 29 of a single charge: disobeying a general's order not to discuss the abuse investigation. He was reprimanded and fined one month's pay.*

WHOSE JUSTICE?

I cannot tell whether the Army is deliberately oblivious to my potential input or that it is simply not taking these things seriously

Lt. Col. Jordan was there, for some reason the Army does not seem interested in my testimony.

I could, for example, provide testimony demolishing the myth that Jordan was not really all that much involved in interrogations.

One of the soldiers who worked very closely with Jordan verified that he was fully familiar with the infamous “hard site,” where much of the torture took place. Jordan had been seen there on more than one occasion, hanging out laid back with his feet propped up. My soldier informant also bragged that he had joined Jordan in beating up a prisoner.

Jordan also took liberties with what were standard procedures, much like the CIA and other civilians who did not seem to bother much with such niceties. One of the sergeants with direct access to Jordan told me that Jordan felt empowered to ignore regulations and interview detainees alone, which was highly irregular even for swashbuckling CIA interrogators.

I cannot tell whether the Army is deliberately oblivious to my potential input or that it is simply not taking these things seriously.

In July, a person from the Army’s Criminal Investigations Division and one from the team prosecuting Jordan came to interview me. Why? Because they had seen me in a documentary and learned from the film that I was at Abu Ghraib at the same time as Lt. Col. Jordan. Never mind the copious testimony I had given over the past several years.

I have never been called to testify at

any of the trials.

No one accountable

In keeping with the Rumsfeld adage “Stuff Happens,” and the Senate Armed Services Committee timidity, no senior U.S. Army officer or defense official is likely to be held accountable for the torture, “ghost” prisoners, and other abuses at Abu Ghraib.

Only the bad apples at the bottom; none of the ones at the top.

Not the Commander in Chief, who authorized torture by Memorandum of Feb. 7, 2002, announcing and implementing a new policy that detainees be treated “humanely, as appropriate, and as consistent with military necessity.”

Not then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, nor his deputy Paul Wolfowitz, nor U.S. pro-consul Paul Bremer, nor troop commander Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, nor Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller (in charge of Gitmo-izing Abu Ghraib), nor Sanchez’s intelligence chief Maj. Gen. Barbara Fast, nor National Security Council functionary Frances Townsend.

All of the above visited Abu Ghraib during the torture year of 2003 before the photos surfaced the next year.

Had it never occurred to them that their incessant pressure on Army interrogators to find non-existent WMD in Iraq and nonexistent ties between Iraq and al-Qaeda, together with the expanded list of torture techniques duly approved by hired-gun lawyers in the Pentagon, the Office of the Vice President, and the Department of Justice, would lead to the abuses of Abu Ghraib?

Not to mention things like the marginal notes from Rumsfeld, on the list of torture techniques, “Make sure this happens.”

Only one general officer passes the smell test, and he with flying colors – Maj. Gen. Antonio Taguba.

On Jan. 31, 2004, he was asked to look into the abuses at Abu Ghraib. A mark of his seriousness of purpose is the fact that Taguba completed his investigation in two months and did not sugarcoat his findings: “Systemic and illegal abuse of detainees ... numerous incidents of sadistic, blatant, and wanton criminal abuses.”

In an attempt to explain how it could be that Taguba could deviate so far from the official line, one wag speculated that, for some reason, Taguba “didn’t get the memo.” He did an honest job – and we would probably never have seen his unvarnished findings, had not some patriotic truth-teller (aka leaker) made it available. That was the end of Taguba’s Army career, however. Several months after his report leaked, Taguba got a phone call from his boss telling him to retire.

Looking back, Taguba recently told Seymour Hersh, “I assumed they wanted to know. I was ignorant of the setting.” [See *The New Yorker*, June 25, 2007.] The general spoke of his futile attempts to get senior generals to focus

on the problem of torture. One lieutenant general was at least candid in rebuffing Taguba: “I don’t want to get involved...because what do you do with that information, once you know?...”

Taguba also spoke of the indignities thrown his way by Rumsfeld and martinets like Gen. John Abizaid who, like so many other high officials – civilian, as well as military – seem to have forgotten the oath we all took to defend the Constitution of the United States.

A few weeks after his report became public, Abizaid turned to Taguba with a pointed warning: “You and your report will be investigated.”

Preferring to hold onto his belief in an Army led by generals with integrity, Taguba later expressed his disappointment that Abizaid would have that attitude. Awakening to the new reality, though, Taguba let it all out in a very telling way: “I had been in the Army 32 years by then, and it was the first time that I thought I was in the Mafia.” **CT**

Sam Provance, a former sergeant specializing in intelligence analysis, refused to remain silent about the torture of Abu Ghraib, where he served for five months at the height of the abuses. He was punished for refusing to take part in the cover-up, and pushed out of the Army. This essay originally appeared at <http://consortiumnews.com>

Taguba completed his investigation in two months and did not sugarcoat his findings: “Systemic and illegal abuse of detainees ... numerous incidents of sadistic, blatant, and wanton criminal abuses”

DELVE INTO OUR PAST

<http://coldtype.net/archives.html>

THE MINISTER OF POLICE: MY PART IN HIS DOWNFALL

BY ANTON HARBER

It was the first and last time South Africa's national broadcaster, the SABC, allowed a rambunctious, angry, independent journalist to go head-to-head with a cabinet minister

It was a small incident at a momentous time in South African history, but I had a part to play in the downfall of former apartheid Cabinet Minister Adriaan Vlok. Recently, Vlok pleaded guilty to murder related to the apartheid era, and received a suspended sentence. The charge came after he had asked to wash the feet of a prominent member of the new government in penance for trying to have him killed some 20 years ago.

When he was still Minister of Law and Order in the early 1990s, I confronted him on live television with evidence of a political scandal that came to be called Inkathagate. He was demoted a few days later.

It is worth recounting the story because it was the first and last time our national broadcaster, the SABC, allowed a rambunctious, angry, independent journalist to go head-to-head with a cabinet minister. And it made for great television, if I say so myself.

The window opened by the SABC was the result of a confluence of unpredictable circumstances in 1991. The

Weekly Mail, a small but feisty anti-apartheid paper which I then edited, had published an expose of secret police funding for the Inkatha Freedom Party, a momentous story in that transitional period when the IFP and the ANC were locked in political battle during negotiations.

The SABC, having had a tip-off about the story, asked me to come to the studio on the night before publication and discuss what the paper was going to publish.

You have to remember that the SABC was in the first stage of trying to transform itself from being the major propaganda mouthpiece of apartheid. It was still firmly in the hands of the old guard, but they were trying to show that they had broken away from the ruling party in a last-ditch bid to keep their jobs.

When I got there, I discovered that Vlok's henchman and liar-in-chief, an ex-journo named Craig Kotze, was locked in discussions with the powers that were still in power at the SABC. They emerged minutes before we were

due on air to say that I was not going on because it was unfair to ambush poor Craig.

The weekend newspapers made a meal of it: Police intervene to have journalist thrown off air at last minute!

The SABC people, realising belatedly that this was not the way to show you were independent and open-minded, invited me back on the Sunday night along with Vlok himself.

But this time I had the initiative. I did two things. First, I went past my office and picked up a huge legal file. I could not show Vlok that we only had a few shabby bits of paper with the evidence, so I thought it would be useful to wave around the newspaper's entire legal papers for the year.

Secondly, I took my lawyer, the wily and combative David Dison, and before we went on air (and only just before, I might say, to make it difficult for them to say no) we laid out a set of conditions for my appearance. The piece would go out as live and unedited; I could speak directly to the Minister; it would be in English; and so on . . .

Like all good lawyers, Dison said these conditions were non-negotiable. And then we got ready to negotiate. To our amazement, they agreed to everything without hesitation. Without even asking or telling Vlok, who was waiting in the studio.

I recall the amazing sight of Kotze applying lip ice to Vlok as we walked in. I banged down on the desk the huge file I was carrying and Vlok jumped so high he almost swallowed the lip ice.

I had him.

The interview started off the way all

SABC interviews did then. The presenter asked a tame question and allowed Vlok to go on and on with his side of the story. I let it run for a while, brushed aside the presenter and began to throw questions at him.

Waving a large file

It was an extraordinary moment, as I have said, because this was live television and it was unheard of to confront a minister in this way. I was rude, aggressive, dismissive, contemptuous and waving in the air a large file which he thought was full of evidence that would damn him. (There was some evidence in there, I should add, but certainly not an impressive file-full.)

After about 15 minutes of this, he was on the defensive and in trouble. The producer was signaling time-up to me and I was ignoring him, knowing that he had promised not to cut anything. I went on and on, until the producer was jumping up and down, and finally I said: "Mr Vlok, if we show you have been lying, as we intend to do in our paper next week, will you resign?"

He said he would resign if it was good for the country. It was all over. It was obvious what was good for the country, even to him.

I should add that I have no regrets for my bad behaviour and I certainly have no intention of washing the man's feet. **CT**

Anton Harber is now Caxton Professor of Journalism at the University of the Witwatersrand. He writes a regular column in Business Day and blogs at <http://www.theharbinger.co.za>

I recall the amazing site of Kotze applying lip ice to Vlok as we walked in. I banged down on the desk the huge file I was carrying and Vlok jumped so high he almost swallowed the lip ice

LESSONS OF ISOLATION

BY JOHN PILGER

"We Palestinians are the Jews now and, like the Jews, we will never allow them or the Arabs or you to forget. The youth will guarantee us that, and the youth after them ..."

From a limestone hill rising above Qalandia refugee camp you can see Jerusalem. I watched a lone figure standing there in the rain, his son holding the tail of his long tattered coat. He extended his hand and did not let go. "I am Ahmed Hamzeh, street entertainer," he said in measured English. "Over there, I played many musical instruments; I sang in Arabic, English and Hebrew, and because I was rather poor, my very small son would chew gum while the monkey did its tricks. When we lost our country, we lost respect. One day a rich Kuwaiti stopped his car in front of us. He shouted at my son, "Show me how a Palestinian picks up his food rations!" So I made the monkey appear to scavenge on the ground, in the gutter. And my son scavenged with him. The Kuwaiti threw coins and my son crawled on his knees to pick them up. This was not right; I was an artist, not a beggar . . . I am not even a peasant now."

"How do you feel about all that?" I asked him.

"Do you expect me to feel hatred? What is that to a Palestinian? I never hated the Jews and their Israel . . . yes, I suppose I hate them now, or maybe I pity them for their stupidity. They can't win. Because we Palestinians are the Jews now and, like the Jews, we will never allow them or the Arabs or you to forget. The youth will guarantee us that, and the youth after them . . .".

That was 40 years ago. On my last trip back to the West Bank, I recognised little of Qalandia, now announced by a vast Israeli checkpoint, a zigzag of sandbags, oil drums and breeze blocks, with conga lines of people, waiting, swatting flies with precious papers. Inside the camp, the tents had been replaced by sturdy hovels, although the queues at single taps were as long, I was assured, and the dust still ran to caramel in the rain.

At the United Nations office I asked about Ahmed Hamzeh, the street entertainer. Records were consulted, heads shaken. Someone thought he had been "taken away . . . very ill". No one knew about his son, whose tra-

choma was surely blindness now. Outside, another generation kicked a punctured football in the dust.

And yet, what Nelson Mandela has called “the greatest moral issue of the age” refuses to be buried in the dust. For every BBC voice that strains to equate occupier with occupied, thief with victim, for every swarm of emails from the fanatics of Zion to those who invert the lies and describe the Israeli state’s commitment to the destruction of Palestine, the truth is more powerful now than ever.

Documentation of the violent expulsion of Palestinians in 1948 is voluminous. Re-examination of the historical record has put paid to the fable of heroic David in the Six Day War, when Ahmed Hamzeh and his family were driven from their home. The alleged threat of Arab leaders to “throw the Jews into the sea”, used to justify the 1967 Israeli onslaught and since repeated relentlessly, is highly questionable.

The fraud of leaving Gaza

In 2005, the spectacle of wailing Old Testament zealots leaving Gaza was a fraud. The building of their “settlements” has accelerated on the West Bank, along with the illegal Berlin-style wall dividing farmers from their crops, children from their schools, families from each other. We now know that Israel’s destruction of much of Lebanon last year was pre-planned. As the former CIA analyst Kathleen Christison has written, the recent “civil war” in Gaza was actually a coup against the elected Hamas-led government, engi-

neered by Elliott Abrams, the Zionist who runs US policy on Israel and a convicted felon from the Iran-Contra era.

The ethnic cleansing of Palestine is as much America’s crusade as Israel’s. On 16 August, the Bush administration announced an unprecedented \$30bn military “aid package” for Israel, the world’s fourth biggest military power, an air power greater than Britain, a nuclear power greater than France. No other country on earth enjoys such immunity, allowing it to act without sanction, as Israel. No other country has such a record of lawlessness: not one of the world’s tyrannies comes close. International treaties, such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, ratified by Iran, are ignored by Israel. There is nothing like it in UN history.

But something is changing. Perhaps last summer’s panoramic horror beamed from Lebanon on to the world’s TV screens provided the catalyst. Or perhaps cynicism of Bush and Blair and the incessant use of the inanity, “terror”, together with the day-by-day dissemination of a fabricated insecurity in all our lives, has finally brought the attention of the international community outside the rogue states, Britain and the US, back to one of its principal sources, Israel.

I got a sense of this recently in the United States. A full-page advertisement in the New York Times had the distinct odour of panic. There have been many “friends of Israel” advertisements in the Times, demanding the usual favours, rationalising the usual outrages. This one was different. “Boycott a cure for cancer?” was its main head-

As the former CIA analyst Kathleen Christison has written, the recent “civil war” in Gaza was actually a coup against the elected Hamas-led government, engineered by Elliott Abrams, the Zionist who runs US policy on Israel and a convicted felon from the Iran-Contra era

BOYCOTTING ISRAEL

The swell of a boycott is growing inexorably, as if an important marker has been passed, reminiscent of the boycotts that led to sanctions against apartheid South Africa

line, followed by “Stop drip irrigation in Africa? Prevent scientific co-operation between nations?” Who would want to do such things? “Some British academics want to boycott Israelis,” was the self-serving answer. It referred to the University and College Union’s (UCU) inaugural conference motion in May, calling for discussion within its branches for a boycott of Israeli academic institutions.

As John Chalcraft of the London School of Economics pointed out, “the Israeli academy has long provided intellectual, linguistic, logistical, technical, scientific and human support for an occupation in direct violation of international law [against which] no Israeli academic institution has ever taken a public stand”.

Calling for a boycott

The swell of a boycott is growing inexorably, as if an important marker has been passed, reminiscent of the boycotts that led to sanctions against apartheid South Africa. Both Mandela and Desmond Tutu have drawn this parallel; so has South African cabinet minister Ronnie Kasrils and other illustrious Jewish members of the liberation struggle.

In Britain, an often Jewish-led academic campaign against Israel’s “methodical destruction of [the Palestinian] education system” can be translated by those of us who have reported from the occupied territories into the arbitrary closure of Palestinian universities, the harassment and humiliation of students at checkpoints and the shooting and killing of Palestin-

ian children on their way to school.

These initiatives have been backed by a British group, Independent Jewish Voices, whose 528 signatories include Stephen Fry, Harold Pinter, Mike Leigh and Eric Hobsbawm.

The country’s biggest union, Unison, has called for an “economic, cultural, academic and sporting boycott” and the right of return for Palestinian families expelled in 1948. Remarkably, the Commons’ international development committee has made a similar stand. In April, the membership of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) voted for a boycott only to see it hastily overturned by the national executive council.

In the Republic of Ireland, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions has called for divestment from Israeli companies: a campaign aimed at the European Union, which accounts for two-thirds of Israel’s exports under an EU-Israel Association Agreement.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Jean Ziegler, has said that human rights conditions in the agreement should be invoked and Israel’s trading preferences suspended.

This is unusual, for these were once distant voices. And that such grave discussion of a boycott has “gone global” was unforeseen in official Israel, long comforted by its seemingly untouchable myths and great power sponsorship, and confident that the mere threat of anti-Semitism would ensure silence.

When the British lecturers’ decision was announced, the US Congress passed an absurd resolution describing the UCU as “anti-Semitic”. (Eighty congressmen have gone on junkets to Israel

this summer.) This intimidation has worked in the past. The smearing of American academics has denied them promotion, even tenure.

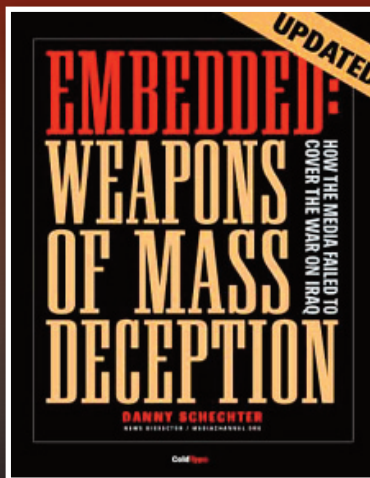
The late Edward Said kept an emergency button in his New York apartment connected to the local police station; his offices at Columbia University were once burned down. Following my 2002 film, *Palestine is Still the Issue*, I received death threats and slanderous abuse, most of it coming from the US where the film was never shown. When the BBC's Independent Panel recently examined the corporation's coverage of the Middle East, it was inundated with emails, "many from abroad, mostly from North America", said its report. Some individuals "sent multiple missives, some were duplicates and there was clear evidence of pressure group mobilisation". The panel's conclusion was that BBC reporting of the Palestinian struggle was not "full and fair" and "in important respects, presents an incomplete and in that sense misleading

picture". This was neutralised in BBC press releases.

The courageous Israeli historian, Ilan Pappé, believes a single democratic state, to which the Palestinian refugees are given the right of return, is the only feasible and just solution, and that a sanctions and boycott campaign is critical in achieving this. Would the Israeli population be moved by a worldwide boycott? Although they would rarely admit it, South Africa's whites were moved enough to support an historic change. A boycott of Israeli institutions, goods and services, says Pappé, "will not change the [Israeli] position in a day, but it will send a clear message that [the premises of Zionism] are racist and unacceptable in the 21st century ... They would have to choose." And so would the rest of us. **CT**

John Pilger's latest book, Freedom Next Time, has just been published in paperback. This article was first published in the New Statesman

Following my 2002 film, *Palestine is Still the Issue*, I received death threats and slanderous abuse, most of it coming from the US where the film was never shown



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THE LANGUAGE OF FORCE

BY URI AVNERY

In 2005, Sharon carried out the "unilateral separation". It seemed to many Israelis that they could manage without an agreement with the Palestinians. The readiness for peace dropped below the half mark

Soon after coming to power, Ariel Sharon started to commission public opinion polls. He kept the results to himself. In August, a reporter of Israel's TV Channel 10 succeeded in obtaining some of them.

Among other things, Sharon wanted to know what the public thought about peace. He did not dream of starting on this road himself, but he felt it important to be informed about the trends.

In these polls, the public was presented with a question that came close to the final Clinton Proposal and the Geneva Initiative: Are you for a peace that would include a Palestinian state, withdrawal from almost all occupied territories, giving up the Arab neighborhoods of East Jerusalem and dismantling most settlements?

The results were very instructive. In 2002, 73% supported this solution. In the next two years, support declined, but it was still accepted by the majority. In 2005 the percentage of supporters slipped under the 50% line.

What had changed in these years?

The TV presenter painted in the con-

text: in 2002 the second intifada had reached its climax. There were frequent attacks in Israeli cities, people were being killed. The majority in Israel preferred to pay the price of peace than to suffer the bloodshed.

Later, the intifada declined, together with the Israeli public's readiness for compromise. In 2005, Sharon carried out the "unilateral separation". It seemed to many Israelis that they could manage without an agreement with the Palestinians. The readiness for peace dropped below the half mark.

A popular Israeli saying has it that "The Arabs understand only the language of force." This poll may confirm what many Palestinians think: that it is the Israelis themselves who don't understand any other language.

Both versions are true, of course.

I have often said that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a clash between an irresistible force and an immovable object. A clash is a matter of force.

The present lamentable state of the Palestinians, with half of them living under occupation and the other half as

refugees, is a direct result of the Palestinian defeat in the 1948 war. The first part of that war, from December 1947 to May 1948, was a clash between the Palestinian people and the Hebrew community (the “yishuv”). It resulted in a resounding defeat for the Palestinians. (When the armies of the neighboring Arab states then entered the fray, the Palestinians became irrelevant to the struggle.)

That was a military defeat, of course, but its roots extended far beyond the narrow military field. It followed from the lack of cohesion of Palestinian society at the time, its failure to set up a functioning leadership and a unified military command, to mobilize and concentrate its forces. Every region fought alone, without coordination with the next one. Abd-al-Kader Husseini in the Jerusalem area fought independently of Fawzy al-Kaukji in the North. The yishuv, in contradistinction, was unified and strictly organized, and therefore won – in spite of the fact that in numbers it was hardly equal to half the Palestinian population.

Mocked by Hamas

Hamas leaders mock Mahmoud Abbas and his supporters in Ramallah for expecting an Israeli withdrawal without armed struggle. They point out that even the Oslo agreement (to which they object) was achieved only after six years of the first intifada, which convinced Yitzhak Rabin that no military solution was possible. They aver that Ehud Barak left South Lebanon in 2000 only after the resounding success of the Shiite guerillas

Their conclusion: even a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders will not come into being unless the “Palestinian resistance” inflicts on the Israelis sufficient casualties and damage to convince them that it is in their interest to withdraw from the occupied territories.

The Israelis, they say, will not give up one square inch without being compelled to do so. Sharon’s poll may well reinforce that belief.

The people around Abbas respond by mocking Hamas for believing that they can win against Israel by force of arms. They point to the immense superiority of Israeli forces. According to them, all the violent actions of the Palestinians have only provided Israel with a pretext to reinforce the occupation, steal more land and increase the misery of the occupied population.

And indeed, the personal situation of the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is now incomparably worse than it was on the eve of the first intifada, when they could reach any place in the country, work in all Israeli towns, bathe on the Tel-Aviv sea-shore and fly from Ben-Gurion airport.

Both views contain much truth. Yasser Arafat understood this. That’s why he did everything to keep the Palestinians united at any cost, encourage the Israeli peace forces and gather international support, without giving up the deterrence of the “armed struggle”. He succeeded in this up to a point, and as a result was removed.

Palestinians who worry about the fate of their people are asking themselves where all this is leading to.

Their situation has reached its low-

Hamas leaders mock Mahmoud Abbas and his supporters in Ramallah for expecting an Israeli withdrawal without armed struggle

Haganah members considered the Irgunists as fascists, the Irgun fighters considered the Haganah men as collaborators with the British occupation authorities.

est point in over 20 years. They are politically almost isolated throughout the world. Israeli public opinion has become indifferent and united around the mendacious mantra: “We have no partner”. In the peace camp, many are dispirited. And, most importantly, the Palestinian national movement has split into two factions, and it seems that the hatred between them is growing from day to day.

Splits are not uncommon in national liberation movements. Actually, there has hardly been one liberation movement that did not undergo such a crisis. But a situation where two warring factions control two different territories, both under foreign occupation, is almost unknown.

It may be interesting to compare this situation with that of our own underground organizations before the foundation of the State of Israel. There is some similarity (not ideological, of course): Fatah is a little bit like the large Haganah organization that was controlled by the official Zionist leadership; Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which reject the PLO leadership, are like the Irgun and Stern group. Fatah’s al-Aqsa Battalions can be compared to the Palmach, the regular fighting force of the Haganah.

Between these Hebrew organizations, a burning hatred developed. Haganah members considered the Irgunists as fascists, the Irgun fighters considered the Haganah men as collaborators with the British occupation authorities. The national leadership called the Irgun and Stern group “secessionists”, the official Irgun designation

for the Haganah was “shits”.

Matters reached a climax in the “season” (hunting season), when the Haganah abducted Irgun members and turned them over to the British police, who interrogated them under torture and then deported them to internment camps in Africa. But there was also a short period when all three organizations coordinated their actions under the umbrella of the “Hebrew Rebellion Movement”.

Ben-Gurion's sacred cannon

Israeli politicians like to recall the Altalena incident, when Ben-Gurion gave the order to shell an Irgun ship loaded with arms off the shore of Tel-Aviv. (Menachem Begin, who had come on deck, was narrowly saved when his men shoved him into the water). Why doesn’t Abbas dare to do the same to Hamas? This question ignores a salient point: Ben-Gurion used the “sacred cannon” (as he called it) only after the State of Israel had already come into being. That makes all the difference.

The bitter hatred between the Haganah and the Irgun, and to some extent also between the Irgun and the Stern group, simmered down only gradually, during the first years of the State of Israel. Nowadays streets in Tel-Aviv are named after the commanders of all three organizations.

More importantly: historians now tend to view the struggle of all three as a single campaign, as if it had been coordinated. The “terrorist” actions of the Irgun and the Stern group complemented the illegal immigration campaign of the Haganah. The growing

popularity of the Irgun and the Stern Group convinced the British that they should reach a modus vivendi with the official Zionist leadership, lest the “extremists” take over the entire Hebrew community.

This analogy has, of course, its limitations. Ben-Gurion was a strong and authoritative leader, like Arafat, while the position of Abbas is much weaker. Menachem Begin resolved to prevent a fratricidal war at any cost, even when his men were abducted and turned over to the British. I don't believe the Hamas leaders would react like this in a similar situation. Unlike the Irgun and its supporting political party, Hamas has won the majority in democratic elections.

But it is possible that in the future, after the state of Palestine comes into being, historians will say that Fatah, Hamas and the Islamic Jihad really complemented each other. President Bush is pressuring Ehud Olmert into making concessions to Mahmoud Abbas, in order to prevent the complete takeover of the West Bank by Hamas. Perhaps it is precisely the turning of Gaza into Hamastan that will enable Abbas to utilize his weakness to achieve things that he could not get any other way.

Anyway, in order to accommodate President Bush's request, Olmert is now ready to cooperate with Abbas in writing something like a “framework agreement” that will lay down the principles of an agreement that may be achieved later on – but without details or a timetable.

According to the leaks, the agree-

ment will repeat more or less Ehud Barak's proposals at Camp David, including some of the bizarre ones, such as Israeli sovereignty “beneath” the Temple Mount. The Palestinian state will have “temporary” borders, with the “permanent” borders to be fixed some time in the future.

Olmert demands that the Separation Wall will serve as the “temporary” border. This, by the way, confirms what we have been saying from the very first moment, and what was violently denied even before the Supreme Court: that the path of the Wall does not reflect security considerations, but was designed to annex 8% of the West Bank to Israel. In this area, the “settlement blocs” were set up, those that President Bush has generously promised to attach to Israel.

The whole exercise is very dangerous for the Palestinians. True, if such a document is indeed completed, it will officially fix the minimum that the Israeli government is ready to give, but it can be interpreted as setting down the maximum that the Palestinians will be allowed to demand. In political life, not much is more permanent than the “temporary”.

It is also dangerous for the Israelis. It may encourage the illusion that such a “solution” would put an end to the conflict. In fact, no Palestinian will see this as a real solution, and the conflict will go on.

How will public opinion treat this plan? Olmert is certainly commissioning polls to find out. We don't know the results. Like Sharon, he keeps his polls secret.

CT

But it is possible that in the future, after the state of Palestine comes into being, historians will say that Fatah, Hamas and the Islamic Jihad really complemented each other

Uri Avnery is an Irgun veteran turned Israeli peace activist

INDIA PAYS PRICE FOR YOUR DRUGS

BY STAN COX

Even after days in a water-treatment plant, effluents discharged into streams and rivers in one Indian region show concentrations of antibiotics and other drugs at 100 to 30,000 times the levels considered safe

Hazardous imports have been the top story on the evening news for weeks now. But the poor quality of some foreign-made products is only half the story. Before we ever see those products, manufacturing plants in the countries of origin can pose an even greater danger to human and ecological health.

Take India, which is now our biggest foreign source of pharmaceuticals. A just-published study by Sweden's Goteborg University shows that, whatever the quality of the drugs being shipped out of India, they are leaving behind a toxic mess. Even after days in a water-treatment plant, effluents discharged into streams and rivers in one Indian region show concentrations of antibiotics and other drugs at 100 to 30,000 times the levels considered safe.

In a 2005 story, I described the devastation of water, land and human health that I saw in the area around Patancheru, India – damage that local villagers, doctors and environmentalists attribute to pollution from the 90 or more bulk-drug factories in the vicinity.

State law says that the factories must haul their toxic wastes to an effluent treatment plant run by Patancheru Enviro Tech, Ltd. (PETL) on a tributary of the Nakkavagu rivulet. The treatment plant's outflow into the Nakkavagu (which waters a valley dotted with 14 villages) has often been found to carry industrial pollutants at many times the statutory limits.

Now the Swedish study, recently published online by the Journal of Hazardous Materials has found record-breaking concentrations of 11 drugs – antibiotics and treatments for high blood pressure, ulcers and allergies – in wastes flowing from the PETL plant.

Noting that “to the best of our knowledge, the concentrations of these 11 drugs were all above the previously highest values [ever] reported in any sewage effluent,” the authors singled out the antibiotic Ciprofloxacin (Cipro), which flows out of the plant at the rate of 100 pounds of active ingredient per day. That, say the authors, “is equivalent to the total amount consumed in Sweden (population 9 million) over an

average five-day period”!

Concentrations of five other antibiotics were found at levels that are toxic to plants, blue-green algae and a range of bacteria. And before it leaves the facility, the stew of drugs is mixed with human sewage, creating perfect conditions for breeding dangerous, antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

In June, a front-page story by Washington Post reporter Marc Kaufman revealed that there are virtually no controls on the quality of drugs being imported from India. He wrote that India and China together supply as much as 20 percent of the U.S. market for generic and over-the-counter drugs and 40 percent of all bulk drugs used here, and that the two nations’ share may rise to 80 percent by 2022. India’s share of the U.S. market in 2006 was \$800 million, exceeding China’s.

32 inspections in India

According to Kaufmann, the FDA conducted 1,222 quality-assurance inspections of domestic drug-manufacturing plants in 2006. That same year, the agency carried out only 32 inspections of Indian drug plants, mostly to check on new import applications, not for quality control by existing suppliers. And “on-the-ground inspections of Indian and Chinese plants remain rare and relatively brief and are always scheduled in advance, unlike the surprise visits that FDA inspectors pay to domestic manufacturers.” There is no indication that FDA inspectors pay any attention to environmental impacts of the plants.

The Swedish researchers calculated

that if the quantities of pharmaceuticals they detected being released from the Patancheru treatment facility in a single 24-hour period could be collected and sold in Sweden, they would fetch an amount approaching \$200,000, even in generic form. But, they wrote, because the production costs are so much lower than the eventual retail price, it is cheaper for companies to waste the drugs than to invest in pollution control.

When I returned to India earlier this year and checked on the current state of pollution in Patancheru, I was told that burgeoning export-drug production is putting more pressure than ever on the system. Meteorologist Dr. S. Jeevananda Reddy – a former chief technical advisor to the United Nations and now a campaigner for tougher policies on pollution in the Patancheru area – told me that the sheer quantity of drugs that plants are producing means that they pump out far more waste water than the treatment plant can handle.

The state permits each company to dispose of only a certain amount of water per day, and if its chemical concentration is too high, the company is fined.

But, said Dr. Reddy, “The fines are peanuts to them.” And, of course, the effluent is not even tested for presence of pharmaceuticals. The bulk-drug plants are often producing at two, three, sometimes ten times the permitted capacity.

Reddy has watched as tanker trucks full of effluent from drug factories are turned away by the water treatment plant because their company’s daily

The effluent is not even tested for presence of pharmaceuticals. The bulk-drug plants are often producing at two, three, sometimes ten times the permitted capacity

TOXIC WASTE

it's our own insatiable demand for those cheap products that pushes manufacturers into using slapdash practices

quota has been exceeded. He says that rather than returning to the factory, the trucks will often head out into the countryside to dump their load. Those wastes would contain, if anything, higher concentrations of pharmaceuticals than seen in the Swedish study.

So when we're raising the alarm over hazardous toys, food and drugs imported from China, India or other countries, it's important to remember that it's our own insatiable demand for those

cheap products that pushes manufacturers into using slapdash practices – and that it's people living and working downstream or downwind from the foreign factories who could well be paying the highest price of all.

*Stan Cox is a plant breeder and writer in Salina, Kansas. His book **Sick Planet: Corporate Food and Medicine** will be published by Pluto Press in Spring 2008*

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HOW DID WE GET INTO THIS MESS?

BY GEORGE MONBIOT

For the first time, the United Kingdom's consumer debt now exceeds our gross national product: a new report shows that we owe £1.35 trillion⁽¹⁾. Inspectors in the United States have discovered that 77,000 road bridges are in the same perilous state as the one which collapsed into the Mississippi⁽²⁾. Two years after Hurricane Katrina struck, 120,000 people from New Orleans are still living in trailer homes and temporary lodgings⁽³⁾.

As runaway climate change approaches, governments refuse to take the necessary action. Booming inequality threatens to create the most divided societies the world has seen since before the first world war. Now a financial crisis caused by unregulated lending could turf hundreds of thousands out of their homes and trigger a cascade of economic troubles.

These problems appear unrelated, but they all have something in common. They arise in large part from a meeting that took place 60 years ago in a Swiss spa resort. It laid the foundations for a philosophy of government that is responsible for many, perhaps most, of our contemporary crises.

When the Mont Pelerin Society first met, in 1947, its political project did not

have a name. But it knew where it was going. The society's founder, Friedrich von Hayek, remarked that the battle for ideas would take a least a generation to win, but he knew that his intellectual army would attract powerful backers. Its philosophy, which later came to be known as neoliberalism, accorded with the interests of the ultra-rich, so the ultra-rich would promote it.

Neoliberalism claims that we are best served by maximum market freedom and minimum intervention by the state. The role of government should be confined to creating and defending markets, protecting private property and defending the realm. All other functions are better discharged by private enterprise, which will be prompted by the profit motive to supply essential services. By this means, enterprise is liberated, rational decisions are made and citizens are freed from the dehumanising hand of the state.

This, at any rate, is the theory. But as David Harvey proposes in his book, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, wherever the neoliberal programme has been implemented, it has caused a massive shift of wealth not just to the top one per cent, but to the top tenth of the top one per cent⁽⁴⁾. In the United States, for ex-

Wherever the neoliberal programme has been implemented, it has caused a massive shift of wealth not just to the top one per cent, but to the top tenth of the top one per cent

NEOLIBERAL WOES 1

Their purpose was to develop the ideas and the language which would mask the real intent of the programme – the restoration of the power of the elite - and package it as a proposal for the betterment of humankind

ample, the upper 0.1% has already regained the position it held at the beginning of the 1920s⁽⁵⁾. The conditions that neoliberalism demands in order to free human beings from the slavery of state – minimal taxes, the dismantling of public services and social security, deregulation, the breaking of the unions – just happen to be the conditions required to make the elite even richer, while leaving everyone else to sink or swim.

So the question is this. Given that the crises I have listed are predictable effects of the dismantling of public services and the deregulation of business and financial markets, given that it damages the interests of nearly everyone, how has neoliberalism come to dominate public life?

We're all neoliberals now

Richard Nixon was once forced to concede that “we are all Keynesians now”: even the Republicans supported the interventionist doctrines of John Maynard Keynes. But we are all neoliberals now. Mrs Thatcher kept telling us that “there is no alternative”, and by implementing her programmes, Clinton, Blair, Brown and the other leaders of what were once progressive parties appear to prove her right.

The first great advantage the neoliberals possessed was an unceasing fountain of money. American oligarchs and their foundations – Coors, Olin, Scaife, Pew and others – have poured hundreds of millions into setting up think-tanks, founding business schools and transforming university economics departments into bastions of almost total-

itarian neoliberal thinking.

The Heritage Foundation, the Hoover Institute, the American Enterprise Institute and many others in the US, the Institute of Economic Affairs, the Centre for Policy Studies and the Adam Smith Institute in the UK were all established to promote this project. Their purpose was to develop the ideas and the language which would mask the real intent of the programme – the restoration of the power of the elite - and package it as a proposal for the betterment of humankind.

Their project was assisted by ideas which arose in a very different quarter. The revolutionary movements of 1968 also sought greater individual liberties, and many of the *soixante-huitards* saw the state as their oppressor. As Harvey shows, the neoliberals coopted their language and ideas. Some of the anarchists I know still voice notions almost identical to those of the neoliberals: the intent is different, but the consequences very similar.

Hayek's disciples were also able to make use of economic crises. One of their first experiments took place in New York City, which was hit by budgetary disaster in 1975. Its bankers demanded that the city follow their prescriptions: massive cuts in public services, the smashing of the unions, public subsidies for business⁽⁶⁾. In the United Kingdom, stagflation, strikes and budgetary breakdown allowed Margaret Thatcher, whose ideas were framed by her neoliberal adviser Keith Joseph, to come to the rescue. Her programme worked, but created a new set of crises.

If these opportunities were insufficient, the neoliberals and their backers would use bribery or force. In the US the Democrats were neutered by new laws on campaign finance. To compete successfully with the Republicans, they would have to give big business what it wanted.

Disagree and get shot

The first neoliberal programme of all was implemented in Chile following Pinochet's coup, with the backing of the US government and economists taught by Milton Friedman, one of the founding members of the Mont Pelerin Society.

Drumming up support for the project was a simple matter: if you disagreed, you got shot. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank used their power over developing nations to demand the same policies.

But the most powerful promoter of this programme was the media. Most of it is owned by multi-millionaires who use it to project the ideas that support their interests. Those which threaten their plans are either ignored or ridiculed. It is through the newspapers and television channels that the socially destructive ideas of a small group of extremists have come to look like common sense. The corporations' tame thinkers sell the project by reframing our political language (for an account of how this happens, see George Lakoff's book, *Don't Think of an Elephant!*⁽⁷⁾).

Nowadays I hear even my progressive friends using terms like wealth creators, tax relief, big government, consumer democracy, red tape, com-

pensation culture, job seekers and benefit cheats. These terms, all deliberately invented or promoted by neoliberals, have become so commonplace that they now seem almost neutral.

Neoliberalism, if unchecked, will catalyse crisis after crisis, all of which can be solved only by the means it forbids: greater intervention on the part of the state.

In confronting it, we must recognise that we will never be able to mobilise the resources its exponents have been given. But as the disasters they have caused develop, the public will need ever less persuading that it has been misled. **CT**

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*George Monbiot's latest book is **Heat: How To Stop The Planet From Burning**. This column originally appeared in London's Guardian newspaper.*

It is through the newspapers and television channels that the socially destructive ideas of a small group of extremists have come to look like common sense

THE FAT CATS' PROTECTION LEAGUE

BY GEORGE MONBIOT

In Britain the split loyalties of the major political parties has created a hybrid system of public provision. If it left public services intact, the party in power would be roasted by the corporate media, but if it attempted full-scale privatisation, it would be booted out of office

After the previous column (pages 37-39) was published, several people wrote to point out that the neoliberal project – which demands a minimal state and maximum corporate freedom – actually relies on constant government support. They are of course quite right. The current financial crisis, caused by a failure to regulate financial services properly, is being postponed by government bail-outs. The US Federal Reserve has reduced its lending rate to the commercial banks, while the Bundesbank organised a E3.5bn rescue of the lending company IKB. This happens whenever the banks suffer the consequences of the freedom they demand. But over the past week an even starker example has emerged.

In Britain the split loyalties of the major political parties has created a hybrid system of public provision. If it left public services intact, the party in power would be roasted by the corporate media, but if it attempted full-scale privatisation, it would be booted out of office. So the last Conservative govern-

ment devised a plan which would keep both sides if not exactly happy then at least totally bewildered. They called it the private finance initiative, or PFI. Corporations would build and run our schools, hospitals, roads and prisons and rent them to the state. This, the Tories maintained, would enable costs to be cut, while ensuring that public services remained free of charge.

At first Labour opposed this scheme. Alastair Darling warned in opposition that “apparent savings now could be countered by the formidable commitment on revenue expenditure in years to come”⁽¹⁾. But as the 1997 election approached, Labour sought to prove that it was more sympathetic to business than the Tories. Two months after the party took office, the health secretary, Alan Milburn, announced that “when there is a limited amount of public-sector capital available, as there is, it’s PFI or bust”⁽²⁾. From then on, the only money the NHS could rely on for capital projects belonged to the private sector.

The problem was that much of what

the NHS wanted to do was not attractive to private financiers. In Coventry, for example, it had been planning to refurbish its two hospitals at a cost of £30m⁽³⁾. But its analysts realised that business would not be interested. The scheme was too small and there was no scope for the financial innovation which could produce serious profits. As a confidential report by the local health authority showed in 1998, the health service re-designed its scheme to make it more attractive to private capital⁽⁴⁾. Instead of refurbishing the two existing hospitals, it would ask private business to knock them down and build a new one – the University Hospital. This would cost not £30m but £174m. The health experts who wrote the confidential report predicted that in order to find this money, the hospital trust would have to cut both beds and services. They have just been proved right.

Did I say £174m? I beg your pardon. By January 2002, the price had risen to £290m⁽⁵⁾. A month later it reached £311m. By the end of that year it had grown to £330m⁽⁶⁾. In 2003 it was estimated at £370m. In March 2007, the Birmingham Post reported that the final cost was £410m⁽⁷⁾. This year the hospital trust must find £56m, in the form of repayments and service fees, to hand to the private consortium⁽⁸⁾. The annual cost will rise in line with the retail price index for 30 years.

It is now pretty obvious that this fee is unpayable, if the hospital is to maintain a proper standard of care. Over the past few days the hospital trust has announced a £30m hole in its budget⁽⁹⁾. Around £10m of the necessary cuts

could be found by making staff redundant: it will lose perhaps 200 people, possibly 375. It will also rely on “revenue generating activities”. These include charging people £3 for dropping their sick relatives outside the hospital, and £10 for parking there, while cancelling the free parking scheme for disabled people. As the new hospital (against the wishes of 160,000 people who signed the Socialist Party’s petition to have it built in the city centre) is on the edge of the city, which means that it is hard to reach without a car, this is an effective way of raising money. But it casts doubt on the government’s claim that the NHS remains free at the point of use.

Plugging the gap

The trust’s press officer told me that this cost-cutting is a unique event: “we have always balanced our books up to this year”⁽¹⁰⁾. But in 2005 – the year in which the PFI payments began – a leaked memo revealed that the trust was anticipating a deficit of £13m by the end of the financial year and “drastic measures” were required to plug the gap⁽¹¹⁾. These included the closure of one ward, the removal of eight beds from another, limiting the opening hours of the Surgical Assessment Unit and the “rationalisation of certain posts”: which meant, eventually, cutting 116 jobs⁽¹²⁾.

In 2006 the local paper reported a shortfall of £29m⁽¹³⁾. This was met partly by freezing the recruitment of district nurses. In January this year, the hospital announced that it was closing another ward, just six months after it opened⁽¹⁴⁾. Yet another ward – treating

It is now pretty obvious that this fee is unpayable, if the hospital is to maintain a proper standard of care. Over the past few days the hospital trust has announced a £30m hole in its budget

In September 1997 the government declared that these payments would be legally guaranteed: beds, doctors, nurses and managers could be sacrificed, but not the annual donation to the Fat Cats' Protection League

people with acute conditions such as pneumonia and strokes – was closed in June⁽¹⁵⁾. The impact of these cuts is already being felt: three months ago the new hospital found itself in the bottom ten in the national league table for waiting times⁽¹⁶⁾. Where will the money come from over the rest of the 30-year contract?

There is one set of costs the hospital cannot cut: the money it must pay every year to the private financiers. In September 1997 the government declared that these payments would be legally guaranteed: beds, doctors, nurses and managers could be sacrificed, but not the annual donation to the Fat Cats' Protection League⁽¹⁷⁾. The great free market experiment looks more like a corporate welfare scheme.

The government justifies all this by claiming that privately financed schemes are cheaper than comparable public schemes. Allyson Pollock showed on these pages in April that the data required to support this claim does not exist, or if it does the government refuses to release it⁽¹⁸⁾.

Government deception

But as the Coventry scheme shows, there's an even bigger deception at work. The government compares the cost of building the hospital under PFI with the imagined cost of building it with public money. But it would not have been built with public money. If public funds had been available, the two existing hospitals would have been refurbished, at around one 13th of the cost.

It was Gordon Brown who insisted

that PFI became the principal means of funding capital projects in the United Kingdom. By deferring costs into the future, as Darling warned, he was able to sustain his reputation as an iron chancellor, while suppressing the constant baying of the corporate press. The BBC predicted that in a key speech early in September, Brown would announce a reduction in the corporations' involvement in the public sector⁽¹⁹⁾. It was about the only subject he did not discuss⁽²⁰⁾. For all his talk of "listening and engaging", corporate power still seems to be forbidden territory. **CT**

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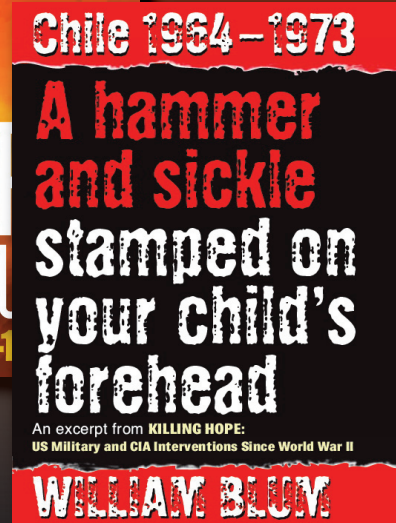
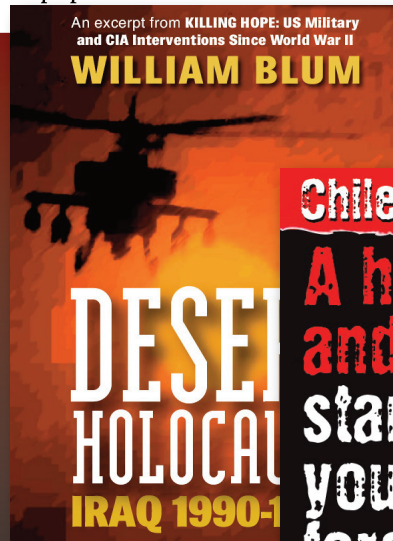
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For all his talk of "listening and engaging", corporate power still seems to be forbidden territory

*George Monbiot's latest book is **Heat: How To Stop The Planet From Burning**. This column originally appeared in London's Guardian newspaper.*

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AN AMERICAN NIGHTMARE

BY GREG PALAST

In effect, US Attorney Iglesias was under pressure from the boss to charge citizens with crimes they didn't commit. Saddam did that. Stalin did that. But Iglesias would NOT do that – even at the behest of the Attorney General

Last month, David Iglesias and I were looking out at the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island where his dad had entered the US from Panama decades ago. It was a hard moment for the military lawyer who, immediately after Attorney General Alberto Gonzales fired Iglesias as US Attorney for New Mexico, returned to active military duty as a Naval Reserve JAG.

Captain Iglesias, cool and circumspect, added something I didn't expect:

"They misjudged my character, I mean they really thought I was just going to roll over and give them what they wanted and when I didn't, that I'd go away quietly but I just couldn't do that. You know US Attorneys and the Justice Department have a history of not taking into consideration partisan politics. That should not be a factor. And what they tried to do is just wrong and illegal and unethical."

When a federal prosecutor says something is illegal, it's not just small talk. And the illegality wasn't small. It's called, "obstruction of justice," and it's

a felony crime.

Specifically, Attorney General Gonzales, Iglesias told me, wanted him to bring what the prosecutor called "bogus voter fraud" cases. In effect, US Attorney Iglesias was under pressure from the boss to charge citizens with crimes they didn't commit. Saddam did that. Stalin did that. But Iglesias would NOT do that – even at the behest of the Attorney General. Today, Captain Iglesias, reached by phone, told me, "I'm not going to file any bogus prosecutions."

But it wasn't just Gonzales whose acts were "unethical, wrong and illegal."

It was Gonzales' boss.

Iglesias says, "The evidence shows right now that [Republican Senator Pete] Domenici complained directly to President Bush. And that Bush then called Alberto Gonzales, the Attorney General, and complained about my alleged lack of vigorous enforcement of voter fraud laws."

In other words, it went to the top. The Decider had decided to punish a prosecutor who wouldn't prosecute in-

nocents. I've heard Democrats dance with glee that they now have the scalp of Alberto Gonzales. They nailed the puppet. But what about the puppeteer?

The question that remains is the same that Watergate prosecutors asked of Richard Nixon, "What did the President know and when did he know it?"

Or, to update it for Dubya, "What did the President know and how many times did Karl Rove have to explain it to him?"

During the Watergate hearings, Nixon tried to obstruct the investigation into his obstruction of justice by offering up the heads of his Attorney General and other officials. Then, Congress refused to swallow the Nixon bait. The only resignation that counted was the one by the capo di capi of the criminal-political cabal: Nixon's. The President's. But in this case, even the exit of the Decider-in-Chief would not be the end of it. Because this isn't about finagling with the power of prosecutors, it's about the 2008 election.

"This voter fraud thing is the bogey man," says Iglesias.

Chill on turnout

In New Mexico, the 2004 announcement of Iglesias' pending prosecution of voters (which he ultimately refused to do) put the chill on the turnout of Hispanic citizens already harassed by officialdom. The bogus "vote fraud" hysteria helped sell New Mexico's legislature on the Republican plan to require citizenship IDs to vote – all to stop "fraudulent" voters that simply don't exist.

The voter witch-hunt worked. "Wrong" or "insufficient" ID was used to knock out the civil rights of over a

quarter million voters in 2004. In New Mexico, that was enough to swing the state George Bush by a mere 5,900 votes.

So what is most frightening is not the resignation of Alberto Gonzales, the Pinocchio of prosecutorial misconduct, but the resignation of Karl Rove. Because New Mexico 2004 was just the testing ground for the roll-out of the "ID" attack planned for 2008.

And Rove who three decades ago cut his political fangs as chief of the Nixon Youth*, is ready to roll. To say Rove left his White House job under a cloud is nonsense. He just went into free-agent status, an electoral hitman ready to jump on the next GOP nominee's black-ops squad. The fact that Rove's venomous assistant, Tim Griffin, was set up to work for the campaign of Fred Thompson, is a sign that the Lord Voldemort of vote suppression is preparing to practice his Dark Arts in '08.

It was Rove who convinced Bush to fire upright prosecutors and replace them with Rove-bots ready to strike out at fraudulent (i.e. Democratic) voters.

Iglesias, however, remains the optimist. "I'm hopeful that I'll get back to the American dream. And get out of the American nightmare."

Dreams. Nightmares. I have a better idea for America: Wake up. **CT**

*Greg Palast is the author of **Armed Madhouse: From Baghdad to New Orleans - Sordid Secrets and Strange Tales of a White House Gone Wild***

* See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9HPnW4EBed4>

"Wrong" or "insufficient" ID was used to knock out the civil rights of over a quarter million voters in 2004. In New Mexico, that was enough to swing the state George Bush by a mere 5,900 votes

PAINFUL EXTRACTION

BY MARK CURTIS

The Philippines mining industry was recently described by the former international development secretary Clare Short as the most "systematically destructive" she has ever seen

It all has a depressingly familiar ring. The fingerprints of a British mining company are found to be all over abuses around the world. And again, there are high-level connections with the government. Enervated readers might be tempted to follow the lead of Gordon Brown, who is allowing it all to happen.

Anglo American, the world's second-largest mining company, is about to announce its financial figures for 2007, on the back of record profits in 2006 of more than \$6bn.

Last year I visited Obuasi in Ghana, the site of Africa's largest gold mine, run by AngloGold Ashanti (AGA), an Anglo American subsidiary. The mine had polluted local water systems, while many people told me how they live in fear of joint company/police "security" patrols.

In the past year, the appalling poverty of villagers literally living on top of gold has not improved one jot.

Ghana is just the tip of the slag heap. A report I authored for War on Want – <http://waronwant.org> – notes that in

Colombia's Sur de Bolivar region, where AGA is exploring for new deposits, the army is engaged in a campaign of murder of trade union and community leaders. Although there is no evidence of AGA complicity, it is the beneficiary of this onslaught, designed to force people off their land to make way for mining.

Exploration by Anglo American is also being bitterly opposed in the Cordillera region of the Philippines, an area rich in gold and copper ore, where the local population fears a loss of farmland, forest and rivers.

Political killings of anti-mining activists have occurred in the region, and are among the 700 extrajudicial killings reported in the country since 2001. The Philippines mining industry was recently described by the former international development secretary Clare Short as the most "systematically destructive" she has ever seen.

Anglo American's chairman, Sir Mark Moody-Stuart, has been courted by the government as a chief exponent of "corporate social responsibility". He

has signed the company up to Brown's initiative supposedly designed to rein-vigorate the world's commitment to anti-poverty targets. While championing CSR as a voluntary mechanism for companies to improve their social impact, Moody-Stuart has been a staunch opponent of further mandatory regulation on companies.

In this he finds a soulmate in Brown, who in 10 years in government has never seriously criticised, let alone sought to regulate, British companies overseas. Virtually every speech he has given since 1997 has pledged his commitment to minimal company regulation while praising businesses as "partners" in overseas development.

The reality is that a more open investment climate in poor countries can sometimes be good and sometimes bad. In Obuasi, Sur de Bolivar and Cordillera, open investment translates as repression and exploitation. Yet Brown is a liberalisation evangelist who has failed to discriminate between good

investment and bad. Britain has supported the World Bank-led rewriting of dozens of countries' mining laws, resulting in foreign firms paying much lower corporation tax and royalties to host governments. In Ghana the government gets a minuscule 5% of the value of all minerals exported. No wonder Anglo American was able to make \$6bn profits last year.

While the company is benefiting from high commodity prices, driven by China's demand for minerals, I can't but think of the people of Dokyiwa village near Obuasi, who can no longer use their local stream and whose water pumps regularly fail. This is just their everyday banality of life. It will continue until those feted as the "champions of Africa" stop the unfair extraction of its wealth. **CT**

*Mark Curtis is the author of **Unpeople: Britain's Secret Human Rights Abuses**. He blogs at <http://www.markcurtis.info>*

He finds a soulmate in Brown, who in 10 years in government has never seriously criticised, let alone sought to regulate, British companies overseas

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SAYING 'NO' TO REAGANOMICS

BY MICHAEL I. NIMAN

I recalled how the "grandfatherly" Reagan obscenely celebrated in the American media was no grandfather to children in Nicaragua, where more than 50,000 people were killed in his terrorist "Contra War"

I remember the "Reagan Revolution." Though it certainly didn't seem like any sort of revolution at the time. It was more like some sick joke – or a bad dream that wouldn't end. I remember the wars that also wouldn't end.

And corruption on an unprecedented mass scale as various industries and their representatives were put in charge of policing and regulating themselves. I remember the tax cuts for the rich and the cuts in education and health funding for the rest of us. I remember "trickle down" economics – with the rich pissing on the poor while the middle class was satiated with credit cards.

When Reagan died in 2004 I wrote a eulogy entitled "Reagan to Rot in Hell." I recalled how the "grandfatherly" Reagan obscenely celebrated in the American media was no grandfather to children in Nicaragua, where more than 50,000 people were killed in his terrorist "Contra War" against that nation's democratically elected government. And he was no grandfather to Mayan

children in Guatemala, where more than 400 villages were wiped out and as many as 200,000 people killed in a Reagan-supported soft war. Then there were El Salvador and Apartheid South Africa – murderous regimes supported by the Gipper.

I also recalled his treason, arming Iran's fundamentalist regime and funding, training and arming Osama bin Laden's incubating al Qaeda forces. This criminal cowboy foreign policy of reckless plunder continued under the Bush Senior "son of Reagan" administration, the Clinton "Bush Lite" White House, and finally under the Bush "son of Bush" regime, also known as the Cheney White House. Over the course of a generation we went from being perceived as a beacon of democracy to becoming the world's foremost rogue state.

But ultimately Reagan's legacy was at home. How did the Reagan revolution transform America? As the rich became richer, did their wealth trickle down? Back in the 1980s, as the Reagan White House celebrated greed as an

economic doctrine, there was hot debate as to where all this greedism would take us. The Reagan government, however, also paved the way for the concentration of media that we see today, so over the next two decades greedism was sold to us without debate as “normal” and a healthy economic policy. The greediest Bush and Clinton governments continued Reaganomics, bringing Neanderthal economics into the 21st century. As Latin America and Europe swung left, we swung right, continuing to cut taxes for the rich and social programs for the poor while expanding military and corporate welfare spending.

The experiment is over

We’ve reached the point where this stuff is no longer academic. We threw the entire American society into a radical rightist experiment with no turning back. And a generation has gone by. So let’s look at where we are compared to the rest of the world’s affluent, industrialized nations.

We know that the rich have been getting richer and the poor have been getting poorer. And we know that more and more the middle class has been plagued with downward mobility. The wealthiest Americans have been splurging on McMansions and luxury cars and boats while the average American family is struggling to pay off high-interest credit cards. When you divide the amount owed among families with at least one credit card, the figure divvies up to about \$9,000 per household.

What fewer people know is that

among wealthy industrialized nations, the US is second only to Switzerland in the amount of its national wealth owned by the richest 10 percent of the population. And guess what – the United States’ rich have been getting richer and richer since the Reagan Revolution. Conversely, according to the Federal Reserve, the wealth of the bottom 40 percent of the US population dropped by two thirds since Reagan took office. You see, money doesn’t just appear. It has to come from somewhere.

While we’re only number two in wealth concentration, we’ve won the Super Bowl of poverty, earning the number one spot by having the largest percentage of our population living in poverty. When it comes to poor children, we win the trifecta, besting, for example, Scandinavian nations by a factor of at least five. I guess American toddlers are lazy and don’t want to go out and find jobs.

American children living in poverty at least can be thankful to be alive. According to the United Nations Children’s Fund, the US now ranks number one among industrialized nations for infant mortality as well.

How’s that for pro-life? CNN reports that an American baby is three times as likely to die during its first few months of life as a Japanese baby. Perhaps this is a function of the US being next to last when it comes to funding social programs – a result of us also being next to last when it comes to the amount of taxes collected per capita. One dividend of the tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans imposed over the last generation is a bounty of tiny corpses.

The wealthiest Americans have been splurging on McMansions and luxury cars and boats while the average American family is struggling to pay off high-interest credit cards

NEVER AGAIN

We do have one large unionized growth industry, however – that being prison guards (though a terrifying arrangement, many of these jobs are now outsourced to a growing private prison industry)

We've also taken to working longer hours, scoring first place in the number of weeks worked per year. Americans now work a full two-and-a-half *months** more than our Swedish counterparts, for example, whose government, like those of France, Austria and Denmark, mandates a minimum of five weeks paid vacation per worker. Other wealthy developed nations mandate at least four. We're the only one that mandates zero weeks of vacation – with most American workers only scoring a week or less.

Globally, the number of weeks worked tends to be inversely tied to a nation's unionization rate. The lower the rate of union membership among workers, the less vacation we get. In the US the rate of unionization fell from 22 percent when Reagan began his war against unions by firing the nation's striking air traffic controllers, to 13 percent today – placing us second to last in unionization behind France. France, however, has a peculiar arrangement by which 90 percent of its workers are protected by collective bargaining agreements. US workers are dead last in that field, with only 14 percent protected by such agreements.

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** Swedes get a minimum five weeks vacation guaranteed per year. Many Swedes take more. Many Americans work two jobs or lots of overtime. The difference works out to the equivalent of 10 weeks of 40 hour weeks.*

now outsourced to a growing private prison industry). The US leads the entire world, developed and undeveloped, rich and poor, democratic or totalitarian, when it comes to the incarceration of its citizens.

Nobody else even comes close, with Americans, on average, 10 times more likely to be caged than our European counterparts and 30 times more likely to be incarcerated than folks in India. And if you're a black or Hispanic American, raise that number another tenfold – not because you're more likely to commit a crime but because you're more likely to be arrested, convicted and sentenced to prison if you do – see <http://mediastudy.com/articles/incarceration.html>

Leaders in obesity

We also lead the developed world in obesity – with no one else coming close to clinching this crown from us. Obesity leads to high blood pressure and heart disease, adult onset diabetes and a host of other chronic diseases. This in turn is good for the bottom line of pharmaceutical and health care companies and the investors who own their stocks – who tend not to be as obese as those who go into debt to pay their health care bills. That's because obesity is tied to social class, with poorer people eating cheap unhealthy food while having less time for and access to activities that promote fitness.

Americans are also targeted as children by ruthless advertisements for high-fat, high-sugar junk foods – ads that are illegal in other countries. This commercial propaganda leads to the develop-

ment of lifelong eating disorders, which are also good for various businesses and their investors.

Then there's the environment. In the generation since Reagan ordered the solar panels removed from the White House roof, we've held fast as the world's largest per capita carbon producer – another record that no one is coming close to challenging. Laissez-faire planning policies have saddled us with an unworkable urban transportation infrastructure dependent upon private automobiles. This drains more money from the pockets of working folks while perpetuating our shameful energy addiction.

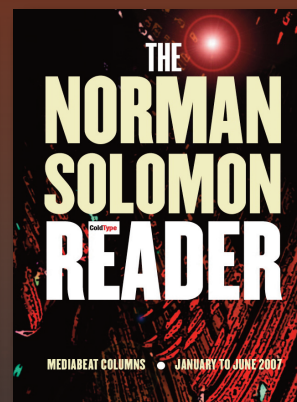
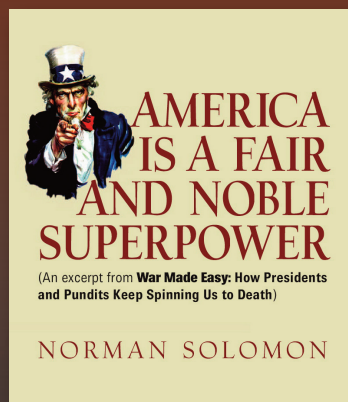
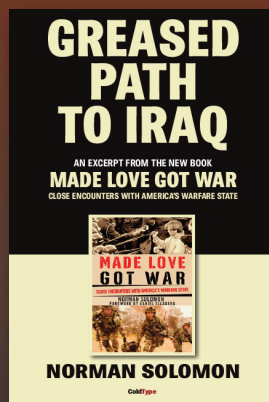
Morally, ethically, environmentally

and economically, the Reagan Revolution experiment in greedism is a bust. And there's no amount of historical revisionism that can cover this up. So let's finally knock it off with the docudramas, the talk of naming highways, parks and airports after Reagan, the nonsense about carving his bust into Mount Rushmore or putting his likeness on our increasingly worthless currency. As a nation, we need to get to the business of cleaning up the mess this failed ideology left for us. **CT**

Dr. Michael I. Niman is a professor of journalism at Buffalo State College, Buffalo, New York. His web site is <http://mediastudy.com>

Morally, ethically, environmentally and economically, the Reagan Revolution experiment in greedism is a bust

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IRAN: THE NEXT QUAGMIRE

BY CHRIS HEDGES

We prefer the illusion that we can dictate events through force. It hasn't worked well in Iraq. It hasn't worked well in Afghanistan. And it won't work in Iran

The most effective diplomats, like the most effective intelligence officers and foreign correspondents, possess empathy. They have the intellectual, cultural and linguistic literacy to get inside the heads of those they must analyze or cover. They know the vast array of historical, religious, economic and cultural antecedents that go into making up decisions and reactions. And because of this — endowed with the ability to communicate and more able to find ways of resolving conflicts through diplomacy — they are less prone to blunders.

But we live in an age where dialogue is dismissed and empathy is suspect. We prefer the illusion that we can dictate events through force. It hasn't worked well in Iraq. It hasn't worked well in Afghanistan. And it won't work in Iran.

But those who once tried to reach out and understand, who developed expertise to explain the world to us and ourselves to the world, no longer have a voice in the new imperial project. We are instead governed and informed by

moral and intellectual trolls.

To make rational decisions in international relations we must perceive how others see us. We must grasp how they think about us and be sensitive to their fears and insecurities. But this is becoming hard to accomplish. Our embassies are packed with analysts whose main attribute is long service in the armed forces and who frequently report to intelligence agencies rather than the State Department.

Our area specialists in the State Department are ignored by the ideologues driving foreign policy. Their complex view of the world is an inconvenience. And foreign correspondents are an endangered species, along with foreign coverage.

We speak to the rest of the globe in the language of violence. The proposed multibillion-dollar arms supply package for the Persian Gulf countries is the newest form of weapons-systems-as-message. U.S. Undersecretary of State R. Nicholas Burns was rather blunt about the deal. He told the International Herald Tribune that the arms

package “says to the Iranians and Syrians that the United States is the major power in the Middle East and will continue to be and is not going away.”

The arrogant call for U.S. hegemony over the rest of the globe is making enemies of a lot of people who might be predisposed to support us, even in the Middle East. And it is terrifying those, such as the Iraqis, Iranians and Syrians, whom we have demonized. Empathy and knowledge, the qualities that make real communication possible, have been discarded. We use tough talk and big weapons deals to communicate. We spread fear, distrust and violence. And we expect missile systems to protect us.

“Imagine an Iranian government that was powerful, radical, and in possession of nuclear weapons; imagine the threat that would pose to Israel and to the American-led balance of power, which has been so important in the Middle East since the close of the Second World War,” Burns said in a speech at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library in Boston last April 11. “That is our first challenge.

“Our second challenge is that Iran continues to be the central banker of Middle East terrorism,” he went on. “It is the leading funder and director of Hamas, Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine general command.

Third, Iran is in our judgment a major violator of the human rights of its own people; it denies religious, political, and press rights to the people of a very great country representing a very great

civilization. And so we see a problem that is going to be with us for a long time, and we are trying to fashion a strategy that will work for the long term.”

George W. Bush’s latest salvo, on Aug. 28, was more of the same: “Iran’s active pursuit of technology that could lead to nuclear weapons threatens to put a region already known for instability and violence under the shadow of a nuclear holocaust,” he said. Bush warned that the United States and its allies would confront Iran “before it is too late.”

Sending a clear message

These kinds of words, pouring out of the administration, send a clear message to any Iranian: You are in trouble. Bend to our will or we destroy you. These were the same words, with a few minor changes, that the Bush administration delivered to Saddam Hussein, who, despite numerous compromises, including letting the U.N. inspectors back into his country, was overthrown and put to death during a U.S. occupation.

And the Iranians know that without the bomb, which no intelligence agency thinks they can produce for a few years, they are now probably going to be attacked.

The Pentagon has reportedly drawn up plans for a series of airstrikes against 1,200 targets in Iran. The air attacks are designed to cripple the Iranians’ military capability in three days. The Bushehr nuclear power plant, along with targets in Saghand and Yazd, the uranium enrichment facility in Natanz,

The arrogant call for U.S. hegemony over the rest of the globe is making enemies of a lot of people who might be predisposed to support us, even in the Middle East. And it is terrifying those, such as the Iraqis, Iranians and Syrians, whom we have demonized

Iranian Shabab-3 and Shabab-4 missiles, which cannot reach the United States, will be launched at Israel, as well as American military bases and the Green Zone in Baghdad

a heavy-water plant and radioisotope facility in Arak, the Ardekan Nuclear Fuel Unit, and the uranium conversion facility and nuclear technology center in Isfahan, will all probably be struck by the United States and perhaps even Israeli warplanes. The Tehran Nuclear Research Center, the Tehran molybdenum, iodine and xenon radioisotope production facility, the Tehran Jibril Multipurpose Laboratories, and the Kalaye Electric Co. in the Tehran suburbs will also most likely come under attack.

But then what? We don't have the troops to invade. And we don't have anyone minding the helm who knows the slightest thing about Persian culture or the Middle East. There is no one in power in Washington with the empathy to get it. We will lurch blindly into a catastrophe of our own creation.

It is not hard to imagine what will happen. Iranian Shabab-3 and Shabab-4 missiles, which cannot reach the United States, will be launched at Israel, as well as American military bases and the Green Zone in Baghdad. Expect massive American casualties, especially in Iraq, where Iranian agents and their Iraqi allies will be able to call in precise coordinates.

The Strait of Hormuz, which is the corridor for 20 percent of the world's oil supply, will be shut down. Chinese-supplied C-801 and C-802 anti-shiping missiles, mines and coastal artillery will target U.S. shipping, along with Saudi oil production and oil export centers. Oil prices will skyrocket to well over \$4 a gallon.

The dollar will tumble against the euro. Hezbollah forces in southern Lebanon, interpreting the war as an attack on all Shiites, will fire rockets into northern Israel. Israel, already struck by missiles from Tehran, will begin retaliatory raids on Lebanon and Iran. Pakistan, with a huge Shiite minority, will reach greater levels of instability.

Regional inferno

The unrest could result in the overthrow of the weakened American ally President Pervez Musharraf and usher into power Islamic radicals. Pakistan could become the first radical Islamic state to possess a nuclear weapon. The neat little war with Iran, which few Democrats oppose, has the potential to ignite a regional inferno.

We have rendered the nation deaf and dumb. We no longer have the capacity for empathy. We prefer to amuse ourselves with trivia and gossip that pass for news rather than understand. We are blinded by our military prowess. We believe that huge explosions and death are an effective form of communication. And the rest of the world is learning to speak our language. **CT**

Chris Hedges, a Pulitzer prize-winning reporter, was the Middle East bureau chief for The New York Times. He spent seven years in the Middle East and reported frequently from Iran. His latest book is "American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America."

This essay originally appeared at the web site <http://truthdig.com>

BEDLESS IN BASRA

BY FELICITY ARBUTHNOTT

So the British have finally slunk off in the dead of night from their squatted palace in central Basra, to the old air base at Shuaiba, west of the city. The new Prime Minister, Gordon Brown has worked hard to dress up slinking as victory. Our brave boys, he said, have brought stability to the south of Iraq, they have rebuilt schools, hospitals, electric power stations (which *they* destroyed over 13 years of illegal bombings during the embargo and then finally flattened in an illegal invasion.)

Actually, speak to anyone in Basra and they say they are far worse off than under Saddam Hussein, who restored in just months some semblance of normality after 1991's 42-day carpet bombing, despite the embargo on a country which broadly, imported 70 percent of everything, including maintenance and essential materials.

A year after the invasion, I met a group of doctors, old friends from Basra, dedicated, heartbroken professionals who had watched their patients die for want of equipment and medication un-

der the embargo. None were fans of Saddam Hussein; all had been incensed at the 1991 Kuwait invasion, yet again putting their beautiful, ancient city in the front line, with them, literally, picking up the pieces. The 1991 bombing and assault by the US-UK led "coalition" was such that they were unable to collect bodies, eaten by dogs and rats, from the streets.

That the perpetrators of the embargo's horrors and 1991's carnage were going to be greeted with anything but loathing and lethal attacks by the entire community, was delusional, bordering on insanity. One of my friends hesitated for a moment, when talking of the British in Basra and the south, catching the eye of colleagues before saying: "You know, we all wish Saddam Hussein was back". So much for the British "liberation" being so much better than that of the Americans.

So now the British have retreated to the Shuaiba base, a remnant from the last time they took Basra in 1918, when they were worried about the oil fields in Abadan (one of the world's earliest oil

That the perpetrators of the embargo's horrors and 1991's carnage, were going to be greeted with anything but loathing and lethal attacks by the entire community, was delusional, bordering on insanity

SLINKING FROM WAR

Did the British know anything of this jewel of a city they were defiling, kicking down doors, beating up kids, indulging in the occasional bit of torture, their tanks tearing up streets criss-crossed with waterways and canals, in the former 'Venice of the Middle East'?

fields) over the border in Iran and finally crept away in 1932, after imposing various puppets and leaving an impressive legacy of British war graves for the Iraqis to maintain (as they did, with dedication and respect, right up to the invasion; then they trashed them.) The resistance must be rubbing their hands, they now have all the invading apples in the one Shuaiba barrel.

During the embargo, the British and Americans flew together, in the south and the north, bombing painstakingly reconstructed essentials, built from cannibalised parts. As soon as the locals had finished fixing Basra airport, water purification plants, electricity sub-stations, they were bombed again. The Iraqis repaired again, only for them to be bombed again. Now, we are told, the invaders must stay “until Iraqis can stand on their own feet”. (Read: until we have helped steal the oil.) The bombing was often continual. One day, as I was sitting in a cafe, a bomb rocked the area, the blast deafening. Crockery and cutlery rattled and fell. I jumped. No one else even looked up. It was the norm. Children were still losing life and limb from bomblets dropped in 1991, made to look like tempting shiny toys. How seriously sick are weapons designers?

In one bombing in a tiny street, in a proud but poverty stricken area of the city, whole families were wiped out, one man losing his wife and three little daughters, all aged under seven. Saddam Hussein ordered the homes rebuilt. They were, in just months, to exemplary specifications (what exactly have the British rebuilt in four-and-a-

half years?) Saddam, however, could not rebuild the lives our *brave* lads had decimated from on high. And of course Basra's sons and daughters were dying from the cancers caused by the depleted uranium munitions used by the US and UK.

Whilst the US-run lynch mob, kangaroo courts in “sovereign” Baghdad “tries” former members of Iraq's legitimate government, in a spectacle that shames the world, law and any claim to civilisation itself, there are real war criminals out there, from those who ordered the illegal 13-year bombings and the invasion, to those who carried them out and invaded. Nuremberg's “supreme international crime”.

Venice of the Middle East

Did the British know anything of this jewel of a city they were defiling, kicking down doors, beating up kids, indulging in the occasional bit of torture, their tanks tearing up streets criss-crossed with waterways and canals, in the former “Venice of the Middle East”?

Founded in A.D. 637, by Omar bin Khattab, Basra quickly grew to a city of 300,000 and became a focal point of Arab sea trade which went as far as China. It became an intellectual centre where philosophers, scientists, literary luminaries created and flourished. Ibn Al Jowzi and Ibn Al Haitham gifted discoveries in optics and mechanics that are thought to have taught Europe lessons.

Did they marvel as the sun fell and rose behind Basra's many thousands of palm trees, while the birds soared and swung in their great sun-eclipsing

waves, dancing and singing in the dusk and dawn? Did they walk with compassion through ancient, ochre-stoned, streets that have witnessed so much destruction, and wonder at the remaining, superb and unique architecture of homes with vines, internal mosaic courtyards, intricate balconies and ancient elegant arched windows? Or did they just kick in the doors, some of which were fashioned when Oliver Cromwell first thought to democratise Britain?

Did they trespass on “Sinbad’s Island” in the middle of the Shatt al Arab (named for Sinbad the Sailor who set off from here on his magical journeys) and wonder at its gardens, fountains and think of those who came there over generations, to picnic, sun and spend family time in the peace, beauty and tranquility where the Tigris and Euphrates meet? Or have they bombed it?

Did they rush to the hospitals to distribute equipment and pharmaceuticals, denied for so long? Shamed by the state of them, despite the heroic effort of staff who had risked their lives during 1991, the subsequent bombings and invasion. Did they restore some normality, drainage, clean water, cooling, heating? No.

When Richard Branson flew in in 2003 with essential aid, collected by Medical Aid for Iraqi Children – <http://www.maic.org.uk> – palletted and marked for hospitals, it was handed to the British Commanding Officer in charge, who vowed to have his men distribute it. In fact, he passed the aid to US troops, who allegedly passed it on to a South Korean fundamentalist,

Christian evangelical group (of the ilk of the 23 recently kidnapped in Afghanistan by the Taliban) and a quarter of a million pounds-worth of medical aid, which would have translated into lives, not deaths, was never seen again.

No room at the hotel

The loathing for the British in the south was never clearer than just after the four-day 1998 Christmas blitz by the US and UK. Award winning photographer Karen Robinson and I travelled to Basra on assignment. We went to hotel after hotel, formerly always welcoming, in a city which has a special place in both our hearts. Handing over our passports to check in, they beamed at me: “Welcome back”. My passport is Irish. Faces froze at they looked at Karen’s: British. “Madam Felicity, you are so welcome, but I am sorry, not your friend”. Finally, around 3 a.m., having been traveling, sleepless, for nearly two days, we found beds. Since the lights were not working, we could not check the rooms and were anyway, we thought, beyond caring. It was a very low point. Collapsing into our beds, we both immediately sat bolt upright. The pillows were near congealed, bedding seemingly unchanged in recent history. The stench from what passed for the bathroom was eye watering. To call it a doss house would elevate it. But it was the only place in Basra that would take a British passport holder.

Tony Blair, “Lord Blair of Kut Al Amara”, as he was dubbed by the Independent newspaper’s Robert Fisk (Kut, site of another humiliating British defeat in Iraq in an earlier colonial adven-

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SLINKING FROM WAR

Those who visited Iraq regularly and diplomats in the region who knew and warned of the inevitable impending disaster for the US, and UK, were dismissed, threatened and ridiculed by governments who had no diplomatic representation on the ground for 13 years

ture, December 1915-April 1916) trumpeted the sweets and flowers, stuff sold to him by convicted embezzler, the CIA-funded Ahmed Chalabi and by Iyad Allawi who, Fisk writes, has been paid by up to three dozen spook agencies. Their British and American passports should surely be withdrawn (by two countries avowed to rid themselves of undesirable immigrants) and they ought to be packed back to their country of origin to face their fate with those they have so shamefully betrayed.

Those who visited Iraq regularly and diplomats in the region who knew and warned of the inevitable impending disaster for the US, and UK, were dismissed, threatened and ridiculed by governments who had no diplomatic representation on the ground for 13 years.

Never were the near-100 years old words of 1914-1918 war poet, Siegfried Sassoon more apt for the beleaguered British, holed up in their Shuaiba base. Sassoon wrote an open letter to the British government: "I am making this statement, as a wilful defiance of mili-

tary authority, because I believe that the war has been deliberately prolonged, by those who have the power to end it."

Sassoon also wrote: "When the war is over and youth stone dead and old men toddle home – and die in bed". Replace the "old men" with "politicians". Sassoon was Basra's son, he came from a family of wealthy Jewish merchants there. History repeats itself uncannily in Iraq. After Kut, half the 8,000 British soldiers captured by the Ottomans died. Around the same number, including support staff, are holed up in Shuaiba. Since they are there illegally anyway, they have the perfect excuse to echo Basra's son and end this "deliberately prolonged" invasion for oil and lies, in which, every hour, their lives hang in the balance. **CT**

*Felicity Arbuthnot is a journalist and activist who has visited the Arab and Muslim world on numerous occasions. She was also senior researcher for John Pilger's documentary, **Paying the Price: Killing the Children of Iraq.***

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WHEN NEWS AND PROPAGANDA MERGE

BY JAMES CLAY FULLER

Language matters. It matters greatly. Unfortunately, fewer and fewer Americans can read, or listen, with anything approaching critical attention. So we get conned and robbed and thrust into untenable and often illegal situations at every turn. We get pushed into wars that should never happen on the basis of what a Bush or Cheney or Rove seems to be saying, rather than hearing the truth beneath the twists and clever obfuscations.

We're constantly bombarded by the propaganda machine, hammered with words and phrases that seem to say something straight but that, in fact, encourage a belief in lies and dodges.

The propaganda machine includes the once independent news outfits – virtually all radio and television and almost all newspapers.

Remember how quickly the “news” outfits adopted the Bush Administration word “surge” to describe the escalation in the occupation (never called an occupation) and war in Iraq? For at least a couple of months, you heard or

read “surge” in every story about the escalation. You rarely saw “escalation” in a corporate newspaper or heard it on television.

“Surge,” a word chosen by the office of Karl Rove, conveys new strength. It says “increased power.” And that’s the idea it sold. New strength, new power for our side in Iraq. And millions of Americans absorbed the word and its meaning and at least half believed it.

It was a lie, like almost everything out of the White House during the past six years. The same tactic had been tried before and failed. There was not the tiniest reason to believe the latest attempt would fare better. Thousands of people complained about the use of the word in the news, but the new failure had to become clear before the papers and television stopped using it and started pretending, in fact, that they’d never heard it.

Surge? What surge?

Most such propaganda words stay with us, unfortunately.

A few days after the I35W bridge in Minneapolis went down, Patricia

“Surge,” a word chosen by the office of Karl Rove, conveys new strength. It says “increased power.” And that’s the idea it sold. New strength, new power for our side in Iraq

Any time you see the phrase "throw money at," you know the writer or speaker is someone who has learned the Republican mantra by rote. Any spending, for any purpose, no matter how good or necessary, is automatically dismissed as "throwing money at" whatever problem needs solving

Lopez, a reporter for the Minneapolis Star Tribune, said in a story about replacing the bridge that the Democrats in the State Legislature were planning a "tax and spending" plan to rebuild the state's crumbling roads, bridges and other infrastructure.

"Tax and spend" is, of course, a right wing think-tank construction, endlessly drilled into the heads of the "base," with the same fervor applied to "Support our troops." It is a knee-jerk phrase, applied without thinking every time someone suggests our tax system favors the rich and hurts the rest of us.

Lopez used it as her own, not in quoting some Republican anti-tax fanatic, and in so doing, whether deliberately or stupidly, triggered the Pavlovian response of the nonthinkers and set them up against whatever plan the Democrats devise.

Liberals I know read over that without catching what had happened. Careless reading.

Can you identify the "frontrunner" for the Democratic presidential nomination?

Of course you can. The American press annointed Hillary Clinton with that title long before anyone had officially declared candidacy. And, yes, it matters.

A recent poll showed that about 53 percent of Democrats believe Clinton is the most "electable" of the Democratic candidates. The same poll showed Clinton is not "liked" by anywhere near the same percentage of Democrats.

The press and television have convinced them that she is the one who must be nominated.

That's propaganda at its most powerful. She and her campaign crew conned the political reporting herd, which moves almost entirely as a unit, right from the git-go, and they've worked hard to persuade Democrats that only Clinton can win.

Oh, and about that highway bridge: Not all of the bodies have yet been recovered, but the anti-tax mob already has shifted from clucking their sympathy to fighting any meaningful moves to improve Minnesota's rotting infrastructure.

Republican catch phrases

Catch phrases – taught to the Republican base along with "tax and spend" and "Support our troops," have appeared in at least a couple of op-ed pieces and in several letters to the editors of local newspapers.

Any time you see the phrase "throw money at," you know the writer or speaker is someone who has learned the Republican mantra by rote. Any spending, for any purpose, no matter how good or necessary, is automatically dismissed as "throwing money at" whatever problem needs solving.

It means, "The rich guys are afraid they may have to pay something closer to their fair share of taxes and they damned well don't want to." It also means: "We (or the rich guys whose butts we kiss) don't personally use this particular service, so we don't want it funded."

Of course, it also can mean "We're too stupid and self-centered to understand how this benefits us," but one shouldn't say that, so I won't.

Another favorite, used very heavily right now by the tax haters in Minnesota, is “rather than taxes, we just have to reorder priorities.” That also has popped up in several letters to editors. To those who created the phrase, it means “Take money from children’s health programs, and education, and inner city police and fire departments and any government activity that doesn’t directly and immediately serve me.”

And another: “bloated bureaucracy,” which simply means the people who do the public’s work. It is never applied to the truly inefficient and fear-paralyzed bureaucracies of corporations. Supposedly, there is always “plenty of fat” in public budgets, and government can do its work without people.

For a long time now, when I hear such phrases – “too much fat in government budgets” or “bloated bureaucracy” I demand that the speaker give me specific examples, and they can’t be fiction from the right wing myth machine. I have yet to get a straight answer.

Just one more: One of the countless newspaper pieces on Karl Rove’s sup-

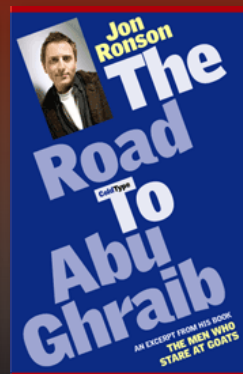
posed departure noted that one of his initiatives involved using public funds – tax money – to support “faith-based initiatives.”

That term appears over and over in the news. The speakers or writers almost never point out that “faith based initiatives” or “faith-based programs” are simply the programs of religious organizations, and “public support for faith-based programs” means handing tax money over to (mostly) churches. There are some who quibble about the constitutional problem inherent in that action, but who pays any attention to the Constitution these days?

Folks, please read and listen with full attention to what’s really being said, promoted, denigrated. It’s dangerous out there.

James Clay Fuller worked in newspapers and magazines for more than 45 years. His day job for 30 years was at the Minneapolis StarTribune, where he was a business and economics reporter, features writer, and sometime music critic. His web site is <http://jamesclayfuller.com>

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THE GOLDEN AGE THAT NEVER WAS

BY PATRICE GREANVILLE

That the American media are palpably in what we might call a pathetic and degenerate state, if not a free fall toward irrelevancy, should be obvious to thoughtful observers.

There's a widespread assumption in left-wing circles that increasing concentration of media ownership is, ipso facto, the main if not sole culprit for the appalling performance of mainstream journalism in our time. Surely there's a lot to decry, but is media consolidation and deregulation the cause for this calamity? And if the American media have indeed fallen from grace, as it is claimed, where in time do we locate this mythical "golden period" when the media establishment did measure up to its social mandate?

That the American media are palpably in what we might call a pathetic and degenerate state, if not a free fall toward irrelevancy, should be obvious to thoughtful observers. This reflects the larger forces at work: As US capitalist democracy and general culture evolve due to their inexorable dynamic into ever more predatory and cynical iterations (Bush is more a symptom of the disease than its cause), so do the "relative" quality of the nation's formal institutions, whether they be at the political

center or adjunct, such as the media. But I think that attributing the obscenely bad performance of the corporate media – and television in particular – to concentration is somewhat erroneous. I realize this is by now, mainly thanks to the work of Ben Bagdikian and others, an article of faith on the liberal left. The usual mantra is "It's the media concentration, stupid!". But in order for me to believe that claim, that a few decades ago, when diversity of ownership was more widespread than now, everything was honkey dorey in Ed Murrow heaven, you'd have to show me first a period when the American media was substantively better than today, and that, friends, is hard to do, no matter how many media icons you roll out to worship.

Hard if you take the historical record as the arbiter of truth and not the intramural chatter of the profession, which far too many critics seem to have swallowed without examining its self-serving distortions. For at all times the performance of a mass media system must be measured and graded according to

output, and this output has been consistently deplorable, for at least 150 years, and shamefully so since the era of supposedly “professional journalism” began in the 1920s. Shall we review this for a moment? (I’m speaking here of mass media, not about the dissenters’ publications, which America has always had.) The question we must ask is: when confronted with severe crises of democracy and criminality in foreign policy, what did the press do?

Consider a few turning points in American history. Let’s take first the infamous “Palmer Raids” in the first quarter of the 20th century. In the wake of the birth of the Soviet Union and the disaster of the First World War, a great upsurge in worker agitation ensued which struck fear in the heart of many ruling classes around the world. The response of the US ruling class, always paranoid to a fault, was swift and unsurprising. As is customary, the target was the “radical movement” and its alleged threat “to the nation” (i.e., big propertied interests).

In an article in *Forum* magazine in February 1920, aptly entitled “The Case Against the Reds,” Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer held forth in near-Apocalyptic terms: “Like a prairie fire the blaze of revolution was sweeping over every American institution of law and order...It was eating its way into the homes of the American workman, its sharp tongues of revolutionary heat were licking the altars of the churches, leaping into the belfry of the school bell, crawling into the sacred corners of American homes seeking to replace marriage vows with libertine laws,

burning up the foundations of society.”

Under Palmer’s direction, and the direct supervision of J. Edgar Hoover, one of the most sordid hypocrites in American history, waves of spies, paid informers, and agent provocateurs were sent into unions, self-help organizations for the foreign born, and leftist groups of many stripes. A special Justice Department publicity bureau was commissioned to concoct and disseminate stories around the country about a Moscow-directed plot to overthrow the government in Washington.

As James Aronson has noted in his classic book, *The Press and the Cold War*, press releases were issued daily with inflammatory and highly tendentious headlines, such as, “US Attorney General Warns Nation Against Bolshevik Menace.” Inevitably, once the “radical enemy” had been properly softened through character assassination (a favorite trick), the government’s henchmen moved in to finish the job.

Foreign-born citizens arrested

On November 7, 1919, as a dress rehearsal, hundreds of foreign-born citizens were arrested throughout the country, many at meetings commemorating the second anniversary of the Russian Revolution. A few months later, on January 2, 1920, raids were carried out in 20 cities with the assistance of state and local police. More than 1,000 were arrested just in New York City, and 400 in Boston, where, as Aronson again notes, the prisoners were marched in chains through the streets. Similar scenes were recorded in many other cities, factories, and communities.

Waves of spies, paid informers, and agent provocateurs were sent into unions, self-help organizations for the foreign born, and leftist groups

MEDIA MYTHS

This is the "big property owners" speaking through one of their countless megaphones, approving of their other instrument of social control, the government itself

Now, this was a blatant unconstitutional abuse of power, for if freedom of speech and political assembly are worthless when you side with an "unpopular" viewpoint or vision, what is the meaning of protected freedom? We don't need protection or guarantees when we're safely ensconced in the bosom of the majority opinion, or fully compliant with the approved status quo. Anyone can loudly proclaim his love for apple pie and motherhood and expect zero retribution for such "bravery" in America. So, how did the media behave? This much more owner-diversified media? Did we see furious editorials and scrupulous coverage denouncing such obvious government overreach?

Well, not exactly. Emblematic of the media's attitude, on January 3, the day after the raids, The New York Times reported the roundup of "2,000 Reds" putatively involved in a "a vast working plot to overthrow the government." The headline read: "REDS PLOTTED COUNTRY-WIDE STRIKE – ARRESTS EXCEED 5,000 – 2,635 HELD."

By the way, in case you never thought about it, "Reds" is an invidious term calculated to dehumanize radical activists.

Two days later, the American press' "paper of record" let loose with an even more overt endorsement of the persecution:

"If some or any of us, impatient for the swift confusion of the Reds, have ever questioned the alacrity, resolute will and fruitful, intelligent vigor of the Department of Justice in hunting down these enemies of the United States (sic)

the questioners have now cause to approve and applaud... This raid is only the beginning... The Department's further activities should be far-reaching and beneficial."

This is the "big property owners" speaking through one of their countless megaphones, approving of their other instrument of social control, the government itself. It's class-informed "journalism" and nothing but, for what these dangerous "enemies of the United States" were agitating for was a shorter work day, higher wages, and the right of protest – hardly subversive notions in a really free society.

An editorial in Editor & Publisher, the newspaper industry trade journal, later summed up the situation rather neatly: "When Attorney General Palmer started his so-called "radical raids." so many newspapers entered into the spirit of that infamous piece of witch-hunting that the reputation of the American press suffered heavily."

Check the record

So much for the press' "superior" performance nine decades ago. Did anything really change since then? Let's look at the "output" – again.

- Did the press stop "Tailgunner" Joe McCarthy in his tracks when the Republican senator started pulling rabbits out of his hat, which the media, along with many other powerful opinion forming institutions, could have easily done? Nope. He practically had to self-destruct by hubristic overreach before the puppeteers upstairs decided he'd become a liability and threw the switch

to cancel his show (mostly because, in search of more headlines and power, the opportunistic senator had begun to insinuate that the Army was crawling with Reds). With a real quality press McCarthy and the whole stinking anti-communist hysteria of the 1950s would not have happened.

- Did the press stand in the way of the “forgotten war,” our cynical imperial war in Korea? Nossirreee. With a real quality press Korea would not have happened.

- Did the press stop our cynical and even more murderous imperial war in Vietnam? Did it expose its off-the-charts hypocrisy and immorality? No again. With a real quality press Vietnam would not have happened. (Let’s recall this was the “golden years” of TV journalism, with names such as Murrow, Cronkite and similar press heroes emblazoned on the profession’s escutcheon.)

- In the same postwar period did the press expose – on its own – the shameless and criminal abuses of the great industrial monopolies, drugs, cars, food, etc? No. It took a crusading populist Senator from (of all places) Tennessee (Estes Kefauver) to conduct revealing hearings on these oligopolies (the story was quickly swept aside), and the work of an outsider to the media, Ralph Nader, to blow the whistle on the automotive cartel’s deliberate underperformance.

In more recent times, why didn’t this supposedly “liberal” media stop Ronald Reagan, a man whose political resume reeked with willful prostitution to the

plutocracy? Let’s recall that it was the Reagan regime that inaugurated the radical right’s ascension to power, with a cast of neococon malefactors soon to find continued employment in the two Bushes’ administrations – and whose handiwork require no further comment.

The media did not perform its basic duties in the 1920s, nor in the 1950s, nor in the 1960s, 70s, 80s, 90s, or since the turn of the new century. Yet in earlier years there was far less media ownership concentration. So where is the significant correlation between quality and concentration? Where is this wonderful past, this period when the American press was behaving according to its own glowing mythical best?

Matters of degree you may say, and I’m not saying that some differences, however small, may not have important consequences in a monster nation of this size and power. One or two degrees of difference may spell life or death for hundreds of thousands or even millions of humans, animals, and other species. True enough. (The same logic applies to differentiate between Democrats and Republicans, for those who like to study quantum particles.) But that’s a different discussion, related to quantitative aspects of social institutions, not qualitative aspects. Perhaps the lesson of this cursory review of the American media record is that many people continue to confuse “numerosity” with true diversity. But as is the case with fractals, you can split an entity into innumerable pieces, and, as long as those pieces carry the same “DNA”, they will stubbornly replicate

Perhaps the lesson of this cursory review of the American media record is that many people continue to confuse “numerosity” with true diversity

MEDIA MYTHS

Monopolies – and even subparts of a huge monopoly are grotesquely large entities – do not really compete, except in superficial matters. True price and quality wars are the exception, not the rule

the same marching values.

We see this in media and we see this in any other industry or institution of the capitalist matrix we inhabit. In 1911 the Feds split Standard Oil, thinking that size was the culprit. It was as effective as King Canute ordering the waves to recede – do we have real competition today? How do you think we are being treated by the oil companies? The breakup of AT&T was initiated in 1974 by the U.S. Department of Justice antitrust suit against the telephone monopoly.

Under the terms of a settlement finalized on January 8, 1982, “Ma Bell” agreed to divest its local exchange service operating companies, in return for a chance to go into the computer business, AT&T Computer Systems. Effective January 1, 1984, AT&T’s local operations were split into seven independent Regional Holding Companies, also known as Regional Bell Operating Companies (RBOCs), or “Baby Bells”.

Did the public really get better service out of this, especially after de facto deregulation? Not really, because monopolies – and even subparts of a huge monopoly are grotesquely large entities – do not really compete, except in superficial matters. True price and quality wars are the exception, not the rule.

Sociology rules: It’s a class question

Since the overwhelming majority of the corporate media – big or small – is perforce beholden to capitalist values and goals, then it’s the resulting sociology of the profession that trumps matters of simple size. As media critic Robert Mc-

Chesney has pointed out in his intro to Danny Schechter’s classic, *The More You Watch, the Less You Know*, words that should be taken to heart by J-school students (and faculty):

“One of the important functions of the profession of journalism is to make journalists and the public regard issues of ownership and control as unimportant to explaining how the media operate.”

And McChesney goes on to elaborate: “[P]rofessional journalism was born almost a century ago precisely during the era that newspaper ownership was consolidating and advertising was becoming the primary means of support. Urged on by the largest publishers, professional journalism was supposed to assure readers that the news could not be influenced by owners or advertisers or the biases of the journalists themselves.”

Noble intent, indeed, but what happened? What always happens: the logic of business, the irrepressible dynamic of the economy that owns all and controls all, soon blew away anything exogenous or inimical to the goals of the company or business in general, and in passing created a tacit set of workplace rules that no ambitious journalist concerned about his or her career is bound to disregard for long – or ever.

As Ben Bagdikian himself has noted, “. . . professional journalism internalized the overall political values of the owners and advertisers (nearly identical, anyway), and recognized a decontextualized “neutral” coverage based upon “official sources” as legitimate news.”

The “commoditization” of journalists

A commodity is anything that is bought and sold on the market with the sole purpose of making a profit. And when journalists literally sell themselves to their employers, and consciously do their bidding, they commoditize themselves just like any other item, except that the respectable operating phrase here is “pursuing a career.”

Careerism – which is another word for putting self-interest over the public interest – trumps duty every day in America. It’s the “natural” and rarely questioned American script all the way from the halls of Congress to the nation’s newsrooms. This is not an admirable value among common citizens, but among folks entrusted with the well-being of the commwealth, it is nothing short of poison. And we see the fruits of this shabby “ethic” everywhere in our social disintegration. For journalists – and media workers in general – are no more exempt from duty to the society they have freely chosen to serve than judges, police, firemen, doctors, emergency room personnel and other sensitive professions.

This wholesale corruption of duty in what is arguably one of the most critical professions in a free society – to serve as the eyes of the people in their democratic decisionmaking – is abetted by institutional arrangements and “examples” that easily misguide the young and confuse the citizenry.

For the undeniable fact is that, as befits a huge, extremely rich, and complex nation ruled by the market, we have given rise to journalism schools

that crank out new media personnel already fully acclimated to the political requirements of the system, and see nothing wrong in cutthroat competition to advance their own agendas. Enormous salaries comparable to the obscene pay of professional athletes (Katie Couric got a \$60 million contract to anchor for CBS, and other stars and “celebrity media people” command similarly stratospheric compensation) are now the rule in the profession’s “pinnacle” – which of course includes the perennially “invisible” top media executives.

Are we to expect an understanding or even true sympathy for the travails of the average working stiff from a crowd so alarmingly insulated from their reality? Certainly not. After all, as the old Bolshies used to say, existence conditions consciousness, and not the other way around.

In conclusion, as it relates to overall performance, while concentration in traditional media may matter somewhat by raising still more the “barriers to entry” and stifling the appearance of alternative outlets, it is really secondary to the longstanding and deeply embedded political and social “DNA” of the American press, dominated by a decadent capitalist worldview and an utterly bourgeois way of interpreting events that effectively prevents it from fulfilling its mandate. **CT**

Patrice Greanville is editor of chief of Cyrano’s Journal, where this essay first appeared – <http://www.bestcyrano.org>

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TOILET TYRANNY

BY DAVID RUBINSON

What's most frightening about the Larry Craig debacle is not about getting hit on in the crapper, it's that there are actually POLICE hiding in toilets everywhere, waiting to bust us

What exactly is wrong with a man going into a men's room looking for anonymous sex? Why is it illegal? Who cares?

Egregious crimes have been committed by uncountable numbers of our high elected officials that have resulted in the death, dismemberment, immolation, starvation and poisoning of millions of people, and so far not ONE of them has spent a minute behind bars. Few have even lost their jobs.

But one guy goes for a quick weenie wank and from our duly elected representatives and the pimp media erupts a deafening self-righteous roar. What's most frightening about the Larry Craig debacle is not about getting hit on in the crapper, it's that there are actually POLICE hiding in toilets everywhere, waiting to bust us.

Think about it – next time you go pee in a public restroom. My advice is to hold it til ya get home. Not worth the risk. Odds are there's a cop in there, hanging out(!) – just waiting to slam the cuffs on some poor slob – like us.

This country's gestapo doesn't stop

at snooping on emails or eavesdropping telephone calls, or spy video cams.

Read the transcript of the Craig bust from June 2007.⁽¹⁾ What scares ya? That Craig might have been looking for some? What's the big deal?

Here's what scares me. That every goddamn place we go there's a cop, or a camera. That under the lie of some loonie War on Terror, we are being surveilled and spied upon, literally everywhere. And, get this straight – this means YOU. And they want you to KNOW it. Especially if you are Un-White.

Here is a section from the transcript of the interrogation after the bust.

The Cop says: "I just, I just, I guess, I guess I'm gonna say I'm just disappointed in you sir. I'm just really am. I expect this from the guy that we get out of the hood. I mean, people vote for you."

Did ya get that? "I EXPECT this from a guy... out of the HOOD"

What? whatwhatwhat?

The COP says he EXPECTS this from an UNWHITE person, but not from a nice white guy, a SENator

forchrissakes. He EXPECTS it. I have heard not one word about this from anywhere. Sharpton? Are you awake?

The media is positively enthralled with Craig's sexuality, but not one peep about a cop blatantly and publicly proclaiming his racial prejudice, proud of his pattern of racial profiling. As for his fellow Senators – do you think they would be treating Craig like Typhoid Tom if this wasn't about faggots?

Men are supposed to fuck women⁽²⁾, hookers, young girls, their secretaries⁽³⁾ or other Senators' wives⁽⁴⁾. That's all fine. Senator David Vitter⁽⁵⁾ and who knows how many others admit to seeing the DC Madam and her stable. Hey thass OK. It's just Men being Men. There's a littttle Strom Thurmond in alla us boys, ya know.

Har Har.

But Craig – uh oh. A faggot. Mark Foley redux. String him up. We gotta show America what we do to faggots around here. Ya do what Tucker Carlson⁽⁶⁾ says (on National TV, to great applause) he did – ya go back with a few testosterone poisoned good ole boys, and kick the faggot's ass.

Har har har.

Now I think they got the right man, but for the wrong things. I don't care who Craig licks, or where. I don't care where he sticks any part of himself, or how. That's up to him and the consent-

ing adult lickorstickee.

I do care that Craig was a war-mongering racist hypocrite, who has the blood of thousands on his hands. A man who rushed to vote for the very spying that bit him. He deserved to be outed as a murderer, a snoop, a gay bashing homophobe, a willing and enthusiastic reactionary bastard.

So, good that he's gone. But not at this price. Because we are next.

Right now, thousands – hundreds of thousands – of us are being arrested⁽⁷⁾, and imprisoned by the I.C.E.⁽⁸⁾ for being Brown.

Right now, the President and his stooges have the power to name us as traitors and not only bust us, but imprison us as enemy combatants. And not just bust us, and imprison us, but take away everything we own⁽⁹⁾. Just because they think or have reason to believe us “to have committed, or to pose a significant risk of committing” various acts, in their SOLE judgement.

So, do you see ? Do you see that we are all walking into the toilet, every day? And that we are all subject to the whims of millions of cops who are just sitting there, hiding, waiting for us to drop our drawers ?

Let down our guard for an instant ? Craig was one of Them. But he was one of Us as well. And ya better believe it – you're next.

CT

Men are supposed to fuck women, hookers, young girls, their secretaries or other Senators' wives. That's all fine

David Rubinson retired from a long life in the record business producing a wide variety of artists and film music. He lives in California and Jamaica, West Indies, where he produces the Negril and Kingston Free Film Festival

NOTES

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