

INSIDE: WELCOME TO AMERICA! ● GOOD AND EVIL AT THE WORLD'S CENTRE ● GREED AT A GLANCE ● WORSE THAN A CRIME ● JUNIOR PARTNER IN A GLOBAL WAR

The ^{ColdType} READER

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FAMOUS COUSIN BLUES

Way back, when occasional eggheads started to ask **Denis Beckett** if he was related to Samuel, he didn't know who they meant. Times changed. Vicarious notoriety became a built-in feature of life even in distant Africa. But it took a visit to France to be hit by the imposterhood of being hero-worshipped not for who you are, but for who someone else is



The ^{ColdType} READER



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FAMOUS COUSIN BLUES

Denis Beckett tramps the streets of Paris with Samuel, and takes a strange car ride with a gang of French diplomats

Sons of famous fathers are never 'Joe is a panel beater' or 'Joe collects bottle tops.' They are 'son of Jack.' If they follow their father's career and reach the top, the whisper-mill says, 'His Dad pulled strings.' If they halt at a normal part-way level it's 'He's a failure.' Take up a different field and the pop psychologists go orgasmic: 'running away from his father!'

Even if you laugh off the volunteer analysts you spend fortunes on paid analysts, working out why you fit under a stone after family lunches. Then your father dies and thereafter you fit under a stone all the time. You get to wish he'd been a personnel manager.

This information comes to you courtesy of two guys I know, who've been there. My own personnel manager father loved me regardless, gliding so lightly even over my also-ran showing on the sportsfield, where he'd been captain of everything, that I didn't know this was a classic font of paternal neurosis until I learned it from a movie at the age of 38.

But I have known lesser strains of the same genus. Long before mid-life crisis, I

had famous cars, magnificent impractical Jaguar XKs and E-types which had rear visibility like a blindfold, burst their water-pipes on dates, and donated generous oil-puddles to unwilling drive-ways. I loved them. But I saw the syndrome. Friends didn't say, 'Hullo, Dennis, how are you.' They said, 'Hullo, Dennis, how are your cars.' You get to feel like an incidental accessory to an inanimate object.

Then there was the other matter, Famous Second Cousin.

Or maybe it's Famous Uncle-Once-Removed. All these years and I still need help. What, to you, is your father's cousin? Technically I think it's second cousin, but that feels wrong. You wouldn't have a first cousin 40 years older. Uncle sounds better, but officially an uncle is a parent's brother. And officially, I think, once-removed means an affinity relative as opposed to a consanguine relative, i.e. marriage rather than so-called blood.

Anyway, that's what Sam was.

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SECONDHAND FAME

I wrote, 'Dear Uncle Samuel...', after consuming half a pad on Second-Cousin, Mr Beckett, Sir, and clever-clever alternatives which I am too embarrassed to publicly remember. Sam replied in tiny black ink on very white, very stiff paper the size of a cigarette packet

things that nobody understood, nobody in my world, anyway. But somewhere else, London and places like that, where they read books without pictures on the cover, minds doubtless greater than our own developed the idea that these plays and especially one of them, *Waiting for Godot*, unsealed the human predicament.

As the idea developed, so did Sam's name, and reflected glory. At first only an occasional English Hons type would ask if I was related, and plumb me for insights as if these were transmitted through a network of genetic cyberspace. They seldom asked twice, concluding they had stumbled upon the family retard, but the circle of first-go enquirers expanded.

During a spell of sentry duty in my call-up year I armed myself. I read *Godot*. Plus *Malloy* and *Malone Dies*. It was Greek but, begorrah, impressive Greek. Was I proud of my ... er, relative. I asked my Dad for his address.

At boarding school, whither my dad was despatched at the age of six, Sam, eight years older, was for a brief while a big feature in a small boy's life. He was father-figure (my dad's dad died young), elder brother (no incumbent) and ersatz mother (the official title-holder was truant.) I don't think they ever saw each other after schooldays. But, the one having settled in France, because the Irish were too gregarious, and the other in South Africa, which had given him a wife, they corresponded.

They didn't correspond out of nostalgia, let alone literary mind-meeting. They corresponded about money. In their boyhoods a lady named Toshie had, unaided by ties whether consanguine or affinite, become an honorary

aunt to both. Subsequently her cupboard had bared a bit, and Sam and my dad rallied round.

Later an aged uncle struck a cash-flow crisis, and then an aunt, and Sam and my dad were getting into quite a habit, along with other cousins. Which was incidentally a strange and lovely thing. The family had once been rich and riven, and now here had scarcity wrought unity. It was also a surprising thing. The family were (mainly) Protestant, supposedly the more anally-retentive brand of Irish who kept the spare tyre pumped and the coal-pile stocked, but the bloodline evidently balked at premiums and prudence.

Dear Uncle Samuel

Sam lived at Boulevard St Jacques, Paris 14. I wrote, 'Dear Uncle Samuel...', after consuming half a pad on Second-Cousin, Mr Beckett, Sir, and clever-clever alternatives which I am too embarrassed to publicly remember. Sam replied in tiny black ink on very white, very stiff paper the size of a cigarette packet. He said Uncle Samuel sounded like a folk tale. He corrected my recap of the lineage. He ignored my earnest freshman references to his books (*several wasted pads*). He said to come and visit some time.

Six years later, I did – memorably, but not necessarily for the right reasons.

I was 24, and as fit as the next man. Sam was 64. We walked. Did we walk! We walked everywhere, and Sam walked way better than I walked. I puffed forward with blisters on my feet and mind while Sam strode like a Derby winner. The times my burning blisters or aching muscles forced a softening of his pace, I heard distant chimes of that Fa-

mous Father tune – hey boy, match up.

It was worse when we talked.

In the fashion of 1970s humanities graduates, I was sure that South Africa's political system was the sorest boil on the face of the planet. Our lives were built on opposing it, and I devised a plot, a secret weapon. Sam would write a play on apartheid.

Plays on apartheid weren't new. South Africans wrote them all the time. People like me barely knew there were plays on anything else. But they hadn't so far galvanised the world. That needed Sam's heft. I'd give Sam the lowdown, how the pale lot made all the rules and the other guys were cut out, even from catching our buses. He'd be aghast, having previously heard the enormities only through media filters. He'd write his play, which I wouldn't understand but would set the Great Minds alight. Galvanisation ahoy.

Heh. Sam's interest in Africa and all its works was nought. That he wasn't a man for politics and parties, I had divined. But our issue was supposed to be on a higher plane, a test case for humanity. He didn't seem to grasp that civilised people from pole to pole ought to agonise daily over how to help The Struggle. He said in effect: *pfift*. From such a prince of intellect! This was shattering. And a consanguine at that!

I had also swotted my *Godot* and other Beckettiana, so that in time off from plotting the plot I'd be tuned to receive the ultimate insider's insight. Another *pfift*. Sam was sick of *Godot*, and everything he'd written. He cared only for what he was still to write, and for cricket. He knew South Africans were cricket-mad, in the corner left over from

rugby-madness. But my cranium was too stuffed with the Cause to leave any corner for either. Sam would ask if so-and-so was on form. I'd say, 'Um, does he bat or bowl?', and shrink a little.

One place we walked was to Sam's restaurant in Montmartre, which was about equidistant with Moscow. So my blisters told me. He had a permanent table, with vast red vinyl seats.

On the way we passed a grand mansion. Sam said, 'This is the Men of Lesser Society.'

I thought, that's a strangely coy way of putting it. I said, 'I see, like an asylum.'

Sam gave me a sharp glance. 'I said, this is the Men of Letters Society.'

I got the impression I wasn't giving the correct impression. Still, I slept on a couch in his small poky apartment ('Boulevard St Jacques' had given the impression of a gorgeous French 'otel) and while the Jameson's sank we did establish a commonality. He wrote later, with 'appreciation of your dogged dedication, even if I cannot share it' and invited me to come again.

Without the legs

By 1989, Sam was to France what Princess Di was to Britain, except for legs, and I was still on the same old mission. By now my dogged dedication was given over to a theory, on which I had written two books and enough articles to wreck my magazine, *Frontline*.

Frontline, of which I was owner and editor, and frequently sales-rep and bottle-washer, was reasonably light in the Righteousness Dept, at least by the norms of the anti-apartheid industry, and an allegedly lively journal until the theory sabotaged it. But the theory was

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SECONDHAND FAME

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my way of getting past apartheid, as opposed to shrieking at the ruling Afrikaners as per chorus. Having found the theory I had to go at it, like Don Quixote and windmills.

Editors tend to take up weaponry when I advance the theory, so I desist, nearly – merely noting that starkly split countries have a dud record of overcoming their splits. The more minority rights you provide the more you short-change majority rule. Both lots gripe, heads get broken, economies wither, and paper constitutions frazzle trying to squelch natural pressures. You need something better, viz a structure which does not purport to dictate the fields of battle but firmly locks the methods of battle to a web of interacting power-sites.

Alright, it may not ring bells in a sentence, but note this: One day, when Earth's Democracy Version 1 has graduated to about 4.0, vexed societies will routinely tie the wildmen to the anchor of ordinary people's votes. Everyone will be in a majority in some foci of power and a minority in others, and much age-old strife will dry up.

In '89 my life-calling was to get a Version 4 prototype on the map. My own government had wax in its ears but on the diplomatic circuit there were flickers. On the day of Tiananmen Square I was in a classy Paris restaurant with France's Under-Secretary for Africa and three of his henchmen, urging France to pressurise the apartheid regime into supercharging a richer democracy than had been heard of here in the hub of the universe.

The Under-Sec listened approximately politely until the third refill. Then he waxed lyrical (and admittedly amusing) about utopia and dreams, and we re-

gressed to standard politics like whether X's alliance with Y was intact and did Z have a bottle problem.

In the course of goodbyes the Under-Sec asked jokingly if I was related to Sam. I said I was forthwith proceeding to the Metro to call on him.

I ceased to be a nutcase from nowhere and became Royalty. Metro!? No way. Foreign Affairs had *cars*, special luxury cars for VIPs like me. A special luxury car was summoned. It took a while coming, during which I (a) learned that my theory was the greatest discovery since $E=mc^2$, and (b) checked my watch. Sam expected me at 5. It was after 4. I'd should be on the Metro. But I was a prisoner of vicarious fame, and delighted by my hosts' delayed dawning, and not averse to being driven through Paris in a special luxury car with flags flying. Would they have out-riders?

We waited on the pavement. I scoured for a long sleek car with an immaculate driver. I was re-explaining why, no, enriched democracy does not mean neighbouring villages legislating to drive on different sides of the road, when there was a noisy shouting from a hot cross T-shirted person leaning from a scruffy 10-year-old Renault.

It turned out I had to be escorted as well as chauffeured. The two smaller henchmen squashed impossibly in the front. The Under-Sec and I shared special luxury at the back with henchman three, whose stomach flopped on my lap. Sweat occurred. So did rush-hour.

Denfert-Rochereau is in deep southern Paris, a.k.a. slightly north of Orleans. By 8-ish, when we pulled up at an old-age home, I was sick of being heavy-

weight by proxy, dismissed for what you are and respected for what somebody else is. I was sick of the car, sick of the flopping stomach, sick of the Gauoise air. My escorts expected to escort me right into Sam's room. I drew the line.

Sam's legs locomoted but you could have stood a bottle on his back, if the weight didn't crumple him. He looked like one of his own characters. He was nowhere near the world of Under-Secretaries, theories, or the magical effect of his name. He poured whisky and he toasted bread. We ate it dry. He asked after my father ('fine, thanks') and my trip ('fine, thanks') and told me he would be dead before the year was out. I blurted the obligatory guff – years to go, medical science... He cut me off with 'bullshit.' We sat in silence but for toast crunching. Then he said, 'thank you for having visited me.'

The trip back took half an hour on the Metro. Sam died on December 28.

Genius, giant – and me

Each year has more press about Sam as genius and giant Each year my surname elicits mor queries. A steadily lower proportion go, 'As in Thomas a' Beckett?' A steadily higher proportion go, 'As in Samuel Beckett?' Whereupon follows Frequently Asked Question Number 1

Did he mean it or was he having us on, especially with some of the later stuff like the one where you pay good legal tender to watch the stage lighting change?'

The answer is, Don't ask me. I had one real conversation with the guy, with double-tots on the way. When I crashed on his couch that night in '71 I understood the universe, but in the morning it had sneaked off. I believe an urgent message on the meaning of life is in there somewhere, but where, when and whether it might be supplemented by a secret guffaw at the gullibility of the believers, I have less idea than any of millions of Lit III students around the world.

What I know is, he did it his way. That's a good enough model for a second cousin. Or sort-of nephew. **CT**

Denis Beckett is an author and TV personality in South Africa.

*This article originally appeared in the magazine **NineOnTen** – readers may download pdfs of all issues at <http://newsdesign.net/freebies.html>*

*It was also reprinted in **Redeeming Features**, Beckett's collection of essays, published by Penguin Books.*

*A selection of articles from the archive's of Beckett's apartheid-era magazine **Frontline** will shortly be on line at <http://www.coldtype.net/frontline.html>*

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PARIS, OCTOBER 18

Alexander Zevin joins his first student demonstration

There are many ways to feel out of place as an American in Paris but few are as jarring as joining in a protest. The very phrase 'marching in solidarity with' seems exotic

During the strike in Paris on 18 October last year people holding papers hand papers to other people holding papers. An inflationary papering. The striking workers – mostly rail workers, but also miners, state utility workers, opera singers, librarians and actors from the Comédie Française – have pensions that allow them to retire earlier than other public sector workers – well before the age of 60. The rights they enjoy are known as *régimes spéciaux* and the government has proposed doing away with them. The strike action set for 18 October demanded the withdrawal of this reform. In return for the unions' support last spring in the protests against the proposed first employment contract law (CPE), which would have made it easier to hire and fire young workers, students came out in large numbers to support the unions and the *régimes spéciaux*.

About forty students met in the vestibule off the main entrance of the Ecole Normale Supérieure at 45 rue d'Ulm – an ideal space because cramped and vibratory. A statement of common

cause with the rail workers was read aloud to shouts, eye-rolling and a great deal of mumbling. Amendments and counter-amendments were voted on. A route and a slogan were decided.

We left school in the early afternoon to walk to the general rendezvous at République. A very thin Vietnamese student carried an African drum for keeping time. Passers-by stopped briefly to observe the long train of students in sweater vests and herringbone jackets. Some, the very old especially, nodded approvingly, and a middle-aged man with a camera said: 'Finalement.'

There are many ways to feel out of place as an American in Paris but few are as jarring as joining in a protest. The very phrase 'marching in solidarity with' seems exotic. Then there is the word 'union': not a thing to which many people in the US besides screenwriters and New York City public school teachers seem to belong; and autoworkers, whom one never meets.

Young Americans. We haven't much conception of what co-ordinated 'action' might mean. Some of us, it is true, have

marched to say no, collectively, to an unjustifiable war. Others to protest against laws or court decisions restricting abortion rights. But none of these instances of dissent concerns a structural matter; for instance, the way national wealth is divided and shared. This most recent *manifestation* united those seeking to keep pension plans intact, to protect job security and to protest university reforms. The idea of marching, let alone voting, for such demands would seem inconceivable, even dangerous to most Americans, of any age. We do not dissent on social rights. We are comfortable only with the basically agnostic language of human rights.

Illegal in my hometown

No clearer instance is needed than my hometown: New York City. When the MTA union went on strike two years ago, its action was declared illegal (striking, as it turns out, is illegal for public employees in New York State), the union leader, Robert Toussaint, was sent to jail and otherwise 'progressive' residents spat venom at their train conductors, platform sweepers and track-layers for daring to walk off the job.

During the strike I stayed overnight at a friend's house because commuting from Queens, where I was living, would have been virtually impossible. I was thinking aloud about joining the union demonstration and my friend's mother, who was boiling an egg in the kitchen, hastily interjected: 'It's very romantic of you, Alex, but it doesn't do a thing. It never does!'

One constantly meets people like her, members of that great vanguard generation of the 1960s and 1970s, their voices

so derisive one begins to wonder if these people ever had enough imagination to believe in the first place, let alone be disillusioned. My generation is no better: we receive our disillusionment second-hand and wear it like a badge of honour. Which is different from apathy, and worse.

So when you do agree, in a fit of enthusiasm, to *faire la grève* with your French classmates, you're bound to get carried away. It's a cloudless day, very mild. The Second Empire limestone is blinding; the vistas on the wide, unpoliced boulevards stretch to the horizon. It puts you in an anarcho-syndicalist mood. You might even think a little about Proudhon, though you know you shouldn't. You begin speaking to students in scattershot French about how you've come to Paris to defend the left in this difficult moment: 'Like Dombrovski . . . I'm like Iaroslav Dombrovski, you know . . . the guy who, when exiled from Poland, came to defend liberty in France? A great general!' Incomprehension, blown out cheeks. 'During the Commune, the Commune of Paris . . . you know, 1871!'

One person smiles and starts to walk the other way. Which is difficult at a demonstration. You're embarrassing yourself, mouthing absurdities. 'Like Garibaldi!' 'Like Tom Paine!' You start screaming: 'Guerre à outrance!' No time for chitchat.

We move slowly from République to Nation, two enormous squares dedicated to civic virtue in algae-coloured bronze. Directly behind us, a group of young girls and boys are carrying signs with dot-printed pictures of Sarkozy sticking up his middle finger. They are

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Comparing today's student activists to those in 1968 is meant to embarrass and shame the former at the expense of the latter

wearing matching T-shirts, very clean, and dancing to 'Hey Ya!' by Outkast. 'Who are they?' I ask another student. 'Those are the socialist student groups. They're annoying.' The students I'm marching with are affiliated with SUD Etudiant, a national union dedicated broadly to a free and accessible system of higher education as well as better conditions for students and workers.

The crowds crash and dissolve like waves as they empty into Nation. Loudspeakers and horns announce the end of the march. A student turns on his radio to listen to the numbers: according to the CGT, the biggest union represented, about 25,000 people took part. People seem disappointed with this.

The voice of my friend's mother re-enters my thoughts: 'It's very romantic but it doesn't do a thing.' One needn't look very far for compelling counter-examples. The most glaring are the 1995 general strikes which crippled France after lasting intermittently for two months. Public and private sector employees protested the then prime minister Alain Juppé's plan to lay off state workers and cut public spending. Juppé was forced to withdraw some, but not all, of his reforms, leaving intact the same *régimes spéciaux* that Sarkozy now aims to end. Last spring young people across France, and workers marching in solidarity with them, forced President Chirac to decline to sign the CPE into law.

Sarkozy has spoken a great deal about 'minimum service' in schools, hospitals and public transport as one way of limiting the legality of strikes. This is not a right most Americans either enjoy (when they happen to be union members) or miss (when they aren't). But it is

worth asking if any demonstrations or, more generally, movements, can hope to be successful in the absence of this right. Only 15 per cent of public sector workers belong to unions in France and yet they have been fundamental in igniting every major protest against so-called economic reforms from the winter of 1995 up to the present.

Behind each strike lurks a hoped for supersession; the *general strike*, a malignant form, from which the actual strike derives its (metastatic) energy. The general strike is to the strike what snow is to Christmas morning – an excess, a wish, which is also the realisation of the event in its fullest form. For Guy Debord everything depended on being ready for the general strike, which arrives in haste, unexpectedly, to create a new set of conditions as well as possible actions, relationships etc. This event's name is May 1968.

References to '68

Those who single out today's student demonstrators as backward-looking – as conservative – always make more or less explicit reference to '68. In the aftermath of the CPE strikes this was all one read in the US press. Then, the story goes, students worked to transform society, but now they scramble to keep it just as it has been for their parents – free from risk, comfortable, remunerative. As if what the critics of these students truly object to is their lack of a genuinely radical politics.

Comparing today's student activists to those in 1968 is meant to embarrass and shame the former at the expense of the latter. It's an approach that hides as much as it reveals about these historical

conjunctures. If it is interesting it's because it carries the trace of a structural revision of the past. *Le Figaro* warns students that the moment to struggle against reality has passed; it went out with the revolutionary bathwater in 1968. But why this valorisation of the 68ers from *Figaro*? Likewise the *Herald Tribune*'s snide dismissal of students as 'part-time revolutionaries' marching to defend 'thoroughly conservative values'. The current moment is, as it turns out, a recapitulation: the intergenerational conflict of the 1960s and 1970s makes a tenuous return as a funny feeling, as fear and distrust. The critical difference is that the denunciation of the young is

made in the name of the same people who participated in (who were, at the very least, implicated in) the revolutionary events of that era.

The casual dismissal – *they don't do a thing* – and the learned dismissal – *this is not 1968* – turn out to be linked. As in-junction. The latter dismissal, which seems to celebrate the aims of 1968 and its participants, is really its celebration as defeat.

CT

Le Figaro warns students that the moment to struggle against reality has passed; it went out with the revolutionary bathwater in 1968

Alexander Zevin is a student at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris.

This essay first appeared in the London Review of Books.

The newspaper's website is lrb.co.uk

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WELCOME TO AMERICA!

Erla Ósk Arnardóttir Lilliendahl flew to New York to enjoy the city's Christmas spirit. The reception was not quite what she expected

I had overstayed my visa by three weeks in 1995 and for this reason I would not be admitted to the country and would be sent home on the next flight

During the last 24 hours I have probably experienced the greatest humiliation to which I have ever been subjected. I have been handcuffed and chained, denied the chance to sleep, been without food and drink and been confined to a place without anyone knowing my whereabouts, imprisoned. Now I am beginning to try to understand all this, rest and review the events which began as innocently as possible.

Early in December, I and a few other girls began our trip to New York. We were going to shop and enjoy the Christmas spirit. We made ourselves comfortable on first class, drank white wine and looked forward to going shopping, eating good food and enjoying life.

When we landed at JFK airport the traditional clearance process began. We were screened and went on to passport control. As I waited for them to finish examining my passport I heard an official say that there was something which needed to be looked at more closely and I was directed to the work station of Homeland Security. There I was told that according to their records I had

overstayed my visa by three weeks in 1995 and for this reason I would not be admitted to the country and would be sent home on the next flight.

I looked at the official in disbelief and told him that I had in fact visited New York after the trip in 1995 without encountering any difficulties. A detailed interrogation session ensued. I was photographed and fingerprinted. I was asked questions which I felt had nothing to do with the issue at hand. I was forbidden to contact anyone to advise of my predicament and although I was invited at the outset to contact the Icelandic consul or embassy, that invitation was later withdrawn. I don't know why.

I was then made to wait while they sought further information, and sat on a chair before the authority for five hours. I saw the officials in this section handle other cases and it was clear that these were men anxious to demonstrate their power. Small kings with megalomania. I was careful to remain completely cooperative, for I did not yet believe that they planned to deport me because of my "crime".

When five hours had passed and I

had been awake for 24 hours, I was told that they were waiting for officials who would take me to a kind of waiting room. There I would be given a bed to rest in, some food and I would be searched. What they thought they might find I cannot possibly imagine.

Finally guards appeared to transport me to the new place. I saw the bed as if in a mirage, for I was absolutely exhausted. What turned out was something else.

I was taken to another office exactly like the one I had been in, and once again a long wait ensued. At this office all my things were taken from me. I succeeded in sending a single sms to worried relatives and friends when I was granted a bathroom break. After that the cell phone was taken from me.

After I had been sitting for five hours I was told that they were waiting for guards who would take me to a place where I could rest and eat. Then I was placed in a cubicle which looked like an operating room. Attached to the walls were four steel plates, probably intended to serve as bed and a toilet. I was exhausted, tired and hungry. I didn't understand the officials' conduct, for they were treating me like a very dangerous criminal.

Soon thereafter I was removed from the cubicle and two armed guards placed me up against a wall. A chain was fastened around my waist and I was handcuffed to the chain. Then my legs were placed in chains. I asked for permission to make a telephone call but they refused. So secured, I was taken from the airport terminal in full sight of everybody. I have seldom felt so bad, so humiliated and all because I had taken a

longer vacation than allowed under the law – 12 years ago!.

They would not tell me where they were taking me. The trip took close to an hour and although I couldn't see clearly outside the vehicle I knew that we had crossed over into New Jersey. We ended up in front of a jail. I could hardly believe that this was happening. Was I really about to be jailed? I was led inside in chains and there yet another interrogation session ensued. I was fingerprinted once again and photographed. I was made to undergo a medical examination, I was searched and then I was placed in a jail cell. I was asked absurd questions such as: When did you have your last period? What do you believe in? Have you ever tried to commit suicide?

Porridge and bread

I was completely exhausted, tired and cold. Fourteen hours after I had landed I had something to eat and drink for the first time. I was given porridge and bread. But it did not help much. I was afraid and the attitude of all who handled me was abysmal to say the least. They did not speak to me as much as snap at me. Once again I asked to make a telephone call and this time the answer was positive. I was relieved but the relief was short-lived. For the telephone was set up for collect calls only and it was not possible to make overseas calls. The jail guard held my cell phone in his hand. I explained to him that I could not make a call from the jail telephone and asked to be allowed to make one call from my own phone. That was out of the question.

I spent the next nine hours in a small,

A chain was fastened around my waist and I was handcuffed to the chain. Then my legs were placed in chains

HOLIDAY IN HELL

I was led through a full airport terminal handcuffed and escorted by armed men. I felt terrible. On seeing this, people must think that there goes a very dangerous criminal

dirty cell. The only thing in there was a narrow steel board which extended out from the wall, a sink and toilet. I wish I never experience again in my life the feeling of confinement and helplessness that I experienced there.

I was hugely relieved when, at last, I was told that I was to be taken to the airport, that is to say until I was again handcuffed and chained. Then I could take no more and broke down and cried. I begged them at least to leave the leg chains but my request was ignored.

When we arrived at the airport, another jail guard took pity on me and removed the leg chains. Even so I was led through a full airport terminal handcuffed and escorted by armed men. I felt terrible. On seeing this, people must think that there goes a very dangerous criminal.

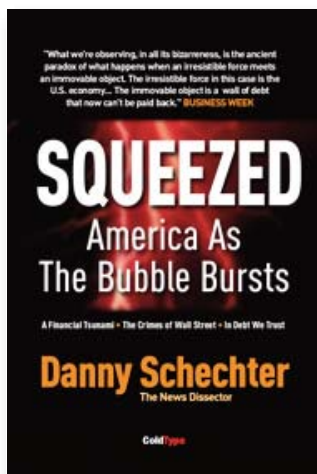
In this condition I was led up into the airline's waiting room, where I was kept

handcuffed until I entered the embarkation corridor. I was completely run down by all this in both body and spirit. Fortunately I could count on good people and both Einar (the captain) and the crew did all which they could to try to assist me. My friend Audur was in close contact with my sister and the consul and embassy had been contacted. However, all had received misleading information and all had been told that I had been detained at the airport terminal, not that I had been put in jail.

Now the Foreign Ministry is looking into the matter and I hope to receive some explanation why I was treated this way. **CT**

Erla Ósk Arnardóttir Lilliendahl is/was an Icelandic tourist to the United States. This translation of her story was posted at <http://erla1001.blog.is> (entry no.306)

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ORGANISING ACROSS BORDERS

Solidarity is the only solution to workers' woes, says **Susan Rosenthal**

In my article "Their Globalization or Ours?" (*ColdType* issue 22) I stated that free trade and protectionist policies both serve the capitalist class and that working people must unite across national borders to raise their living standards. In response, one reader wrote,

"I also believe that if all unions in the world work together we can achieve more, but many countries don't have unions, and in some that do, like my birth country Iran, union leaders get arrested all the time. So, my question is, how can we support unions in other countries?"

The answer to that question lies in two basic principles of the labor movement: self-determination (what we wish for ourselves, we want for all) and solidarity (an injury to one is an injury to all).

Self-determination

"What we wish for ourselves, we want for all" means that all people must have the right to determine their own affairs. That includes dealing with their own

leaders and governments, however corrupt.

The more the US threatens Iran, the more the Iranian government can silence internal dissidents by claiming they are American agents. To support workers in Iran, Iraq, Venezuela, Cuba, Columbia, Africa, Asia, etc., American workers must oppose any US intervention in those nations for any reason.

In his book, *The New Military Humanism: Lessons From Kosovo*, Noam Chomsky documents how NATO bombed the former Yugoslavia "in the name of principles and values." The actual goal was to take control of a portion of eastern Europe that was formerly under Russia's influence.

Imperialism presents itself as humanitarian intervention in order to override domestic opposition to war.

The US invaded Iraq on the pretext of protecting the world from nuclear attack, protecting the Iraqi people from a cruel dictator and establishing democracy. These have all proved to be lies. The majority of Iraqis want US troops out of their country, and the majority of Amer-

The more the US threatens Iran, the more the Iranian government can silence internal dissidents by claiming they are American agents

TAKING CHARGE

Although workers are divided by national boundaries, global capitalism is forcing them to unite to defend their common interests

icans and American soldiers agree. Yet, Washington continues its military occupation because, from the beginning, this has been a war for oil.

It is impossible to support workers in other nations and also support our own government invading or meddling in those nations. Capitalism forces us to choose: be loyal to your nation and betray your class or be loyal to your class and betray your nation. (By “nation,” the capitalist class means its own interests, not those of the majority.)

The loyalty of the labor movement is divided. Without the awareness or consent of their members, top executives in the AFL-CIO have helped Washington to overthrow democratically-elected governments, prop up anti-union dictators and support right-wing unions against progressive governments. When the AFL-CIO backed the short-lived coup against Venezuela’s democratically-elected President, Hugo Chávez, many rank-and-file workers were outraged. As the South Bay (California) Labor Council protested,

“There’s no solidarity when labor becomes a go-between, laundering funds and resources from the Bush administration and passing them to groups abroad. That role is more appropriate for government agents – agents of empire... We believe that international labor solidarity must come from the heart of the workers in one country to the heart of workers in another country – a ... reciprocal relationship.”

Solidarity actions

My first demonstration was at the US embassy in Toronto in the spring of 1965. It was a solidarity rally, protesting police

violence against civil rights demonstrators in Selma, Alabama. I was amazed that a group of predominately White people would stand for hours in a cold rain to defend the rights of Black people in another country.

Mutual aid (solidarity) is basic to human nature. Over 70 percent of Americans think that the government should ensure that no one goes without food, clothing or shelter. More than three-quarters of the billions of dollars raised by US non-profit organizations every year is donated by individuals. In every disaster, 9/11, Katrina, the Asian tsunami, ordinary people rally to provide aid.

Worker solidarity has a special power. In the fall of 2003, thousands of dockworkers shut down ports in Los Angeles in solidarity with striking grocery workers. In Brazil, unionists organized a solidarity campaign against US intervention in Colombia and supported striking Volkswagen workers in South Africa.

As the world becomes more integrated, the need for solidarity grows. An increasing number of goods are now manufactured by Chinese workers, assembled by Mexican workers, sold by American workers and serviced by Indian workers.

Although workers are divided by national boundaries, global capitalism is forcing them to unite to defend their common interests.

United we stand. Divided we fall. The political relationships we build today make possible more effective solidarity actions tomorrow.

American unionists are sponsoring Iraqi unionists to tour the United States. Talking person-to-person about what’s really going on in Iraq helps break

through the web of self-serving lies spun by the people in power.

Every year, people from around the globe gather at World Social Forums and demonstrations against the G-8 summits. Last year, I attended a Labor Notes conference in Detroit. The most memorable meeting was the one where union activists from more than 17 different countries met in one room.

Workers from Northern Ireland, Iraq and Palestine shared their experiences of organizing under military occupation. Auto workers from Germany, France and the US exchanged tactics on fighting assembly-line speedups. Despite language barriers, our similarities were overwhelming. After the meeting, people traded names and email addresses with great excitement.

International grouping

An Irish nurse and I found much in common and began writing to each other. One by one, we have included other health workers in our discussion. There are now six of us, from three different countries, corresponding by email. The challenges we face on the job and in our lives are remarkably similar. We want to build an organization of international health workers.

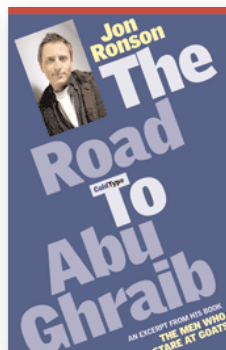
You might be wondering what six people in three different countries could possibly do. Knowing that you are not alone, that others are struggling with the same rotten system, is essential to staying sane and continuing the fight. That, alone, is priceless. But we want more than that. The relationships we are building today will be the foundation of tomorrow's solidarity actions.

There is only one world. Economic booms and slumps spill over national borders and ripple around the globe in synchronous waves. Internet technology allows people to communicate from anywhere on the planet in seconds.

To keep us divided, our rulers insist that we are more different than similar. We are discovering that the opposite is true. And in the process, we are beginning to build a very different world based on sharing and cooperation. **CT**

*Susan Rosenthal is a doctor in Ontario, Canada, and the author of **Market Madness and Mental Illness** (1998) and **Power and Powerlessness** (2006). She may be contacted through her web site www.powerandpowerlessness.com or at susanrosenthal@bestcyrano.org. This article first appeared at Znet – <http://www.zmag.org>*

The relationships we are building today will be the foundation of tomorrow's solidarity actions



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THE KINGS OF ENGLAND

George Monbiot discusses lessons not learned from the Gulf War

Either Lord Guthrie does not understand the difference between a battle and a war or he does not understand the most basic point in international law. Launching a surprise war is forbidden by the charter

If you doubt that Britain needs a written constitution, listen to a strangely unbalanced discussion broadcast by the BBC in early January. The Today programme asked Lord Guthrie, formerly chief of the defence staff, and Sir Kevin Tebbit, until recently the senior civil servant at the Ministry of Defence, if parliament should decide whether or not this country goes to war. The discussion was a terrifying exposure of the privileges of unaccountable power. It explained as well as anything I have heard how Britain became party to a crime that might have killed a million people.

Lord Guthrie argued that parliamentary approval would mean that intelligence had to be shared with MPs; that the other side could not be taken by surprise (“do you want to warn the enemy you are going to do it?”), and that commanders should have “a choice about when to attack and when not to attack”. Sir Kevin maintained that “no prime minister would be able to deploy forces without being able to command a parliamentary majority. In that sense the exec-

utive is already accountable to parliament.” Once the prime minister has his majority, in other words, MPs become redundant.

Let me dwell for a moment on what Lord Guthrie said, for he appears to be advocating that we retain the right to commit war crimes. States in dispute with each other, the UN Charter says, must first seek to solve their differences by “peaceful means” (article 33)⁽¹⁾. If these fail, they should refer the matter to the Security Council (#37), which decides what measures should be taken (#39). Taking the enemy by surprise is a useful tactic in battle, and encounters can be won only if commanders are able to make decisions quickly. But either Lord Guthrie does not understand the difference between a battle and a war – which is unlikely in view of his 44 years of service⁽²⁾ – or he does not understand the most basic point in international law. Launching a surprise war is forbidden by the charter.

It has become fashionable to scoff at these rules and to dismiss those who support them as pedants and prigs, but they are all that stand between us and

the greatest crimes in history. The International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg ruled that “to initiate a war of aggression ... is not only an international crime; it is the supreme international crime”⁽³⁾. the tribunal’s charter placed “planning, preparation, initiation or waging of a war of aggression”⁽⁴⁾ at the top of the list of war crimes.

If Britain’s most prominent retired general does not understand this, it can only be because he has never been forced to understand it. In September 2002, he argued in the House of Lords that “the time is approaching when we may have to join the United States in operations against Iraq. ... Strike soon, and the threat will be less and easier to handle. If the United Nations route fails, I support the second option.”⁽⁵⁾ No one in the chamber warned him that he was proposing the supreme international crime. In another debate in the Lords, Guthrie argued that it was “unthinkable for British service men and women to be sent to the International Criminal Court”, regardless of what they might have done⁽⁶⁾. He demanded a guarantee from the government that this would not be allowed to happen, and proposed that the British armed forces should be allowed to opt out of the European Convention on Human Rights. The grey heads murmured their agreement.

Sufficient ‘flexibility’

Perhaps it is unfair to single out the noble and gallant lord. The exceptionalism of the British establishment is almost universal. According to the government, both the Commons public administration committee and the Lords constitution committee recognise that decision-

making should “provide sufficient flexibility for deployments which need to be made without prior parliamentary approval for reasons of urgency or necessary operational secrecy.”⁽⁷⁾ You cannot keep an operation secret from parliament unless you are also keeping it secret from the UN.

Sir Kevin appears to have a general aversion to disclosure. In 2003 the *Guardian* obtained letters showing that he had prevented the fraud squad at the ministry of defence from investigating allegations of corruption against the arms manufacturer BAE, that he tipped off the chairman of BAE about the contents of a confidential letter the Serious Fraud Office had sent him and that he failed to tell his minister about the fraud office’s warnings⁽⁸⁾. In October 2003, under intense cross-examination during the Hutton inquiry into the death of the government scientist David Kelly, he revealed that the decision to name Dr Kelly was made in a “meeting chaired by the Prime Minister.”⁽⁹⁾ That could have been the end of Blair, but a week later Sir Kevin quietly sent Lord Hutton a written retraction of his evidence⁽¹⁰⁾. No one bothered to tell parliament or the press; the retraction was made public only when the Hutton report was published, three months later⁽¹¹⁾. Blair knew all along, and the secret gave him a crushing advantage⁽¹²⁾.

The discussion also reveals that Guthrie and Tebbit appear to have learnt nothing from the disaster in Iraq. They are not alone. Soon before he stepped down last year, Tony Blair wrote an article for the *Economist* called What I’ve Learned⁽¹³⁾. He had discovered, he claimed, that his critics were both wrong

In another debate in the Lords, Guthrie argued that it was “unthinkable for British service men and women to be sent to the International Criminal Court”, regardless of what they might have done

The British establishment has a unique capacity to move on, and then to repeat its mistakes. What other former empire knows so little of its own atrocities?

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

and dangerous and that his decisions, based on “freedom, democracy, responsibility to others, but also justice and fairness” were difficult but invariably right. He called his article “a very short synopsis of what I have learned”. I could think of an even shorter one.

We have yet to hear one word of regret or remorse from any of the major architects – Blair, Brown, Straw, Hoon, Campbell and their principal advisers – of Britain’s participation in the supreme international crime. The press and parliament appear to have heeded Blair’s plea that we all “move on” from Iraq. The British establishment has a unique capacity to move on, and then to repeat its mistakes. What other former empire knows so little of its own atrocities?

When people call our unwritten constitution a “gentleman’s agreement”, they reveal more than they intend. It allows the unelected gentlemen who advise the prime minister to act without reference to the proles. Britain went to war in Iraq because the public and parliament were not allowed to know when the decision was made, what the intelligence reports really said, and what the attorney-general wrote about the legality of an invasion. Had the truth not been suppressed, our armed forces could never have attacked Iraq.

Real constitutional reform requires much more than the timid proposals in the green paper on the governance of Britain, which are likely to appear in a new bill in a few weeks’ time. Yes, parliament should be allowed to vote on whether to go to war, yes the Royal Prerogative should be rolled back. But the prime minister, his diplomats, civil servants and generals would still decide

which wars parliament needs to know about, which crimes could be secretly committed in our name. Real constitutional reform means not only handing power to parliament; it also means confronting the power of the cold, unaccountable people who act as if it is their birthright. **CT**

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THE SMILING GARDEN OF EDEN

Pablo Ouziel on the reemergence of the nuclear lobby

In 1905 Albert Einstein, presented the Annus Mirabilis (“Wonderful Year”) Papers, in which he explained the mass-energy equivalence formula, $E = mc^2$, which lead to the development of nuclear energy. In 1955, a few days before his death, Einstein together with Bertrand Russell issued the Russell-Einstein Manifesto, highlighting the dangers posed by nuclear weapons, and calling for world leaders to seek peaceful resolutions to international conflict. One of the paragraphs in the manifesto read; “We shall try to say no single word which should appeal to one group rather than to another. All, equally, are in peril, and, if the peril is understood, there is hope that they may collectively avert it.”

2007 was a “Wonderful Year” in the quest for nuclear supremacy. While as ‘global citizens’ we have been distracted by the dangers of a nuclear-armed Iran, the possible failed state of Pakistan, and the push for disarmament by North Korea, our political and economic leaders have been making aggressive moves towards reinstating the forgotten supremacy of nuclear energy.

Following the 1986 disaster at Chernobyl and the end of the nuclear arms race of the Cold War, it seemed that nuclear energy would be replaced with alternative sources of energy, both for military and civilian purposes. However, it seems apparent that the opposite is taking place and as wars continue to spread, together with terrorism and failed states, the global race is on for nuclear domination. As President Bush said on December 20, “[Nuclear plants] are the best solution to making sure we have economic growth and at the same time be good stewards of the environment.”

The *Washington Post* told us on December 19, “Nuclear power is on the verge of a renaissance in the United States.” The fact is that there is a global renaissance thirsty for nuclear proliferation, and this time Washington is not its sole promoter. The main problem is that as ‘global citizens’ we don’t understand the true implications of this choice. In 1953 Edward Teller “the father of the hydrogen bomb” and an early member of the Manhattan Project, charged with developing the first atomic bombs, ad-

There is a global renaissance thirsty for nuclear proliferation, and this time Washington is not its sole promoter

POWER GAME

I am drawn to the prediction made in 1909 by the British chemist Frederick Soddy, who believed atomic power would "make the entire world one smiling Garden of Eden"

Pablo Ouziel is a sociologist and freelance writer based in Spain

dressed the issue in a letter to Sterling Cole, Chairman of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy. Referring to the use of nuclear energy for civilian purposes he said, "it is clear that no legislation will be able to stop future accidents and avoid completely occasional loss of life... Power production can, however, be conducted in such a manner as to produce militarily useful materials."

Little does this "occasional loss of life" matter at the beginning of the 21st century: At the French National Assembly's economic affairs committee, Anne Lauvergeon, chief executive of Areva, the world's largest nuclear power group, said that between now and 2030, 100 to 300 nuclear reactors could be built around the world.

During this aggressive uranium rush, Umberto Quadrino, chief executive of Edison, Italy's second-largest utility, is calling for a substantial increase in Europe's nuclear power capacity, a move which deems irrelevant the research released on December 8 by physicians and health researchers from the University of Mainz in Germany, which clearly states "that the risk for children under five years of contracting leukaemia grows with proximity of their homes to nuclear power plants."

As all countries seek to invest in nuclear energy, no importance is given to the dangers of promoting investment in nuclear development in such a volatile world; "The open secret of the nuclear age is that the line between civilian and military programs is extraordinarily thin... Indeed, the most difficult part of building a bomb is... the process that is also crucial to civilian nuclear power – producing the fuel." (*New York Times*

December 5.)

A new United States legislation was agreed in December directing the Secretary of Energy to provide \$20.5 billion for nuclear energy, \$18.5 billion for nuclear reactors and \$2 billion for uranium enrichment, while, coincidentally, there is also a plan backed by the UK government's chief scientist to build a £1bn fuel processing plant at Sellafield capable of turning the UK's 60,000 tonnes of high-level nuclear waste into reactor fuel.

Meantime in China, there are plans to increase the country's nuclear power capacity to 40,000 MW by 2020 and an agreement has already been reached for the construction of six third-generation reactors. Russia has announced that in 2008 a nuclear-energy university will be established in Moscow, based at the Moscow Engineering Physics Institute, and coordinated in unison with the Russian Education Ministry.

As the year came to a close, while observing these rapid moves towards a more nuclear world, I am drawn to the prediction made in 1909 by the British chemist Frederick Soddy, who believed atomic power would "make the entire world one smiling Garden of Eden". Sadly, I am confident that analysis will reveal that 2007 was the "Wonderful Year" in which doctrines of arbitrary authority, with their innate contempt for freedom, and belief in the necessity of violence and the morality of war were promoted side by side with a thriving nuclear complex. In this real life scenario, it seems to me that collective common sense holds the key to a non-terrorized society, which today stands far away from this mythological "Smiling Garden of Eden".

CT

GOOD AND EVIL AT THE EARTH'S CENTRE

Greg Palast meets the President of Ecuador and finds a man who truly cares about his 'poor children'

I don't know what the hell seized me. In the middle of an hour-long interview with the President of Ecuador, I asked him about his father.

I'm not Barbara Walters. It's not the kind of question I ask.

He hesitated. Then said, "My father was unemployed." He paused. Then added, "He took a little drugs to the States... This is called in Spanish a *mula* [mule]. He passed four years in the States – in a jail."

He continued. "I'd never talked about my father before."

Apparently he hadn't. His staff stood stone silent, eyes widened.

Correa's dad took that frightening chance in the 1960s, a time when his family, like almost all families in Ecuador, was destitute. Ecuador was the original "banana republic" – and the price of bananas had hit the floor. A million desperate Ecuadorans, probably a tenth of the entire adult population, fled to the USA any way they could.

"My mother told us he was working in the States."

His father, released from prison, was deported back to Ecuador. Humiliated, poor, broken, his father, I learned later, committed suicide.

At the end of our formal interview, through a doorway surrounded by paintings of the pale plutocrats who once ruled this difficult land, he took me into his own Oval Office. I asked him about an odd-looking framed note he had on the wall. It was, he said, from his daughter and her grade school class at Christmas time. He translated for me:

"We are writing to remind you that in Ecuador there are a lot of very poor children in the streets and we ask you please to help these children who are cold almost every night."

It was kind of corny. And kind of sweet. A smart display for a politician. Or maybe there was something else to it.

Correa is one of the first dark-skinned men to win election to this Quechua and mixed-race nation. Certainly, one of the first from the streets. He'd won a surprise victory over the richest man in Ecuador, the owner of the biggest banana plantation.

Ecuador was the original "banana republic" – and the price of bananas had hit the floor. A million desperate Ecuadorans, probably a tenth of the entire adult population, fled to the USA any way they could

CONFRONTING BIG OIL

His three-year-old son swam in what appeared to be contaminated water then came out vomiting blood and died

Doctor Correa, I should say, with a Ph.D in economics earned in Europe. Professor Correa as he is officially called – who, until not long ago, taught at the University of Illinois.

And Professor Doctor Correa is one tough character. He told George Bush to take the US military base and stick it where the equatorial sun don't shine. He told the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which held Ecuador's finances by the throat, to go to hell. He ripped up the "agreements" which his predecessors had signed at financial gun point. He told the Miami bond vultures that were charging Ecuador usurious interest, to eat their bonds. He said, "We are not going to pay off this debt with the hunger of our people." Food first, interest later. Much later. And he meant it.

Explaining to Bush

It was a stunning performance. I'd met two years ago with his predecessor, President Alfredo Palacio, a man of good heart, who told me, looking at the secret IMF agreements I showed him, "We cannot pay this level of debt. If we do, we are DEAD. And if we are dead, how can we pay?" Palacio told me that he would explain this to George Bush and Condoleezza Rice and the World Bank, then headed by Paul Wolfowitz. He was sure they would understand. They didn't. They cut off Ecuador at the knees.

But Ecuador didn't fall to the floor. Correa, then Economics Minister, secretly went to Hugo Chavez Venezuela's president and obtained emergency financing. Ecuador survived. And thrived. But Correa was not done.

Elected President, one of his first acts

was to establish a fund for the Ecuadoran refugees in America – to give them loans to return to Ecuador with a little cash and lot of dignity. And there were other dragons to slay. He and Palacio kicked US oil giant Occidental Petroleum out of the country.

Correa STILL wasn't done.

I'd returned from a very wet visit to the rainforest – by canoe to a Cofan Indian village in the Amazon where there was an epidemic of childhood cancers. The indigenous folk related this to the hundreds of open pits of oil sludge left to them by Texaco Oil, now part of Chevron, and its partners. I met the Cofan chief. His three-year-old son swam in what appeared to be contaminated water then came out vomiting blood and died.

Correa had gone there, too, to the rainforest, though probably in something sturdier than a canoe. And President Correa announced that the company that left these filthy pits would pay to clean them up.

But it's not just any company he was challenging. Chevron's largest oil tanker was named after a long-serving member of its Board of Directors, the Condoleezza. The US Secretary of State.

The Cofan have sued Condi's corporation, demanding the oil company clean up the crap it left in the jungle. The cost would be roughly \$12 billion. Correa won't comment on the suit itself, a private legal action. But if there's a verdict in favor of Ecuador's citizens, Correa told me, he will make sure Chevron pays up.

Is he kidding? No one has ever made an oil company pay for their slop. Even in the USA, the Exxon Valdez case drags on to its 18th year. Correa is not deterred.

He told me he would create an international tribunal to collect, if necessary. In retaliation, he could hold up payments to US companies who sue Ecuador in US courts.

This is hard core. No one – NO ONE – has made such a threat to Bush and Big Oil and lived to carry it out.

And, in an office tower looking down on Quito, the lawyers for Chevron were not amused. I met with them.

“And it’s the only case of cancer in the world? How many cases of children with cancer do you have in the States?” Rodrigo Perez, Texaco’s top lawyer in Ecuador was chuckling over the legal difficulties the Indians would have in proving their case that Chevron-Texaco caused their kids’ deaths. “If there is somebody with cancer there, [the Cofan parents] must prove [the deaths were] caused by crude or by petroleum industry. And, second, they have to prove that it is OUR crude – which is absolutely impossible.” He laughed again. You have to see this on film to believe it.

The oil company lawyer added, “No one has ever proved scientifically the connection between cancer and crude oil.” Really? You could swim in the stuff and you’d be just fine.

The Cofan had heard this before. When Chevron’s Texaco unit came to their land, the oil men said they could rub the crude oil on their arms and it would cure their ailments. Now Condi’s men had told me that crude oil doesn’t cause cancer. But maybe they are right. I’m no expert. So I called one. Robert F Kennedy Jr., professor of Environmental Law at Pace University, told me that elements of crude oil production – benzene, toluene, and xylene, “are well-

known carcinogens.” Kennedy told me he’s seen Chevron-Texaco’s ugly open pits in the Amazon and said that this toxic dumping would mean jail time in the USA.

But it wasn’t as much what the Chevron-Texaco lawyers said that shook me. It was the way they said it. Childhood cancer answered with a chuckle. The Chevron lawyer, a wealthy guy, Jaime Varela, with a blond bouffant hairdo, in the kind of yellow chinos you’d see on country club links, was beside himself with delight at the impossibility of the legal hurdles the Cofan would face. Especially this one: Chevron had pulled all its assets out of Ecuador. The Indians could win, but they wouldn’t get a dime. “What about the chairs in this office?” I asked. Couldn’t the Cofan at least get those? “No,” they laughed, the chairs were held in the name of the law firm.

Confronting Chevron

Well, now they might not be laughing. Correa’s threat to use the power of his Presidency to protect the Indians, should they win, is a shocker. No one could have expected that. And Correa, no fool, knows that confronting Chevron means confronting the full power of the Bush Administration. But to this President, it’s all about justice, fairness. “You [Americans] wouldn’t do this to your own people,” he told me. Oh yes, we would, I was thinking to myself, remembering Alaska’s Natives.

Correa’s not unique. He’s the latest of a new breed in Latin America. Lula, President of Brazil, Evo Morales, the first Indian ever elected President of Bolivia, Hugo Chavez of Venezuela. All “Left-

When Chevron's Texaco unit came to their land, the oil men said they could rub the crude oil on their arms and it would cure their ailments. Now Condi's men had told me that crude oil doesn't cause cancer

CONFRONTING BIG OIL

Maybe we can take some guidance from this tiny nation at the center of the earth

ists,” as the press tells us. But all have something else in common: they are dark-skinned working-class or poor kids who found themselves leaders of nations of dark-skinned people who had forever been ruled by an elite of bouffant blonds.

Black and Indian

When I was in Venezuela, the leaders of the old order liked to refer to Chavez as, “the monkey.” Chavez told me proudly, “I am *negro e indio*” – Black and Indian, like most Venezuelans. Chavez, as a kid rising in the ranks of the blond-controlled armed forces, undoubtedly had to endure many jeers of “monkey.” Now, all over Latin America, the “monkeys” are in charge. And they are unlocking the economic cages.

Maybe the mood will drift north. Far above the equator, a nation is ruled by a blond oil company executive. He never made much in oil – but every time he lost his money or his investors’ money, his daddy, another oil man, would give him another oil well. And when, as a rich young man out of Philips Andover Academy, the wayward youth tooted a little blow off the bar, daddy took care of that, too. Maybe young George got his powder from some guy up from Ecuador.

I know this is an incredibly simple story. Indians in white hats with their dead kids and oil millionaires in black hats laughing at kiddy cancer and play-

ing musical chairs with oil assets.

But maybe it’s just that simple. Maybe in this world there really is Good and Evil.

Or maybe we’ll have to figure it out ourselves. When I met Chief Emergildo, I was reminded of an evening years back, when I was way the hell in the middle of nowhere in the Prince William Sound, Alaska, in the Chugach Native village of Chenega. I was investigating the damage done by Exxon’s oil. There was oil sludge all over Chenega’s beaches. It was March 1991, and I was in the home of village elder Paul Kompkoff on the island’s shore, watching CNN. We stared in silence as “smart” bombs exploded in Baghdad and Basra.

Then Paul said to me, in that slow, quiet way he had, “Well, I guess we’re all Natives now.”

Well, maybe we are. But we don’t have to be, do we?

Maybe we can take some guidance from this tiny nation at the center of the earth. I listened back through my talk with President Correa. And I can assure his daughter that she didn’t have to worry that her dad would forget about “the poor children who are cold” on the streets of Quito.

Because the Professor Doctor is still one of them. **CT**

*Greg Palast’s latest book is **Armed Madhouse**. Read three excerpts at <http://www.coldtype.net/gregpalast.html>*

READ THE BEST OF JOE BAGEANT

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

ONLY IF SOMEONE ELSE HAS TO DO IT!

Fighting for freedom? Where and when?, asks **Fred Reed**

I have just received the November issue of the magazine of the American Legion, in which I discover an article by one Ralph Peters, that reminded me of why, having joined the Legion on impulse, I have never gone to the Post. The piece is entitled “Twelve Myths of 21st Century War.” A better title might be, “A Pedestrian Compendium of Agonizingly Cliched Jingoism.” (I guess he didn’t think of calling it that.) Anyway, Ralph believes that Americans have become too comfortable, have lost their taste for war, no longer want to pay the butcher’s bill. Ralph is for war. Not much for history, though.

As a diagnostic exercise in intellectual pathology, let’s look at some of these clichés. Ralph speaks of “the terrible price our troops had to pay for freedom” in our various wars. Ah. In exactly which wars did the military protect our freedoms?

The Mexican War of 1847 didn’t protect our freedoms. In the view of Ulysses Grant – a participant in that war, and unconvincing as a limp-wristed liberal – it constituted sheer unjustified aggres-

sion. In the Civil War the Confederacy posed no danger to our freedoms, if by “us” one means the Union. The South wanted only to be left alone to misbehave in peace. The Spanish-American War of 1898 was also unjustified aggression: Neither Cuba nor Spain posed the slightest threat to our freedoms. World War I didn’t protect our freedoms, nor probably those of Europe. It was an internal war between colonial powers led by idiots. World War II was justified retaliation for attack and a plausible long-term peril for freedom. The Korean War wasn’t about our freedoms – many observers assert that it took place in Korea – and neither was Viet Nam. We lost the latter and seemed no less free than before. Iraq has nothing to do with our freedoms. It couldn’t threaten the freedom of Guatemala.

One for eight, Ralph. It wouldn’t fly in the NFL.

Non-fighting elites

Ralph, a doubtless well-paid commentator on television, complains that our elites do not fight in the country’s wars.

Ralph speaks of “the terrible price our troops had to pay for freedom” in our various wars. Ah. In exactly which wars did the military protect our freedoms

FIGHTING TALK

What are the current wars about? Ralph thinks, or says he thinks, that our wars serve to protect civilization, decency, and apple pie. This is either boilerplate brainlessness or deliberate cant

True. Neither do our Ralphs. Relying on his biography in the Wikipedia, I find that he was born in 1952, making him of military age in 1970. The war in Viet Nam being at its height, he went to Europe for ten years. Rough duty, it was. Cirrhosis always looms in those beer gardens. He retired from the Army as a lieutenant colonel in intelligence. (Officers usually being peters, it is not surprising that Peters was an officer.)

In the Marines we referred to such people as “admin pogues” or “REMFs,” rear-echelon motherfuckers. I confess to a loathing for those who shelter safely behind the lines yet send others to fight, bowwow, grrrr, woof. Still, his record is not irrelevant to his views. War looks exciting to office workers, but has less appeal to those who are forced to fight. It has even less appeal for those who are hit.

I remember lying in the NSA hospital in Danang, across the way from some guys whose tank had been hit by an RPG. I couldn’t see them because my face was bandaged. Still, we talked. They were badly burned, but seemed likely to live, though with ghastly scars.

The RPG had ruptured the hydraulics, they said, and the cherry juice cooked off. The two across from me had gotten out. The other two crewmen had burned to death. Apparently they screamed a lot. You panic, it hurts, you are blinded, you can’t find the hatches, that kind of thing.

I could tell a lot of stories like that. I don’t because then I get very strange and want to hit something. A loud-mouthed REMF, for example.

Don’t take this as denigration of Ralph, though. Intel work carries its per-

ils. He could have broken a nail on his shift key. Sure, a trip to the nails parlor would fix it, but those things hurt.

Sacrificing our boys

Ralph, of course, speaks of the sacrifices our boys are making. They aren’t making sacrifices. They are being sacrificed. Sacrifices are voluntary, but if the troops decline to fight, they go to jail. The mechanics go this way: Having an all-volunteer army minimizes objections to the war since no one of any influence has to go; if a lot of high-school grads from Tennessee are getting killed, well, it’s not a good thing of course, but who really cares? This facilitates hobbyist wars. A voluntary army is a small army, so you have to send the same troops for tour after tour until they are half-mad and their families wrecked. Who cares? They are just rednecks anyway – not our sort of people, nobody a general would let his daughter date.

What are the current wars about? Ralph thinks, or says he thinks, that our wars serve to protect civilization, decency, and apple pie. This is either boilerplate brainlessness or deliberate cant. Permit me to cite a contrary view:

“War is a racket. It always has been. It is possibly the oldest, easily the most profitable, surely the most vicious. It is the only one international in scope. It is the only one in which the profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives... A racket is best described, I believe, as something that is not what it seems to the majority of the people. Only a small “inside” group knows what it is about. It is conducted for the benefit of the very few, at the expense of the very many. Out of war a few people

make huge fortunes.”

Many will recognize this as the writing of the celebrated leftist Noam Chomsky, but this would be a case of misidentification. The author is, of course, Marine Major General Smedley Butler, holder of two Congressional Medals of Honor, even more than Ralph. But what does Butler know about war, compared to an office-weenie veteran of Europe’s beer chutes?

War is a racket. The military budget is absolutely huge after you add up the usual budget, the expenditures for the current wars, the intel outfits, the black programs, the Veterans Administration, and Homeland Security. Each of these jelly jars attracts its swarm of hungry bees. Always a new weapon is needed. Some threat pullulates in the darkness, ready to defeat the weapons we have. Some of these programs become virtual kingdoms. A fighter can take a quarter century to develop at wonderful cost. Then you get to produce it for decades perhaps, and sell spare parts and upgrades and then you sleep it (Service Life Extension Program, become a verb). Money, money, money. An occasional war provides plausibility.

Protecting our freedoms?

Of course we are in Iraq to protect our freedoms, Ralph. Who could doubt it? Only by coincidence does colonization put American troops on the borders of Iran and Syria, enemies of Israel, and in a position to control by intimidation the oil of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, and the UAE. Coincidence, I assure you.

A bloated military requires enemies. Ralph sees one in the Mohammedans, a desperate recourse but the only one

available. Enemies have to be frightening so as to justify the budget. The Soviets were serviceable in this regard, having a huge if low-grade military and a history of occupying places. When the commies punked out, no believable bugaboo was at hand, so makeup was applied to Moslems to let them serve until China comes online. Already one reads of the ominous buildup of the wily Chinese. Evil lurks everywhere, fearsome shapes twist in the fog, send money.

Why does Ralph think Iraq threatens our freedoms? Because he is supposed to. To quote Smedley Butler further, “Like all the members of the military profession, I never had a thought of my own until I left the service. My mental faculties remained in suspended animation while I obeyed the orders of higher-ups. This is typical with everyone in the military service.”

Actually it is much more true of officers, who are issued their minds when they sign up. They seldom turn them in upon retirement. Enlisted men know less but think more.

Enough. I can’t stand it. Ralph complains that the presidential candidates have never been in uniform, but I note that Hillary’s combat record exactly equal Ralph’s. Frauds, phonies, poseurs, always saying, “Let’s you and him fight.”

CT

Fred Reed 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. Fred’s web site is <http://fredoneverything.net>

Why does Ralph think Iraq threatens our freedoms? Because he is supposed to

GREED AT A GLANCE

Sam Pizzigati tracks the redistribution of a nation's wealth

The most atypical CEO in the Fortune 500? That may be Jim Sinegal, the 71-year-old chief exec at Costco, the big-box retailer. In 2007 Sinegal collected \$3.2 million in total pay, less than 40 percent of the big-time CEO average

Some things in Colorado never seem to dip. The Rockies always stand tall. And so apparently does the going rate for local luxury housing. This past November, hedge fund magnate Louis Moore Bacon shelled out \$175 million for Colorado's Trinchera Ranch, the highest sum ever paid for a US residential property. Over in the Aspen area, the epicenter of Colorado luxury, real estate sales in 2007 barely missed setting a new annual record. Over the course of the year, the *Aspen Daily News* reports, three local single-family houses sold for over \$20 million. What's keeping prices high? About 40 billionaires now have Aspen area abodes, and, says appraiser Randy Gold, they have the cash to "get whatever they want." If a mere millionaire were to spend a dollar a second, explains Gold, that millionaire's fortune would be gone in 11 or so days. But a billionaire, spending a dollar a second, can keep going for 30 years . . .

Tracking CEO pay a bit easier in 2008

The Securities and Exchange Commission, the top federal corporate watchdog

agency, has just unveiled a new "Executive Compensation Reader" that lets anyone with online access compute "how much a company pays its top executives." The reader features data from the biggest 500 companies with shares that trade on Wall Street. CEO pay at these 500 companies, says a new study from the Corporate Library, rose 23 percent in the 12 months that ended this past October 25. Over that same period, shareholder value at the companies rose 14 percent. Another new report, from compensation experts at Equilar, notes that the typical top exec at a Fortune 500 company has now accumulated \$48.2 million in pension benefits, deferred pay, unexercised stock options, other stock awards that haven't yet vested, and "shares owned outright."

The most atypical CEO in the Fortune 500? That may be Jim Sinegal, the 71-year-old chief exec at Costco, the big-box retailer. In 2007, Costco revealed last month, Sinegal collected \$3.2 million in total pay, less than 40 percent of the big-time CEO average. Sinegal, for the seventh straight year, took no pay raise. In 2004, the last time *Business Week* com-

pared big-box retailers, Costco was solidly outpacing Wal-Mart's Sam's Club in sales per store square foot, a key retail success measure. Yet Wal-Mart CEO Lee Scott was then making over 850 times the average Wal-Mart worker wage – while Sinegal was taking home just 111 times more than average Costco workers. The Costco board has no plans to hike CEO pay any time soon. Higher rewards, the board said last month, “would not change Mr. Sinegal's motivation and performance.”

The board of directors at Comcast, the cable TV giant, is taking a somewhat different approach to motivating executives. The board has just agreed to pay Comcast executive committee chairman Ralph Roberts, the 87-year-old father of the company's current CEO, five years worth of salary after he dies. The billionaire Roberts collected \$24.1 million in total compensation from Comcast in 2006. The company hasn't yet revealed either his 2007 salary or total pay. The after-death payout, says Comcast, will go to whoever chairman Roberts names as his beneficiary . . .

With Democratic Party White House hopefuls and even one Republican – Mike Huckabee – now regularly decrying how top-heavy the US economy has become, defenders of America's unequal economic order have taken to the offensive. Over recent weeks, they've started lobbing op-ed grenades against the research that documents America's steadily rising inequality. Late last month, for instance, a *Washington Post* op-ed by economist Stephen Rose labeled the squeeze on the US middle class a “myth.” A week earlier, the *Economist* magazine saluted “those intrepid souls

who make vast fortunes” for “turning out ever higher-quality goods at ever lower prices.” That piece, in turn, echoed a late fall Cato Institute attack on analyses that link luxury consumption by the super-rich to higher living costs for everyone else. Attacks like these, notes Princeton's Paul Krugman, are attempting to revive the classic “dodges” of inequality denial. Among the best dissections of these dodges: a pair of astute essays from the Economic Policy Institute's Larry Mishel and Cornell economist Robert Frank.

Baloney, Inequality, and Mitt

Want to really understand how dramatically the distribution of wealth in the United States has changed over the past half-century?

To gain that understanding, you could go poring through reams of research data. Or you could take a shorter route. You could simply consider the family financial history of Mitt Romney, Wall Street's favorite in the race for the 2008 GOP Presidential nomination.

This Romney family history encapsulates, over the span of a single generation, just about every dominant trend that has shaped our increasingly unequal times. The tilt to the top. The squeeze on the middle. The assault on honest labor.

Mitt Romney, for his part, appears to have precious little interest in telling this story – or discussing anything else about inequality. “I don't believe,” he opined at a recent campaign stop in New Hampshire, “in this baloney that there are two Americas.”

But we don't need Mitt to narrate the story of his family's evolving financial fortunes. The details are already sitting

This Romney family history encapsulates, over the span of a single generation, just about every dominant trend that has shaped our increasingly unequal times. The tilt to the top. The squeeze on the middle. The assault on honest labor

MUCH WANTS MORE

Back in 1960, taxpayers who reported \$275,000 in income paid on average, after exploiting every loophole they could find, just under 44 percent of that income in federal taxes

*Labor journalist Sam Pizzigati edits Too Much, an online weekly available at www.toomuchonline.org His most recent book is **Greed and Good: Understanding and Overcoming the Inequality that Limits Our Lives***

in the public record.

Our story starts in 1954, the year that Mitt's dad George became the chief executive of American Motors, the newly created company that had just emerged from what qualified, at the time, as the largest corporate merger in US business history.

George Romney's new status, not surprisingly, quickly catapulted the Romney family into the nation's economic elite, the most affluent 0.01 percent of US income-earners. But here's the surprising part. George Romney's new status did not make him super-rich. In fact, as the top exec at American Motors, George Romney never made more than \$225,000 a year. His total annual income over these years – his auto industry take-home coupled with gains from his personal investments – only averaged \$275,000.

That's just \$1.8 million in today's dollars, points out *New York Times* reporter David Leonhardt, a sum not even close to the near \$10 million that a corporate executive needed to make in 2005 to enter the ranks of America's topmost 0.01.

And that's also not the only difference between the wealthy in George Romney's time and ours. Back in 1960, taxpayers who reported \$275,000 in income paid on average, after exploiting every loophole they could find, just under 44 percent of that income in federal taxes.

By contrast, in 2005, the most recent year with IRS data available, taxpayers in America's most affluent 0.01 percent – average income, \$27.3 million – paid only 20.9 percent of that to Uncle Sam.

In other words, back in George Romney's heyday, America's most affluent one-hundredth of 1 percent paid over

twice as much of their income in taxes as their counterparts do today. And they started out, after adjusting for inflation, with considerably less income!

What has made today's United States so much more unequal? The quick answer: The twin pillars of growing economic equality back in George Romney's time – a vital trade union presence throughout the economy and a steeply graduated progressive income tax – have both crumbled.

George Romney's American Motors paid good union wages, as did, at the time, almost all major US companies outside the South. Widespread collective bargaining – a third of private-sector workers carried union cards – helped make sure that companies shared the wealth their operations created.

The federal income tax, meanwhile, reinforced this sharing impulse. In 1960, the top tax rate on income over \$400,000 stood at 91 percent. Corporate boards then, as now, could pay their top executives whatever they chose. But why bother – when so little above \$400,000 would end up in executive pockets?

Mitt Romney, George Romney's son, hasn't had to worry about 91 percent top marginal tax rates – or unions either. He came of business executive age in the early 1980s. By that time, the Reagan "revolution" had already begun sharply shrinking both unions and tax rates on high incomes.

Thanks to these dynamics, Mitt now holds a fortune worth as much as \$350 million. Out of that sum, he has already spent more on his own Presidential campaign – over \$17 million – than his dad George earned in his entire business career.

CT

IRAQ POLICY: DIVIDE AND RULE

Dahr Jamail explains why violence will drop when the US leaves

If the US leaves Iraq, the violent sectarianism between the Sunni and Shia will worsen. This is what Republicans and Democrats alike will have us believe. This key piece of rhetoric is used to justify the continuance of the occupation of Iraq.

This propaganda, like others of its ilk, gains ground, substance, and reality due largely to the ignorance of those ingesting it. The snow job by the corporate media on the issue of sectarianism in Iraq has ensured that the public buys into the line that the Sunni and Shia will dice one another up into little pieces if the occupation ends.

It may be worthwhile to consider that before the Anglo-American invasion and occupation of Iraq there had never been open warfare between the two groups and certainly not a civil war. In terms of organization and convention, Iraqis are a tribal society and some of the largest tribes in the country comprise Sunni and Shia. Inter-marriages between the two sects are not uncommon either.

Soon after arriving in Iraq in November 2003, I learned that it was considered

rude and socially graceless to enquire after an individual's sect. If in ignorance or under compulsion I did pose the question, the most common answer I would receive was, "I am Muslim, and I am Iraqi." On occasion there were more telling responses like the one I received from an older woman, "My mother is a Shia and my father a Sunni, so can you tell which half of me is which?" The accompanying smile said it all.

Large mixed neighborhoods were the norm in Baghdad. Sunni and Shia prayed in one another's mosques. Secular Iraqis could form lifelong associations with others without overt concern about their chosen sect. How did such a well-integrated society erupt into vicious fighting, violent sectarianism, and segregated neighborhoods? How is one to explain the millions in Iraq displaced from their homes simply because they were the wrong sect in the wrong place at the wrong time?

Back in December 2003 Sheikh Adnan, a Friday speaker at his mosque, had recounted a recent experience to me. During the first weeks of the occupa-

It may be worthwhile to consider that before the Anglo-American invasion and occupation of Iraq there had never been open warfare between the two groups and certainly not a civil war

ENDING THE AGONY

When the Coalition Provisional Authority, led by Paul Bremer, formed the first puppet Iraqi government, a precedent was set. The 25 seats in the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC), were assigned strictly along sectarian lines

tion, a US military commander had showed up in Baquba, the capital of Diyala province located roughly 25 miles northeast of Baghdad with a mixed Sunni-Shia population. He had asked to meet with all the tribal and religious leaders. On the appointed day the assembled leaders were perplexed when the commander instructed them to divide themselves, “Shia on one side of the room, Sunni on the other.”

It would not be amiss, perhaps, to read in this account an implanting of a deliberate policy of “divide and rule” by the Anglo-American invaders from the early days of the occupation.

There have been no statistical surveys in recent years to determine the sectarian composition of Iraq. However, when the Coalition Provisional Authority, led by Paul Bremer, formed the first puppet Iraqi government, a precedent was set. The 25 seats in the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC), were assigned strictly along sectarian lines based on the assumption that 60 percent of the population is Shia, 20 percent Sunni, and 20 percent Kurds, who are mostly Sunni. For good measure, a couple of Turkoman and a Christian were thrown in.

It is evident that this puppet troupe deployed at the onset of “democracy” in Iraq was mandated to establish to the population that it was in the larger interest to begin thinking, at least politically, along sectarian and ethnic lines. Inevitably, political power struggles ensued and were cemented and exacerbated with the January 30, 2005, elections.

Mild surface scratching reveals a darker, largely unreported aspect of the divisive US plan. A UN report released in

September 2005 held Iraqi interior ministry forces responsible for an organized campaign of detention, torture, and killing of fellow Iraqis. These special police commando units were recruited from the Shia Badr Organization and Mehdi Army militias.

In Baghdad during November and December 2004, I heard widespread accounts of death squads assassinating Sunni resistance leaders and their key sympathizers. It was after the failure of Operation Phantom Fury, as the US siege of Fallujah that November was named, that the Iraqi resistance spread across Iraq like wildfire. Death squads were set up to quell this fire by eliminating the leadership of this growing resistance. The firefighting team had at its helm the US ambassador to Iraq, John Negroponte, ably assisted by retired Colonel James Steele, adviser to Iraqi security forces. In 1984-86 Steele had been commander of the US military advisory group in El Salvador. Between 1981 and 1985 Negroponte was US ambassador to neighboring Honduras. In 1994 the Honduras Commission on Human Rights charged him with extensive human rights violations, reporting the torture and disappearance of at least 184 political workers.

A CIA working group set up in 1996 to look into the US role in Honduras has placed on record documents admitting that the operations Negroponte oversaw in Honduras were carried out by “special intelligence units,” better known as “death squads,” of CIA-trained Honduran armed units which kidnapped, tortured, and killed thousands of people suspected of supporting leftist guerrillas. Negroponte was ambassador to Iraq

for close to a year from June 2004.

The only public mention of any of this I have seen was in *Newsweek* magazine on January 8, 2005. It quotes Donald Rumsfeld, US secretary of defense at the time, who discussed the use of the “Salvador Option” in Iraq. It compared the strategy being planned for Iraq to the one used in Central America during the Reagan administration:

“Then, faced with a losing war against Salvadoran rebels, the US government funded or supported “nationalist” forces that allegedly included so-called death squads directed to hunt down and kill rebel leaders and sympathizers. Eventually the insurgency was quelled, and many US conservatives consider the policy to have been a success – despite the deaths of innocent civilians and the subsequent Iran-Contra arms-for-hostages scandal.”

US-backed sectarian death squads have become the foremost generator of death in Iraq, even surpassing the US military machine, infamous for its capacity for industrial-scale slaughter. It is no secret in Baghdad that the US military would regularly cordon off pro-resistance areas like the al-Adhamiyah neighborhood of Baghdad and allow “Iraqi police” and “Iraqi army” personnel, masked in black balaclavas, through their checkpoints to carry out abductions and assassinations in the neighborhood.

Consequently, almost all of Baghdad and much of Iraq is now segregated. The flipside is that violence in the capital city has subsided now that the endgame of forming the death squads, that of fragmenting the population, has been mostly accomplished.

Baghdad resident, retired General Waleed al-Ubaidy told my Iraqi colleague recently, “I would like to agree with the idea that violence in Iraq has decreased and that everything is fine, but the truth is far more bitter. All that has happened is a dramatic change in the demographic map of Iraq.” Baghdad today is a divided city.

Ahmad Ali, chief engineer from one of Baghdad’s municipalities told my colleague, Ali al-Fadhily, “Baghdad has been torn into two cities and many towns and neighborhoods. There is now the Shia Baghdad and the Sunni Baghdad to start with. Each is divided into little town-like pieces of the hundreds of thousands who had to leave their homes.” Al-Adhamiyah, on the Russafa side of Tigris River, is now entirely Sunni, the other areas are all Shia. The al-Karkh side of the river is purely Sunni except for Shula, Hurriya, and small strips of Aamil which are dominated by Shia militias.

Not being privy to the US machinations, Iraqis in Baghdad blame the Iraqi police and Iraqi army for the sectarian assassinations and wonder why the US military does little or nothing to stop them. “The Americans ask [Prime Minister Nouri al] Maliki to stop the sectarian assassinations knowing full well that his ministers are ordering the sectarian cleansing,” says Mahmood Farhan of the Muslim Scholars Association, a leading Sunni group.

A more recent manifestation of the divisive US policy has been the “purchase” of members of the largely Sunni resistance in Baghdad and in al-Anbar province that constitutes one-third of the geographic area of Iraq. Payments made by the US military to collaborating

US-backed sectarian death squads have become the foremost generator of death in Iraq, even surpassing the US military machine, infamous for its capacity for industrial-scale slaughter

ENDING THE AGONY

Dahr Jamail, who spent eight months in Iraq as an independent journalist, is author of ***Beyond the Green Zone: Dispatches From an Unembedded Journalist in Occupied Iraq*** (Haymarket Books, 2007). Dahr is currently on a national speaking tour sponsored by Haymarket and his articles can be found at <http://www.dahrjamailiraq.com>

(c)Dahr Jamail

tribal sheikhs already amount to \$17 million. The money passes directly into the hands of fighters who in many cases were engaged in launching attacks against the occupiers just a few weeks ago.

Tribal fighters are being paid \$300 per month to patrol their areas, particularly against foreign mercenaries. Today the military refers to these men as “concerned local citizens,” “awakening force,” or simply “volunteers.”

Arguably, violence in the area has temporarily declined. “Those Americans thought they would decrease the resistance attacks by separating the people of Iraq into sects and tribes,” announced a 32-year-old man from Ramadi, who spoke with al-Fadhily on terms of anonymity, “They know they are sinking deeper into the shifting sand, but the collaborators are fooling the Americans right now, and will in the end use this strategy against them.” By the end of November 2007, the US military had enlisted 77,000 of these fighters, and hopes to add another 10,000. Eighty-two percent of the fighters are Sunni.

Politically, the US administration maintains its support of the Shia-dominated government in Baghdad. The fallout has been blatantly clear. On December 1, Adnan al-Dulaimi, head of the Accordance Front, which is the Sunni political bloc in the Iraqi Parliament, was placed under house arrest by Iraqi and US security forces in the Adil neighborhood, west of Baghdad. Iraqi security forces also detained his son Makki and 45 of his guards. They were accused of manufacturing car bombs and killing Sunni militia members in the neighborhood who have been working with the

US military. Members of the Accordance Front, which holds 44 of the 275 seats in the Iraqi Parliament, promptly walked out. Maliki has, several times in the last several weeks, hurled public accusations and criticisms at al-Dulaimi, sending political and sectarian shock waves, further crippling the crumbling political process.

It is important to mention that Maliki, a US puppet par excellence, acts only as told. After the January 2005 elections, the government that came into power had chosen Ibrahim al-Jaafari as its prime minister. When Jaafari refused to toe the US/UK line, Condoleezza Rice and her UK counterpart Jack Straw flew to Baghdad, and before their short trip ended Jaafari was out and Maliki was in as prime minister.

In the context of these facts let us now return to the big question: Will Iraq descend further into a sectarian nightmare if the occupation ends?

An indicator of how things will likely resolve themselves upon the departure of foreign troops may be drawn from the southern city of Basra. In early September, 500 British troops left one of Saddam Hussein’s palaces in the heart of the city and ceased to conduct regular foot patrols. According to the British military, the overall level of violence in the city has decreased 90 percent since then.

This may or may not be a guarantee of a drop in sectarianism upon the departure of the invading armies, but it does prove that when the primary cause of the violence, sectarian strife, instability, and chaos is removed, things are bound to improve rapidly.

Are we still going to believe that the occupation is holding Iraq together? **CT**

JUNIOR PARTNER IN A GLOBAL WAR

Linda McQuaig on Canada's confused role in Afghanistan

For Canadians, watching a televised debate of Republican presidential candidates can be a bit like observing an inscrutable species. Baffling as it is to us, all the candidates reject public health care and celebrate the excellence of the US health-care system, apparently regarding the fact that millions of Americans lack basic coverage as a minor flaw in the system.

Even more disturbing, the Republican presidential hopefuls seem to see the West as engaged in an all-out war against radical Islam in what sounds awfully like a crusades-style “clash of civilizations.”

This is instructive for Canadians. Much as Canadian political leaders and commentators emphasize the notion that we're in Afghanistan to help with “reconstruction” and to improve the lot of women – goals Canadians readily support – we can perhaps get a better sense of the real nature of what we've signed on for by listening to these leading Republicans, who come from the same political pool as the war's architect,

George W. Bush.

And while Canadians like to think of Afghanistan as a very different war than the one in Iraq, the Republicans clearly see the two wars as simply twin parts in America's battle with radical Islam.

The view of the Republican candidates is strikingly similar, for that matter, to the view expressed by a US general, Thomas Metz, who gave the keynote address at a conference (which I attended) at the Canadian Forces College in Toronto in January 2006.

Metz gave the high-level conference of Canadian soldiers and military think-tank experts what amounted to a pep talk for fighting the Muslim enemy. The audience included one of Canada's top generals, Andrew Leslie.

“The Islamic faith is not evil,” Metz told the gathering. “But it's been hijacked by thugs ... Most of the Islamic world believes the suicide bombers of the World Trade Center are now in the land of milk and honey.”

Metz noted that there are almost a billion Muslims in the world. Then, engaging in some freewheeling specula-

Even more disturbing, the Republican presidential hopefuls seem to see the West as engaged in an all-out war against radical Islam in what sounds awfully like a crusades-style “clash of civilizations”

WAR ON WHAT?

Canadians watching the debate probably suspected that US foreign policy isn't totally irrelevant to the rise of terror

tion, he added that if only 1 per cent of Muslims are radical “that’s 10 million radicals.”

The general’s message seemed to be that Canadians are engaged in a war, not against a small group of extremists, but ultimately against millions of Muslims. Will this mentality change if the Republicans lose the White House this fall?

In the Democratic debate that followed the Republican one, there was plenty of criticism of the disaster in Iraq. But the candidates shied away from seriously critiquing the ideas behind Bush’s “war on terror” or his doctrine of preemptive war.

Ironically, the strongest critique came in the Republican debate, from candidate Ron Paul, who challenged the notion that terrorists hate Americans “because we’re free and prosperous.”

Paul suggested instead that it was “because we invaded their countries and

occupy their countries, have bases in their (countries). And we haven’t done it just since 9/11 ... we have done that for a long time.”

Paul’s argument that terrorism was a response to American foreign policy was quickly dismissed by the other Republican candidates with a resounding chorus: terrorism is purely the product of irrational, freedom-hating Muslims.

“Our foreign policy is irrelevant,” harumphed Rudy Giuliani, “totally irrelevant.”

Canadians watching the debate probably suspected that US foreign policy isn’t totally irrelevant to the rise of terrorism. But then, we don’t make these wars, we just fight in them. **CT**

*Toronto author and journalist Linda McQuaig’s most recent book is **Holding The Bully’s Coat: Canada and the US Empire**. This essay was originally published in the Toronto Star*

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NADER, THE UNREASONABLE?

William Blum ponders democracy, spies, Iraq and Building Seven

I recommend *An Unreasonable Man*, the new documentary about Ralph Nader, which was recently shown on PBS television. Its primary focus is on Nader's argument for having run in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections despite the alleged harm done to the Democratic Party candidates. As I've written earlier: The choice facing people like myself was not Ralph Nader or Albert Gore or John Kerry. The choice facing us was Ralph Nader or not voting at all. If Nader had not been on the ballot, we would have stayed home. It's that simple. The film shows a clip of a TV network newscast just after the 2000 election in which star news anchors Katie Couric and Tom Brokaw are discussing this very question, and much to my surprise they both come to this same conclusion – Nader did not cost the Democrats many votes at all. If he had not been on the ballot, the great bulk of his supporters would NOT have voted Democratic instead.

This escapes Nader's critics, such as the two featured in the film, *Nation* magazine columnist Eric Alterman and au-

thor and 60s icon Todd Gitlin. NASA should check them out – just mention “Ralph Nader” and they go ballistic. They engage in an orgy of angry name calling, labeling Nader an egomaniac, irrational ... “prefabricated purity” ... “borders on the wicked” ... responsible for the Iraq war and the destruction of the environment ... They don't directly challenge anything of substance amongst the views of Nader or his supporters. They're not at all impressed with what I find most exhilarating – the unique phenomenon of a noted public political figure consistently standing on principle. Nader's critics can't admit that there's principle involved in all this, for fear of revealing their own lack of that quality, as they cling to defending the indefensible – the idea that the Democratic Party is a force for even liberal change, never mind progressive.

The film also gives time to other Nader critics, including Michael Moore, whom I admire more than the likes of Alterman or Gitlin. However, it shows Moore speaking during the 2000 campaign on behalf of Nader, telling the au-

Nader did not cost the Democrats many votes at all. If he had not been on the ballot, the great bulk of his supporters would NOT have voted Democratic instead

Defenders of the Democrats now ask: "Would Al Gore have invaded Iraq?" Maybe not. He might have invaded Iran instead; that apparently was the first choice of Israel and their American lobby

dience not to be afraid to vote their conscience; it then shows him in 2004, making fun of those who call for voting for one's conscience – Yes, the hypocrisy is that blatant. Moore is indeed a strange political animal. The maker of *Fahrenheit 911* and *Sicko* was until not long ago a super-avid supporter of Hillary Clinton (admitting to even a sexual crush on her), and he has supported General Wesley Clark for president, a genuine war criminal for his merciless 78-day bombing assault upon Yugoslavia.

Defenders of the Democrats now ask, "Would Al Gore have invaded Iraq?" Maybe not. He might have invaded Iran instead; that apparently was the first choice of Israel and their American lobby. Remember that the Clinton-Gore administration imposed eight years of heartless and needless sanctions upon the people of Iraq, simultaneously bombing them hundreds of times, costing the lives of more than a million people, ruining the lives of millions more. Al Gore has already invaded Iraq.

It's an old and painful story. Democrats cannot be trusted ideologically, not even to be consistently liberal, and certainly not progressive or radical, no matter how much we wish we could trust them, no matter how awful the Republicans may be. In 1968 Democratic Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota was the darling of the left. He ran in the Democratic presidential primaries on an anti-Vietnam war platform that excited a whole generation of young people. Peaceniks and hippies, the story goes, were getting haircuts, dressing like decent Americans, and forsaking dope, all to be "clean for Gene" and work in his campaign. Yet, in 1980, Gene McCarthy

came out in support of Ronald Reagan against Jimmy Carter.^[1]

It's most often foreign policy which separates liberals from those further to the left. In the post World War II period, one of the most revered American liberals was Senator Hubert Humphrey. But he was at the same time a fanatical anti-communist. In 1954 he introduced a bill to outlaw the Communist Party on the grounds that it was "an illegal conspiracy to overthrow the Government of the United States by force and violence and not a legitimate political party." When he became Lyndon Johnson's vice-president in 1965 he supported the Vietnam War. Two years later he was actually moved to declare to American troops in Vietnam: "I believe that Vietnam will be marked as the place where the family of man has gained the time it needed to finally break through to a new era of hope and human development and justice. This is the chance we have. This is our great adventure – and a wonderful one it is."^[2]

It was the administration of the liberal Jimmy Carter that instigated the Soviet intervention into Afghanistan in 1979, leading to Washington's decisive role in the overthrow of a government which, compared to what replaced it, was extremely progressive.^[3] It was also Carter who gave Iraq the OK to invade Iran in 1980, with terrible consequences for the two countries.^[4]

No, I don't know what we should do about our leaders. The US electoral process we're all suffering through right now, which feels like it's been going on non-stop forever, is replete with continual cries from the leading candidates about some kind of "change". Whatever

can they mean? They mean nothing. And the media treats it all like some kind of horse race, a spectator sport. Is there any election system in this world as lacking in intellectual discussion, as hopelessly corrupted by money, and as undemocratic as the one Americans are blessed with? Where else in the world is the candidate with the most votes not necessarily the winner? If we could interview each and every American voter to determine exactly why they voted for a particular candidate, compared to what the actual facts are about that candidate, and the results were widely publicized, it would be such a national embarrassment the next election might be called off. What does winning an election mean other than that the sales campaign was successful? An outright auction for the presidency would be more efficient, and more honest.

Another tale of a liberal

Gilbert Harrison, former editor and publisher of the influential Washington magazine, *New Republic*, departed this world on January 3. I never met the man, but in 1975, while living in London, I submitted a review of former CIA officer Philip Agee's new book, *Inside the Company: CIA Diary*, to the magazine. The book was a shocker, providing more detail about CIA covert operations in Latin America than any book ever written, revealing the names of hundreds of CIA officers, agents, and front organizations. The book had not yet appeared in the United States and the *New Republic* was pleased to have what would be one of the first reviews. At that time the magazine was still firmly in the liberal camp. At last my writing résumé would list

something other than the alternative press.

A couple of weeks later, another letter arrived from the magazine's literary editor. She was sorry to inform me that the Editor-in-Chief, Gilbert Harrison, had vetoed publication of my review at the last moment. The article was returned to me, already edited for publication, even with an issue date marked on it.

Some years later, I came to appreciate that Harrison was a typical Cold-War, anti-communist liberal – no matter how progressive their views concerning the individual and society, the basic tenets, assumptions, and objectives of American foreign policy were held sacrosanct. In 1961 the *New Republic* obtained a comprehensive account of the preparations by the CIA for its upcoming invasion of Cuba. Harrison was a friend of President Kennedy and he dutifully submitted the magazine's planned article to the White House for advice.

We thus have a case here of the United States about to initiate what the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg called “a war of aggression ... not only an international crime, it is the supreme international crime.” And an American journalist did not know whether he should expose this. When Kennedy asked that the story not be printed, Harrison complied.^[5] If the story had been published, it might have led to the cancellation of the invasion, and thus the saving of a few thousand lives on the two sides.

Ironically and sadly, just four days after Harrison's death, Philip Agee died. We had been friends since I met him in England in 1975, shortly after his book came out. Phil was truly a hero. He gave

If the story had been published, it might have led to the cancellation of the invasion, and thus the saving of a few thousand lives on the two sides

The Agency had him under surveillance for much of the rest of his life. The extreme strain this put on him may well have contributed to the perforated ulcer which led to his death

up his career, his financial security, a normal family life, and his safety to work against the CIA in one country after another that was threatened by the Agency – Cuba, Jamaica, Grenada, Chile, Nicaragua, Venezuela. The CIA revoked his US passport, spread all manner of false stories about him (such as his being in the pay of the KGB), and hounded him in Europe, getting him expelled from the UK, the Netherlands, Italy, and other countries. The Agency had him under surveillance for much of the rest of his life. The extreme strain this put on him may well have contributed to the perforated ulcer which led to his death.

The CIA was, as it still is, a force for dreadful things. What could a man of principle and idealism, with so much inside knowledge of the workings of the Agency, do but devote his life to fighting such a force?

Oh, by the way, the Iraqis don't really want us

Did you miss this? It should have been the lead story in every newspaper and radio and TV program in America. In the *Washington Post* it was on page 14. In virtually all of the rest of the media it was on page zero, channel zero, 0000 AM or 00.0 FM.

The US military in Iraq hired firms to conduct focus groups amongst a cross section of the population. A summary report of the findings was obtained by the *Post*. Here are some of the highlights of the report as disclosed by the newspaper:

*Until the March 2003 US occupation Sunnis and Shiites coexisted peacefully.

*Iraqis of all sectarian and ethnic groups believe that the US military inva-

sion is the primary root of the violent differences among them.

*After the United States leaves Iraq, national reconciliation will happen “naturally.”

*A sense of “optimistic possibility permeated all focus groups ... and far more commonalities than differences are found among these seemingly diverse groups of Iraqis.”

*Dividing Iraq into three states would hinder national reconciliation. (Only the Kurds did not reject this option.)

*Most would describe the negative elements of life in Iraq as beginning with the US occupation.

Few mentioned Saddam Hussein as a cause of their problems, which the report described as an important finding, implying that “the current strife in Iraq seems to have totally eclipsed any agonies or grievances many Iraqis would have incurred from the past regime, which lasted for nearly four decades – as opposed to the current conflict, which has lasted for five years.”

The *Washington Post* added this note: “Outside of the military, some of the most widespread polling in Iraq has been done by D3 Systems, a Virginia-based company that maintains offices in each of Iraq’s 18 provinces. Its most recent publicly released surveys, conducted in September for several news media organizations, showed the same widespread Iraqi belief voiced by the military’s focus groups: that a U.S. departure will make things better. A State Department poll in September 2006 reported a similar finding.”^[6]

This just in: The US has found the perfect way to counteract such foolish attitudes of the Iraqi people. On January

10, the Associated Press reported, “U.S. bombers and jet fighters unleashed 40,000 pounds of explosives on the southern outskirts of Baghdad within 10 minutes Thursday in one of the biggest air strikes of the war, flattening what the military called safe havens for al-Qaida in Iraq.” There was no mention of whether the planes had also dropped pamphlets saying: “We bomb you because we care about you.”

On December 20, the legislature of Panama declared the date to be a day of “national mourning” in memory of the American invasion on that day in 1989. “This is a recognition of those who fell on Dec. 20 as a result of the cruel and unjust invasion by the most powerful army in the world,” said Rep. Cesar Pardo, of the governing Democratic Revolutionary Party, which holds a majority in the legislature. U.S. officials downplayed the issue. “We prefer to look to the future,” said a U.S. Embassy spokesman. “We are very satisfied to have a friend and partner like Panama, a nation that has managed to develop a mature democracy.”^[7] As with their attack on Iraq on March 19, 2003, the United States, with no provocation or international legality (yes, another war of aggression), first bombed Panama, then staged a ground invasion, killing as many as a few thousand, while offering no believable reason for their psychopathic behavior.^[8]

Will we some day see in a free and independent Iraq the setting of March 19 as a day of national mourning?

Some further thought re the 9/11 truth movement

When I say, as I did in last month’s report, that I don’t think that 9-11 was an

“inside job”, it’s not because I believe that men like Dick Cheney, George W. Bush, Donald Rumsfeld, et al. are not morally depraved enough to carry out such a monstrous act; these men each has a piece missing, a piece that’s shaped like a social conscience; they consciously and directly instigated the current Iraqi and Afghanistan horrors which have already cost many more American lives than were lost on 9/11, not to mention more than a million Iraqis and Afghans who dearly wanted to remain amongst the living. In the Gulf War of 1991, Cheney and other American leaders purposely destroyed electricity-generating plants, water-pumping systems, and sewage systems in Iraq, then imposed sanctions upon the country making the repair of the infrastructure extremely difficult.

Then, after 12 years, when the Iraqi people had performed the heroic task of getting these systems working fairly well again, the US bombers came back to inflict devastating damage to them all once more. My books and many others document one major crime against humanity after another by our America once so dear and cherished.

So it’s not the moral question that makes me doubt the inside-job scenario. It’s the logistics of it all – the incredible complexity of arranging it all so that it would work and not be wholly and transparently unbelievable. That and the gross overkill – they didn’t need to destroy or smash up ALL those buildings and planes and people. One of the twin towers killing more than a thousand would certainly have been enough to sell the War on Terror, the Patriot Act, and Homeland Security. The American

As with their attack on Iraq on March 19, 2003, the United States, with no provocation or international legality (yes, another war of aggression), first bombed Panama, then staged a ground invasion, killing as many as a few thousand, while offering no believable reason for their psychopathic behavior

ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

Following the JFK assassination at least two men came forward afterward and identified themselves as being one of the three "tramps" on the grassy knoll in Dallas

William Blum is the author of: Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War 2; Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower; West-Bloc Dissident: A Cold War Memoir; and Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire

people are not such a hard sell. They really yearn to be true believers. Look how they scream hysterically over Hillary and Obama.

To win over people like me, the 9/11 truth people need to present a scenario that makes the logistics reasonably plausible. They might start by trying to answer questions like these: Did planes actually hit the towers and the Pentagon and crash in Pennsylvania? Were these the same four United Airline and American Airline planes that took off from Boston and Newark? At the time of collision, were they being piloted by people or by remote control? If people, who were these people?

Also, why did Building Seven collapse? If it was purposely demolished – why? All the reasons I've read so far I find not very credible. As to the films of the towers and Building Seven collapsing, which make it appear that this had to be the result of controlled demolitions – I agree, it does indeed look that way. But what do I know? I'm no expert. It's not like I've seen, in person or on film, numerous examples of buildings collapsing due to controlled demolition and numerous other examples of buildings collapsing due to planes crashing into them, so I could make an intelligent distinction. We are told by the 9/11 truth people that no building constructed like the towers has ever collapsed due to fire. But how about fire plus a full-size, loaded airplane smashing into it? How many examples of that do we have?

But there's one argument those who support the official version use against the skeptics that I would question. It's the argument that if the government planned the operation there would have

to have been many people in on the plot, and surely by now one of them would have talked and the mainstream media would have reported their stories. But in fact a number of firemen, the buildings' janitor, and others have testified to hearing many explosions in the towers some time after the planes crashed, supporting the theory of planted explosives. But scarce little of this has made it to the media. Likewise, following the JFK assassination at least two men came forward afterward and identified themselves as being one of the three "tramps" on the grassy knoll in Dallas. So what happened? The mainstream media ignored them both. I know of them only because the tabloid press ran their stories. One of the men was the father of actor Woody Harrelson. **CT**

NOTES

- [1] *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 24, 1980, p.7
- [2] United Press International (UPI) dispatch from Saigon, October 31, 1967
- [3] See interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter's national security adviser: <http://members.aol.com/bblum6/brz.htm>
- [4] <http://www.consortiumnews.com/archive/xfile5.html>
- [5] Victor Marchetti and John Marks, *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence* (1975), p.307; Peter Wyden, *Bay of Pigs: The Untold Story* (1979), p.142-3
- [6] *Washington Post*, December 19, 2007, article plus accompanying sidebar; see also the Anti-Empire Report of August 18, 2006, last item, for another *Post* article demonstrating the belief of the Iraqi people, as well as American military personnel, that things would be better if the US left the country.
- [7] Associated Press, December 20, 2007
- [8] For the full details, see William Blum, *Killing Hope*, chapter 50

JOSE PADILLA: AMERICA'S SHAME

Andy Worthington wonders why there's so little outrage at the way this man was treated by his country

The news that US citizen Jose Padilla has received a prison sentence of 17 years and four months should provoke outrage in the United States, although it is unlikely that there will be much more than a whimper of dissent.

The former gang member and convert to Islam – whose arrest in May 2002 was trumpeted by then-Attorney General John Ashcroft as that of a “known terrorist,” who was “exploring a plan” to detonate a radioactive “dirty bomb” in a US city – was once regarded as one of the most dangerous terrorists ever apprehended on American soil. Almost six years later, as he received his sentence, he was not actually accused of lifting a finger to harm even a single US citizen.

While this is shocking enough in and of itself, Padilla's sentence – in what at least one perceptive commentator called “the most important case of our lifetimes” – is particularly disturbing because it sends a clear message to the President of the United States that he can, if he wishes (and as he did with Padilla), designate a US citizen as an

“enemy combatant,” hold him without charge or trial in a naval brig for 43 months, and torture him – through the use of prolonged sensory deprivation and solitary confinement – to such an extent that, as the psychiatrist Dr. Angela Hegarty explained after spending 22 hours with Padilla, “What happened at the brig was essentially the destruction of a human being's mind.”

Padilla's warders had another take on his condition, describing him as “so docile and inactive that he could be mistaken for ‘a piece of furniture,’” but the most detailed analysis of the effects of his torture was, again, provided by Angela Hegarty in an interview last August with Democracy Now:

Juan Gonzalez: “And have you dealt with someone who had been in isolation for such a long period of time before?”

Dr. Angela Hegarty: “No. This was the first time I ever met anybody who had been isolated for such an extraordinarily long period of time. I mean, the sensory deprivation studies, for example, tell us that without sleep, especially, people will develop psychotic symptoms,

Padilla's warders had another take on his condition, describing him as “so docile and inactive that he could be mistaken for ‘a piece of furniture’ ”

TWISTED JUSTICE

His application form, which, according to a government expert, bore his fingerprints, was apparently discovered during a CIA raid on an alleged al-Qaeda safe house in Afghanistan

hallucinations, panic attacks, depression, suicidality within days. And here we had a man who had been in this situation, utterly dependent on his interrogators, who didn't treat him all that nicely, for years. And apart from – the only people I ever met who had such a protracted experience were people who were in detention camps overseas, that would come close, but even then they weren't subjected to the sensory deprivation. So, yes, he was somewhat of a unique case in that regard.”

As if this were not worrying enough, it was what happened after Padilla's 43-month ordeal that sealed the President's impunity to torture US citizens at will. When it seemed that his case was within reach of the US Supreme Court, the government transferred him into the US legal system, deposited him in a normal prison environment, dropped all mention of the “dirty bomb” plot, and charged him, based on his association with two alleged terrorist facilitators, Adham Amin Hassoun and Kifah Wael Jayyousi, with participating in a Florida-based plot to aid Islamic extremists in holy wars abroad.

Airbrushed from history

When the case came to court last summer, the judge, Marcia Cooke, airbrushed Padilla's torture from history, insisting that it could not be discussed at all, and, after a trial regarded as farcical by many observers, Padilla and his co-defendants were duly found guilty.

The January sentencing, after an unusually protracted two-week debate, has apparently brought the whole sordid saga to an end, with Padilla's torture only mentioned briefly in passing by

Judge Cooke, who noted, “I do find that the conditions [for Padilla as an enemy combatant] were so harsh that they warrant consideration.”

Nevertheless, he received a longer sentence than either of his co-defendants (who were sentenced to 15 years and eight months, and 12 years and eight months, respectively), even though two jurors admitted to the *Miami Herald* that the jury as a whole “struggled to convict Padilla because the panel initially viewed him as a bit player in the scheme to aid Islamic extremists, unlike his co-defendants.”

They certainly had a point. While the conviction of Hassoun and Jayyousi was based on coded conversations in 126 phone calls intercepted by the FBI over a number of years, Padilla was included in only seven of those phone calls.

Groomed by his mentor, Hassoun, he had traveled to the Middle East and, in 2000, had applied to attend a military training camp in Afghanistan, using the name Abu Abdallah al-Muhajir.

His application form, which, according to a government expert, bore his fingerprints, was apparently discovered during a CIA raid on an alleged al-Qaeda safe house in Afghanistan, but although the prosecution presented an alleged al-Qaeda graduation list with his Muslim name on it during the sentencing, they had been unable to provide any evidence during the trial that he had actually attended the training camp in Afghanistan.

In the end, Padilla's conviction hinged on the jury's determination that he had “joined the terrorism conspiracy in the United States before leaving the country.”

This was based on a single recorded

conversation, in July 1997, in which he stated that he was ready to join a jihad overseas.

Seventeen years and four months seems to me to be an extraordinarily long sentence for little more than a thought crime, but when the issue of Padilla's three and half years of suppressed torture is raised, it's difficult not to conclude that justice has just been horribly twisted, that the President and his advisors have just got away with torturing an American citizen with im-

punity, and that no American citizen can be sure that what happened to Padilla will not happen to him or her. This time, it was a Muslim; tomorrow, unless the government's powers are taken away from them, it could be any number of categories of "enemy combatants" who have not yet been identified. **CT**

*British writer Andy Worthington's latest book is **The Guantanamo Files: The Stories of the 774 Detainees in America's Illegal Prison** (Pluto Press)*

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WORSE THAN A CRIME

Uri Avnery on the day the Gaza wall fell down

From Casablanca to Amman angry mass protest broke out and frightened the authoritarian Arab regimes. Hosny Mubarak called Ehud Barak in panic

It looked like the fall of the Berlin wall. And not only did it look like it. For a moment, the Rafah crossing was the Brandenburg Gate.

It is impossible not to feel exhilaration when masses of oppressed and hungry people break down the wall that is shutting them in, their eyes radiant, embracing everybody they meet – to feel so even when it is your own government that erected the wall in the first place.

The Gaza Strip is the largest prison on earth. The breaking of the Rafah wall was an act of liberation. It proves that an inhuman policy is always a stupid policy: no power can stand up against a mass of people that has crossed the border of despair.

That is the lesson of Gaza, January, 2008.

One might repeat the famous saying of the French statesman Boulay de la Meurthe, slightly amended: *It is worse than a war crime, it is a blunder!*

Months ago, the two Ehuds – Barak and Olmert – imposed a blockade on the Gaza Strip, and boasted about it. Lately they have tightened the deadly

noose even more, so that hardly anything at all could be brought into the Strip. Then they made the blockade absolute – no food, no medicines. Things reached a climax when they stopped the fuel, too. Large areas of Gaza remained without electricity – incubators for premature babies, dialysis machines, pumps for water and sewage. Hundreds of thousands remained without heating in the severe cold, unable to cook, running out of food.

Again and again, al Jazeera broadcast the pictures into millions of homes in the Arab world. TV stations all over the world showed them, too. From Casablanca to Amman angry mass protest broke out and frightened the authoritarian Arab regimes. Hosny Mubarak called Ehud Barak in panic. That same evening Barak was compelled to cancel, at least temporarily, the fuel-blockade he had imposed in the morning. Apart from that, the blockade remained total.

It is hard to imagine a more stupid act.

The reason given for the starving and freezing of one and a half million hu-

man beings, crowded into a territory of 365 square kilometers, is the continued shooting at the town of Sderot and the adjoining villages.

That is a well-chosen reason. It unites the primitive and poor parts of the Israeli public. It blunts the criticism of the UN and the governments throughout the world, who might otherwise have spoken out against a collective punishment that is, undoubtedly, a war crime under international law.

A clear picture is presented to the world: the Hamas terror regime in Gaza launches missiles at innocent Israeli civilians. No government in the world can tolerate the bombardment of its citizens from across the border. The Israeli military has not found a military answer to the Qassam missiles. Therefore there is no other way than to exert such strong pressure on the Gaza population as to make them rise up against Hamas and compel them to stop the missiles.

The day the Gaza electricity works stopped operating, our military correspondents were overjoyed: only two Qassams were launched from the Strip. So it works! Ehud Barak is a genius!

But the day after, 17 Qassams landed, and the joy evaporated. Politicians and generals were (literally) out of their minds: one politician proposed to “act crazier than them”, another proposed to “shell Gaza’s urban area indiscriminately for every Qassam launched”, a famous professor (who is a little bit deranged) proposed the exercise of “ultimate evil”.

The government scenario was a repeat of Lebanon War II (the report about which is due to be published soon). Then: Hizbullah captured two soldiers on the Israeli side of the border, now:

Hamas fired on towns and villages on the Israeli side of the border. Then: the government decided in haste to start a war, now: the government decided in haste to impose a total blockade. Then: the government ordered the massive bombing of the civilian population in order to get them to pressure Hizbullah, now: the government decided to cause massive suffering of the civilian population in order to get them to pressure Hamas.

The results were the same in both cases: the Lebanese population did not rise up against Hizbullah, but on the contrary, people of all religious communities united behind the Shiite organization. Hassan Nasrallah became the hero of the entire Arab world. And now: the population unites behind Hamas and accuses Mahmoud Abbas of cooperation with the enemy. A mother who has no food for her children does not curse Ismail Haniyeh, she curses Olmert, Abbas and Mubarak.

The hidden truth

So what to do? After all, it is impossible to tolerate the suffering of the inhabitants of Sderot, who are under constant fire. What is being hidden from the embittered public is that the launching of the Qassams could be stopped tomorrow morning.

Several months ago Hamas proposed a cease-fire. It repeated the offer before the wall came down. A cease-fire means, in the view of Hamas: the Palestinians will stop shooting Qassams and mortar shells, the Israelis will stop the incursions into Gaza, the “targeted” assassinations and the blockade.

Why doesn’t our government jump

The day the Gaza electricity works stopped operating, our military correspondents were overjoyed: only two Qassams were launched from the Strip. So it works! Ehud Barak is a genius!

The man in charge of the experiment is Defense Minister Ehud Barak, a man of many ideas and few scruples, a man whose whole turn of mind is basically inhuman. He is now, perhaps, the most dangerous person in Israel

at this proposal?

Simple: in order to make such a deal, we must speak with Hamas, directly or indirectly. And this is precisely what the government refuses to do.

Why? Simple again: Sderot is only a pretext – much like the two captured soldiers were a pretext for something else altogether. The real purpose of the whole exercise is to overthrow the Hamas regime in Gaza and to prevent a Hamas takeover in the West Bank.

In simple and blunt words: the government sacrifices the fate of the Sderot population on the altar of a hopeless principle. It is more important for the government to boycott Hamas – because it is now the spearhead of Palestinian resistance – than to put an end to the suffering of Sderot. All the media cooperate with this pretence.

Satire becomes reality

It has been said before that it is dangerous to write satire in our country – too often the satire becomes reality. Some readers may recall a satirical article I wrote months ago. In it I described the situation in Gaza as a scientific experiment designed to find out how far one can go, in starving a civilian population and turning their lives into hell, before they raise their hands in surrender.

In the third week of January, the satire has become official policy. Respected commentators declared explicitly that Ehud Barak and the army chiefs are working on the principle of “trial and error” and change their methods daily according to results. They stop the fuel to Gaza, observe how this works and backtrack when the international reaction is too negative. They stop the delivery of

medicines, see how it works, etc. The scientific aim justifies the means.

The man in charge of the experiment is Defense Minister Ehud Barak, a man of many ideas and few scruples, a man whose whole turn of mind is basically inhuman. He is now, perhaps, the most dangerous person in Israel, more dangerous than Ehud Olmert and Binyamin Netanyahu, dangerous to the very existence of Israel in the long run.

The man in charge of execution is the Chief of Staff. We’ve just had the chance of hearing speeches by two of his predecessors, generals Moshe Ya’alon and Shaul Mofaz, in a forum with inflated intellectual pretensions. Both were discovered to have views that place them somewhere between the extreme Right and the ultra-Right. Both have a frighteningly primitive mind.

There is no need to waste a word about the moral and intellectual qualities of their immediate successor, Dan Halutz. If these are the voices of the three last Chiefs of Staff, what about the incumbent, who cannot speak out as openly as they? Has this apple fallen further from the tree? Until the wall fell, the generals could entertain the opinion that the experiment was succeeding. The misery in the Gaza Strip had reached its climax. Hundreds of thousands were threatened by actual hunger.

The chief of UNRWA warned of an impending human catastrophe. Only the rich could still drive a car, heat their homes and eat their fill. The world stood by and wagged its collective tongue. The leaders of the Arab states voiced empty phrases of sympathy without raising a finger.

Barak, who has mathematical abili-

ties, could calculate when the population would finally collapse.

The pressure cooker explodes

And then something happened that none of them foresaw, in spite of the fact that it was the most foreseeable event on earth. When one puts a million and a half people in a pressure cooker and keeps turning up the heat, it will explode. That is what happened at the Gaza-Egypt border. At first there was a small explosion. A crowd stormed the gate, Egyptian policemen opened live fire, dozens were wounded. That was a warning.

The next day came the big attack. Palestinian fighters blew up the wall in many places. Hundreds of thousands broke out into Egyptian territory and took a deep breath. The blockade was broken.

Even before that, Mubarak was in an impossible situation. Hundreds of millions of Arabs, a billion Muslims, saw how the Israeli army had closed the Gaza strip off on three sides: the North, the East and the sea. The fourth side of the blockade was provided by the Egyptian army.

The Egyptian president, who claims the leadership of the entire Arab world, was seen as a collaborator with an inhuman operation conducted by a cruel enemy in order to gain the favor (and the money) of the Americans. His internal enemies, the Muslim Brothers, exploited the situation to debase him in the eyes of his own people.

It is doubtful if Mubarak could have persisted in this position. But the Palestinian masses relieved him of the need to make a decision. They decided for him. They broke out like a tsunami wave. Now he has to decide whether to succumb to the Israeli demand to re-impose the blockade on his Arab brothers.

And what about Barak's experiment? What's the next step? The options are few:

(a) To re-occupy Gaza. The army does not like the idea. It understands that this would expose thousands of soldiers to a cruel guerilla war, which would be unlike any intifada before.

(b) To tighten the blockade again and exert extreme pressure on Mubarak, including the use of Israeli influence on the US Congress to deprive him of the billions he gets every year for his services.

(c) To turn the curse into a blessing, by handing the Strip over to Mubarak, pretending that this was Barak's hidden aim all along. Egypt would have to safeguard Israel's security, prevent the launching of Qassams and expose its own soldiers to a Palestinian guerilla war – when it thought it was rid of the burden of this poor and barren area, and after the infrastructure there has been destroyed by the Israeli occupation. Probably Mubarak will say: Very kind of you, but no thanks.

The brutal blockade was a war crime. And worse: it was a stupid blunder. **CT**

Uri Avnery is an Irgun veteran turned Israeli peace activist

When one puts a million and a half people in a pressure cooker and keeps turning up the heat, it will explode. That is what happened at the Gaza-Egypt border

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FINISHING IN THE MONEY

Michael I. Niman on the US election horse race

The corporate media, now an ad hoc monopoly dominated by about five corporations with interlocking boards of directors, sets the pace for the race, anointing "front runners" as the only "viable" or "electable" candidates – before the first vote is ever cast

They're all lined up at the starting gate, ready to go. Bugles sound. And they're off. It's Clinton (the media likes to call her Hillary because she's a girl) and Obama neck and neck at the first turn, pulling away from the pack. Obama's out front by a nose. It's Obama by a head. It looks like Obama's got it. But wait – here's Clinton on the outside neck and neck with Obama in the final turn. Now she's pulling ahead at the wire. And it's Clinton, our winner by a Diebold nose. Wow, what a race. And what a smart dresser she is.

This pretty much sums up election coverage this primary season. It's a horse race. It's all about who's in the lead – not why or how. We all love a winner, issues be damned. We're the cheering mob with our life savings on the line, and they're the horses. It's as simple as that.

Of course there are issues. But issues are dangerous. Especially when they tend to embarrass the candidates that the corporate media has already crowned as finalists before the first vote has ever been cast. Sure, we get to vote

in our model of a democracy. But the field is narrowed to a point that our vote is stripped of its real potential power. We can choose between vanilla and chocolate – but perhaps we don't want ice cream?

The corporate media, now an ad hoc monopoly dominated by about five corporations with interlocking boards of directors, sets the pace for the race, anointing "front runners" as the only "viable" or "electable" candidates – before the first vote is ever cast. The unworthy contenders become "minor" or "second-tier" candidates who, as the *Wall Street Journal* pulled no punches in reminding us in a January 10 article, just "siphon off votes" from the legitimate candidates.

The most interesting media-preordained loser this year is Cleveland's representative to Congress, Dennis Kucinich. What makes Kucinich interesting isn't the tabloid fodder about his having lived in Shirley McClain's basement or his being married to a British ex-hippie half his age, or even that McClain claims that she and Kucinich once saw a UFO. This stuff certainly could ultimately un-

dermine his electability (I find the daughter-aged wife thing a bit creepy), but given the big picture, it's not what sets him apart from the other candidates, all of whom have weird histories of personal drama.

What sets Kucinich apart from the rest of the pack is the fact that he is the only candidate in the Democratic primary who voted against the Patriot Act and against authorizing the Iraq invasion; who supports the only proven model for universal health care – a not-for-profit, single-payer system; who has refused corporate campaign financing (not that any was offered); and who supports a universal right to marriage for all consenting adults. He is also the only candidate who has proposed a New Deal/WPA style economic stimulus program to pull the nation out of recession. And he's the only Democrat who wants to end the Iraq War immediately – like pronto.

A winning loser

What sets Kucinich apart from the other “losers” is the fact that he was winning debates and polls while the corporate media was writing him off as a loser and, more importantly, marginalizing his voice and keeping his populist ideology out of the presidential contest.

Let's go back to the early stages of the race, when ABC hosted a full debate with the top 10 Democratic contenders. An ABC news poll showed viewers choosing Kucinich as the winner by a large margin, with 34 percent believing he bested Obama (22 percent), Clinton (14 percent) and Edwards (four percent). Most polls are of questionable accuracy, but this one was conducted by the same

organization that later contradicted its own findings by declaring that Kucinich didn't have enough support to warrant inclusion in subsequent debates. Kucinich was still polling strong in November when CSPAN's viewers chose him as the clear winner of a seven-way debate. In that poll, 41 percent of those queried chose Kucinich as the winner, compared to 18 percent for Clinton, 15 percent for Obama and five percent for Edwards.

Toward the end of January, NBC in Las Vegas televised a local Democratic presidential debate in advance of the Nevada caucuses. Their criterion for participation was for candidates to rank among the top four in national polls. There are a few problems here. First, polls are only as accurate as their methodology allows them to be. But even more importantly, this is not how democracy works. Democracy is not set up to limit debate – especially to those who are only popular before the public knows anything about them. The only way poll respondents can be equipped to pick a favorite is by hearing the views of all the candidates – not just those the corporate media determines are worthy of coverage.

What we wind up with here is a Catch-22. Only popular candidates get media coverage. Candidates become popular by being covered in the media.

Candidates can also become popular by buying the necessary media access. Here's where the real invisible election contest comes into play. In American politics, the candidate with the most money almost always wins – this rule has held true with top fundraisers winning in over 90 percent of TV-era Congressional elections.

What we wind up with here is a Catch-22. Only popular candidates get media coverage. Candidates become popular by being covered in the media

ELECTION FEVER 1

By its own rules, NBC had to invite Kucinich to participate in the debate. But rather than allow Kucinich, who has publically spoken ill of NBC and its owner – military contractor GE – to participate, the network changed its rules mid-game

It's in this first, invisible election that the presidential front-runners have established themselves. So far, Hillary Clinton, a former member of Wal-Mart's board of directors, is the clear winner with \$91 million. Barack Obama, another stalwart of the status quo, has racked up \$80 million. Edwards, who has made the politically dangerous issue of economic inequality central to his campaign, has only raised slightly over \$30 million. Kucinich, by comparison, has only raised slightly over \$2 million. This is why Edwards is "in third place" and Kucinich is a second-tier spoiler.

The problem for NBC, however, is that their poll put loser Kucinich fourth in the 10-way race, earning him a spot in NBC's exclusive, winner's circle debate in Nevada. (Blame the Internet.) By its own rules, NBC had to invite Kucinich to participate in the debate. But rather than allow Kucinich, who has publically spoken ill of NBC and its owner – military contractor GE – to participate, the network changed its rules mid-game. NBC uninvited him and limited the debate to the three most popular candidates: Clinton, Obama and Edwards.

Missile maker & gatekeeper

Kucinich sued, arguing that by excluding "credible candidates" NBC was artificially narrowing the field and in effect endorsing those candidates it had selected to participate in the debate. The lower court found in his favor. A higher court reversed the ruling, and with hours to go before the debate was to begin, a Nevada judge made a final ruling in Kucinich's favor: By excluding him from the debate, NBC violated the Federal Communications Act of 1934.

NBC responded by pulling the debate off local Nevada broadcast television and running it only on its national cable network, thus evading the FCC law it would otherwise be violating. It seemed they really didn't want Nevadans to hear Dennis Kucinich.

The end result was that the very part of the electorate that Kucinich needed to connect with – people who couldn't afford the \$45-and-up monthly cable charges – would not get to hear anyone debate. In our malfunctioning democracy, the media is the gatekeeper. And the election is over before it begins.

Like Kucinich, John Edwards is another preordained loser, though his third-place fundraising finish (thank the trial lawyers) guarantees him media recognition. So we have Edwards and his populist message about the toxicity of social inequality muscling its way into the debates, but still the media needs to remind us that this winner is a loser. Hence, we got *USA Today's* December 2007 article about the supposed "electability" of presidential candidates. Obama, their polls show, is more electable than Clinton in hypothetical matchups against various potential Republican nominees. Edwards, well, he really wasn't part of this story. This is rather odd, since, as Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting pointed out in a December 21 "Action Alert," polls that included Edwards, such as those conducted by CNN, showed him faring better than both Clinton and Obama in matchups against Republicans.

Despite its own polls, however, CNN was no friendlier toward Edwards than *USA Today*. After Edwards upset the pollsters by beating Clinton in the Iowa

caucuses, coming in as a strong second behind Obama, CNN's David Gergen declared on January 3 that "John Edwards has no place to go...because he has no money."

Get it? Third place in the money race just ain't good enough. The next day the *New York Times'* David Brooks declared that Edwards' political career is "probably over." By January 7, before 95 percent of the national electorate had a chance to vote, *USA Today*, the folks who sidelined Edwards in December, reported that "[t]he Democratic contest is a two-person race" between Clinton and Obama.

Interestingly enough, by contrast, while Edwards' surprise second-place finish in the Iowa Democratic caucus condemned him to the trash bin of history, "Bomb-bomb-bomb, bomb-bomb Iran" crooner John McCain's fourth-place finish in the Iowa Republican caucus was nearly universally celebrated in the corporate media as a victory and a jump-start for the McCain campaign. This media-manufactured momentum propelled McCain into a victory in the

subsequent New Hampshire primary – the same primary that transformed Clinton from a loser into a winner.

The New Hampshire results aren't necessarily indicative of anything other than how a small group of relatively unique ("Live free or die"), overwhelmingly white folks happened to vote in the dead of winter. And they might not even indicate that. In what threatens to be a harbinger of worse things to come, the New Hampshire primary ended with allegations of voting machine irregularities; Obama bested Clinton by four points across the state in districts with hand-counted ballots, while losing to Clinton by five points in districts where Diebold machinery tabulated the votes.

Maybe the horse race analogy is wrong. Maybe wrestling would be more apropos. **CT**

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While Edwards' surprise second-place finish in the Iowa Democratic caucus condemned him to the trash bin of history, John McCain's fourth-place finish in the Iowa Republican caucus was nearly universally celebrated in the corporate media as a victory and a jump-start for the McCain campaign



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JUST LIKE THE MOVIES

Ramzy Baroud casts a jaundiced eye over the US elections

Candidates do not bring fresh principles to the table, but instead shape their views based on what national and local polls tell them matters to the voting public. And what matters is largely manipulated by the media and the state

The United States political process bears an uncanny resemblance to mainstream filmmaking. Elections and speeches are scripted to the letter, politicians put on a tirelessly rehearsed act, catering endlessly to the whims of the target audience. A successful Hollywood filmmaker can't afford to risk raising issues in a way that don't immediately reflect audience sympathies. Good politicians vying for votes are similar in that they speak according to the already existing expectations – and prejudices – of the voting public.

Rarely do candidates stand behind a podium without amending or overriding their personal beliefs in return for generating applause. You would hardly hear, for example, of a US presidential candidate getting booed by an audience.

Candidates do not bring fresh principles to the table, but instead shape their views based on what national and local polls tell them matters to the voting public. And what matters is largely manipulated by the media and the state. Their combined scare tactics convinced most Americans of outright falsehoods, such

as Saddam's ties to 9/11, his stockpiles of WMDs, the "liberation" of women in Afghanistan, and so forth.

In a healthy democracy, the media is expected to represent the interests of the people – all the people, while the government serves as a conduit to carry and defend these interests without violating the constitution. But in the age of evangelical fanatics, lobby groups, international corporations and lucrative Iraq contracts, democracy itself can be placed on hold.

Indeed, maintaining the image of a democracy while violating its genuine principles has consumed the efforts of successive US administrations. No other administration, however, has compromised the interest of the American people and flouted the constitution as much as the brazen Bush administration. No wonder Republicans were squarely defeated in the Congressional elections of 2006. Americans clearly voted for change, but change in a system so skilfully corrupt doesn't come easy. The way in which Democrats supported the recent spending bill for 2008, their vacillating stance on

Iraq, and their downright hawkish stance on Iran says volumes about their contribution to maintaining the status quo.

Democrats are also bound by the rules of the game. They need the money, media coverage and lobbyists. Currently there are 35,000 registered federal lobbyists representing all sorts of special interests, including foreign powers such as Israel, whose collaborative role in the Iraq fiasco is too blatant to overlook.

Barack Obama, who does indeed have little experience of understanding how the system works still possesses a talent for pleasing the crowd. Thus his initial assertion that lobbyists “won’t work in my White House”. Then, possibly after being told by his campaign managers that special interests are more influential than the rest of the country, he tweaked his vow slightly whereby lobbyists “are not going to dominate my White House.” Although his pledge changed its substance almost entirely, he was able to receive victory in Iowa.

Truly new message

For now, analysts can extract temporary comfort from the prevailing interpretation of the Iowa caucuses’ results. Obama was elected by the Democratic caucuses with 37 per cent because he was the only nominee who managed to present a truly new message – that he and only he can advocate real “change”. As for former Arkansas governor, Republican Mike Huckabee, he was the best possible candidate to represent the Republican voters’ conservative concerns. The former Baptist pastor is the rising star of the Christian evangelicals who boast 40 million followers, all tied by an outrageous message of doomsday.

Rev Stan Moody of the Christian Policy Institute, writes, “Huckabee is a Rapturist” in reference to the mid-19th Century interpretation of biblical text which culminated in 1909 as the Scofield Desk Reference Bible. This envisions – and not metaphorically – a Greater Israel as a precondition to the return of Christ, who, with the true Christians, will defeat Satanic forces, convert 144,000 Jews and exterminate the rest. It has no Harry Potter twists, but it puts Hollywood horror movies to shame. The actual concern is that this group has cultivated an alliance with the Israeli government since the late 1970s and is a major power-broker in US foreign policy in the Middle East.

In an article in *The Jerusalem Post* on January 3, Hilary Leila Krieger reported from Iowa that Huckabee “has also been staunchly supportive of Israel, writing in *Foreign Affairs* that, ‘I will not waver in standing by our ally Israel.’ It is a country he has visited several times, leading groups there as well as taking his family.”

According to the same article, “Huckabee has drawn on his experience in the Holy Land in making his pitch to voters, which has especially resonated with evangelicals.”

With the notable exceptions of Republican Ron Paul and Democrat Dennis Kucinich, most visible presidential candidates were eager to compromise the interest of their country to guarantee that of Israel’s. Clinton and Obama exemplify this. The Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) wrote, “Obama has always enjoyed strong Jewish support since entering state politics in Illinois in 1996, although some in the pro-Israel establishment are wary of his calls to

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ELECTION FEVER 2

Huckabee's advent – described as the "second coming" of Ronald Reagan by a producer at an Iowa TV station, is the truly alarming trend

negotiate with rogue states such as Syria and Iran." JTA, of course, nonchalantly substitute the word 'Zionist' for 'Jewish', but that's another story.

While supporting Israel, right or wrong, is business as usual for US politicians, Huckabee's advent – described as the "second coming" of Ronald Reagan by a producer at an Iowa TV station, is the truly alarming trend. He cannot simply be dismissed as a lunatic Armageddonist who thinks that he can win an election; he actually captured the Republican endorsement in Iowa.

Huckabee knows well how to carry the momentum to the next destination – he needs to keep up the religious fer-

our, as narrow-minded and irrational as it may be. We are told that this is what voters are expecting. To win, like a good filmmaker, Huckabee must deliver.

Life can indeed resemble the movies, but in the case of US elections the movie has become so familiar and predictable that it's no longer even entertaining. **CT**

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DANSE MACABRE OF US DEMOCRACY

John Pilger on lies, elections and BBC propaganda

The former president of Tanzania Julius Nyerere once asked, “Why haven’t we all got a vote in the US election? Surely everyone with a TV set has earned that right just for enduring the merciless bombardment every four years.” Having reported four presidential election campaigns, from the Kennedys to Nixon, Carter to Reagan, with their Zeppelins of platitudes, robotic followers and rictal wives, I can sympathise. But what difference would the vote make? Of the presidential candidates I have interviewed, only George C. Wallace, governor of Alabama, spoke the truth. “There’s not a dime’s worth of difference between the Democrats and Republicans,” he said. And he was shot.

What struck me, living and working in the United States, was that presidential campaigns were a parody, entertaining and often grotesque. They are a ritual *danse macabre* of flags, balloons and bull-shit, designed to camouflage a venal system based on money power, human division and a culture of permanent war.

Travelling with Robert Kennedy in

1968 was eye-opening for me. To audiences of the poor, Kennedy would present himself as a saviour. The words “change” and “hope” were used relentlessly and cynically. For audiences of fearful whites, he would use racist codes, such as “law and order”. With those opposed to the invasion of Vietnam, he would attack “putting American boys in the line of fire”, but never say when he would withdraw them.

That year (after Kennedy was assassinated), Richard Nixon used a version of the same, malleable speech to win the presidency. Thereafter, it was used successfully by Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton and the two Bushes. Carter promised a foreign policy based on “human rights” – and practised the very opposite. Reagan’s “freedom agenda” was a bloodbath in central America. Clinton “solemnly pledged” universal health care and tore down the last safety net of the Depression.

Nothing has changed. Barack Obama is a glossy Uncle Tom who would bomb Pakistan. Hillary Clinton, another bomber, is anti-feminist. John McCain’s

What struck me, living and working in the United States, was that presidential campaigns were a parody, entertaining and often grotesque

None of this drivel is journalism. It is anti-journalism, worthy of a minor courtier of a great power

one distinction is that he has personally bombed a country. They all believe the US is not subject to the rules of human behaviour, because it is “a city upon a hill”, regardless that most of humanity sees it as a monumental bully which, since 1945, has overthrown 50 governments, many of them democracies, and bombed 30 nations, destroying millions of lives.

If you wonder why this holocaust is not an “issue” in the current campaign, you might ask the BBC, which is responsible for reporting the campaign to much of the world, or better still Justin Webb, the BBC’s North America editor. In a Radio 4 series last year, Webb displayed the kind of sycophancy that evokes the 1930s appeaser Geoffrey Dawson, then editor of the London *Times*. Condoleezza Rice cannot be too mendacious for Webb.

According to Rice, the US is “supporting the democratic aspirations of all people”. For Webb, who believes American patriotism “creates a feeling of happiness and solidity”, the crimes committed in the name of this patriotism, such as support for war and injustice in the Middle East for the past 25 years, and in Latin America, are irrelevant.

Indeed, those who resist such an epic assault on democracy are guilty of “anti-Americanism”, says Webb, apparently unaware of the totalitarian origins of this term of abuse. Journalists in Nazi Berlin would damn critics of the Reich as “anti-German”.

Moreover, his treacle about the “ideals” and “core values” that make up America’s sanctified “set of ideas about human conduct” denies us a true sense of the destruction of American democracy: the dismantling of the Bill of Rights, habeas corpus and separation of powers.

Here is Webb on the campaign trail: “[This] is not about mass politics. It is a celebration of the one-to-one relationship between an individual American and his or her putative commander-in-chief.” He calls this “dizzying”.

And Webb on Bush: “Let us not forget that while the candidates win, lose, win again... there is a world to be run and President Bush is still running it.” The emphasis in the BBC text actually links to the White House website.

None of this drivel is journalism. It is anti-journalism, worthy of a minor courtier of a great power. Webb is not exceptional. His boss Helen Boaden, director of BBC News, sent this reply to a viewer who had protested the prevalence of propaganda as the basis of news: “It is simply a fact that Bush has tried to export democracy [to Iraq] and that this has been troublesome.”

And her source for this “fact”? Quotations from Bush and Blair saying it is a fact. **CT**

*John Pilger’s latest book, **Freedom Next Time**, is now out in paperback. This article was first published in *New Statesman*. His new movie is **The War on Democracy***

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Amnesty International activists and lawyers demonstrate outside Downing Street to protest against the serious human rights abuses in Pakistan during President Pervez Musharraf visit to London on January 26. © Jess Hurd, reproduced with permission of Report Digital – <http://www.reportdigital.co.uk>

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