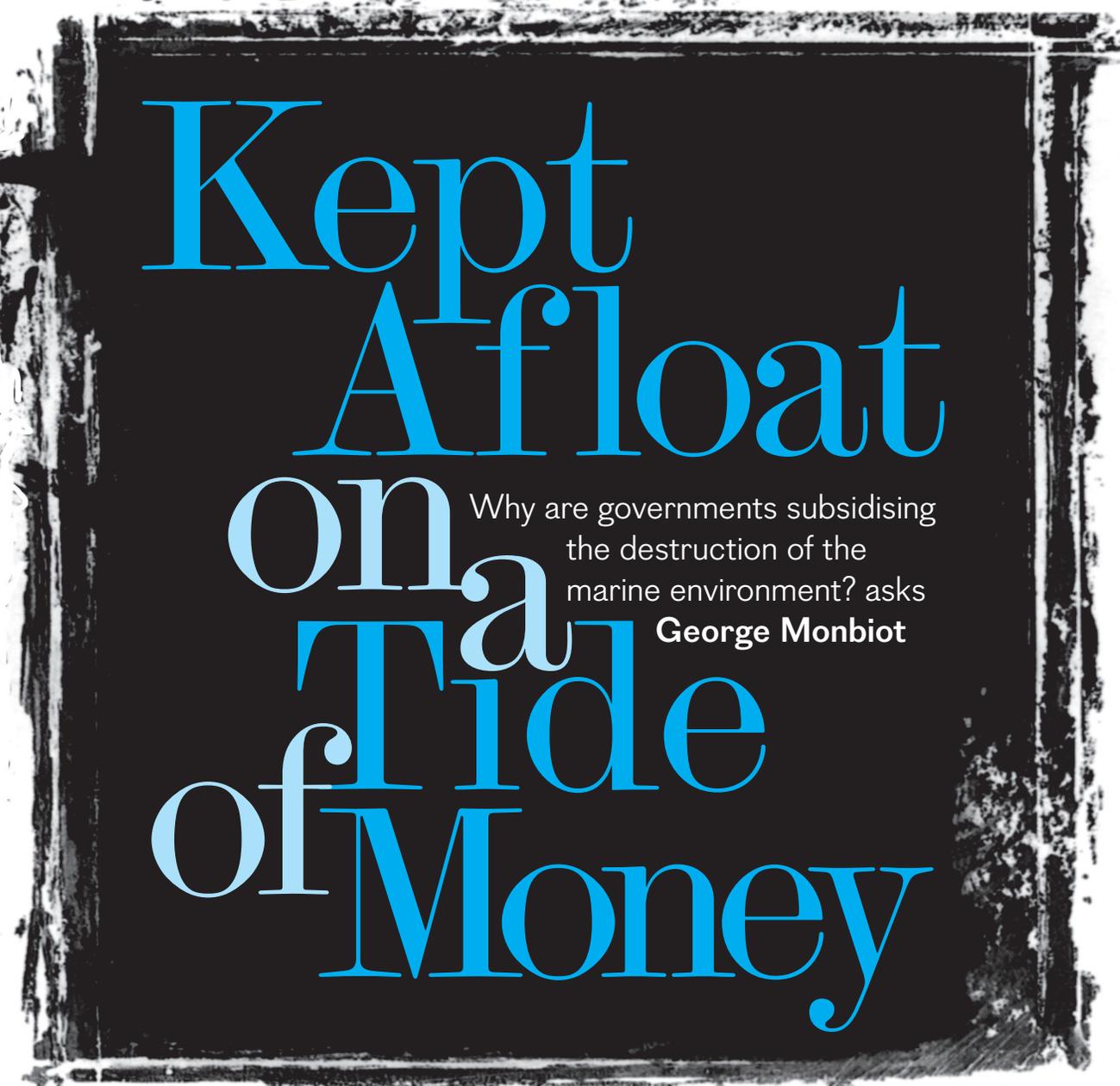


INSIDE: 47 VICTIMS, 43 WORDS ● BOOZE, HEMP AND REVOLUTION ● THE KILLING OF RACHEL HOFFMAN ● LIES, KIDNAPPING AND A LAPTOP

The ColdType READER

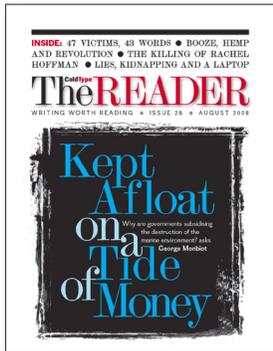
WRITING WORTH READING ● ISSUE 29 ● AUGUST 2008



Kept
Afloat
on a
Tide
of
Money

Why are governments subsidising the destruction of the marine environment? asks
George Monbiot

The ^{ColdType} READER



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Booze, hemp and revolution

Mike Ely on patriotism, slavery and beer

Ok, I admit it. I'm not your usual observer. When I heard that Budweiser had been bought by the Euro-capitalists InBev, I was not concerned. I don't care who owns the factories in the US I don't worry the US heartland is being infiltrated by foreign interests. And certainly, I don't consider Budweiser a national treasure. The truth is that it's almost undrinkable.

But my ears perked up when I read how Budweiser's maker, Anheuser-Busch had roots in St. Louis that went back before the Civil War. Ah, my friends, THERE is a story worth telling. And I'm going to sit back in the damp heat of this Chicago evening, sip on a couple of Fat Tires, and tell it to you, just because I hate patriotic bullshit and because I love revolution.

First, there is nothing American about beer making in St. Louis.

St. Louis in the 1850s was a raw river town situated where the Missouri River and the broad Mississippi met. It was a frontier town in many ways and the jumping off point. It was the "end of the line" for civilization. But it was also one of the first American industrial cities, with one of the heaviest concentration of factory workers in the country. And these workers were not native-born Americans.

A great many of them came straight from Germany – and formed part of a

very large German speaking population that then dominated both the urban and rural landscape from St. Louis to Chicago, to Cincinnati and far into the farmlands of Pennsylvania. And these immigrant workers were a very rowdy and radical bunch. Many were veterans of Europe's great revolutionary battles of 1848 – the first upheavals when working class and communist revolution emerged as a living threat to the world's ruling classes.

And, at the same time, surrounding this heavily leftwing, workingclass, German-speaking city was a countryside filled with some of the most ugly, racist, pro-slavery forces in the US. The Missouri River stretched west from St. Louis, and its shores were lined with slave plantations producing raw materials for twine, a product that shipped down river to bind the cotton bales of the Mississippi Delta.

The slave owners of Missouri were quite militant. They produced the political gangs called "border ruffians" who crossed the western Missouri border into nearby Kansas territory, where they engaged in armed struggle with abolitionists like John Brown over whether Bloody Kansas would be a slave state or free.

So you can imagine that there was a tension growing through the 1850s between the pro-slavery farmers of the Missouri floodplains and the anti-slavery and

Many were veterans of Europe's great revolutionary battles of 1848 – the first upheavals when working class and communist revolution emerged as a living threat to the world's ruling classes

DRINK TO THIS

In the Mississippi river valley, this important historical clash started between beer lovers and hemp growers. And, believe it or not, revolutionary sympathies go with the beer drinkers

often communist workers of St. Louis.

There was a parallel, and little known cultural clash going on at the same time: the German workers arrived as beer drinkers and some were first class brewers. There were some Irish among the workers, and they too were fans of the Germans' sudsy "liquid bread."

Before long St. Louis was peppered with huge German beer halls, where the immigrants found community and a feeling of home. For reasons I haven't yet uncovered, the reactionary political forces of Missouri territory were anti-beer. Maybe they didn't want this foreign culture to take root. Perhaps they had some early religious prohibitionist logic. But in any case there was an early political clash when a major push was made to ban beer in St. Louis, and (needless to say) the German workers pushed back.

Here is an irony worth thinking about: In the Mississippi river valley, this important historical clash started between beer lovers and hemp growers. And, believe it or not, revolutionary sympathies go with the beer drinkers.

At a time when social organization among immigrants was primitive, the fight over beer helped spur a sense of common identity among the workers, and gave rise to a number of political newspapers. And the movement that emerged from these circles were increasingly active in the fight over slavery. I have on my bookshelf a rare little book that gathers articles and histories from these German immigrant newspapers – and it is clear how they started to articulate deeply revolutionary views that spoke for a highly conscious and engaged working class population.

You may have studied the civil war a little.... I know I have always been fascinated by this first, truly revolutionary war on US soil. And one thing to keep in mind was that the so-called "border states" were a key battleground as the civil war broke out. There was a strip

of these states (from Maryland through Kentucky, Tennessee, to Missouri). They had sizable populations of slave owners and slaves – but a general political mood that was divided over the issues of secession and war.

And in this fight over the border states, Maryland had a particular importance because it surrounded the Union capital, so that if it joined the slavery confederation, Washington DC would be harder to defend. And the mood was so bad that Abraham Lincoln was almost killed in Baltimore as he traveled from Illinois to DC to assume the presidency. At the other end of the country, St. Louis had a major strategic importance for the war: It was the major anti-slavery center on the Mississippi. (Nearby Memphis was a creature of the Mississippi Delta, it was one of the urban nerve centers of the slave empire – filled with slave markets and holding pens.)

Seizing St Louis

And so, as war broke out, all sides prepared to seize St. Louis by force. And if it had fallen to the slavocracy, it would have been quite hard for the Union's armies to gain a foothold on the Mississippi, and it would have been that much harder to defeat the South. On the surface, the politics of St. Louis did not look promising. After 1860, the new governor Claiborne Fox Jackson was clearly a pro-slavery diehard, and the bastard was scheming to secede from the Union and pull the state into slavery's confederacy. Step by step the tensions mounted. One focus of preparation was the state armory, the largest warehouse of weapons on the frontier. Whoever controlled those guns would be better able to crush their enemies. Here again beer enters the story. Because the German workers started to prepare for battle. Led by veterans of the 1848 revolutions, they started to secretly train themselves in discipline and military tactics. Their plan: to rise up against

the state government in armed insurrection, to seize the armory, and defeat the governor's army.

Where did they do their drills? In the cavernous beer halls of St. Louis. At a given time, they would gather. The doors would be sealed and put under vigilant guard. The tables would be cleared away. And cartloads of sawdust would be scattered deep on the beerhall floors. And with the sawdust muffling the tramp, tramp, tramp of their feet, the workers prepared for war – learning the unit movements so central to the warfare of that day. Outside, on the streets, the many spies of the governor could not hear what was going on within.

I won't go into great detail about the heroic and fascinating ways that violence erupted. Led by heroic army officer Nathaniel Lyons the anti-slavery forces struck and struck hard. They seized St. Louis and the armory. And they shattered the schemes of the slave owners. They routed the Governor's troops in the early battles. And they bottled up the slaveowners of the Missouri River – cutting them off from the Confederacy.

What followed was one of the most bitter civil wars I have ever studied: Missouri was criss-crossed by vicious pro-slavery death squads that carried out horrific murders and mutilations. Their raiders came dressed in a cloud of human scalps sewn into their clothes and bridles – as they spread terror among those who opposed the sale of human beings. If you have ever wondered where the frontier killer Jesse James got trained, it was as a triggerman for one of the most notorious death squads of the slavocracy.

Hemp made its appearance here too, right in the midst of the fighting: in several key battles the Confederate forces build protective breast works out of the hemp bales pulled from their slave plantations, piling up the bundled hemp harvest to protect themselves from Union bullets.

Fighting against the slavocrats was a complex array of forces, at its core were new Union army units led by radical Republican John Charles Fremont, recruited heavily from among the German workers of St. Louis. The first known actions of communists in the US was the revolutionary armed struggle of these largely German-speaking forces, led in part by Colonel Joseph Weydemeyer, an energetic communist co-thinker of Karl Marx.

These units militantly emancipated many slaves that fell into their hands. This was in direct contradiction to the policy of President Lincoln who, afraid to offend the leading forces of other border states, insisted in the early days of the civil war that slaves should not be freed, but should be treated as “contraband property.” In this dispute, Fremont was removed from the command of the Missouri armies, and these revolutionary working class forces were dispersed into larger armies in order to better control them.

There are many lessons and insights within this story. And more in the parts I have left untold. But I tell this story now just to make a single point: Anyone who thinks that Budweiser and the beer industry of St. Louis is a story of patriotism, Americanism, of all-American “national treasures,” of a white man's “heartland” of traditional values and conservative xenophobia.... Anyone who runs that story just doesn't know.

The story of beer in St. Louis is a story of communist immigrant workers who didn't speak English, who hated the mistreatment of kidnapped Africans in the United States and who were willing to kill and die end the horrific practices of human slavery.

Deal with it. Pass it on.

CT

Mike Ely's web site is the Kasama Project at <http://mikeely.wordpress.com>.

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And with the sawdust muffling the tramp, tramp, tramp of their feet, the workers prepared themselves for war – learning the unit movements so central to the warfare of that day. Outside, on the streets, the many spies of the governor could not hear what was going on within

Hessians of the 21st century

Andrew S. Fischer finds a new economic destiny for his country

Let's face it, intervention around the globe has been our true stock in trade for many decades now, and we haven't even charged a penny for it, unless you count political quid pro quos, of course

Could this be our nation's destiny? Might the once-proud economic Atlas, the United States of America – due to the meddling and incompetence of its government – actually evolve into a hired gunslinger, an antihero-for-hire?

The Hessians were German soldiers hired by the British to fight against our forefathers during our war for liberty, the American Revolution.

Two-and-a-quarter centuries later, that struggle's purpose – freedom – has been cast aside, a casualty of near-universal governmental ineptitude and corruption, leading directly to the eventual demise of the haughtily almighty dollar, as well as the imminent collapse of our financial system.

So, after the government-led downfall of the financial sector, which is currently taking place, what will we be able to offer the rest of the world? The bulk of our income surely won't come through manufacturing, since we've already shifted much of that industry overseas, enriching our Asian "friends" at the expense of our middle class. This doesn't seem to matter to our twin, incestuous parasites: government and Wall Street. As long as government employees, lobbyists and politicians can steal as much as they can from the productive sector, as long as investment

bankers and brokers are awarded massive bonuses for merely pushing paper around, let the average worker, and the nation itself, be damned.

Of our remaining major economic sectors (wholesale, retail, construction and health care), only health care is expanding, but it's essentially an internal industry, as is construction.

Wholesale and retail include food production, so perhaps, as prices increase along with hungry stomachs, this business will also expand in the years to come. Yet, there is another industry that offers much more to the world. You guessed it – the good ol' military-industrial complex – standing ready, willing and able to fill the economic void – yes, sir!

Let's face it, intervention around the globe has been our true stock in trade for many decades now, and we haven't even charged a penny for it, unless you count political quid pro quos, of course. Our future business plan will, one day, in retrospect, turn out to be the same that drug dealers employ: give out a few freebies, then watch the suckers get hooked.

Soon we'll be charging big-time for our destructive services; after all, the USA will need *some* way to earn an "honest" living in the brave, new globalized economy. As noted above, it won't be through our financial industry, since a hyper-in-

flationary death spiral is practically inevitable. As overweight men and women cry out for food, and “poor me” pleas for all sorts of financial help sprout like dandelions throughout the deteriorating landscape, the feds will have little choice but to be accommodative. As columnist Ty Andros succinctly states: “They will print the money.” One day the globe’s dollar-holders will tire of our depreciating legal tender, and simply chuck the dollar as its reserve currency, faster than you can say “Got gold?”

So, nations of the world – do you have a problem with some African dictator? Give us a call, we’ll see if 50,000 troops will make him back down... and don’t forget our invoice for 100 million – terms: net upon receipt. (That’s ounces of gold, thank you.) Unrest in the South Pacific? We’ll be glad to send one of our fleets out there; it can haul away your payment (gold bars, please) on the way back – you save the cost of our usual shipping fee! China, old pal, you’d better hire us be-

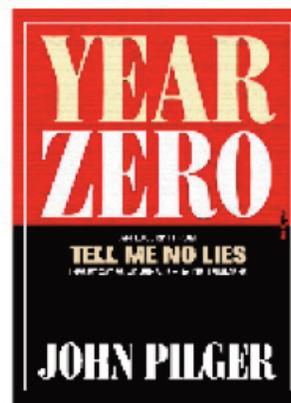
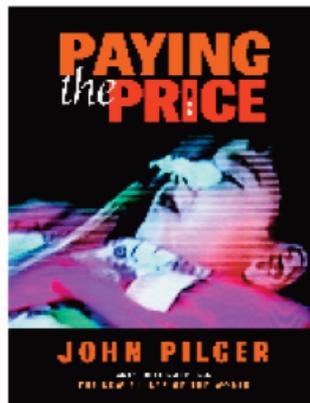
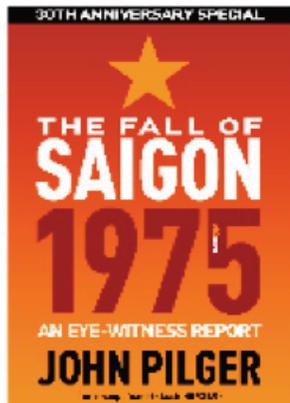
fore the Russians do; we’ll put you on a modest retainer. Since we like you (and you now own a large percentage of our physical assets), we’ll take 10% of that in greenbacks. Need a little precision bombing to root out those nasty South American rebels? We can scramble our jets within the hour. Metal up front, if you don’t mind, and results are not guaranteed.

According to wikipedia.com “the [Hessian] troops were not mercenaries in the modern sense of professionals who hire out their own services for money. As in most armies of the eighteenth century, the men were mainly conscripts, debtors.... some were also petty criminals.” This description may very well come to fit us individually, as history has a funny way of repeating itself. This would be a tragic destiny indeed, for “We, the People.” **CT**

Andrew S. Fischer is a controller for an investment advisory firm in Pennsylvania.

So, nations of the world – do you have a problem with some African dictator? Give us a call, we’ll see if 50,000 troops will make him back down... and don’t forget our invoice for 100 million – terms: net upon receipt.

READ THE BEST OF **JOHN PILGER**



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

Dear Steve: Bring Omar Khadr home

John S. Hatch writes to Stephen Harper, Canada's Prime Minister

But careful, Steve – Bush is down to two lapdogs now that Tony-boy is gone, he might be looking for a third, and you might be it

Yo, Harper – this is an open letter to you. Wait a minute. That's no way to address the Prime Minister of a great nation. I'll just call you Steve. Is that ok?

I hope you had fun with your good buddy George at Rusutsu and discussed all sorts of important matters regarding poverty and the poorest of the poor. Did the caviar go down ok? That's good.

That George is such a kiddier, isn't he? One almost forgets the indelible blood all over his hands. He introduced you to President Umaru Yar'Adua of Nigeria, one of the most corrupt countries on earth. The election was massively fraudulent, just like both of George's. "Good man," George said. Well, it takes one to know one, I guess. But careful, Steve – Bush is down to two lapdogs now that Tony-boy is gone, he might be looking for a third, and you might be it. Being a Canus Lopus for Bush (who many consider to be in the same league as Hitler, Pol Pot and Idi Amin) can be bad for one's political career, let alone one's dignity. Up to you, but if you're going to sniff around George, maybe you shouldn't do it from the Office of Prime Minister.

But that's not why I'm writing, Steve.

About six years ago Omar Khadr, a Canadian citizen then fifteen years old, was captured by American troops in Ayub

Kheyl, Afghanistan. After dropping five-hundred pound bombs on the house in which he and others were hiding, Khadr was shot three times in the back.

An American soldier prepared to murder him, but was restrained by a superior.

An American died in the previous fighting, and as Khadr was the only 'insurgent' survivor, it became convenient to blame him for the killing, although no evidence of this was forthcoming.

Under international law and convention, a 15 year old cannot be considered a soldier (much less an 'unlawful combatant' which has no legal standing whatsoever), and cannot be held or tried for war crimes.

Nevertheless, Mr. Khadr was imprisoned first at Bagram Air Force Base in Afghanistan, then at Guantanamo in Cuba.

Over the six year period of his confinement, Mr. Khadr has undergone numerous forms of torture. These include but are not restricted to:

- Being hung from a door frame for hours in spite of his wounds;
- Being 'short-shackled' in painful positions for hours;
- Being sleep-deprived for twenty-one days in preparation for interrogation by Canada's own CSIS

LETTER TO MY LEADER

(which then turned over information it gained to the Americans);

- Being held in solitary confinement for long periods;
- Being repeatedly threatened with rape.

He was interrogated by Joshua Claus who was removed after killing another prisoner named Dilawar. He beat him to death. Dilawar was later found to be completely innocent.

As far as a fair trial is concerned, the Department of Justice already directed that there be no not-guilty findings. Even military lawyers on both sides have described the process as a sham that makes Stalin's show-trials look positively fair. The government has admitted that in many cases there will never be a hearing, and the prisoners will never be released. Better to bury them than admit to mistakes.

Steve, other civilized nations such as Britain, Australia, Germany, etc. have intervened with the US to save their citizens from America's illegal deadly clutches.

Children have been raped with various implements by American troops, CIA, or mercenaries.

Children have been taken and held as hostages, and sometimes tortured. Many other people have been tortured to death or otherwise murdered. In some cases prisoners were tortured for long periods so that their screams would serve to sleep-deprive others. Two birds with one stone, so to speak, good ol' American ingenuity. If some poor soul manages to end his misery by committing suicide, it's considered 'an asymmetrical act of war'.

We know, and even the Americans admit that many of the people imprisoned at known sites (and this includes an estimated 2500 children as young as nine) are completely innocent. It would follow that innocent people are also being held at the so-called 'black' sites. In spite of all this and the atrocities at Guantanamo Bay, your government has steadfastly refused to intervene in Mr. Khadr's case, even when being urged to by Amnesty International, UNICEF, the Canadian Bar Association, and others. You even tried to blame the previous government for Mr. Khadr's predicament. That was pretty unconvincing, and even cowardly.

As with so many people caught up in America's self-induced hysteria, Mr. Khadr's imprisonment is illegal. His torture is not only illegal, but despicable, and offends and threatens every value we hold dear as Canadians.

Steve, to paraphrase a not very great man, 'You're either with us or you're with the evildoers'. In trying to wash your hands of the imprisonment and torture of Omar Khadr, an innocent Canadian, you've made it clear who your friends are.

History may judge harshly. I hope so. A Prime Minister who countenances illegal detention and torture because his 'friend' is the perpetrator is one who has abdicated his responsibility, and does not represent me.

Have a nice day.

CT

John S. Hatch is a Vancouver writer and film-maker. www.freakishlyfinefilms.com postings.

In some cases prisoners were tortured for long periods so that their screams would serve to sleep-deprive others. Two birds with one stone, so to speak, good ol' American ingenuity

Read the best of
DAVID MICHAEL GREEN

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

Kept afloat on a tide of money

George Monbiot wants to know why governments are subsidising the destruction of the marine environment

The fishermen warn that if something isn't done to help them, thousands could be forced to scrap their boats and hang up their nets. It's an appalling prospect, which we should greet with heartfelt indifference

All over the world, protesters are engaged in a heroic battle with reality. They block roads, picket fuel depots, throw missiles and turn over cars in an effort to hold it at bay. The oil is running out and governments, they insist, must do something about it. When they've sorted it out, what about the fact that the days are getting shorter? What do we pay our taxes for?

The latest people to join these surreal protests are the world's fishermen. They are on strike in Italy, Spain, Portugal, France and Japan and demonstrating in scores of maritime countries. Last month in Brussels they threw rocks and flares at the police, who have been conspiring with the world's sedimentary basins to keep the price of oil high. The fishermen warn that if something isn't done to help them, thousands could be forced to scrap their boats and hang up their nets. It's an appalling prospect, which we should greet with heartfelt indifference.

Just as the oil price now seems to be all that stands between us and runaway climate change, it is also the only factor which offers a glimmer of hope to the world's marine ecosystems. No East Asian government was prepared to conserve the stocks of tuna; now one-third of the tuna boats in Japan, China, Taiwan and South Korea will stay in dock for the

next few months because they can't afford to sail⁽¹⁾. The unsustainable quotas set on the US Pacific seaboard won't be met this year, because the price of oil is rising faster than the price of fish⁽²⁾. The indefinite strike called by Spanish fishermen is the best news European fisheries have had for years. Beam trawlermen – who trash the seafloor and scoop up a massive bycatch of unwanted species – warn that their industry could collapse within a year⁽³⁾. Hurray to that too.

It would, of course, be better for everyone if these unsustainable practices could be shut down gently without the need for a crisis or the loss of jobs, but this seems to be more than human nature can bear.

The European Union has a programme for taking fishing boats out of service – the tonnage of the European fleet has fallen by 5% since 1999⁽⁴⁾ – but the decline in boats is too slow to overtake the decline in stocks. Every year the EU, like every other fishery authority, tries to accommodate its surplus boats by setting quotas higher than those proposed by its scientific advisers, and every year the population of several species is pressed a little closer to extinction.

The fishermen make two demands, which are taken up by politicians in coastal regions all over the world: they

must be allowed to destroy their own livelihoods, and the rest of us should pay for it. Over seven years, European taxpayers will be giving this industry €3.8bn⁽⁵⁾. Some of this money is used to take boats out of service and to find other jobs for fishermen, but the rest is used to equip boats with new engines and new gear, to keep them on the water, to modernise ports and landing sites and to promote and market the catch. Except for the funds used to re-train fishermen or help them into early retirement, there is no justification for this spending. At least farmers can argue – often falsely – that they are the “stewards of the countryside”. But what possible argument is there for keeping more fishermen afloat than the fish population can bear?

The EU says its spending will reduce fishing pressure and help fishermen adopt greener methods. In reality, it is delaying the decline of the industry and allowing it to defy ecological limits for as long as possible. If the member states want to protect the ecosystem, it’s a good deal cheaper to legislate than to pay. Our fishing policies, like those of almost all maritime nations, are a perfect parable of commercial stupidity and short-termism, helping an industry to destroy its long-term prospects for the sake of immediate profit.

Demanding more

But the fishermen only demand more. The headline on *Fishing News* is “Thanks for Nothing!”, bemoaning the British government’s refusal to follow France, Spain and Italy in handing out fuel subsidies⁽⁶⁾. But why the heck should it? The Scottish fishing secretary, Richard Lochhead, demands that the government in Westminster “open the purse strings”. He also insists that new money is “not tied to decommissioning”: in other words no more boats should be taken off the water⁽⁷⁾. Is this really a service to the industry, or only to its most short-sighted members?

I have a leaked copy of the draft proposal that European states will discuss this month⁽⁸⁾. It’s a disaster. Some of the boats which, under existing agreements, will be scrapped and turned into artificial reefs, permanently reducing the sized of the fleet, can now be replaced with smaller vessels. The EU will pay costs and salaries for crews stranded by the fuel crisis, so that they stay in business and can start fishing again when the price falls. Member states will be able to shell out more money (€100,000 per boat instead of €30,000) without breaking state aid rules. They can hand out new grants for replacing old equipment with more fuel-efficient gear. The proposal seems to be aimed at ensuring that the industry collapses through lack of fish rather than lack of fuel. The fishermen won’t go down without taking the ecosystem with them.

What makes the draft document so dumb is that in some regions, especially in British waters, the industry is just beginning to turn. While French, Spanish and Italian fishermen clamour for a resumption of bluefin tuna fishing⁽⁹⁾, knowing that if they are allowed to fish now, this will be the last season ever, around the UK it has begun to dawn on some fishermen that there might be an association between the survival of the fish and the survival of the fishing.

Prompted by Young’s seafood and some of the supermarkets, who in turn have been harried by environmental groups, some of the biggest British fisheries have applied for eco-labels from the Marine Stewardship Council, which sets standards for how fish are caught⁽¹⁰⁾. Fishermen around the UK also seem to be taking the law more seriously, and at last to be showing some interest in obscure issues such as spawning grounds and juvenile fish (which, believe it or not, turn out to have a connection to future fish stocks). By ensuring that far too many boats, and far too many desperate

Fishermen around the UK also seem to be taking the law more seriously, and at last to be showing some interest in obscure issues such as spawning grounds and juvenile fish (which, believe it or not, turn out to have a connection to future fish stocks)

SOMETHING FISHY

Why do the leaders of the fishermen's associations feel the need always to denounce the scientists who say that fish stocks decline if they are hit too hard?

fishermen, stay on the water, and that the remaining quotas are stretched too thinly, the EU will slow down or even reverse the greening of the industry.

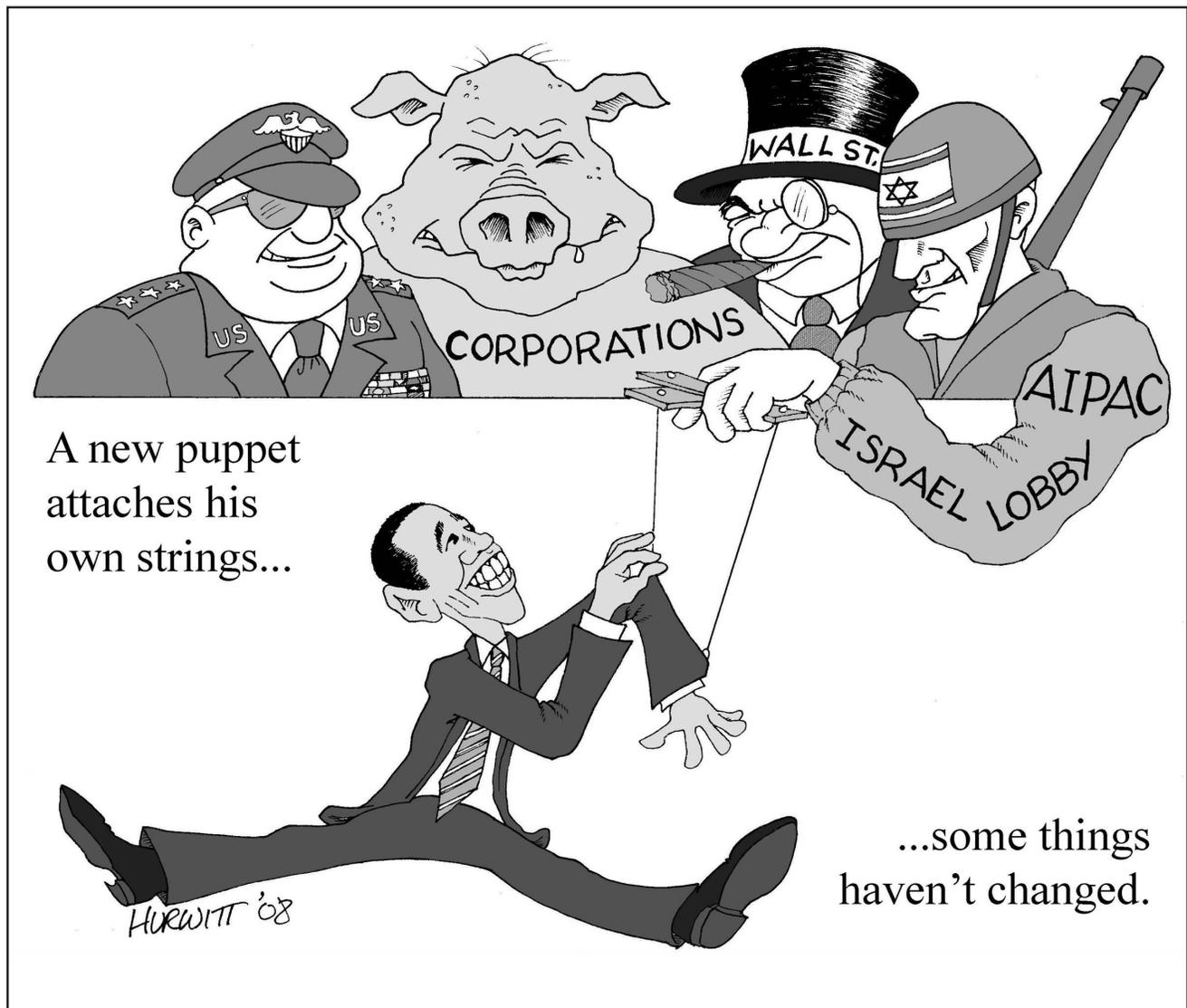
Why is this issue so hard to resolve? Why does every representative of a fishing region believe he must defend his constituents' right to ensure that their children have nothing to inherit? Why do the leaders of the fishermen's associations feel the need always to denounce

the scientists who say that fish stocks decline if they are hit too hard? If this is a microcosm of how human beings engage with the environment, the prospect for humanity is not a happy one. **CT**

*George Monbiot's latest book is **Bring On The Apocalypse**. This essay originally appeared in the Guardian newspaper*

HURWITT'S EYE

Mark Hurwitz



Getting ready for the post-SUV world

One of the benefits of the oil crisis, says **Stan Cox**, is the twilight of the era of gas-guzzling behemoths

As peak-oil enthusiasts keep vigil over world petroleum statistics, they can find comfort in America's sudden, rapid descent from a different summit: the peak of sport-utility vehicle (SUV) production. In the early 2000s, combined sales of SUVs, pickup trucks, and minivans (which together make up the "light truck" class) caught and surpassed sales of passenger cars. But automakers have just announced that high gas prices have caused their sales of SUVs and full-size pickups to plummet by as much as 50 percent compared with a year ago.

With big-box vehicles waddling off into the sunset, we can expect the nation's roads to become safer and less crowded. But just as the end of the Cold War failed to bring with it a promised peace dividend, the end of the SUV era is unlikely to bring a "green dividend" – unless it is accompanied by much bigger changes. The numbers show that even the complete disappearance of SUVs from the nation's roadways, without other fuel-saving developments, would put only a slight bend in the rising curve of national fuel consumption.

First, the good news

By 2006, sales of the largest pickup trucks were two and a half times what they had

been in 1992; meanwhile, assisted by the so-called "Hummer tax deduction", sales of 6000-to-10,000-pound SUVs had risen by 25-fold. But as recent sales reports from Detroit made clear, 2008 will be a very different year.

In May, for the first time in 17 years, the top-selling vehicle model in America was not a pickup truck. In fact, Ford's F-150, the perennial leader, was overtaken by three small import-car models. Ford's June truck sales were down 41 percent from a year ago, and its SUV sales are now in freefall, down 55 percent. Sales of Dodge Ram pickups tumbled 48 percent. General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler were hit hard, and all have announced plans to close or suspend production at plants that make trucks and SUVs.

The post-SUV world will come to pass only gradually, but as it does, we can look forward to getting at least some relief from the damage that the reign of the big boxes has done:

* Less gas will be burned, reducing greenhouse gas emissions: The average SUV is driven 20 percent more miles per year than the average car. That, along with its low fuel efficiency, means that it burns more than 800 gallons of fuel per year. The average pickup is only slightly less thirsty, at 700 gallons, compared with just under 500 burned by the aver-

Just as the end of the Cold War failed to bring with it a promised peace dividend, the end of the SUV era is unlikely to bring a "green dividend" – unless it is accompanied by much bigger changes

DOWNIZING THE ROAD

Statistics show that a person who's at the wheel of a small, nimble car and appropriately aware of the need to avert danger is much safer than a complacent driver relying solely on the protective bulk of an SUV

age car. But without greater restraint by all drivers, how much can the demise of the SUV reduce fossil-fuel consumption? As we will see, not much.

* Drivers of all vehicles will be less likely to die in a car crash: Michael Anderson, assistant professor of economics at the University of California, Berkeley has shown that increasing popularity of SUVs and pickups led to an increase in annual traffic fatalities. Of the additional deaths, he wrote, "approximately one-fifth accrue to the light trucks' own occupants, and the remaining four-fifths accrue to the occupants of other vehicles and pedestrians." Put another way, getting most SUVs and pickups off the road will make everyone safer – especially those who don't drive them.

In *High and Mighty: SUVs – The World's Most Dangerous Vehicles and How They Got That Way*, his definitive 2002 book on the SUV, journalist Keith Bradsher described how the taller vehicles block the vision of car drivers and contribute to accidents. Statistics show that a person who's at the wheel of a small, nimble car and appropriately aware of the need to avert danger is much safer than a complacent driver relying solely on the protective bulk of an SUV – a vehicle "designed to overcome its environment, not to respond to it," in the words of writer Malcolm Gladwell.

* Fewer children may be run over: Some, but not all, surveys have shown that, presumably because of poorer visibility to the rear, SUVs and pickups are more likely to be involved in what are called driveway "backover" accidents, most victims of which are children. In a survey of patients at a Salt Lake City hospital over a seven-year period, backovers were fatal most often when the vehicle was a pickup truck.

* There will be more room on the road for everyone – and maybe less road construction: Small-car drivers know that bottom-of-a-well feeling that comes

when you're surrounded on all sides at a traffic light by three-ton, black-windowed behemoths. Bradsher cites studies demonstrating the various ways in which SUVs clog roadways: that a length of road or street able to accommodate, say, 100 cars can hold only 71 SUVs or 87 pickups; that at busy intersections dominated by SUVs, fewer vehicles can get through a green light before the next change; and that large SUVs sap taxpayers by increasing wear and tear on roads. Indeed, as big-vehicle pressures decline, states and municipalities may be able to give drivers, and the environment, a little break by canceling some of their road-widening plans.

* Will we be contending with less road rage?: A 2004 Canadian study in the journal *Traffic Injury Prevention* found that "serious" road rage incidents, in which drivers "intentionally damaged or attempted to damage another driver's vehicle, and/or intentionally hurt or attempted to hurt a driver or passenger in another vehicle", SUV drivers were more likely to be perpetrators than were drivers of other vehicle types.

What will SUV drivers drive next?

Despite being prized for their roominess, most SUVs haul only slightly more people than do cars – on average, not enough riders to fill even the front seat. In advertisements, SUVs are parked on cliff-tops, but in real life, 76 percent are parked in urban streets, driveway and garages most nights. And despite their hardworking country-and-western image, 60 percent of pickup trucks are owned by urban households, and typically ply the streets with empty cargo beds.

In a 2005 paper, University of Pennsylvania doctoral candidate Josh Lauer dismissed the SUV's reputation for safety and spaciousness: "Safety is not road safety but personal safety, and space is not interior cargo space but social space, including the ability to traverse the most

inhospitable terrain to sequester oneself from the hazards of modern civilization. In this way, the SUV's popularity reflects underlying American attitudes toward crime, random violence, and the importance of defended personal space."

Only 13 percent of SUVs are owned by families of five or more people, and a big 40 percent are found in households of only one or two. A report prepared for the US Department of Energy in August 2000 cited a survey of car-buyers that found, "The average SUV customer is male, married, aged 45 years, in a household with an income of \$94,400 ... Because SUV owners are fairly affluent, the price of the vehicle and of fuel is not sufficiently important to cause them to consider changing the type of vehicle they drive."

But at the time that paper was published, gasoline was at \$1.43 per gallon, a price we're certain never to see again. Recent price shocks appear to have changed attitudes even among well-to-do car shoppers, despite the fact that people who can easily afford a \$100 dinner check should be unfazed by a \$100-plus tank of gas.

Without a national survey on the issue, it's hard to predict what will fill the garages of the most affluent drivers in coming years, according to Pamela Danziger. As president of Unity Marketing in Stevens, Penn., a firm specializing in analysis of luxury markets, Danziger predicts that current high-end SUV drivers "will keep them going until their current leases are up or it's time to buy a new vehicle. Then it is likely that they will trade down to a more economical, but no less luxurious vehicle."

The well-heeled sport-utility driver won't be going extinct. On the day that automakers' dismal June sales figures were announced, Reuters profiled a few members of that species — people like John Stephens: "Arizona mortgage broker John Stephens uses his big plum-

colored Dodge RAM pickup to tow off-road vehicles out to the desert to play. He likes their comfort and space. As he sluiced gallon after gallon of gas at \$4.16 a go into his truck at a Scottsdale gas station, Stephens said he was prepared to make certain sacrifices to improve consumption, such as driving more slowly if the government cut speed limits to save fuel. But he would not consider giving up his truck despite getting just 13 miles per gallon.

"I'd rather see more drilling and more alternative type fuels, anything to keep the price of gas down," he said.

Possibly the worst news for Detroit in June was that buyers were not just switching models or brands; sales of all types of vehicles, including cars, were down an average 18 percent. With the era of cheap oil over, companies may find that it's hard to build and sell a vehicle that meets both the economic and the psychological demands of drivers. As they scramble to find one, they may refer back to their ultra-successful SUV market analysis. In his book, Keith Bradsher asked, "Who has been buying SUVs since automakers turned them into family vehicles?" and arrived at this answer: "They tend to be people who are insecure and vain. They are frequently nervous about their marriages and uncomfortable about parenthood. They often lack confidence in their driving skills. Above all, they are apt to be self-centered and self-absorbed, with little interest in their neighbors or communities. No, that's not a cynic talking — that's the auto industry's own market researchers..."

But setting up SUV owners as villains is probably not very helpful. (Nor is the SUV's widely discussed appeal to the "reptile brain", an idea hatched by the eccentric French anthropologist Clotaire Rapaille and popularized by Bradsher.) However tastes in vehicles shift, there will remain huge numbers of vehicles of all types out there, racking up huge num-

"The SUV's popularity reflects underlying American attitudes toward crime, random violence, and the importance of defended personal space"

Downsizing The Road

Replacing SUVs with standard cars would take us back to the nation's 2003 level of gas consumption; with Priuses, we'd get back to 1999. And much of the good done by those small savings would be canceled out by the deep ecological tireprint of the discarded vehicles and the manufacture, sales, and eventual disposal of so many new cars

bers of miles.

Many ex-SUV drivers have been trading them in for so-called crossover vehicles (CUVs) – smaller versions of SUVs with car-like unibody construction. But even a mass replacement of SUVs with cars would not make this a fuel-frugal nation. Suppose that all SUV owners in America turned instead to average-efficiency cars or CUVs while retaining current driving habits. That, based on government figures, would reduce fuel consumption by less than 5 billion gallons per year – equivalent to 3 percent of national gasoline consumption. Were all SUVs replaced by those hot-selling Prius hybrids, the switch would save about 7.5 percent.

It may be, as two Duke University professors recently recommended, that policy should be focused on replacing the most inefficient vehicles; however, the conservation gains estimated above would not even make up the ground that we lost in the SUV era. Replacing SUVs with standard cars would take us back to the nation's 2003 level of gas consumption; with Priuses, we'd get back to 1999. And much of the good done by those small savings would be canceled by the deep ecological tireprint of the discarded vehicles and the manufacture, sales, and eventual disposal of so many new cars.

Since 1990, the total number of vehicle-miles traveled in the US has risen twice as fast as the country's population. Americans appear to be driving less in 2008, but we continue to travel in largely empty vehicles. Average 2001 figures for occupancy (the average number of people, including the driver, who ride in a vehicle) are 1.6 for passenger cars, 2.2 for minivans, 1.7 for SUVs, and 1.5 for pickups.

A North Carolina survey found that over a six-month period in 2001, 78 percent of SUVs on the road had no occupants other than the driver; the figure was the same for pickups and slightly

higher than the 76 percent observed for passenger cars. That squares with DOT figures showing that 76 percent of commuter trips are made solo.

From the US Department of Transportation (DOT) comes this astonishing comparison: "In 1969, about 20.6 percent of households owned no vehicles [and a miniscule number owned more than three]. By 2001, more households owned four or more vehicles than owned no vehicles." We now have almost 14 million more personal vehicles in the US than we have licensed drivers.

Where will the SUVs go next?

Production of new SUVs and pickups could eventually taper off somewhere near its level of the early 1980s, when sport-utility vehicles were used primarily for, well, sport and utility. Meanwhile, a financial system that's still hung over from the pop of the McMansion bubble is sinking even deeper, as 'pop!' goes the McMotor bubble. *AutoWeek* recently reported that "with some 800,000 truck-based sport/utility vehicles coming off lease this year, residual values projected three and four years ago will be missed by as much as \$6,000 per unit... Those who lend the money— banks, credit unions, car companies' captive finance arms and others who write leases — will face a tab of nearly \$5 billion just in 2008."

Abner Perney is a city commissioner in Salina, Kansas, where he owns and runs Abner's Autos, a used-car business. He's watching prices of SUVs and pickups vanish into a seemingly bottomless pit and expects the lease crunch to trigger "another banking-credit mini-crisis" that mirrors the home mortgage fiasco. Perney, who is now running for the Kansas state senate on a low-carbon-emissions platform, adds, "Same thing goes for millions of people who owe much more than their gas hog is worth, when they find themselves in the bind of wanting to sell or having to sell."

Many of the oldest, least expensive gas-guzzlers may end up parked with those families who can least afford to feed them. Perney expects used SUVs to move well down the income scale: "Historically poor folks have big old cars because they depreciate fast, yet they are tough enough to keep on going. Keeping them running is actually cheaper for everything other than fuel and oil, because they're rugged and generally understressed mechanically. The luxury doo-dads and electronic gizmos are expensive to repair, but you can usually get by without them."

If the more fuel-efficient vehicles end up with the least affordable price tags on used-car lots, cash-strapped buyers may end up stuck with big, cheap trucks or SUVs. The question of how to keep them running will have to be left for another day.

Taking back the streets

In dealing with the aftermath of the SUV boom and bust, some creativity is needed. Maybe a worthwhile complement to the nation's Strategic Petroleum Reserve would be a Strategic Light Truck Reserve. All of those orphaned SUVs and macho pickups could be rounded up, mothballed, and designated a public resource. Then over the coming decades, they could be doled out a few at a time to communities, to be shared by all residents for necessary hauling, towing, and traveling in larger groups. Because most people need the greater capacity of SUVs and pickups only rarely, such vehicles would seem to be ideal candidates for joint-ownership or sharing arrangements.

Tracey Axelsson is executive director of the non-profit Cooperative Auto Network (CAN) in Vancouver, British Columbia, which is the oldest car-sharing co-op in the English-speaking world. By offering pickup trucks in its fleet, CAN manages to fill members' occasional hauling needs while helping reduce the number of large vehicles on the road. Axelsson

hopes "that the old adage is changing – that 'The only thing better than owning a truck is having a friend that does' will become 'The only thing better than sharing a truck is spending the money you save from not owning one'."

But, she adds, CAN is part of a coalition of similar groups struggling to develop a general code of ethics for car sharing. Otherwise, she says, such systems "can fall into the standard drama of providing just another disposable automobile or actually add to the number of cars in a person's toy box."

In the summer 2008 issue of the green journal *Synthesis/Regeneration*, editor Don Fitz laid out a plan for radically reducing the numbers of personal vehicles on the road through combinations of living rearrangements, incentives, and disincentives. Some of his recommendations: Cut the workweek to 32 hours or much less, ensure that getting to work is quicker without a car than with one, move jobs closer to residences, and start making it harder to drive by eliminating more parking spaces every year. (The Utah state government recently went to an energy-saving 4-day work week, but without decreasing work hours.)

Fitz emphasized, "Increasing trains and buses could be deep green transportation – but if and only if it is part of an actual decrease in the number of automobiles. Likewise, increasing bicycles, scooters, car-pooling and car-sharing is truly green transportation only if it is a piece of the big picture of reducing cars."

America's vehicle population will eventually shrink, whether it's through choice or necessity. This twilight of the SUV era seems an appropriate occasion to open up a broad debate on our whole concept of personal transportation. **CT**

Stan Cox is a plant breeder and writer in Salina, Kansas and author of Sick Planet: Corporate Food and Medicine (Pluto Press, 2008)

If the more fuel-efficient vehicles end up with the least affordable price tags on used-car lots, cash-strapped buyers may end up stuck with big, cheap trucks or SUVs. The question of how to keep them running will have to be left for another day.

47 victims, 43 words

David Edwards finds a clear case of censorship by omission in media treatment of civilian deaths in Afghanistan and Iraq

In reporting the November 2005 Haditha massacre, in which 24 Iraqi civilians were murdered by US troops, *Newsweek* suggested that the scale of the tragedy “should not be exaggerated”

In his classic work, *Obedience to Authority*, psychologist Stanley Milgram observed: “There is always some element of bad form in objecting to the destructive course of events, or indeed, in making it a topic of conversation. Thus, in Nazi Germany, even among those most closely identified with the ‘final solution’, it was considered an act of discourtesy to talk about the killings.” (Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, Pinter & Martin, 1974, p.204)

The same “bad form” is very much discouraged in our own society. One would hardly guess from media reporting that Britain and America are responsible for killing anyone in Iraq and Afghanistan, where violence is typically blamed on “insurgents” and “sectarian conflict”. International “coalition” forces are depicted as peacekeepers using minimum violence as a last resort.

In reporting the November 2005 Haditha massacre, in which 24 Iraqi civilians were murdered by US troops, *Newsweek* suggested that the scale of the tragedy “should not be exaggerated”. Why? “America still fields what is arguably the most disciplined, humane military force in history, a model of restraint compared with ancient armies that wallowed in the spoils of war or even more-modern armies that heedlessly killed civilians

and prisoners.” (Evan Thomas and Scott Johnson, ‘Probing Bloodbath,’ *Newsweek*, June 12, 2006)

The truth was revealed in a single moment of unthinking honesty by a senior US Army commander involved in planning the November 2004 Falluja offensive and convinced of its necessity. He visited the city afterward and declared: “My God, what are the folks who live here going to say when they see this?”

The answer was provided by physician Mahammad J. Haded, director of an Iraqi refugee centre, who was in Falluja during the US onslaught: “The city is today totally ruined. Falluja is our Dresden in Iraq... The population is full of rage.” (countercurrents.org)

In July 2005, the *Independent* commented on US actions in Iraq: “The American army’s use of its massive firepower is so unrestrained that all US military operations are in reality the collective punishment of whole districts, towns and cities.” (Patrick Cockburn, ‘We must avoid the terrorist trap,’ the *Independent*, July 11, 2005)

In April 2004, the *Daily Telegraph* reported the disgust of senior British army commanders in Iraq with the “heavy-handed and disproportionate” military tactics used by US forces, who view Iraqis “as *untermenschen*. They are not

concerned about the Iraqi loss of life... their attitude toward the Iraqis is tragic, it is awful.” (Sean Rayment, ‘US tactics condemned by British officers’, Defence Correspondent, *Daily Telegraph*, April 11, 2004)

Burying the bride

The anonymous commanders’ comments generalise to both British and American media reporting.

In July, Afghan investigators in Nangarhar, Afghanistan, told the AFP news agency that they had been shown the “bloodied clothes of women and children” killed in a July 6 US air strike. The attack was reported to have killed 47 civilian members of a wedding party, including 39 women and children, with nine wounded. The head of the team, Burhanullah Shinwari, deputy speaker of Afghanistan’s senate, said: “They were all civilians and had no links with Taliban or Al-Qaeda.”

Around ten people were reported still missing, believed buried under rubble. It is now estimated that 52 people were killed – the same number that died in the London suicide attacks of July 7, 2005. Another member of the team, Mohammad Asif Shinwari, said there were only three men among the dead and the rest were women and children. Marc Herold of the University of New Hampshire reports that eight of the victims were between 14 and 18 years of age. The US military initially claimed only “militants” involved in mortar attacks had been killed.

A separate investigation into a July 4 strike in the northeastern province of Nuristan found that 17 civilians had been killed there. The coalition claimed they had killed several militants who were fleeing after attacking a base. But an Afghan official again confirmed that the victims were “all civilians.” Afghan authorities said the dead included two doctors and two midwives who had been attempting to leave the area to escape

military operations.

Air Force Times reports that allied warplanes are currently dropping a record number of bombs on Afghanistan. For the first half of 2008, aircraft dropped 1,853 bombs – more than they released during all of 2006 and more than half of 2007’s total. But this only hints at the true extent of the slaughter. The figures do not include cannon rounds shot by fighters or AC-130 gunships, Hellfire and other small rockets launched by warplanes and drones, and assaults by helicopters. *Air Force Times* comments: “In close-quarter firefights where friendly soldiers could be wounded if bombs are used, cannon fire and missiles are often the preferred alternative.” (Bruce Rolfsen, ‘Afghanistan hit by record number of bombs,’ *Air Force Times*, July 18, 2008)

The response of the UK press to these latest atrocities is a case study in censorship by omission.

On July 12, the *Guardian* devoted 307 words to the attack on the wedding party. The killing of 39 women and children was not considered front page news – the story was buried on page 30. (Mohammad Rafiq Jalalabad, ‘US air strike killed 47 civilians, says Afghan government,’ the *Guardian*, July 12, 2008)

On the same day, a 490-word article in the *Times* focused on the fate of nine British troops injured when a US helicopter accidentally targeted them in a “friendly fire” incident. Six of the nine soldiers have since returned to duty, with three still receiving medical treatment. While 447 words were devoted to this story, the article concluded with two sentences totalling 43 words on the killing of the Afghan civilians: “However, 47 civilians, most of them women and children, were killed when a US aircraft bombed a wedding party in eastern Afghanistan on Sunday, an Afghan government investigation has concluded. The nine-man investigation team found that only civilians were hit during the airstrike.” (Dominic Kennedy

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KILLING FIELDS

When the first female British soldier, Sarah Bryant, was killed in Afghanistan on June 17, the media poured forth details about her life. The BBC website showed pictures of Bryant's wedding and devoted an article to moving tributes from her husband, father, mother, commanding officer, unit commander, friends and colleagues

and Michael Evans, 'Friendly fire inquiry to investigate messages from troops,' the *Times*, July 12, 2008)

At time of writing there have been five mentions of the 47 deaths in UK national quality newspapers.

Media reports on Western victims of terrorist or insurgent attacks typically provide detailed information on the names, backgrounds and personal histories of the victims. When the first female British soldier, Sarah Bryant, was killed in Afghanistan on June 17, the media poured forth details about her life. The BBC website showed pictures of Bryant's wedding and devoted an article to moving tributes from her husband, father, mother, commanding officer, unit commander, friends and colleagues. A friend of the family described Bryant: "A hundred per cent feminine, very pretty, very unassuming, a natural person, very happy – the sort of person that when she was in a room, it lit up."

Bryant, recall, was a combatant. The depth of focus changes for Iraqi and Afghan non-combatant victims of US-UK violence. In a BBC online article, Martin Patience reported the July 6 attack: "Regional officials said the casualties were attending a wedding party and that the bride had been killed."

I wrote to Patience (July 14), noting that he had reported that the bride had been among the victims. We asked him why he had not mentioned that fully 39 of the victims were women and children. He responded: "I accept your point about not mentioning women and children, although, in my defence, the story was linked to the new story and I didn't necessarily want to repeat the details." (Email to Media Lens, July 14)

We wrote back: "Thanks for your response, I appreciate it. But something doesn't add up. How often did the media provide us with the personal details – name, gender, photo, education, work lives, loved ones, aspirations – of the vic-

tims of the July 7 bomb attacks in London? The July 6 atrocity in Afghanistan has been reported a tiny handful of times in the press. Why would you be concerned about repeating the fact that almost all of the victims were women and children?" (Email, July 14)

We received no further reply but, to its credit, the BBC did subsequently publish an excellent piece on the July 6 attack: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7504574.stm

Patience had earlier reported: "the latest claim of civilian casualties puts yet more pressure on the Afghan authorities and international forces to get it right when carrying out operations."

The reference to the need for "international forces" to "get it right" might sound like neutral language. But imagine if a journalist had commented in August 1990 that claims of civilian casualties had put "yet more pressure on Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi forces to get it right when carrying out operations in Kuwait." The bias suddenly becomes very clear.

Militants and mistakes

On July 12, Leonard Doyle of the *Independent* reported: "The UN said last month that nearly 700 Afghan civilians had lost their lives in Afghanistan this year, about two-thirds in attacks by militants and about 255 in military operations." (Doyle, 'US to investigate air strike that killed 47 Afghan civilians,' the *Independent*, July 12, 2008)

From this, we were presumably to understand that the "militants" are not conducting "military operations", and Afghan government/"coalition" forces conducting "military operations" are not "militants".

The point being that "militant" is a pejorative term used by journalists to suggest illegitimacy. In June 1999, the BBC reported that "Kosovo Albanians have been welcoming the return of armed KLA soldiers." (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/>

hi/europe/369239.stm) KLA insurgents fighting Serbian forces were supported by the West and were regularly described as “soldiers” rather than “militants” or “insurgents”. The British media have similarly referred to the “Chechen resistance” fighting the Russian army. Ironically, British and American journalists also commonly referred to Afghan forces fighting the 1979-1989 Soviet occupation of Afghanistan as “resistance fighters” and “freedom fighters”. The use of such terms is of course inconceivable in US-UK reporting of the current occupation.

Blunders, not crimes

On the rare occasions when US-UK atrocities are discussed, they are invariably described as blunders rather than crimes. On July 13, Alastair Leithead commented on the BBC’s evening news: “It’s these mistakes that cost the US the support of the [Afghan] people.”

In September 2004, the BBC’s Nicholas Witchell reported on BBC TV news from Baghdad: “As is so often the case in this conflict it’s the Iraqi civilian population which suffers the greatest loss of life – either as a result of mistakes by the Americans, or, far more frequently, of course, as a result of the bombs and the bullets of the insurgents.” (Witchell, BBC1, 18:00 News, September 30, 2004)

The bias could hardly be more transparent – we kill civilians only by “mistake”, our enemies do not. Noam Chomsky comments: “The more vulgar apologists for US and Israeli crimes solemnly explain that, while Arabs purposely kill people, the US and Israel, being democratic societies, do not intend to do so. Their killings are just accidental ones, hence not at the level of moral depravity of their adversaries.” (Noam Chomsky, “Terrorists wanted the world over.”

February 26, 2008; <http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/174899>)

As Chomsky notes we can distinguish three categories of crimes: murder with intent, accidental killing, and murder with foreknowledge but without specific intent. When Israel’s High Court authorised intense collective punishment of the people of Gaza by depriving them of electricity, when Bill Clinton bombed the al-Shifa pharmaceutical plant in 1998 in Sudan supplying half the country’s drugs, and when Bush and Blair invaded Iraq, the devastating consequences for civilians were predictable, but ignored.

Certainly it is reprehensible to kill with intent. But is it any better to kill without intent when the likely consequences for our victims are so irrelevant that they do not even enter our minds? The point being, as Chomsky writes, that Western elites really do appear to regard Third World peoples “much as we do the ants we crush while walking down a street. We are aware that it is likely to happen (if we bother to think about it), but we do not intend to kill them because they are not worthy of such consideration.” (Ibid)

When we assemble the different pieces of the media jigsaw puzzle, clear patterns emerge. Western victims are presented as real, important people with names, families, hopes and dreams. Iraqi and Afghan victims of British and American violence are anonymous, nameless. They are depicted as distant shadowy figures without personalities, feelings or families.

The result is that Westerners are consistently humanised, while non-Westerners are portrayed as lesser versions of humanity. **CT**

David Edwards is co-editor of the UK media watchdog, Media Lens – <http://medialens.org>

On the rare occasions when US-UK atrocities are discussed, they are invariably described as blunders rather than crimes

READ THE BEST OF TOM ENGELHARDT

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

Lies, kidnapping and a laptop

Johann Hari explains we shouldn't believe all the bad things we keep hearing about Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez

The ability of democracy and freedom to spread to poor countries may depend on whether we can unscramble these propaganda fictions.

Sometimes you hear a stray sentence on the news that makes you realise you have been lied to. Deliberately lied to; systematically lied to; lied to for a purpose. If you listened closely in early July, you could have heard one such sentence passing in the night-time of news.

As Ingrid Betancourt emerged after six-and-a-half years – sunken and shrivelled but radiant with courage – one of the first people she thanked was Hugo Chavez. What? If you follow the news coverage, you have been told that the Venezuelan President supports the Farc thugs who have been holding her hostage. He paid them \$300m to keep killing and to buy uranium for a dirty bomb, in a rare break from dismantling democracy at home and dealing drugs. So how can this moment of dissonance be explained?

Yes: you have been lied to – about one of the most exciting and original experiments in economic redistribution and direct democracy anywhere on earth. And the reason is crude: crude oil. The ability of democracy and freedom to spread to poor countries may depend on whether we can unscramble these propaganda fictions.

Venezuela sits on one of the biggest pools of oil left anywhere. If you find yourself in this position, the rich govern-

ments of the world – the US and EU – ask one thing of you: pump the petrol and the profits our way, using our corporations. If you do that, we will whisk you up the Mall in a golden carriage, no matter what. The “King” of Saudi Arabia oversees a torturing tyranny where half the population – women – are placed under house arrest, and jihadis are pumped out by the dozen to attack us. It doesn't matter. He gives us the oil, so we hold his hand and whisper sweet crude-nothings in his ear.

Ideal regime

It has always been the same with Venezuela – until now. Back in 1908, the US government set up its ideal Venezuelan regime: a dictator who handed the oil over fast and so freely that he didn't even bother to keep receipts, never mind ask for a cut.

But in 1998 the Venezuelan people finally said “enough”. They elected Hugo Chavez. The President followed their democratic demands: he increased the share of oil profits taken by the state from a pitiful one per cent to 33 per cent. He used the money to build hospitals and schools and subsidised supermarkets in the tin-and-mud shanty towns where he grew up, and where most of his countrymen still live.

DEMONISING A PRESIDENT

I can take you to any random barrio in the high hills that ring Caracas and show you the results. You will meet women like Francisca Moreno, a gap-toothed 76-year-old granny I found sitting in a tin shack, at the end of a long path across the mud made out of broken wooden planks. From her doorway she looked down on the shining white marble of Caracas's rich district. "I went blind 15 years ago because of cataracts," she explained, and in the old Venezuela people like her didn't see doctors. "I am poor," she said, "so that was that." But she voted for Chavez. A free clinic appeared two years later in her barrio, and she was taken soon after for an operation that restored her sight. "Once I was blind, but now I see!" she said, laughing.

In 2003, two distinguished Wall Street consulting firms conducted the most detailed study so far of economic change under Chavez. They found that the poorest half of the country have seen their incomes soar by 130 per cent after inflation. Today, there are 19,571 primary care doctors – an increase by a factor of 10. When Chavez came to power, just 35 per cent of Venezuelans told Latinobarometro, the Gallup of Latin America, they were happy with how their democracy worked. Today it is 59 per cent, the second-highest in the hemisphere.

Serious problem

For the rich world's governments – and especially for the oil companies, who pay for their political campaigns – this throws up a serious problem. We are addicted to oil. We need it. We crave it. And we want it on our terms.

The last time I saw Chavez, he told me he would like to sell oil differently in the future: while poor countries should get it for \$10 a barrel, rich countries should pay much more – perhaps towards \$200. And he has said that if the rich countries keep intimidating the rest he will shift to selling to China instead. Start the sweat-

ing. But Western governments cannot simply say: "We want the oil, our corporations need the profits, so let's smash the elected leaders standing in our way." They know ordinary Americans and Europeans would gag.

So they had to invent lies. They come in waves, each one swelling as the last crashes into incredulity. First they announced Chavez was a dictator. This ignored that he came to power in a totally free and open election, the Venezuelan press remains uncensored and in total opposition to him, and he has just accepted losing a referendum to extend his term and will stand down in 2013.

When that tactic failed, the oil industry and the politicians they lubricate shifted strategy. They announced that Chavez was a supporter of Terrorism (it definitely has a capital T). The Farc is a Colombian guerrilla group that started in the 1960s as a peasant defence network, but soon the pigs began to look like farmers and they became a foul, kidnapping mafia. Where is the evidence Chavez funded them?

On 1 March, the Colombian government invaded Ecuador and blew up a Farc training camp. A few hours later, it announced it had found a pristine laptop in the rubble, and had already rummaged through the 39.5 million pages of Microsoft Word documents it contained to find cast-iron "proof" that Chavez was backing the Farc. Ingrid's sister, Astrid Betancourt, says it is plainly fake. The camp had been totally burned to pieces and the computers had clearly, she says, been "in the hands of the Colombian government for a very long time". Far from fuelling the guerrillas, Chavez has repeatedly pleaded with the Farc to disarm. He managed to negotiate the release of two high-profile hostages – hence Betancourt's swift thanks. He said: "The time of guns has passed. Guerilla warfare is history."

So what now? Now they claim he is

First they announced Chavez was a dictator. This ignored that he came to power in a totally free and open election, the Venezuelan press remains uncensored and in total opposition to him, and he has just accepted losing a referendum to extend his term and will stand down in 2013

DEMONISING A PRESIDENT

The US government is already funding separatist movements in Zulia province, along the border with Colombia, where Venezuela's largest oilfields lie.

a drug dealer, he funds Hezbollah, he is insane. Sometimes they even stumble on some of the real non-fiction reasons to criticise Chavez and use them as propaganda tools. As the world's oil supplies dry up, the desire to control Venezuela's pools will only increase.

The US government is already funding separatist movements in Zulia province, along the border with Colombia, where Venezuela's largest oilfields lie. They hope they can break away this whiter-skinned, anti-Chavez province and then

drink deep of the petrol there.

Until we break our addiction to oil, our governments will always try to snatch petro-profits away from women like Francisca Moreno. And we – oil addicts all – will be tempted to ignore the strange, dissonant sentences we sometimes hear on the news and lie, blissed-out, in the lies.

Johann Hari is a columnist with the Independent newspaper in London, in which this column was first printed.

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Justifying torture; Two big lies

Coleen Rowley & Ray McGovern listen to testimony on US torture at the House Judiciary Committee

One can assume that former Attorney General John Ashcroft didn't mean it to be funny, but his testimony in July before the House Judiciary Committee might strike one as hilarious, were it not for the issue at hand – torture.

Ashcroft is the Attorney General who approved torture before he disapproved it, but committee members spared him accusations of flip-flopping.

He explained that he initially blessed the infamous torture memoranda drafted by Justice Department lawyer John Yoo and others in mid-2002 because he (Ashcroft) believed it imperative to afford the President “the benefit of genuine doubt” regarding how to protect American lives in the “war on terror.”

But Ashcroft added that, despite this, when concerns about that earlier guidance for interrogations were brought to his attention, changing his mind “was not a hard decision for me.” A very flexible Attorney General.

“The benefit of genuine doubt?” Perhaps Ashcroft thought that this genteel way of looking at things would appeal to the poorly led, motley group calling itself the House Committee on the Judiciary, chaired by Rep. John Conyers, D-Michigan.

But the rest of us, whose time does not

expire in five minutes, cannot buy his defense of torture. For it is based on two demonstrable lies.

Lie Number One

According to Ashcroft, “The administration’s overriding goal...was to do everything in its power and within the limits of the law...to keep this country safe from terrorist attack.”

His is merely the latest in a string of torture-exculpating statements adduced to document a myth; namely, that the Bush administration, having failed to prevent the attacks of 9/11, pulled out all the stops to keep us safe from a second attack; and that one of the necessary measures introduced was torture.

It was a situational thing, you see. But even that explanation does not survive close scrutiny.

First, for those with a strong stomach, a sample of recent statements; then proof of their transparency in aiming to create an exculpatory myth:

– On May 22, 2008, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice publicly discussed the use of enhanced interrogation techniques: “After Sept. 11, whatever was legal in the face of not just the attacks of Sept. 11, but the anthrax attacks that happened, we were in an environment in which saving America from the next at-

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INTERROGATION TIME

Flight school pilots acting as whistleblowers had notified the FBI, against the wishes of their airline employer, of detailed information making Moussaoui the most suspicious student they had ever encountered

tack was paramount.”

– On June 5, 2008, CIA Director Michael Hayden told Jim Angle of Fox News that it was fear of an imminent attack that led to the controversial interrogation practices – including waterboarding, which Hayden referred to as a “high-end interrogation technique.”

“Keep in mind...you have the nation suffering, reeling from a recent attack in which 3,000 citizens had been killed, until it was the collective judgment of the American government that these techniques would be appropriate and lawful in these circumstances.”

– On June 26, 2008, testifying before the Conyers committee, Vice President Dick Cheney’s chief of staff David Addington added, with some flair: “Smoke was still rising...3,000 Americans were just killed.” Dana Milbank of the *Washington Post* used the quote to show how Addington “justified his legal reasoning” regarding enhanced interrogation techniques.

Since members of the Judiciary Committee did little to expose the myth, let us try to help. The sense of pressing urgency conjured up by Bush administration folks to justify torture does not square with Coleen Rowley’s direct personal experience in the FBI.

As some will remember, the FBI’s joint terrorism task force in Minneapolis had detained Zacarias Moussaoui on Aug. 16, 2001. Flight school pilots acting as whistleblowers had notified the FBI, against the wishes of their airline employer, of detailed information making Moussaoui the most suspicious student they had ever encountered.

French intelligence soon supplied further background confirming Moussaoui’s fighting for a “foreign power” – Chechnyan rebels, whose leader was connected to al-Qaeda. By Aug. 23, the case was deemed so suspicious, it went all the way to the top of the intelligence community, to Director of Central Intelligence George

Tenet, in a PowerPoint presentation entitled: “Islamic Extremist Learns to Fly.”

As Rowley revealed in her letter of May 21, 2002, to FBI Director Robert Mueller, there was considerable frustration in her FBI unit in Minneapolis over the inability of FBI headquarters to get its act together and present these facts pursuant to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) to obtain the secret FISA Court’s permission to search Moussaoui’s personal effects and laptop computer in the days before 9-11.

Odd Reactions

But once the attacks took place on 9-11, confirming the Minneapolis FBI unit’s worst fears and finally overcoming FBI Headquarters’ reluctance to conduct further searches of Moussaoui’s belongings, there was still little sense of urgency.

At that point, Moussaoui sat atop the list of prime sources for information about any “second wave” of attacks. But the Justice Department persisted in its refusal to allow agents to attempt to interview Moussaoui even after the attacks.

During the afternoon of Sept. 11, 2001, the acting US Attorney denied the unit permission to interview Moussaoui.

Rowley – having seen what just had transpired due, at least in part, to the FBI unit having accepted No for an answer in August – decided to go a rung higher by calling Justice officials in the FBI’s Command Post in Washington on the morning of Sept. 12.

In that conversation, Rowley repeatedly drew attention to the Supreme Court decision (*New York v Quarles*, 467 US 649, 1984) granting an “exigent-circumstances” exception to the Miranda rule in cases where an interview is judged necessary to protect public safety.

Rowley was told by Justice Department officials that “no such public emergency existed.” This is what Rowley encountered on 9/11 and 9/12.

Moussaoui remained the only al-Qae-

da terrorist in custody for many months, but the Justice Department's ban on interviewing him remained in place – at huge potential cost by forfeiting the possibility of acquiring information on other terrorist activities about which Moussaoui was very probably aware.

This is not merely theoretical. It appears that Moussaoui almost certainly was acquainted with Richard Reid, the “shoe bomber” who on Dec. 22, 2001, almost succeeded in blowing up American Airlines Flight 63 from Paris to Miami with nearly 200 people aboard.

So, in Rowley's May 21, 2002, letter to FBI Director Mueller, she reminded him that if, as he claimed, priority was now being given to prevention over prosecution, the FBI needed to explore how to apply the Quarles “public safety” exception. Rowley also reminded Mueller that Minneapolis had not only been prevented from further investigation of Moussaoui before 9/11 but also was prohibited from interviewing him after the attacks on that day.

Muzzling Moussaoui

Rowley tried again in early July 2002, after learning that Moussaoui was hinting he wanted to talk. She called then-Assistant Attorney General Michael Chertoff to note the opportunity missed by not interviewing Moussaoui – particularly in view of the suggestive information found on his laptop computer regarding crop dusting and wind currents.

Chertoff was not available; one of his assistants gave Rowley the brush-off.

Rowley's last try came on Feb. 26, 2003, when she wrote the following as part of a longer letter to Director Mueller:

“If, as you have said, ‘prevention of another terrorist attack remains the FBI's top priority,’ why is it that we have not attempted to interview Zacarias Moussaoui, the only suspect in US custody charged with having a direct hand in the horror of 9/11?... Moussaoui almost

certainly would know of other al-Qaeda contacts, possibly in the US, and would also be able to alert us to the motive behind his and Mohammed Atta's interest in crop dusting.

“Similarly, there is the question as to why little or no apparent effort has been made to interview convicted terrorist Richard Reid, who obviously depended upon other al-Qaeda operatives in fashioning his shoe explosive. Nor have possible links between Moussaoui and Reid been fully investigated...

“In short ... lack of follow-through with regard to Moussaoui and Reid gives a hollow ring to our ‘top priority.’”

It may be that Mueller, too, felt powerless at that point but, for whatever reason, he did not respond.

In sum, Rowley's personal experience, and lots else, persuaded her that the please-understand-we-were-just-doing-all-we-could-to-prevent-a-second-wave-of-attacks excuse for torture is bogus – an outrageous lie.

The time is far past when the President and his torture apprentices should be accorded “the benefit of genuine doubt,” to quote again from Ashcroft's testimony.

(Remember, too, that in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, President George W. Bush allowed prominent Saudis, including members of Osama bin Laden's family, to be whisked out of the United States aboard private jets after only cursory interviews with the FBI.)

What, then, accounts for the descent into Inquisition practices of waterboarding and other torture techniques? What accounts for the bizarre decision to round up a whole bunch of people with no provable attachment to terrorism, designate them terrorist suspects, herd them into prisons in New York, New Jersey, Afghanistan, Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib and God knows where else, where they could be – and were – abused?

What accounts for the blithe departure from international and national law

It appears that Moussaoui almost certainly was acquainted with Richard Reid, the “shoe bomber” who on Dec. 22, 2001, almost succeeded in blowing up American Airlines Flight 63 from Paris to Miami with nearly 200 people aboard.

INTERROGATION TIME

Al-Libi was practically the poster boy for the Cheney/Bush torture regime; that is, until he publicly recanted and explained that he only told his interrogators what he thought would stop the torture

– not to mention time-honored civilized procedures for dealing with prisoners and detainees?

What accounts for the marginalization of those military, FBI and other professionals who warned that torture is not only a war crime but also that it doesn't yield reliable information – that, rather, it is the very best recruiting tool for terrorists?

We suggest four reasons why I-don't-care-what-the-international-lawyers-say George Bush and dark-side Dick Cheney opted for torture:

1 – Deceit: Granted, torture does not yield truthful information. It can, though, be an excellent way to obtain the untruthful information you may wish to acquire. All you really need to know is what you want the victims to “confess” to and torture them, or render them abroad to “friendly” intelligence services toward the same end.

One case that speaks volumes is that of Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi, who was captured and rendered to Egypt, where, under torture, he told his interrogators precisely what they wanted to hear.

According to the Defense Intelligence Agency, al-Libi had been identified as a likely fabricator months before the Bush administration began to use his statements to prove that Iraq trained al-Qaeda members to use biological and chemical weapons.

Without mentioning al-Libi by name, President Bush, Vice President Cheney, then-Secretary of State Colin Powell and other administration officials repeatedly cited information from his interrogation as credible evidence that Iraq was training al-Qaeda members in the use of explosives and illicit weapons.

So torture can indeed provide the information you may want to have to grease the skids for war. Al-Libi was practically the poster boy for the Cheney/Bush torture regime; that is, until he publicly recanted and explained that he only told

his interrogators what he thought would stop the torture.

2 – Sadism: Cheney's open advocacy of waterboarding speaks volumes, but what about the President? Sad to say, as psychiatrist Justin Frank, author of *Bush on the Couch*, has noted:

“Bush's certitude that he is right gives him carte blanche for destructive behavior. He has always had a sadistic streak: from blowing up frogs, to shooting his siblings with a BB gun, to branding fraternity pledges with white-hot coat hangers (explaining that the resulting wound was ‘only a cigarette burn’)...”

“His comfort with cruelty is one reason he can be so jocular... Instead of seeing a President in anguish, we watch him publicly joking about the absence of ‘weapons of mass destruction’ in Iraq, in the vain search for which so many young Americans died.”

3 – Intimidation: Are you perhaps in some “shock and awe” at the prospect of the President designating you an “enemy combatant” and sending you off to the Navy brig in South Carolina for an indefinite stay? He now has court approval to do precisely that, and we are proceeding on faith that this joint article will not bring us “enhanced interrogation techniques.”

Indefinite imprisonment is bad enough, but with the fringe benefit of the kind of torture suffered by Jose Padilla? Well, let us just say that the open advocacy of waterboarding and other “harsh” methods may, just may, be aimed at throwing the fear of Cheney into us, as a way of dissuading those of us who still believe in the Constitution from attempting to hold accountable those who break the law.

4 – Because We Can: Lord Acton was, of course, right. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. And closeness to it does the same.

Guided by the principle of an unaccountable unitary executive – not to mention the writings of torture apologist

Alan Dershowitz, the acting performances of the torture evangelists on Scalia's TV favorite, Fox's "24," and using the fear factor to a fare-thee-well – torture has become the bellwether of exclusive dominant power.

The very transparency of the excuses for torture serves to demonstrate that this kind of power is in place, and is not to be questioned.

Lie Number 2: Torture saves lives

It was hard to know whether to laugh or to cry. John Ashcroft insisting that according to "the reports I have heard, and I have no reason to disbelieve them, these techniques are very valuable."

Ashcroft's source? He indicated that it is none other than former CIA Director George Tenet, who wrecked the CIA by creating a Gestapo in the operations directorate and cultivating fawning bootlickers among managers of analysis.

To say Tenet's reputation for truthfulness leaves much to be desired would be the kind of self-evident revelation that CIA analysts were accustomed to assigning to their tongue-in-cheek "Great Moments in Intelligence" file.

It is, nonetheless, the White House line. Not only Ashcroft and Hayden, but also David Addington and John Yoo rang changes on the theme in their recent testimony before the aging Conyers.

Both Addington and Yoo argued that harsh interrogation methods had been crucial in preventing another terrorist attack on the US after 9/11.

On Thursday, Republican members of the House Judiciary Committee picked up the theme, arguing that waterboarding and other harsh tactics yielded information that saved lives.

Rep. Elton Gallegly, R-California: "Had we not used those, would the probability of another attack not only be a probability but a certainty?"

Ashcroft: "It could well have been."

Have you, finally, no shame, Mr. Ash-

croft? There is not a scintilla of evidence to support that claim. And, again, we are far past the point where the President and his torture apprentices merit "the benefit of genuine doubt." Not the way they continue to play fast and loose with the truth.

Here it is the President himself, with his remarkable contempt for truth, who sets the tone.

Dr. Frank points out that contempt itself is a defense, a form of self-protection of Bush's belief system, in which he clings to his beliefs as if they were well researched facts: "Bush's pathology is a patchwork of false beliefs and incomplete information woven into what he asserts is the whole truth."

And Cheney, Fox News, and the rest of the fawning corporate media follow suit. What is truth? Go ask Pontius Bush.

Trouble is, the truth usually gets out, and the President is beginning to squirm. One highly disturbing fact, from the President's point of view, emerged in the questioning of Ashcroft by Rep. Jerrold Nadler, D-New York.

Nadler noted that "high-value" detainee Abu Zubaydah was waterboarded after his arrest in March 2002, and Nadler asked Ashcroft whether that happened before the memos from John Yoo justifying such activity were drafted. Ashcroft said he didn't know.

Nadler, at least, had done some homework. The videotapes of Zubaydah's interrogation were among those destroyed by the CIA, for obvious reasons. Nadler is really asking on whose authority Zubaydah was waterboarded, since Addington and Yoo had not yet completed their ex-post-facto legal acrobatics.

The congressman knows the answer. The reason that CIA interrogators felt comfortable waterboarding is quite simply that the President of the United States cleared the way for such techniques with his Action Memorandum of Feb. 7, 2002.

When FBI agents were taken off the

To say Tenet's reputation for truthfulness leaves much to be desired would be the kind of self-evident revelation that CIA analysts were accustomed to assigning to their tongue-in-cheek "Great Moments in Intelligence" file.

INTERROGATION TIME

How painful it is to watch as the Bush administration's witnesses quibble about semantics, make sweeping assertions of executive privilege, and run out the five-minute clock on each congressman's questions

job of interrogating Zubaydah and became aware of the “techniques” being applied by their CIA colleagues, they questioned their use. They were told by CIA interrogators at the scene that the methods were approved “at the highest levels” and that no one would get in any trouble.

But what about the main contention of Lie Number Two? Has torture saved lives? Milt Bearden, a 30-year veteran of CIA's operations directorate who rose to the most senior managerial ranks, doesn't believe it for a minute:

“The administration's claims of having ‘saved thousands of Americans’ can be dismissed out of hand because credible evidence has never been offered – not even an authoritative leak of any major terrorist operation interdicted based on information gathered from these interrogations in the past seven years. . . . It is irresponsible for any administration not to tell a credible story that would convince critics at home and abroad that this torture has served some useful purpose.”

Bearden said professionals he describes as the “old hands” in the CIA, the ones who know something of interrogation and intelligence, don't believe administration claims. Worse still, they say, torture is counterproductive:

“This is not just because the old hands overwhelmingly believe that torture doesn't work – it doesn't – but also because they know that torture creates more terrorists and fosters more acts of terror than it could possibly neutralize.”

Bearden argues that if the claims of the Bush White House were true, it ought to stop hiding always behind the readily adduced need to protect sources and methods. He notes that in 1986 after the U. S. bombed Libya in retaliation for a Libyan operation that killed US servicemen in Berlin, there was worldwide skepticism and consternation.

The Reagan administration decided it owed the world an explanation and

decided it would be worth sacrificing a very sensitive method; namely, the ability to intercept Libyan encoded messages. Ironically, the Libyan message made public spoke of the successful operation, “without leaving a trace behind.”

Frittering five minutes with Feith

One might ask why Conyers has not thought of inviting experienced professionals like Milt Bearden to testify. One might also ask why Conyers continues to let people like Addington, Yoo, Douglas Feith, and now Ashcroft make a mockery of the committee's attempts to hold hearings on these historically important issues.

How painful it is to watch as the Bush administration's witnesses quibble about semantics, make sweeping assertions of executive privilege, and run out the five-minute clock on each congressman's questions.

Impeachment is what the Founders envisioned for the situation we face at present. Quick, someone download for Congressman Conyers the President's Action Memorandum of Feb. 7, 2002, which provided the loophole through which George Tenet and Donald Rumsfeld drove the Mack truck of torture. That memo is all you need, John. It is signed at the bottom with felt-pen strokes one and half inches high. If that's not good enough for the Judiciary Committee chairman, then please let members and staff go home for an early vacation and spare all of us further humiliation. **CT**

Coleen Rowley, a FBI special agent for almost 24 years, was legal counsel to the FBI Field Office in Minneapolis from 1990 to 2003. Ray McGovern, a CIA analyst for 27 years, now works with Tell the Word, the publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. Both serve on the Steering Committee of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

Weirdos riot, media gets it wrong

Michael I. Niman is concerned by media treatment of a hippie riot that never happened

It doesn't really seem like the kind of story that would make the national news – 10 US Forest Service police officers arrest a man in Wyoming for crime of being “uncooperative.” Add the freak show specter of “eccentrics” and “hippie types” throwing rocks and sticks, however, and in the era of Jerry Springer, you've got the makings of a national news story. Hence, nearly 2,000 miles away, my local paper, the *Buffalo News* ran the story under the headline, “5 arrested in Rainbow Family clash with feds.”

In actuality, there was a national story, only it wasn't the one that appeared in the *Buffalo News*. I was at the scene, conducting research and working with a film crew producing a documentary about the group, which was the subject of my doctoral research and subsequent book, *People of the Rainbow* (Univ. of Tennessee Press). The alleged hippie riot reported by the *News* and dozens of other media outlets around the United States never happened. This *Buffalo News* story, gleaned from the Associated Press wire service, like much of what we read in mainstream newspapers, was based entirely on an official government source, with no “on the ground” reporting or source verification, no independent eyewitness reports, and no quotes from the group in question.

The main problem here, as legendary

investigative reporter I.F. Stone put it, is that “all governments lie.” It's a chronic problem that reporters face – and a point journalism professors have been trying to drive home for at least three generations. You can't base stories entirely on the narrative provided by one party to a conflict. You can't base stories entirely on government or corporate press releases or official documents. News stories need to be based on reporting, not stenography.

The Rainbow story, sadly, is formulaic – a police riot followed by false arrests and prosecutions designed to cover up or obfuscate the original crime. The problem here, however, is that with hundreds of credible witnesses, including healthcare professionals, educators, and working journalists on the ground, as well as photographic and video evidence, the official narrative lacks any credibility. That didn't deter the *Buffalo News* and other papers that rely on the Associated Press's network of underpaid punch-clock stringers from running a discredited official narrative, one that in this case appears to have been written by criminals, as the unquestioned truth. Unfortunately this is common practice.

The AP/*Buffalo News* story begins with this sentence: “About 400 members of the Rainbow Family threw rocks and sticks at 10 federal officers as they tried

The Rainbow story, sadly, is formulaic – a police riot followed by false arrests and prosecutions designed to cover up or obfuscate the original crime

THE BLAME GAME

A woman asked them to put their guns away. She was immediately arrested for interfering with a law officer, and placed on the ground. People demanded her release . . .

to arrest a member of the group, the US Forest Service said Friday.”

Contrast that to the local coverage by the *Jackson Hole Star Tribune*, the nearest daily newspaper on the ground in Wyoming, who began their story with this lead paragraph:

“US Forest Service officers pointed weapons at children and fired rubber bullets and pepper spray balls at Rainbow Family members while making arrests Thursday evening, according to witnesses.”

The *Star Tribune* went on to add witness quotes – “They [police] were so violent, like dogs,” and “People yelled at them, you’re shooting children,” – in paragraphs two and three. The *News*, by contrast, edited the AP story by re-writing the seventh paragraph and moving it up to become the second, reading: “Five members of the group were arrested and one officer slightly injured. A Government vehicle was also damaged.”

Are you thoroughly confused yet? Nowhere does the AP/*Buffalo News* article mention that the Rainbow event has convened annually for 38 years as a multid denominational gathering to pray for world peace and attempt to model a nonviolent, nonhierarchical, utopian society. As for the “injured officer,” he was examined and released without treatment. And the damaged vehicle? The AP/*Buffalo News* passive voice sentence construction obfuscates the actor – the entity that damaged the vehicle. A witness on the ground claims she ran in terror after stumbling upon a Forest Service law enforcement officer who was bashing in the window of a government vehicle with his nightstick.

I was a few miles away eating dinner in the woods when the incidents in question occurred – and given my experiences photographing police riots, in retrospect, I’m quite happy not to have been there. What I did witness was an ongoing campaign of harassment orchestrated by the

Forest Service and directed at the Rainbows. This included federal officers ticketing Rainbows for infractions that are not illegal in Wyoming – and general harassment such as issuing tickets for dusty windshields to gathering participants who had just driven for an hour on dirt roads through sage desert. The narrative that I put together regarding the police riot, after speaking to a credentialed journalist and credible witnesses who I have known and worked with for years, goes like this:

Forest Service law enforcement officers, who had just spent days at the Rainbow Gathering illegally demanding to search tents, harassing women while using latrines, etc., approached a man in the main meadow area of the Gathering. He would be the “suspect,” though it is unclear of what he is suspected. There is speculation that he’s suspected of sharing marijuana – but this is speculation.

The suspect, to his discredit, ran from the feds, into a place the Rainbows call “Kiddie Village,” which is a sanctuary and kitchen for families with young children and expectant parents, as well as a cooperative day care facility. The feds followed, with their weapons drawn.

Once in Kiddie Village, they encountered a large group preparing to eat dinner. A woman asked them to put their guns away. She was immediately arrested for interfering with a law officer, and placed on the ground. People demanded her release. At some point, officers apprehended the original suspect. One officer stepped backward onto the arrested woman. Thinking she had tripped the officer, three Forest Service agents began beating her. The dinner crowd loudly demanded they stop. The 10 officers opened fire wildly in Kiddie Village, shooting pepper-filled (like pepper spray) ammo at specific people as well as indiscriminately firing and hitting others. People screamed and shouted. The officers pointed a Taser point blank into the face of a journalist

who was showing his credentials. His presence may have prevented the officers from using greater force. Alarmed parents, hearing the shots, came running into Kiddie Village. Trained Rainbow peacekeepers formed a line, with their backs to the feds, separating them from the growing crowd. The feds shot these peacekeepers in the back with pepper-filled balls. One man alleges he was hit eight times. According to his testimony, when he turned around to ask why they were shooting him while he was trying to help them, they shot him four more times in the chest.

Victims become defendants

The officers took their two prisoners and left the Gathering via a trail through the woods, possibly shooting indiscriminately at passersby on their way out. They spent the next few days demanding that Rainbows who were leaving the Gathering lift their shirts so that officers could check for injuries caused by their weapons. People with welts were arrested and charged. Once charged, they are magically transformed from victims into defendants. Defendants have the choice of fighting false charges, possibly felony charges, in Wyoming courts, or pleading guilty to misdemeanors with suspended sentences and going home, back to work, and back to their lives. This is how justice works in America.

The day after the attack, the Forest Service put out a press release with their spin on the story. While local press in Wyoming and Colorado reported on the Waco- and Ruby-Ridge-like aspects of a violent and unprovoked federal police attack on a child care facility, the national media ran with the Coverup story.

When I got back to the land of electricity and email, I read the *Buffalo News* story and immediately sent this note to News editor Margaret Sullivan:

“You ran an AP story (<http://www.buffalonews.com/nationalworld/nation->

[al/story/385003.html](http://www.buffalonews.com/nationalworld/national/story/385003.html)) based on discredited official sources. I am familiar with the group in question since they were the topic of my doctoral research and book, and I was on site working on a documentary film. A press release from the group is available at <http://mediastudy.com/Rbow-08-PoliceRiot.html>. I can also put you in touch with a 3rd party journalist who witnessed the event, for a less biased account.

Bottom line – shots fired w/o provocation. Also, your description of the group (eccentrics, young people and hippies) is silly and pejorative.”

Shortly thereafter, I sent Sullivan the link to the *Star Tribune*'s coverage of the incident. As of press time, I have not heard back from Sullivan or anyone at the News, and the false story stands uncorrected.

For the victims of the Kiddie Village police riot, false news coverage by lazy, compliant “journalists” comprises a second, and sometimes longer-lasting and more devastating, attack. The reality of their status as victims is taken away, and their recovery is undermined by the struggle to get reality recognized in an Orwellian world.

The story here, of course, is much bigger than the Rainbows, the Kiddie Village police riot, the Associated Press, or the *Buffalo News*. It's a much more important story about honesty, reality, and bearing witness. It's about how more and more, as journalists turn their backs on their collective responsibilities, we're becoming a society ruled by lies and misinformation. We now must add to our ever growing list of things for which to struggle the demand for coherent, honest narratives of reality, for the creation of an accurate documentation of the events of the day.

CT

Dr. Michael I. Niman is a professor of journalism and media studies at Buffalo State College.

Defendants have the choice of fighting false charges, possibly felony charges, in Wyoming courts, or pleading guilty to misdemeanors with suspended sentences and going home, back to work, and back to their lives. This is how justice works in America

How Britain wages war

The insidious militarising of Britain is the effect of two colonial wars and cover-ups of atrocities coming home, says **John Pilger**

The final photograph is of an Iraqi man, Baha Mousa, who was tortured to death by British soldiers. Taken during his post-mortem, it shows some of the 93 horrific injuries he suffered at the hands of men of the Queen's Lancashire Regiment

The military has created a wall of silence around its frequent resort to barbaric practices, including torture, and goes out of its way to avoid legal scrutiny.

Five photographs together break a silence. The first is of a former Gurkha regimental sergeant major, Tul Bahadur Pun, aged 87. He sits in a wheelchair outside 10 Downing Street. He holds a board full of medals, including the Victoria Cross, the highest award for bravery, which he won serving in the British army.

He has been refused entry to Britain and treatment for a serious heart ailment by the National Health Service – outrages rescinded only after a public campaign. On June 25, he came to Downing Street to hand his Victoria Cross back to the prime minister, but Gordon Brown refused to see him.

The second photograph is of a 12-year-old boy, one of three children. They are Kuchis, nomads of Afghanistan. They have been hit by NATO bombs, American or British, and nurses are trying to peel away their roasted skin with tweezers.

On the night of June 10, NATO planes struck again, killing at least 30 civilians in a single village: children, women, school-teachers, students. On July 4, another 22 civilians died like this. All, including the roasted children, are described as “mili-

tants” or “suspected Taliban.” The Defense Secretary, Des Browne, says the invasion of Afghanistan is “the noble cause of the 21st century.”

The third photograph is of a computer-generated aircraft carrier not yet built, one of two of the biggest ships ever ordered for the Royal Navy. The \$7.9 billion contract is shared by BAE Systems, whose sale of 72 fighter jets to the corrupt tyranny in Saudi Arabia has made Britain the biggest arms merchant on earth, selling mostly to oppressive regimes in poor countries. At a time of economic crisis, Browne describes the carriers as “an affordable expenditure.”

The fourth photograph is of a young British soldier, Gavin Williams, who was “beasted” to death by three non-commissioned officers. This “informal summary punishment,” which sent his body temperature to more than 106 degrees Fahrenheit, was intended to “humiliate, push to the limit and hurt.” The torture was described in court as a fact of army life.

The final photograph is of an Iraqi man, Baha Mousa, who was tortured to death by British soldiers. Taken during his post-mortem, it shows some of the 93 horrific injuries he suffered at the hands of men of the Queen's Lancashire Regiment who beat and abused him for 36 hours,

including double-hooding him with hessian sacks in stifling heat. He was a hotel receptionist. Although his murder took place almost five years ago, it was only in May this year that the Ministry of Defense responded to the courts and agreed to an independent inquiry. A judge has described this as a “wall of silence.”

A court martial convicted just one soldier of Mousa’s “inhumane treatment,” and he has since been quietly released. Phil Shiner of Public Interest Lawyers, representing the families of Iraqis who have died in British custody, says the evidence is clear – abuse and torture by the British army is systemic.

Shiner and his colleagues have witness statements and corroborations of prima facie crimes of an especially atrocious kind usually associated with the Americans. “The more cases I am dealing with, the worse it gets,” he says. These include an “incident” near the town of Majar al-Kabir in 2004, when British soldiers executed as many as 20 Iraqi prisoners after mutilating them. The latest is that of a 14-year-old boy who was forced to simulate anal and oral sex over a prolonged period.

“At the heart of the US and UK project,” says Shiner, “is a desire to avoid accountability for what they want to do. Guantánamo Bay and extraordinary renditions are part of the same struggle to avoid accountability through jurisdiction.”

British soldiers, he says, use the same torture techniques as the Americans and deny that the European Convention on Human Rights, the Human Rights Act and the UN Convention on Torture apply to them. And British torture is “commonplace”: so much so, that “the routine nature of this ill-treatment helps to explain why, despite the abuse of the soldiers and cries of the detainees being clearly audible, nobody, particularly in authority, took any notice.”

Unbelievably, says Shiner, the Minis-

try of Defense under Tony Blair decided that the 1972 Heath government’s ban on certain torture techniques applied only in the UK and Northern Ireland. Consequently, “many Iraqis were killed and tortured in UK detention facilities.” Shiner is working on 46 horrific cases.

Wall of silence

A wall of silence has always surrounded the British military, its arcane rituals, rites and practices, and, above all, its contempt for the law and natural justice in its various imperial pursuits.

For 80 years, the Ministry of Defense and compliant ministers refused to countenance posthumous pardons for terrified boys shot at dawn during the slaughter of the First World War. British soldiers used as guinea pigs during the testing of nuclear weapons in the Indian Ocean were abandoned, as were many others who suffered the toxic effects of the 1991 Gulf War. The treatment of Gurkha Tul Bahadur Pun is typical. Having been sent back to Nepal, many of these “soldiers of the Queen” have no pension, are deeply impoverished and are refused residence or medical help in the country for which they fought, and for which 43,000 of them have died or been injured. The Gurkhas have won no fewer than 26 Victoria Crosses, yet Browne’s “affordable expenditure” excludes them.

An even more imposing wall of silence ensures that the British public remains largely unaware of the industrial killing of civilians in Britain’s modern colonial wars. In his landmark work *Unpeople: Britain’s Secret Human Rights Abuses*, the historian Mark Curtis uses three main categories: direct responsibility, indirect responsibility and active inaction.

“The overall figure [since 1945] is between 8.6 and 13.5 million,” Curtis writes. “Of these, Britain bears direct responsibility for between 4 million and 6 million deaths. This figure is, if anything, likely to be an underestimate. Not all British in-

British torture is “commonplace”: so much so, that “the routine nature of this ill-treatment helps to explain why, despite the abuse of the soldiers and cries of the detainees being clearly audible, nobody, particularly in authority, took any notice.”

VICTIMS OF WAR

Pictures of nomadic boys with NATO-roasted skin almost never appear in the press or on television, nor the after-effects of British thermobaric weapons, or “vacuum bombs,” designed to suck the air out of human lungs

John Pilger's latest book, *Freedom Next Time*, is now out in paperback. His new movie is *The War on Democracy*. This essay first appeared in the *New Statesman*

terventions have been included, because of lack of data.” Since his study was published, the Iraq death toll has reached, by reliable measure, a million men, women and children.

Security state

The spiralling rise of militarism within Britain is rarely acknowledged, even by those alerting the public to legislation attacking basic civil liberties, such as the recently drafted Data Communications Bill, which will give the government powers to keep records of all electronic communication. Like the plans for identity cards, this is in keeping with what the Americans call “the national security state,” which seeks the control of domestic dissent while pursuing military aggression abroad. The \$7.9 billion aircraft carriers are to have a “global role.” For global, read colonial.

The Ministry of Defense and the Foreign Office follow Washington's line almost to the letter, as in Browne's preposterous description of Afghanistan as a noble cause. In reality, the US-inspired NATO invasion has had two effects: the killing and dispossession of large numbers of Afghans, and the return of the opium trade, which the Taliban had banned. According to Hamid Karzai, the West's puppet leader, Britain's role in Helmand Province has led directly to the return of the Taliban.

The militarising of how the British state perceives and treats other societies is vividly demonstrated in Africa, where 10 out of 14 of the most impoverished and conflict-ridden countries are seduced into buying British arms and military equipment with “soft loans.” Like the British royal family, the British prime minister simply follows the money. Having ritually condemned a despot in Zimbabwe for “human rights abuses”—in truth, for no longer serving as the West's business agent—and having obeyed the latest US dictum on Iran and Iraq, Brown set off

recently for Saudi Arabia, exporter of Wahabi fundamentalism and wheeler of fabulous arms deals.

To complement this, the Brown government is spending \$21.8 billion of taxpayers' money on a huge, privatized military academy in Wales, which will train foreign soldiers and mercenaries recruited to the bogus “war on terror.” With arms companies such as Raytheon profiting, this will become Britain's “School of the Americas,” a center for counter-insurgency (terrorist) training and the design of future colonial adventures. It has had almost no publicity.

Of course, the image of militarist Britain clashes with a benign national regard formed, wrote Tolstoy, “from infancy, by every possible means—class books, church services, sermons, speeches, books, papers, songs, poetry, monuments [leading to] people stupefied in the one direction.”

Much has changed since he wrote that. Or has it? The shabby, destructive colonial war in Afghanistan is now reported almost entirely through the British army, with squaddies always doing their Kipling best, and with the Afghan resistance routinely dismissed as “outsiders” and “invaders.” Pictures of nomadic boys with NATO-roasted skin almost never appear in the press or on television, nor the after-effects of British thermobaric weapons, or “vacuum bombs,” designed to suck the air out of human lungs. Instead, whole pages mourn a British military intelligence agent in Afghanistan, because she happens to have been a 26-year-old woman, the first to die in active service since the 2001 invasion.

Baha Mousa, tortured to death by British soldiers, was also 26 years old. But he was different. His father, Daoud, says that the way the Ministry of Defense has behaved over his son's death convinces him that the British government regards the lives of others as “cheap.” And he is right. **CT**

Supersized incentives

Sam Pizzigati on the CEO who ‘earned’ \$258 million while slashing the pay of his company’s workers

Richard E. Dauch currently serves as the CEO of American Axle and Manufacturing, an auto parts giant carved out of General Motors 14 years ago. Late this past May, after threatening to outsource “all of our business to other locations around the world,” Dauch forced 3,600 striking workers at his company’s five original American plants to accept a contract that cuts wages from \$28 an hour down to as low as \$14.35 and slices the company’s US workforce by half.

One month later, in June, Dauch pocketed his reward: a \$8.5 million bonus from the American Axle board of directors for his “leadership role” in “the structural transformation achieved under our new labor agreements.”

Dauch has now collected, over the last decade, over \$258 million in compensation from American Axle – and, in the process, tossed thousands of US worker families out of the middle class.

Auto workers, ironically, once symbolized that middle class, and for good reason. Precedent-setting union contracts at GM and other US automakers after World War II helped give birth to the first mass middle class in world history.

And the executives who signed those contracts? They did well, too, but not too well. In 1950, for instance, GM presi-

dent Charlie Wilson pulled in \$586,100, a bit over \$5 million in current dollars. Today, someone at that \$5 million level will usually clear, after taxes, around \$4 million. Wilson cleared the equivalent of only \$1.25 million. He paid nearly three-quarters of his income in taxes.

Mid-20th century America, in effect, frowned on excessive incomes at the nation’s economic summit. The result: America’s biggest companies, back then, manufactured cars, not mega millionaires.

A young Richard Dauch would start his auto industry career in this mid-20th century manufacturing culture – and thrive in it. The talented Dauch shot up the GM organizational charts. In 1965, GM named him a production foreman at the company’s Flint plant. Three years later, he was supervising all the plant’s production. By 1976, Dauch was running all manufacturing for VW of America.

The rising young executive would go to similar heavy-duty responsibilities at Chrysler. By the mid-1980s, Dauch had established a reputation as one of the top managers in the entire American auto industry.

But that industry was now operating within an economy that had fundamentally changed. By the 1980s, the restraints on the size of the rewards the economy

Dauch has now collected, over the last decade, over \$258 million in compensation from American Axle – and, in the process, tossed thousands of US worker families out of the middle class

RICH PICKINGS

Dauch was now making six times more, in inflation-adjusted dollars, than GM's top exec made in 1950 – and paying taxes at less than one-third the rate. He would be in no hurry to see these good times end

had to offer had begun eroding. The top tax on income over \$400,000 – 91 percent in the Eisenhower years – would be 28 percent by 1986. Big money could now be made – and kept – and Corporate America's smart, talented, and ambitious were pushing the envelope to make it.

Corporate America's most ambitious operators were soon raking in more millions in a year than old-time executives like Charlie Wilson ever made in a career. And they were raking in these millions not by making and selling goods, but by making and selling companies. The action – and the rewards – had shifted. Dauch would shift, too.

Mismanaged plants

In 1994, Dauch and another former General Motors executive rounded up a group of investors, bought up five mismanaged GM parts plants, and started up shop as a privately held company known as American Axle and Manufacturing.

Typically, in a buyout situation like this, the new owners follow some variation on what has come to be called the strip-and-flip script. They proceed to gin up profits by any means necessary, then take their plaything public on the stock exchange and make a killing selling shares of their new company's stock.

That by-any-means-necessary could include anything from squeezing worker wages, benefits, and pensions to slashing jobs and outlays for R & D.

At American Axle, Dauch would go a different route, at least at first. He would stay true to his mid-20th century auto industry roots. Dauch would pay standard auto industry union wages. He would invest in improving the company. And the company would prosper, helped along by the “guaranteed market for American Axle products” that General Motors so thoughtfully provided.

Dauch prospered, too, professionally and financially. In 1997, the National As-

sociation of Manufacturers named him America's “manufacturer of the year.” By 2003, American Axle had become big enough to enter the Fortune 500, and Dauch was cashing in big-time on stock options. He would end up that year as the highest-paid executive in the entire auto industry, at \$30.1 million.

Dauch was now making six times more, in inflation-adjusted dollars, than GM's top exec made in 1950 – and paying taxes at less than one-third the rate. He would be in no hurry to see these good times end. To keep them going, he would start doing dumb things.

Dauch the smart and experienced manufacturing executive knew that enterprises only deliver quality when workers feel committed to their work. In American Axle's early years, Dauch had worked to build that commitment. He didn't just pay decent wages. He respected line workers enough, notes the *Automotive News*, to make the effort to remember the names of their kids. And he held his managers “to the same demanding standards as laborers.”

All that made Dauch “a local working-man's folk hero” and generated “stellar quality and delivery records,” according to the executive in charge of GM's purchasing and supply chain.

But by 2004 this commitment to building an effective enterprise was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. American Axle's competitors were taking the “low road” that Dauch had avoided. They were squeezing workers and quality to inflate their share prices – and keep ample executive rewards flowing.

So Dauch faced a choice. American Axle could fall in line and pander to Wall Street. Or Dauch could put his company's share price – and his personal rewards – at risk by refusing to make the short-term cuts that would leave the company less efficient and effective in the long run.

Dauch chose the dark side. In 2004,

American Axle began pressing the union to swallow lower pay rates for new workers. Two years later, Dauch tried to bully workers at his Buffalo, New York plant to accept wage concessions. They didn't, and Dauch would go on to shut the plant down.

That set the stage for this year's contract negotiations. American Axle came to the table with proposals for draconian wage and benefit cuts. Workers balked – and then walked out on strike in late February.

"We're at war defending the middle class and its wage," Bill Alford Jr., the president of United Auto Workers Local 235, told reporters. "If we lose here, then every other middle-class worker will be next."

The American Axle workers did lose, not on every Dauch demand, but on enough to have Wall Street analysts gushing with investor happy-talk. American Axle, one analyst noted in late June, would likely reap over \$300 million in savings from the worker concessions.

Dauch, meanwhile, is no longer spending much time talking with American Axle workers about their kids. Instead,

the American Axle PR department is sending out news releases about his kids. Early in June, the company announced new career turns for the two Dauch boys at American Axle.

The older, an American Axle executive who had been setting up company plants overseas, is leaving his father's side to run his own privately held company. The younger is becoming American Axle's new president.

Rewards for the smart and talented, in a deeply unequal society, certainly do add up quick. **CT**

Sam Pizzigati has edited Too Much, an online newsletter on excess and inequality, since 1995. He has written widely on issues around the concentration of income and wealth, with op-eds and articles appearing in the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Miami Herald, the Los Angeles Times, and a host of other newspapers and periodicals. His latest book, Greed and Good: Understanding and Overcoming the Inequality that Limits Our Lives (Apex Press), won an "outstanding title" of the year rating from the American Library Association.

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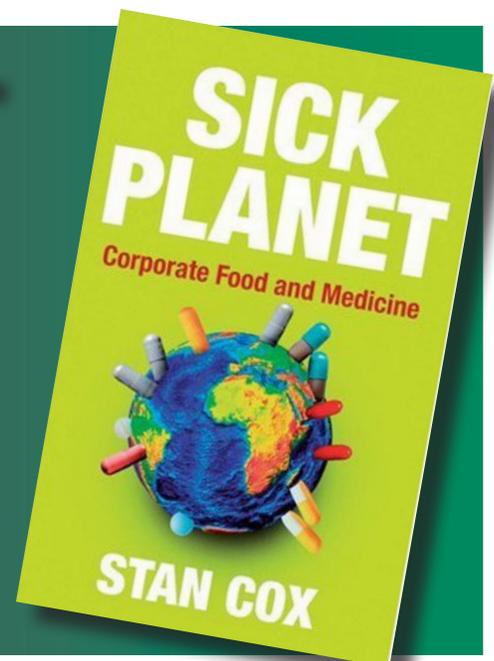
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Spying on a sportswriter

Dave Zirin has been a target of undercover police surveillance. Among his crimes: planning to set up a table at a farmers' market

Our seditious crimes, as Lucy reported, involved such acts as planning to set up a table at the local farmers market and writing up a petition

Finally, at long last, I have something in common with Muhammad Ali. No, I'm not the heavyweight champion of the world, but, like "the Greatest," I have been a target of state police surveillance for activities – in my case, against the death penalty – that were legal, nonviolent and, so I assumed, constitutionally protected.

In classified reports compiled by the Maryland State Police and the Department of Homeland Security, I am "Dave Z." This nickname was given by an undercover agent known to us as "Lucy."

She sat in our meetings of the Campaign to End the Death Penalty, smiling and engaged, taking copious notes about actions deemed threatening by the former Maryland Governor Robert Ehrlich.

Our seditious crimes, as Lucy reported, involved such acts as planning to set up a table at the local farmers market and writing up a petition.

Adding a dash of farce to this outrage, she was monitoring us in the liberal enclave of Takoma Park, Maryland, a place known more for tie-dyeing than terrorism. Incidentally, current Governor Martin O'Malley says he opposes this kind of surveillance. He's also against the death penalty. No word yet on whether he, too, is being spied upon.

Thanks to the Freedom of Informa-

tion Act and the ACLU, we now know that "Lucy" was only one part of a vast, insidious project.

The Maryland State Police's Department of Homeland Security devoted nearly 300 hours and thousands of taxpayer dollars in 2005 and 2006 to harassing people whose only crime was dissenting on the question of the war in Iraq and Maryland's use of cruel and unusual punishment.

My friend Mike Stark, a board member of the Campaign to End the Death Penalty, is at times referred to in Lucy's report as a "socialist" and an "anarchist." One can only assume this is the pathetic, time-honored tradition of reducing people to simple caricatures, all the better to garner Homeland Security grant money.

Veteran Baltimore peace activist Max Obuszewski, who has initiated a lawsuit against the Maryland State Police, has also consistently been shadowed by authorities. His "primary crime" (their terminology) was entered into the homeland security database as "terrorism-anti govern[ment]." His "secondary crime" was listed as "terrorism-antiwar protesters." The database is known as the Washington-Baltimore High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA). A respected peace organizer of many decades is identified as a terrorist, his actions

listed as criminal, for doing nothing more than exercising his rights.

Former police superintendent Tim Hutchins defended these totalitarian practices in the *Washington Post* saying, "You do what you think is best to protect the general populace of the state." The article mentioned that Hutchins is now a federal defense contractor. I guess the global war on terror is just the gift that keeps on giving for the Hutchins family.

But "protect the general populace" from what? The surveillance continued even after it was determined that we were planning nothing more dangerous than carrying clipboards in a public place. Hutchins and the Ehrlich administration have undertaken an ugly violation of our civil rights, manipulating fears of terrorism to stamp out dissent.

This is COINTELPRO, pure and simple. Like the infamous counter-intelligence program whose heyday many assume was a relic the 1950s and 1960s, it's an effort to harass the innocent and breed paranoia, all for daring to question power.

Mental breakdown

Governor Ehrlich and Tim Hutchins follow in the footsteps of those who hounded Martin Luther King and facilitated the death of Malcolm X. They are not unlike those who drove the great actor, college football superstar and activist Paul Robeson toward the mental breakdown that claimed his life. When Robeson's files were opened under the Freedom of Information Act, the results were terrifying.

As his son, Paul Robeson Jr. has written, "From the files I received, it was obvious that there were agents who did nothing but follow every public event

of my father, or even of me.... It took on a life of its own.... Over time, even for someone as powerful and with as many resources as my dad had...the attrition got to him."

Today Robeson is honored on a US postage stamp, but he moral midgets who destroyed him went unpunished.

The ACLU, to its credit, is going on the offensive. As ACLU lawyer David Rocah said at a news conference in Baltimore, "To invest this many hours investigating the most all-American of activities without any scintilla of evidence there is anything criminal going on is shocking. It's Kafkaesque."

Unfortunately for people like Governor Ehrlich, it is also "the most all-American of activities" to take the constitution and use it as their personal hand wipe.

As the great political philosopher Ice T once wrote, "Freedom of speech.... just watch what you say."

Well, now is exactly the time not to watch what we say. I'm angry. I'm angry for my friends, who trusted "Lucy" and others. I'm angry that my tax dollars went to paying the salaries of people who spy and intimidate those exercising their rights. I'm angry that Barack Obama just voted to increase the power of the federal government to disrupt people's lives. And I'm angry enough that I'm joining a lawsuit initiated by the ACLU. "Homeland Security" picked on the wrong sports writer. They also picked on the wrong group of activists. We will not be silenced. **CT**

*Dave Zirin is the author of **Welcome to the Terrordome** (Haymarket) and **A People's History of Sports in the United States** (The New Press), coming out this summer.*

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The killing of Rachel Hoffman

Paul Armentano on the case of a young woman who was murdered after being coerced into becoming a police informant

Her assignment: Meet with two men she'd never met and purchase a large quantity of cocaine, ecstasy and a handgun

Rachel Hoffman is dead. Rachel Hoffman, like many young adults, occasionally smoked marijuana. But Rachel Hoffman is not dead as a result of smoking marijuana; she is dead as a result of marijuana prohibition.

Under prohibition, Rachel faced up to five years in a Florida prison for possessing a small amount of marijuana. (Under state law, violators face up to a \$5,000 fine and five years in prison for possession of more than 20 grams of pot.)

Under prohibition, the police in Rachel's community viewed the 23-year-old recent college graduate as nothing more than a criminal and threatened her with jail time unless she cooperated with them as an untrained, unsupervised confidential informant. Her assignment: Meet with two men she'd never met and purchase a large quantity of cocaine, ecstasy and a handgun. Rachel rendezvoused with the two men; they shot and killed her.

Under prohibition, the law enforcement officers responsible for brazenly and arrogantly placing Rachel in harm's way have failed to publicly express any remorse – because, after all, under prohibition Rachel Hoffman was no longer a human being deserving of such sympathies.

Speaking on camera to ABC News' "20/20" last month, Tallahassee Police Chief Dennis Jones attempted to justify his department's callous and irresponsible behavior, stating, "My job as a police chief is to find these criminals in our community and to take them off the streets (and) to make the proper arrest."

Secret deal

But in Rachel Hoffman's case, she was not taken "off the streets," and police made no such arrest – probably because, deep down, even they know that people like Rachel pose no imminent threat to the public. Instead, the officers on the scene secretly cut a deal with Rachel: They told her that they would not file charges if she agreed to go undercover.

Rachel became the bait; the Tallahassee police force went trolling for sharks.

In the weeks preceding Rachel's murder, police told her to remain tight-lipped about their back room agreement – and with good reason. The cops' on-the-spot deal with Rachel flagrantly violated Tallahassee Police Department protocol, which mandated that such an arrangement must first gain formal approval from the state prosecutor's office. Knowing that the office would likely not sign off on their deal – Rachel was already enrolled in a drug court program from a

VICTIM OF PROHIBITION

prior pot possession charge, and cooperating with the TPD as a drug informant would be in violation of her probation – the police simply decided to move forward with their informal arrangement and not tell anybody.

“(In) hindsight, would it have been a good idea to let the state attorney know? Yes,” Jones feebly told “20/20.” Damn right it would have been; Rachel Hoffman would still be alive.

But don't expect Jones or any of the other officers who violated the department's code of conduct – violations that resulted in the death of another human being – to face repercussions for their actions. Obeying the rules is merely “a good idea” for those assigned with enforcing them. On the other hand, for people like

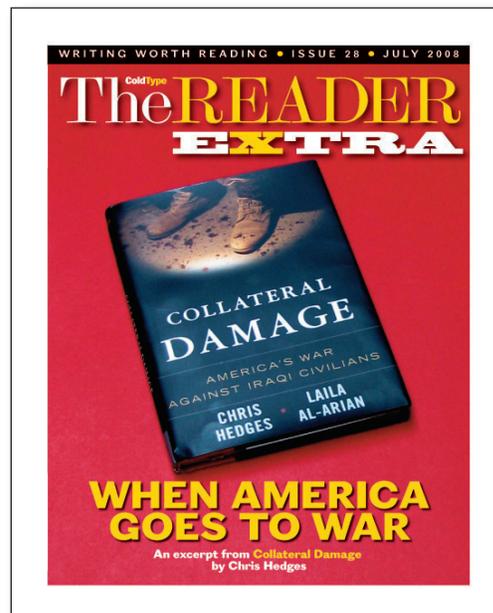
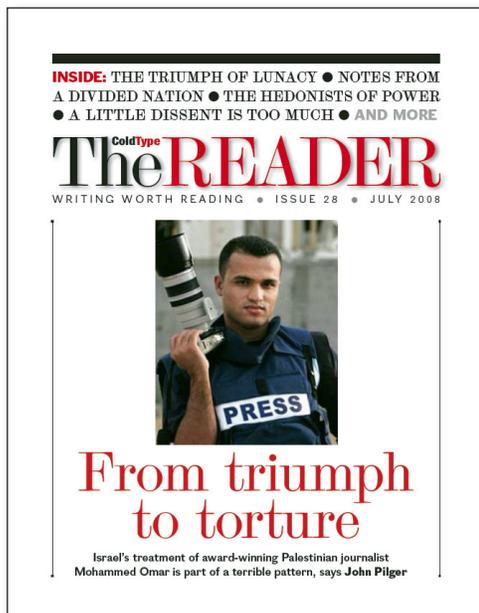
Rachel, violating those rules can be a death sentence.

Of course, to those of us who work in marijuana law reform, we witness firsthand every day the adverse consequences wrought by marijuana prohibition – a policy that has led to the arrest of nearly 10 million young people since 1990. To us, the sad tale of Rachel Hoffman marks neither the beginning nor the end of our ongoing efforts to bring needed “reefer sanity” to America's criminal justice system. It is simply another chapter in the ongoing and tragic saga that is marijuana prohibition. **CT**

Paul Armentano is the deputy director for the NORML Foundation in Washington, D.C.

Obeying the rules is merely “a good idea” for those assigned with enforcing them. On the other hand, for people like Rachel, violating those rules can be a death sentence

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This crazy thing called patriotism

Written on the weekend of July 4, by **William Blum**

Howard Zinn has called nationalism “a set of beliefs taught to each generation in which the Motherland or the Fatherland is an object of veneration and becomes a burning cause for which one becomes willing to kill the children of other Motherlands or Fatherlands.”

The Japanese pilots who bombed Pearl Harbor were being patriotic. The German people who supported Hitler and his conquests were being patriotic, fighting for the Fatherland. All the Latin American military dictators who overthrew democratically-elected governments and routinely tortured people were being patriotic – saving their beloved country from “communism”.

General Augusto Pinochet of Chile: “I would like to be remembered as a man who served his country.”¹

P.W. Botha, former president of apartheid South Africa: “I am not going to repent. I am not going to ask for favours. What I did, I did for my country.”²

Pol Pot, mass murderer of Cambodia: “I want you to know that everything I did, I did for my country.”³

Tony Blair, former British prime minister, defending his role in the murder of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis: “I did what I thought was right for our country.”⁴

I won't bore you with what George W. has said.

At the end of World War II, the United States gave moral lectures to their German prisoners and to the German people on the inadmissibility of pleading that their participation in the holocaust was in

obedience to their legitimate government. To prove to them how legally inadmissible this defense was, the World War II allies changed the leading examples of such patriotic loyalty.

I was once asked after a talk: “Do you love America?” I answered: “No”. After pausing for a few seconds to let that sink in amidst several nervous giggles in the audience, I continued with: “I don't love any country. I'm a citizen of the world. I love certain principles, like human rights, civil liberties, democracy, an economy which puts people before profits.”

I don't make much of a distinction between patriotism and nationalism. Some writers equate patriotism with allegiance to one's country and government, while defining nationalism as sentiments of ethno-national superiority. However defined, in practice the psychological and behavioral manifestations of nationalism and patriotism – and the impact of such sentiments on actual policies – are not easily distinguishable.

Howard Zinn has called nationalism “a set of beliefs taught to each generation in which the Motherland or the Fatherland is an object of veneration and becomes a burning cause for which one becomes willing to kill the children of other Motherlands or Fatherlands.”⁵... “Patriotism is used to create the illusion of a common

interest that everybody in the country has.”⁶

Strong feelings of patriotism lie near the surface in the great majority of Americans. They’re buried deeper in the more “liberal” and “sophisticated”, but are almost always reachable, and ignitable.

Alexis de Tocqueville, the mid-19th century French historian, commented about his long stay in the United States: “It is impossible to conceive a more troublesome or more garrulous patriotism; it wearies even those who are disposed to respect it.”⁷

George Bush Sr., pardoning former Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and five others in connection with the Iran-Contra arms-for-hostages scandal: “First, the common denominator of their motivation – whether their actions were right or wrong – was patriotism.”⁸

What a primitive underbelly there is to this rational society. The US is the most patriotic, as well as the most religious, country of the so-called developed world. The entire American patriotism thing may be best understood as the biggest case of mass hysteria in history, whereby the crowd adores its own power as troopers of the world’s only superpower, a substitute for the lack of power in the rest of their lives. Patriotism, like religion, meets people’s need for something greater to which their individual lives can be anchored.

So this July 4, my dear fellow Americans, some of you will raise your fists and yell: “U! S! A! U! S! A!” And you’ll parade with your flags and your images of the Statue of Liberty. But do you know that the sculptor copied his mother’s face for the statue, a domineering and intolerant woman who had forbidden another child to marry a Jew?

“Patriotism,” Dr. Samuel Johnson famously said, “is the last refuge of a scoundrel.” Ambrose Bierce begged to differ – It is, he said, the first.

“Patriotism is the conviction that this country is superior to all other countries

because you were born in it.” George Bernard Shaw

“Actions are held to be good or bad, not on their own merits but according to who does them, and there is almost no kind of outrage – torture, the use of hostages, forced labour, mass deportations, imprisonment without trial, forgery, assassination, the bombing of civilians – which does not change its moral colour when it is committed by ‘our’ side. ... The nationalist not only does not disapprove of atrocities committed by his own side, but he has a remarkable capacity for not even hearing about them.” George Orwell⁹

“Pledges of allegiance are marks of totalitarian states, not democracies,” says David Kertzer, a Brown University anthropologist who specializes in political rituals. “I can’t think of a single democracy except the United States that has a pledge of allegiance.”¹⁰ Or, he might have added, that insists that its politicians display their patriotism by wearing a flag pin. Hitler criticized German Jews and Communists for their internationalism and lack of national patriotism. Along with Mussolini in Italy, the Führer demanded that “true patriots” publicly vow and display their allegiance to their respective fatherlands. Postwar democratic governments of the two countries made a conscious effort to minimize such shows of national pride.

(Oddly enough, the American Pledge of Allegiance was written by Francis Bellamy, a founding member, in 1889, of the Society of Christian Socialists, a group of Protestant ministers who asserted that “the teachings of Jesus Christ lead directly to some form or forms of socialism.”)

Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, we could read that there’s “now a high degree of patriotism in the Soviet Union because Moscow acted with impunity in Afghanistan and thus underscored who the real power in that part of the world is.”¹¹

“Throughout the nineteenth century, and particularly throughout its latter half,

The entire American patriotism thing may be best understood as the biggest case of mass hysteria in history, whereby the crowd adores its own power as troopers of the world’s only superpower, a substitute for the lack of power in the rest of their lives

ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

Virtually every president from Truman on has been exhorted by one Dr. Strangelove or another, military or civilian, to use The Bomb when things were going badly, such as in Korea or Vietnam or Cuba, or to use it against the Soviets directly, unprovoked, to once and for all get rid of those commie bastards that were causing so much trouble in so many countries

there had been a great working up of this nationalism in the world. ... Nationalism was taught in schools, emphasized by newspapers, preached and mocked and sung into men. It became a monstrous cant which darkened all human affairs. Men were brought to feel that they were as improper without a nationality as without their clothes in a crowded assembly. Oriental peoples, who had never heard of nationality before, took to it as they took to the cigarettes and bowler hats of the West.” – H.G. Wells, English writer ¹²

“The very existence of the state demands that there be some privileged class vitally interested in maintaining that existence. And it is precisely the group interests of that class that are called patriotism.” – Mikhail Bakunin, Russian anarchist ¹³

“To me, it seems a dreadful indignity to have a soul controlled by geography.” – George Santayana, American educator and philosopher

Dr. Strangelove

There have been numerous books published on the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. I have not read one of them. There’s another one just out: *One Minute to Midnight*, by *Washington Post* writer Michael Dobbs. I will not be reading it. The reason authors keep writing these books and publishers keep publishing them is obvious: How close the world came to a nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union! Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., historian and adviser to President Kennedy, termed it “the most dangerous moment in human history.” ¹⁴ But I’ve never believed that. Such a fear is based on the belief that either or both of the countries was ready and willing to unleash their nuclear weapons against the other. However, this was never in the cards because of MAD – Mutually Assured Destruction. By 1962, the nuclear arsenals of the United States and the Soviet Union had grown so large and sophisticated that neither super-

power could entirely destroy the other’s retaliatory force by launching a missile first, even with a surprise attack. Retaliation was certain, or certain enough. Starting a nuclear war was committing suicide. If the Japanese had had nuclear bombs, Hiroshima and Nagasaki would not have been destroyed.

Russian leader Nikita Khrushchev was only looking for equality. The United States had missiles and bomber bases already in place in Turkey and other missiles in Western Europe pointed toward the Soviet Union. Khrushchev later wrote:

“The Americans had surrounded our country with military bases and threatened us with nuclear weapons, and now they would learn just what it feels like to have enemy missiles pointing at you; we’d be doing nothing more than giving them a little of their own medicine. ... After all, the United States had no moral or legal quarrel with us. We hadn’t given the Cubans anything more than the Americans were giving to their allies. We had the same rights and opportunities as the Americans. Our conduct in the international arena was governed by the same rules and limits as the Americans.” ¹⁵

Virtually every president from Truman on has been exhorted by one Dr. Strangelove or another, military or civilian, to use The Bomb when things were going badly, such as in Korea or Vietnam or Cuba, or to use it against the Soviets directly, unprovoked, to once and for all get rid of those commie bastards that were causing so much trouble in so many countries. And not one president gave in to this pressure. They would have been MAD to do so. Which is why all the scary talk of recent years about Saddam Hussein and Iran and all their alleged and potential weapons of mass destruction was just that – scary talk. Hussein was not, and the Iranians are not, MAD. The only modern-day leaders I would not make this assumption about are Osama bin Laden and Dick Cheney. The latter is a genuine

Dr. Strangelove.

In a few weeks we'll once again be marking the anniversary of the two nuclear bombings of Japan. Remarkably, the bombings are still highly controversial. I believe that the evidence clearly shows that the Japanese were already defeated and trying to surrender, thus obviating the need for the bombings. My essay on this can be found at <http://members.aol.com/essays6/abomb.htm>

The Cold War was a marvelous era for Armageddon humor. Here is US General Thomas Power speaking in December 1960 about things like nuclear war and a first strike by the United States: "The whole idea is to kill the bastards! At the end of the war, if there are two Americans and one Russian, we win!" The response from one of those present was: "Well, you'd better make sure that they're a man and a woman." ¹⁶

Economics 101 remedial

The economists who defend the perpetual crises of the capitalist system – the sundry speculative bubbles followed by bursting bubbles followed by a trail of tears – most often turn to "supply and demand" as the ultimate explanation and justification for the system. This provides an impersonal, neutral-sounding, and respectable, almost scientific, cover for the vagaries of free enterprise. They would have us believe that we shouldn't blame the crises on greed or speculation or manipulation or criminal activity because such flawed human behavior is overridden by "supply and demand". It's a law, remember, "the law of supply and demand" is its full name. And where does this "law" come from? Congress? Our ancestral British Parliament? No, nothing so commonplace, so man-made. No, they would have us believe that it must come from nature. It works virtually like a natural law, does it not? And we violate it or ignore it at our peril.

Thus have we all been raised. But great cracks in the levee have been appearing in

recent years, in unlikely places, such as the Senate of the United States, which issued a lengthy report in 2006 (when a gallon of gasoline had already passed the three dollar mark) entitled: "The role of market speculation in rising oil and gas prices". Here are some excerpts:

"The traditional forces of supply and demand cannot fully account for these increases [in crude oil, gasoline, etc.]. While global demand for oil has been increasing ... global oil supplies have increased by an even greater amount. As a result, global inventories have increased as well. Today, US oil inventories are at an 8-year high, and OECD [mainly European] oil inventories are at a 20-year high. Accordingly, factors other than basic supply and demand must be examined."

"Over the past few years, large financial institutions, hedge funds, pension funds, and other investment funds have been pouring billions of dollars into the energy commodities markets ... to try to take advantage of price changes or to hedge against them. Because much of this additional investment has come from financial institutions and investment funds that do not use the commodity as part of their business, it is defined as 'speculation' by the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC). According to the CFTC, a speculator 'does not produce or use the commodity, but risks his or her own capital trading futures in that commodity in hopes of making a profit on price changes.' [Futures contracts gamble on the price goods will fetch on a particular date in the future; the contracts are traded like stocks.] The large purchases of crude oil futures contracts by speculators have, in effect, created an additional demand for oil, driving up the price of oil to be delivered in the future in the same manner that additional demand for the immediate delivery of a physical barrel of oil drives up the price on the spot market. ... Although it is difficult to quantify the effect of speculation on prices, there is sub-

They would have us believe that we shouldn't blame the crises on greed or speculation or manipulation or criminal activity because such flawed human behavior is overridden by "supply and demand". It's a law, remember, "the law of supply and demand" is its full name

ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

While you and I go about our daily lives trying to be good citizens, the Big Boys, the Enron Boys, are busy lobbying the Congress Boys. They call it “modernization”, or some other eye-rolling euphemism, and we get screwed

stantial evidence that the large amount of speculation in the current market has significantly increased prices.”

The prices arrived at daily on the commodity exchanges (primarily the New York Mercantile Exchange – NYMEX), for the various kinds of oil are used as principal international pricing benchmarks, and play an important role in setting the price of gasoline at the pump.

A good part of the Senate report deals with how the CFTC is no longer able to properly regulate commodity trading to prevent speculation, manipulation, or fraud because much of the trading takes place on commodity exchanges, in the US and abroad, that are not within the CFTC’s purview. “Persons within the United States seeking to trade key US energy commodities – US crude oil, gasoline, and heating oil futures – now can avoid all US market oversight or reporting requirements by routing their trades through the ICE Futures exchange in London instead of the NYMEX in New York. ... To the extent that energy prices are the result of market manipulation or excessive speculation, only a cop on the beat with both oversight and enforcement authority will be effective. ... The trading of energy commodities by large firms on OTC [over-the-counter] electronic exchanges, was exempted from CFTC oversight by a provision inserted at the behest of Enron and other large energy traders into the Commodity Futures Modernization Act of 2000.”¹⁷

A tale told many times. While you and I go about our daily lives trying to be good citizens, the Big Boys, the Enron Boys, are busy lobbying the Congress Boys. They call it “modernization”, or some other eye-rolling euphemism, and we get screwed.

The *Washington Post* recently had this to report on the Enron and Congress Boys: “Wall Street banks and other large financial institutions have begun putting intense pressure on Congress to hold off on legislation that would curtail their

highly profitable trading in oil contracts – an activity increasingly blamed by lawmakers for driving up prices to record levels. ... But the executives were met with skepticism and occasional hostility. ‘Spare us your lecture about supply and demand,’ one of the Democratic aides said, abruptly cutting off one of the executives. ... A growing number of members of Congress have reacted to public outrage over skyrocketing gasoline prices by introducing at least eight bills that restrict the ability of financial companies to buy futures contracts, [require companies to] disclose more about those investments or stiffen federal oversight of energy trades.”¹⁸

Some further testimony from the 2006 Senate hearing:

“There has been no shortage, and inventories of crude oil and products have continued to rise. The increase in prices has not been driven by supply and demand.” – Lord Browne, Group Chief Executive of BP (formerly British Petroleum)

“Senator ... I think I have been very clear in saying that I don’t think that the fundamentals of supply and demand – at least as we have traditionally looked at it – have supported the price structure that’s there.” – Lee Raymond, Chairman and CEO, ExxonMobil

“What’s been happening since 2004 is very high prices without record-low stocks. The relationship between US [oil] inventory levels and prices has been shredded, has become irrelevant.” – Jan Stuart, Global Oil Economist, UBS Securities (which calls itself “the leading global wealth manager”)

In 2008, when a gallon of gasoline had passed the four dollar mark, OPEC Secretary General Abdalla Salem el-Badri stated: “There is clearly no shortage of oil in the market.” El-Badri “blamed high oil prices on investors seeking ‘better returns’ in commodities after a drop in equity prices and value of the dollar.”¹⁹

Finally, defenders of the way the sys-

tem works insist that the oil companies have been experiencing great increases in their costs, due particularly to oil running out, so-called “peak oil”. It costs much more to find and extricate the remaining oil and the companies have to pass these costs to the consumer. Well, class, if that is so, then the companies should be making about the same net profit as before peak oil – X-dollars more in expenses, X-dollars added to the price, same amount of profit, albeit a lower percentage of profit to sales, something of interest primarily to Wall Street, not to ordinary human beings. But the oil companies have not done that. Their increases in price and profit defy gravity and are not on the same planet as any increases in costs. Moreover, as economist Robert Weissman of the *Multinational Monitor* has observed: “While the price of oil is going up, these companies’ drilling expenses are not. Oil can trade at \$40 a barrel, \$90 a barrel, or \$130 a barrel. It still costs ExxonMobil and the rest of Big Oil only about \$20 to get a barrel of oil out of the ground.”²⁰

The above is not meant to be the last word on the subject of why our gasoline is so expensive. Too much information is hidden, by speculators, oil companies, refiners, and others; too much activity is unregulated; too much is moved by psychology more than economics. The best solution would be to get rid of all the speculative markets – unless they can demonstrate that they serve a human purpose – and nationalize the oil companies. (Oh my god, he used the “N” word!)

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;
Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire

NOTES

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The best solution would be to get rid of all the speculative markets – unless they can demonstrate that they serve a human purpose – and nationalize the oil companies

Meters apart, but on different planets

Uri Avnery on contrasting reactions to the prisoner swap between Israel and Hezbollah

29 years ago, before Hezbollah had become a significant factor, he landed with his comrades on the beach of Nahariya and carried out an attack that has imprinted itself on the Israeli national memory with its cruelty

I spent the whole day flipping between the Israeli channels and Al-jazeera. It was an eerie experience: in a fraction of a second I could switch between two worlds, but all the channels reported on exactly the same occasion. In one section of the breaking news, the events happened at a distance of a few dozen meters from each other, but they could just as well have happened on two different planets.

Never before have I experienced the tragic conflict in such a stunning immediacy as the day of the prisoner swap between the State of Israel and the Hezbollah organization.

The man who stood at the center of the event personifies the abyss that separates the two worlds, the Israeli and the Arab: Samir al-Kuntar.

All Israeli media call him “Murderer Kuntar”, as if that were his first name. For the Arab media, he is “Hero Samir al-Kuntar”.

29 years ago, before Hezbollah had become a significant factor, he landed with his comrades on the beach of Nahariya and carried out an attack that has imprinted itself on the Israeli national memory with its cruelty. In the course of it, a four-year-old girl was murdered, and a mother accidentally suffocated her small child while trying to keep it from

giving away their hiding place. Kuntar was then 16 years old – not a Palestinian, nor a Shiite, but a Lebanese Druze and a communist. The action was set in motion by a small Palestinian fraction.

Years ago I had an argument with my friend Issam al-Sartawi about a similar incident. Sartawi was a Palestinian hero, a pioneer of peace with Israel, who was later assassinated because of his contacts with Israelis. In 1978 a group of Palestinian fighters (“terrorists” in Israeli parlance) landed on the shore south of Haifa in order to capture Israelis for a prisoner swap. On the beach they came across a photographer who was innocently strolling around and killed her. After that they intercepted a bus full of passengers, and in the end all of them were killed.

I knew the photographer. She was a gentle young woman, a good soul, who liked taking pictures of flowers in nature. I remonstrated with Sartawi about this despicable act. He told me: “You don’t understand. These are youngsters, almost kids, untrained and inexperienced, who are operating behind the lines of a dreaded enemy. They are scared to death. They cannot act with cool logic.”

That was one of the few instances where we did not agree – though both of us were, each within his own people, on the fringe of the fringe.

On the day of the swap, the difference between the two worlds was apparent in its most extreme form. In the morning, the “Murderer Kuntar” woke up in an Israeli prison, in the evening the “Hero al-Kuntar” stood in front of 100,000 cheering Lebanese from all communities and parties. It took him but a few minutes to cross from Israeli territory to the tiny UN enclave at Ras-al-Naqura and from there to Lebanese territory, from the realm of Israeli TV to the realm of Lebanese TV – and the distance was greater than that transversed by Neil Armstrong on the way to the moon.

By talking endlessly about the “Blood-stained Murderer” who will never be freed, whatever happens, Israel has turned him from just another prisoner into a pan-Arab hero.

Nowadays it is already a banality to say that one person’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter. A slight movement of the finger on the TV remote control was enough to experience this first-hand.

Sorrow and mourning

Emotions ran high on both sides. The Israeli public was immersed in a sea of sorrow and mourning for the two soldiers, whose death was confirmed only minutes before the return of their bodies. For hours on end, all the Israeli channels devoted their broadcasts to the feelings of the two families, whom the media had spent the last two years transforming into national symbols (as well as rating-boosting instruments).

No need to mention that not a single voice in Israel said even one word about the 190 families, the bodies of whose sons were returned to Lebanon on the same day.

In this whirlpool of self-pity and mourning ceremonies, the Israeli public had no energy and interest left for trying to understand what was happening on the other side. On the contrary: the reception accorded to the Murderer and

the victory speech of the Mastermind of Murder only added fuel to the flames of fury, hatred and humiliation.

But it would have been really worthwhile for Israelis to follow the happenings there, because they will have a lot of impact on our situation.

It was, of course, Hassan Nasrallah’s big day. In the eyes of tens of millions of Arabs, he has won a huge victory. A small organization in a small country has brought Israel, the regional power, to its knees, while the leaders of all the Arab countries are bending the knee before Israel.

Nasrallah promised to bring Kuntar back. For that purpose he captured the two soldiers. After two years and one war, the newly freed prisoner stood on the tribune in Beirut, dressed in a Hezbollah uniform, and Nasrallah himself, endangering his personal safety, came out and embraced him in front of the TV cameras, as a cheering crowd went wild with enthusiasm.

Faced with this demonstration of personal courage and self-confidence, its dramatic flair so characteristic of the man, the Israeli army reacted with the inane statement: “We would not advise Nasrallah to leave his bunker!”

Al-jazeera brought all this live, hour after hour, to millions of homes from Morocco to Iraq and the Muslim world beyond. It was impossible for Arab viewers not to be swept along on the waves of emotion. For a young person in Riyadh, Cairo, Amman or Baghdad, there was only one possible reaction: Here is the man! Here is the man who is restoring Arab honor after decades of defeats and humiliation! Here is the man, compared to whom all the leaders of the Arab world are dwarfs! And when Nasrallah announced that “As from this moment, the era of Arab defeats has come to an end!” he captured the spirit of the day.

I suspect that there were also quite a number of Israelis who made unflattering

No need to mention that not a single voice in Israel said even one word about the 190 families, the bodies of whose sons were returned to Lebanon on the same day.

SWAPPING PRISONERS

On the eve of the huge rally, he addressed the public and forbade firing into the air, as is common in Arab celebrations. “Anyone who shoots, shoots at my breast, my head, my robe!” he declared. Not a single shot was fired

comparisons between this man and our own cabinet ministers, the champions of empty, boastful verbiage. Compared to them, Nasrallah looks responsible, credible, logical and determined, without spin and hollow words.

On the eve of the huge rally, he addressed the public and forbade firing into the air, as is common in Arab celebrations. “Anyone who shoots, shoots at my breast, my head, my robe!” he declared. Not a single shot was fired.

Gnashing their teeth

For Lebanon it was a historic day. Something like this has never happened before: all the country’s political elite, without exception, turned out at Beirut airport to welcome Kuntar, and at the same time to salute Nasrallah. Some of them were gnashing their teeth, of course, but the understood very well the way the wind is blowing.

They were all there: the President of Lebanon, the Prime Minister, all the members of the new cabinet, the leaders of all the parties, all the communities and all the religions, all living past presidents and prime ministers. The Sunni Saad Hariri, who has accused Hezbollah of involvement in the assassination of his father; the Druze Walid Jumblat, who has demanded the liquidation of Hezbollah more than once; and the Maronite Christian Samir Geagea, who bears the responsibility for the Sabra and Shatila massacre; together with many others who were showering Hezbollah with every possible obscenity.

In his speech, the new President praised all those who took part in freeing Kuntar, thus conferring national legitimacy not only on the Hezbollah action that precipitated the war, but also on the military function of Hezbollah in defending Lebanon. Since the President was until recently the commander of the army, this means that the Lebanese army, too, embraces Hezbollah.

On this day, Nasrallah became the most important and powerful person in Lebanon. Three months after the crisis that almost caused a civil war, when Prime Minister Fuad Siniora demanded that Hezbollah turn over its private communication network, Lebanon has become a unified country. Demands like the disarming of Hezbollah have become a pipe dream. Lebanon is also united in the demand for the liberation of the Shebaa Farms and for the delivery by Israel of the maps of minefields and the deadly cluster bombs left by its army after the second Lebanon war.

Those who remember Lebanon as a doormat in the region, and the Shiites as a doormat in Lebanon, can appreciate the immensity of the change.

In Israel, some people blame the prisoner swap for the dizzying ascent of Nasrallah and the whole national-religious camp in the Arab world. But Israel’s responsibility for these trends started long before Ehud Olmert’s attempts to distract attention from his diverse corruption affairs.

All those are to blame who supported the stupid and destructive Second Lebanon War, which was enthusiastically hailed on the first day by all the media, the “Zionist” parties and the leading men of letters. The bodies of the two captured soldiers could have been retrieved by negotiations before the war much in the same way this has been done now. This is what I wrote at the time.

But one can trace the blame even further back, to Ariel Sharon’s First Lebanon War. Then, too, all the media, the parties and the leading intellectuals deliriously welcomed the war on the first day. Before that disastrous war, the Shiite community was our good and quiet neighbor. Sharon is responsible for the ascent of Hezbollah; and the Israeli army, which assassinated Nasrallah’s predecessor, gave Nasrallah the opportunity to become what he now is.

SWAPPING PRISONERS

Neither should one forget Shimon Peres, who created the disastrous “Security Zone” in South Lebanon, instead of getting out in good time. And David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Dayan, who, in 1955, proposed installing “a Christian major” as dictator of Lebanon, who would then sign a peace treaty with Israel.

The deadly mixture of arrogance and ignorance that is typical of all Israeli dealings with the Arab world is also responsible for what happened. It would be wonderful if this taught our leaders some modesty and consideration for the feelings of others, as well as the ability to read the map of reality, instead of living in a bubble of national autism. But I am afraid that the opposite will happen: a strengthening of the feelings of anger, insult, sanctimoniousness and hatred.

All the Israeli governments bear responsibility for the national-religious wave in the Arab world, which is much more dangerous for Israel than the secular nationalism of leaders like Yasser Arafat and Bashar al-Assad.

Global star

Last month, another important thing happened: in one great leap, the Syrian president jumped from American-imposed isolation into global stardom at a grandiose international show in Paris. The

pathetic attempts by Olmert, Tzipi Livni and a band of Israeli reporters to shake the hand of Assad, or at least a minister, a low official or a bodyguard, were pure slapstick. And still more happened: the No. 3 in the US Department of State officially met with Iranian delegates. And it became clear that the negotiations with Hamas over the next prisoner swap are still in deep freeze.

The new situation harbors many dangers, but also a host of opportunities. The new status of Nasrallah as a central player in the Lebanese political game imposes on him responsibility and caution. A strengthened Assad may be a better partner for peace, if we are ready to take the opportunity. The American negotiations with Iran may avert a destructive war, which would be a disaster for us, too. The legitimization of Hamas by the negotiations, when they are resumed, may lead to Palestinian unity, like the unity achieved now in Lebanon. Any peace agreement we signed with them would really have legs to stand on.

In two months Israel may have a new government. If it wants to, it could start a new initiative for peace with Palestine, Lebanon and Syria. **CT**

Uri Avnery is an Irgun veteran turned Israeli peace activist

The pathetic attempts by Olmert, Tzipi Livni and a band of Israeli reporters to shake the hand of Assad, or at least a minister, a low official or a bodyguard, were pure slapstick

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Who moved my ability to reason?

Barbara Ehrenreich reads the top-selling business self-help books and offers her own convenient condensed version

Clearly you are not in the literature section, or even ordinary diet and mood-boosting self-help; this is the bustling genre of business success books, descended from Dale Carnegie's mid-twentieth-century oeuvre and ready, if only you believe, to transform you into a CEO now.

The following essay is an excerpt from Barbara Ehrenreich's latest book, *This Land Is Their Land*:

There they are, massed in every bookstore, their titles lunging out to slap you in the face. Some are straight-out commands, like *First, Break All the Rules* and *Now, Discover Your Strengths*. Others pose quirky metaphorical questions: *How Full Is Your Bucket?* or *Who Moved My Cheese?* Several of them trumpet forth a kind of numerological majesty: *The 8th Habit*, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*. All lay claim to the almost infinite territory of "work and life," as in the *Cheese* subtitle, *An Amazing Way to Deal with Change in Your Work and in Your Life*. Clearly you are not in the literature section, or even ordinary diet and mood-boosting self-help; this is the bustling genre of business success books, descended from Dale Carnegie's mid-twentieth-century oeuvre and ready, if only you believe, to transform you into a CEO now.

Fortunately, these books are easy to read, since they're directed at an audience more familiar with PowerPoint than Proust. Few words clutter the pages of Spencer Johnson's mega-best seller, *Who Moved My Cheese?*, or his follow-up book, *The Present*, whose covers are embla-

zoned with a kind of stamp that contains the phrase "a gem – small and valuable." In place of words, one often finds graphics, like the little buckets that help fill the pages of *How Full Is Your Bucket?* The caption on the book tells us: "Everyone has an invisible bucket. We are at our best when our buckets are overflowing – and at our worst when they are empty." Even the unusually prolix four hundred pages of *The 8th Habit* are heavily padded with graphlike diagrams, including one depicting a wrinkled sine wave – or perhaps it's a mountain – labeled "Passion." The mountain rises from a sea swimming with "positive" words like "hope," "synergistic," "fun," and "motivating."

The few words that do appear in these books are likely to be bolded, bulleted, or boxed. Lists are unavoidable. *Now, Discover Your Strengths* includes a list with thirty-four possible strength-related "themes," from "achiever" to "maximizer" to "woo." Chapters are often embedded with simple exercises you can perform at home, like this one from *Secrets of the Millionaire Mind*: "Place your hand on your heart and say... 'I admire rich people!' 'I bless rich people!' 'I love rich people!' 'And I'm going to be one of those rich people too!'" In some cases, the author seems ready to abandon print altogether, ending his book with instructions

to visit his Web site, purchase his non-book products, or attend his motivational seminars (and they are, in the current batch of business success books, always “his”). For members of the post-reading generation, *How Full Is Your Bucket?* and *The 8th Habit* tuck in a convenient CD.

But why read these books at all? Here-with are “The Five Essential Principles of Business Success Books,” conveniently condensed for consumption in five minutes or less.

Yes, they overlap and sometimes contradict one another. No, the headings are not parallel, some being nouns, some adjectives, and some entire sentences. Welcome to the genre!

The 24/7 Happy Hour. Be positive, upbeat, and perky at all times. Once, the job of corporate functionaries was to make things happen. Today, their mission is apparently to keep their colleagues company in the office. As *How Full Is Your Bucket?* asserts, “Ninety-nine out of every 100 people report that they want to be around more positive people.” Every book in the genre enjoins a relentless positivity of outlook. In the *Tuesdays with Morrie*-like fable of *The Present*, the anonymous “young man” chirps to the wise “old man,” “So, if what I believe and do today is positive, I help create a better tomorrow!”

In fact, negative thoughts – as toward the boss who laid you off or passed you over for a promotion – will not only be visible to your comrades but “can be harmful to your health and might even shorten your life span.” If you happen to be downsized, right-sized, or outsourced

again, just grin and bear your smiley face to the next potential employer, as the happy folks in *We Got Fired!... And It's the Best Thing That Ever Happened to Us* advise.

Avoid Victimism and Anyone Who Indulges in It. People who fail at being positive – and dwell morbidly on their last demotion or downsizing, for example – easily fall into what *The 8th Habit* diagnoses as “the mind-set of victimism and culture of blame.” Avoid them, even though “it’s very easy to hang out and share suffering with people who are committed to lose.” Poor people, we discover in *Secrets of the Millionaire Mind*, are that way because they “choose to play the role of the victim.” Avoid them, too.

Masters of the Universe. Being positive and upbeat not only improves your health and popularity, it actually changes the world. Yes, your thoughts can alter the physical universe, which, according to *Secrets of the Millionaire Mind*, “is akin to a big mail-order department” in which you “order” what you get by sending energetic messages out to the universe. “The author ascribes this wisdom to the law of attraction, which was explained scientifically in the 2001 book, *The Ultimate Secret to Getting Absolutely Everything You Want*. Thoughts exert a gravitational-type force on the world, so that “whenever you think something, the thought immediately attracts its physical equivalent.” If you think money – in a totally urgent, focused, and positive way, of course – it will come flying into your pockets.

Once, the job of corporate functionaries was to make things happen. Today, their mission is apparently to keep their colleagues company in the office

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SELF-HELP?

Maybe the books tell us what these fellows want their underlings to believe. Be more like mice, for example.

The Mice Come Out Ahead. Although the plot of *Who Moved My Cheese?* centers on two tiny, maze-dwelling, cheese-dependent people named Hem and Haw, there are also two subsidiary characters, both mice. When the cheese is moved, the tiny people waste time ranting and raving “at the injustice of it all,” as the book’s title suggests. But the mice just scurry off to locate an alternative cheese source. They prevail, we learn, because they “kept life simple. They didn’t overanalyze or overcomplicate things.” In the mysteriously titled *QBQ! The Question behind the Question*, we are told that questions beginning with “who” or “why” are symptoms of “victim thinking.”

Happily, rodents are less prone to it than humans. That may be why we never learn the identity of the Cheese Mover; the “who” question reveals a dangerous human tendency to “overanalyze,” which could lead you to look upward, resentfully, toward the C-suites where the true Masters of the Universe dwell.

Passionate. According to *The 8th Habit*, in the old days it was good enough to be effective. But “being effective ...is no longer optional in today’s world – it’s the price of entry to the playing field.” The endlessly churning, cutthroat twenty-

first-century business world demands greatness – which means being not only enthusiastic but also passionate about your work. Presumably, you will pull all-nighters, neglect your family – whatever it takes. And when you do lose your job, you will embrace your next one – in, say, modular building construction – with the same raging passion for greatness.

There you have it, the five highly condensed secrets of business success. If you find them immoral, delusional, or insulting to the human spirit, you should humbly consider the fact that, to judge from the blurbs on the backs of these books, they have won the endorsement of numerous actual CEOs of prominent companies. Maybe the books tell us what these fellows want their underlings to believe. Be more like mice, for example. Or – and this is the truly scary possibility – maybe the principles embody what the CEOs themselves believe, and it is in fact the delusional, the immoral, and the verbally challenged who are running the show. **CT**

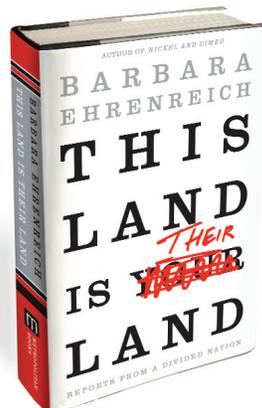
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Market problem or system collapse?

Danny Schechter on the continuing fallout from the US financial meltdown

The question we face in late July, as regulators seize two more banks, is: will we be engulfed by a further collapse in our economy or can the damage be contained, or even turned around?

We know what goes up must come down but when will what's down go back up?

It isn't looking good – and, even now, the two presumptive major party presidential candidates are talking about everything but this deepening crisis. They are debating terrorists and Afghanistan and how to meander out of Iraq but not the reality that so many Americans are living with: a squeeze that is leaving so many of us broke, in deeper and deeper debt and disgusted.

Until now, the doom and gloomsters were mostly to be found in the margins, in financial blogs or in the campaigns of Ron Paul, Ralph Nader or the Greens. The mainstream media has been looking the other way and mostly downplaying the unfolding disaster. Even as foreclosures double, and the price of gas and food rises sharply, it's been business as usual on the business pages, and among the liberal political pundits who would rather debate the cover of the *New Yorker* than the growing desperation of so many Americans.

The Congress finally passed a housing bill a year into the crisis with most of the money allocated to try to shore up two housing agencies with more than a half a trillion in housing assets. The markets are melting down with more major stocks tanking, banks writing off still more billions, and unemployment rising.

People in the know, such as George Soros, are saying this is the worst financial crisis since the depression. Others fear another depression.

This pessimism has reached *Newsweek*, a guardian of conventional wisdom, which now says "It's Worse Than You Think," writing "this downturn is likely to last longer than the eight-month-long recession of 2001. While the US financial system processes popped stock bubbles quickly, it has always taken longer to hack through the overhang of bad debt. The head winds that drove the economy into this dead calm -- a housing and credit crisis, and rising energy and food prices -- have strengthened rather than let up in recent months.

To aggravate matters, the twin crises that dominate the financial news – a credit crunch and the global commodity boom – are blunting the stimulus efforts."

We have two challenges: understanding the gravity of what is threatening

The truth is that without loans and investments from China, The Persian Gulf and various sovereign wealth funds, our economy would have fallen much further, if not collapsed.

THE US ECONOMY

Whoever becomes president will inherit a crisis, not a condition. It is the system that's out of wack, not just a policy here or there. The debate on the economy has to explain this to the American people

us, and then discussing what could or should be done. We might also want to think about what the press should be reporting and what policy makers should be proposing.

On the foreclosure crisis, for example, I was just in Washington for five days with NACA, the Neighborhood Assistance Corporation of America which took over a major hotel and set up a shop to counsel at risk home owners and advocate for affordable loans.

The *Washington Post*, based just across the street from the lines of some 20,000 people seeking help, did not cover it until it was over. But, to their credit, when they did they recognized that this effort by a not for profit citizens group was more effective in responding to the crisis than all the government agencies put together.

Writes *Post* business columnist Steven Pearlstein:

“They came by plane and train, car and subway, starting before dawn and continuing late into the night, all of them clutching tattered folders and envelopes stuffed with the documentary evidence of their financial hardship and miscalculation.

“It was striking how well-organized and executed it all was. Outside, there were plenty of volunteers and staff – 350 were flown in from around the country – doling out information, advice and sympathy to those waiting in line.

“In the space of 30 to 60 minutes, the well-trained, upbeat counselors managed to win the trust of their new clients, wring promises of a more frugal lifestyle and enter into their computers the relevant financial details. At a push of a button, NACA's underwriting system declared how much the client could afford in monthly mortgage payments, and automatically requested the mortgage servicing company to modify the loan accordingly. Depending on the service and the loan, the answer might be available in a matter of days or even hours. In about

half the cases, the result is likely to be a below-market, fixed-rate loan with hundreds of dollars cut from their monthly payments.”

So here's one example of what can be done by an economic justice organization fusing services and advocacy. This all happened three blocks from the White House. While federal regulators visited, none of the progressive DC think tanks or even unions showed up in solidarity even though AFL-CIO headquarters is a block away.

Bubble or breakdown?

Individuals need help but we all need change. Are we dealing with just another market mistake, the latest bubble gone bust in a volatile business cycle or a straining system on the verge of breakdown? Can we solve all this with an Alka-Seltzer-like infusion of new taxes or regulations?

Or, is Gerry Gold, economics editor of the UK's *A World to Win*, right when he argues, “The urgency of building a movement to replace capital, not to rescue it, cannot be overstated. This will mean a major program extending social ownership to all sectors of the economy, ending the distribution of profits to shareholders, and replacing the system of selling labor for wages with collective decision-making about the distribution of an organization's income.”

Pie in the sky? Or is the sky really falling, made worse by global warming, wars without end, and resource depletion? If Obama or McCain are to “fix” what's broken, they better start talking about it. And once they inevitably do, will either one of them, once elected, be able to overcome Congressional inertia and the power of corporate/finance industry lobbies?

If the rest of us see what's coming, we better speak up too. Remember, when you see something say something? It's also time to do more than talk. **CT**

Danny Schechter writes a blog for *MediaChannel.org*. His new book, **Plunder**, will be published this fall

Behind that Kodak moment

Ramzy Baroud tells why that ‘historic’ handshake between Ehud Barak and Jalal Talabani deserves further scrutiny

Most people would not have even realised that the 23rd congress of the Socialist International was being held near Athens were it not for the moment when Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak shook the hand of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani.

An AP report, published in the Israeli daily *Haaretz*, dubbed the handshake “historic”. History was supposedly made in Athens on 1 July 2008. Centred in a photo, featuring a widely grinning Barak and Talabani, is Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, who was credited for introducing the two.

The three individuals involved are members of political establishments that are largely funded and sustained by the US government. Both Abbas and Talabani are at the helm of puppet political structures that lack sovereignty or political will of their own, and are entirely reliant on scripts drafted in full or in part by the Bush administration.

As for Israel, which enjoys a more equitable relationship with the United States, normalisation with the Arabs is something it covets and tirelessly promotes, granted that such normalisation doesn’t involve ending its occupation of the Palestinian territories, or any other concessions.

One might suggest the happenstance

handshake and very brief meeting was not accidental at all. This is what *Haaretz* wrote, rewording Barak’s comments on the handshake. He “said that Israel wished to extend its indirect peace talks with Syria to cover Iraq as well.” That was a major political declaration by Israel – one surely aimed at further isolating Iran, as Israel’s newest moves regarding Syria, Lebanon and Gaza clearly suggest. But the fact is Israel’s ever-careful leaders could make no such major political announcement without intense deliberation and consensus in the Israeli government prior to the “accidental” handshake.

Talabani owes Barak more than a reciprocal handshake; a heartfelt thank you is in order for his newly found fortunes as Iraq’s sixth president starting in 2005. Indeed, over time, pointing the finger at Israel’s leading role in the Iraq war – as it’s now being replayed in efforts to strike Iran – has morphed from being a recurring discussion of writers and analysts outside the mainstream media, to US government and army officials.

In a recent commentary, US writer Paul J Balles brings to the fore some of these major declarations, including those of Senator Ernest Hollings (May 2004) who “acknowledged that the US invaded Iraq ‘to secure Israel’, and ‘everybody knows it.’” Retired four-star US army general and

Talabani owes Barak more than a reciprocal handshake; a heartfelt thank you is in order for his newly found fortunes as Iraq’s sixth president starting in 2005

BEHIND THE HANDSHAKE

To suggest that the Barak-Talabani handshake was “historic” is completely unfounded, if not ignorant. What deserves scrutiny is why the governments of Tel Aviv and the Green Zone decided to upgrade their gestures of “good will” starting in 2003 to a public handshake

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former NATO Supreme Allied Commander Wesley Clark is another: “Those who favour this attack (against Iraq) now will tell you candidly, and privately, that it is probably true that Saddam Hussein is no threat to the United States. But they are afraid at some point he might decide if he had a nuclear weapon to use it against Israel,” he was quoted in *The Independent* as saying.

In his recent review of Michael Scheuer's *Marching Toward Hell: America and Islam after Iraq*, Jim Miles wrote, “It is not so much the Israeli lobby itself that he [Scheuer] criticises, but the ‘Israeli-firsters’, those of the elite who whole-heartedly adopt the cause of Israel as the cause of America. He describes them as ‘dangerous men... seeking to place de facto limitations on the First Amendment to protect the nation of their primary attachment [Israel].’”

Scheuer, an ex-CIA agent who primarily worked on gathering information on Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda, wrote in his book, “to believe that relationship is not only a burden but a cancer on America's ability to protect its genuine national interests... equates to either anti-Semitism or a lack of American patriotism.”

Not only is Israel directly and indirectly responsible for a large share of the war efforts (needless to say media propaganda and hyped “intelligence” on Iraq's non-existing nuclear programme), but it also had much to say and do following the fall of the Iraqi government in March 2003.

In a comprehensive study entitled “The US War on Iraq: Yet Another Battle To Protect Israeli Interests?” published in the *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* in October 2003, Delinda C Hanley discussed Israel's involvement following the invasion of Iraq. The article poses an important question, among others: did Bush's Israel-first advisers invade Iraq in order to assure that Israel would have easy access to oil? – a question that is not predicated on a hunch, but rather statements made

by top Israeli officials, including the country's national infrastructure minister at the time Joseph Paritzky, who “suggested that after Saddam Hussein's departure, Iraqi oil could flow to the Jewish state, to be consumed or marketed from there.” A 31 March 2003 article in *Haaretz* reported on plans to “reopen a long-unused pipeline from Iraq's Kirkuk oil fields to the Israeli port of Haifa.”

Israel's interest in Kirkuk's oil, and thus Iraqi Kurds, didn't merely manifest itself in economic profits, but extended far beyond. Seymour M Hersh wrote in the *New Yorker*, 21 June 2004: “Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's government decided... to minimise the damage that the war was causing to Israel's strategic position by expanding its long-standing relationship with Iraq's Kurds and establishing a significant presence on the ground in the semi- autonomous region of Kurdistan... Israeli intelligence and military operatives are now quietly at work in Kurdistan, providing training for Kurdish commando units and, most important in Israel's view, running covert operations inside Kurdish areas of Iran and Syria.”

Perhaps Talabani is the president of Iraq, but he is also the founder and secretary-general of the major Kurdish political party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). His advocacy for Kurdish political sovereignty spans a period of five decades. Thus, it is also difficult to believe that the influential leader didn't know of Israel's presence and involvement in northern Iraq. Ought one to understand the Athens handshake as a public acknowledgment and approval of that role?

To suggest that the Barak-Talabani handshake was “historic” is completely unfounded, if not ignorant. What deserves scrutiny is why the governments of Tel Aviv and the Green Zone decided to upgrade their gestures of “good will” starting in 2003 to a public handshake. Is it a test balloon or is there a more “historic” and public agreement to follow? **CT**

Whose healing?

David Rubinson on how American war veterans can open a new front in the war being waged on Iraq and Afghanistan

In a vast tragic irony, George W. Bush spoke for all of Us when he signed the latest bill funding the war at the end of June, saying: “Our nation has no greater responsibility than to support our men and women in uniform...”

How murderously true this is, and what a searing if totally unconscious commentary: We don’t have any greater responsibility. We can’t even imagine a greater responsibility.

It’s all about Us.

Once again, “our nation” – which means me and you and your Aunt Betty too – has acted from pure self-interest.

Once again *We* all have acted as if *We* have “no greater responsibility” than to ourselves.

The War Funding Bill – http://www.washingtonwatch.com/bills/show/110_HR_2642.html – was brilliantly and purposefully packaged by a bipartisan coalition to democratically provide bribes for everyone. And we all took the bribes, and couldn’t opt in fast enough.

Little do we care, less we even notice, that we have made a pact to commit another year and a half of unspeakable murder and torture on others.

Why should we? This is all about US, and we got OURS.

Bush definitely got his. He gets to go out in style, unopposed, and heave the

dumpile on the next guy’s lap.

The Congresssholes got theirs, cause now they can fly home in their private jets, and crow about how they supported the troops, and helped the poor, and the farmers, and created forceful anti-drug programs, and of course, sent money to rebuild the Katrina levees. Right on time, that one.

And We get Ours – because we’re going to get longer unemployment benefits, and we get to feel good about supporting our men and women in uniform, and we get paid for crops we couldn’t grow, and don’tcha forget the shameful “stimulus” hush money payments.

And the Veterans – they got theirs: a new complement of benefits and programs worth billions. As the IAVA (Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America) – said in an email blast: “WE DID IT!” Well, they sure did. We all did.

We have ALL of us made a helluva deal, and all we have to do is commit unspeakable acts on some unpronounceable Arabs for another year or so? Hey, where do I sign up?

Well, now that we got ours, and the Veterans got theirs, I wanna know the answer to this question: What are we going to do for the VICTIMS?

If we think that our troops suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress, wounds, disease,

Well, now that we got ours, and the Veterans got theirs, I wanna know the answer to this question: What are we going to do for the VICTIMS?

LAST WORDS

We are ALL of us perpetrators: we who carried out their orders and did not refuse; who killed because we were told to, and did not refuse; who followed some genocidal testosterone-poisoned code of honor and protected or defended our fellow perpetrators, and did not refuse; who blamed somebody or something else – and did not stand up for ourselves and refuse

destruction of family – what the hell do we think our victims suffer from?

I am now asking all the Winter Soldiers to step up and put the same all-out effort into forcing Congress to put up billions in reparations – and begin to make amends for all we have done. I am asking them, and I am asking you and me and all of us. How perfect it is that we have rushed to the aid of our fellow perpetrators – and have lifted not an eyebrow for our real victims.

How indescribably vile it is that the Veterans' Benefits were appended to the very same bill that continued to fund the ongoing killing. So the Veterans supported the bill because THEY got THEIR money, while simultaneously facilitating the next 18 months of murder. And we all did nothing that stopped it.

We are ALL of us perpetrators: we who carried out their orders and did not refuse; who killed because we were told to, and did not refuse; who followed some genocidal testosterone-poisoned code of honor and protected or defended our fellow perpetrators, and did not refuse; who blamed somebody or something else – and did not stand up for ourselves and refuse.

We The Complicit, who have achieved exactly nothing by our feeble efforts to stop six years of war and murder and torture, and have exercised no control over our employees in Congress who have taken OUR money and funded and aided and abetted the war and the murder and the torture.

The healing must begin NOW.

And that healing must itself begin with each of us taking full responsibility for what we have done, and dedicating our lives to making amends.

There can be and there will be no healing unless and until this happens.

We must ALL refuse to take any of the money that this new bill bestows on us.

Every veteran must refuse to use the money he/she gets from this new bill –

and give it instead to our victims. The veterans CANNOT accept the blood money they are getting for having done the killing, while perpetuating the funding of murder.

We need the veterans to show us the way – show Congress and each and every one of US – what we must do. This can be their greatest and most redeeming mission of honor. This is their monumental and historic chance truly to change the course of the world. They can and must lead us – to begin the enormous task of healing. Taking money for evil deeds well done serves only to perpetuate the symbiosis of killing. Turning that money to healing can change the world.

Imagine all the people

Imagine – thousands of Vets lining up in front of Congress, with their new benefit checks, announcing that they are taking the money to Iraq or Afghanistan, to bring aid to the victims. And then we see them board the planes. And then we see them re-building homes and hospitals and schools, and repairing the water and electrical systems, and delivering massive medical aid. And we may even see a few of them with individual victims – the very sons and daughters of people they killed or tortured or “detained.”

And then, we must ALL join them. For we have not just failed to stop them in their killing, not merely been complicit—we have paid for it, and we have – all of us – been war profiteers, hoarding and spending the trickle-down pecuniary profits of the war economy on ourselves. We each of us, must take our OWN checks, and stand in front of Congress, and follow the model that the Veterans set – and get the money to our victims.

Please, let the healing begin. **CT**

In a previous life, David Rubinson was a record producer, artists' manager and producer of film scores. He now blogs at www.thedrانت.blogspot.com

**WRITING WORTH
READING FROM
AROUND THE WORLD**

coldtype