

**INSIDE:** CHRYSLER MURDERED MY UNCLE ● I'M  
TIRED OF GETTING SCREWED ● TOUGH TIMES FOR  
THE REALLY SMART ● STARVING FOR CHANGE

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**The READER**

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**CLASS  
WAR**

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# The <sup>ColdType</sup> READER



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# The era of greed is over

Why has socialism got such a bad rap in the US? Just check who controls the flow of information, writes **Michael I. Niman**

**C**lass is the invisible signifier. In the United States, we just don't speak of it, unless, of course, we're talking about the ubiquitous "middle class," with which we're all supposed to identify. This all changed with "Joe the Plumber from Ohio," actually a man named Sam who worked as a plumber's helper after moving to Ohio from Arizona. Whatever his name and whoever he was, this iconic grunt was used by the McCain campaign as a Hail Mary play to paint Barack Obama as a Bolshevik, "the redistributor-in-chief."

Forget the logic, or lack thereof. The story went like this: There was a plumber's helper in Ohio who dreamed of one day earning over a quarter million dollars per year – making him middle class in John's McCain's reference group. This would put him in the Guinness Book of Records as the best-paid plumber's helper in the world and qualify him for a millionaire's tax increase under the Obama economic plan. His tax levy would then be used to offset Obama's plan to lower taxes on lazy poor folks making, for example, \$80,000 per year. This was as far as our discussion on social class progressed: Obama wanted to declare "class warfare" on the poor rich folk.

The problem with the McCain campaign's failed strategy was that American voters seemed cool with that idea. The more John McCain and Sarah Palin called

Barack Obama a socialist, the higher his poll numbers went. Maybe the electorate was digging the idea of, as McCain kept putting it, "redistributing the wealth." Of course there were surreal moments at McCain campaign stops in Appalachia, where crowds of seemingly poor would-be beneficiaries of any such redistribution cheered on the millionaire candidate as he railed against such dreams. But, for the most part, people ate up the notion that some sort of "socialism" was coming.

This wasn't supposed to happen. It's no accident that socialism has a bad rap in the US. Our public airwaves are managed and monopolized by private for-profit corporations. Capitalists. Even our token public TV and radio presence are underwritten and heavily influenced by corporate money. More capitalists. Our political campaigns depend on corporate money to pay for advertising – media bought from the private controllers of the public airwaves – paid for by capitalists.

## Digging the Donald

This isn't supposed to bother us because we all buy lottery tickets, leave our money at casinos, watch Who Wants to be a Millionaire, and believe in the American dream. We're all going to be rich one day, so we need to fight against any nasty redistributor who will hinder our ability to

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amass untold fortunes and have servants wax our many fine automobiles. We don't want “class war” because we relate more to Donald Trump than we do to our family, our neighbors, our lovers, and our co-workers.

This popular disdain for class warfare, however, obscures the fact that the richest Americans have been engaging in class warfare against the rest of us for more than a generation. Recent figures show that the richest 300,000 Americans “earned” the same total income as the poorest 150 million put together, with the richest one percent of the population receiving paychecks that average more than 400 times what the poorest 150 million got. This income gap has doubled since Ronald Reagan took office in 1980. Twenty-five years later, in 2005, 90 percent of Americans saw their real wages drop while the richest one percent got “raises” averaging \$1.1 million apiece. That same year saw the richest 10 percent of the country earn a percentage of the national income not seen since 1928, on the eve of the Great Depression.

Back in the Roaring Twenties, the richest Americans paid 25 percent of their income in taxes while many looted an unregulated financial market. When the economy finally crashed, their tax rate jumped to 63 percent, which paid for New Deal jobs that preserved capitalism by heading off an uprising of unemployed workers and their hungry and sometimes homeless families. In 1936, with the economy still stumbling and with war clouds on the horizon, the maximum income tax in the US rose to 79 percent. With the US entering World War II, that rate rose to 88 percent. That's because wars cost money, which is one reason why true fiscal conservatives often oppose them.

### **Eisenhower's socialism**

The US maximum tax rate hit 94 percent during the war, the dropped to 91 percent after the war ended. And that's pretty much where it stayed throughout the booming

1950s, under the presidency of Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower, during the decade when prosperity reached America's growing “middle class.” The Eisenhower tax rate financed not only the GI Bill, which underwrote America's first real “ownership society,” but the construction of our now crumbling national infrastructure – things like interstate highways, irrigation and hydroelectric systems. State taxes pounded the rich in tandem, building the nation's systems of public higher education (which remained free in some places until the mid 1970s), which in turn allowed more Americans to enter the middle class.

All this socialism came at the height of the Cold War, while our “redistributors” railed against Marxism and communism. There's logic here, however. The best plan to fight socialism was to emulate some of its finest features in the name of capitalism.

The 91 percent tax rate held through the Republican years, then was finally cut back to 77 percent by the “liberal” Kennedy administration and then to 70 percent by the supposedly more liberal Johnson administration. Then came the Republican administrations of Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, both of which chose not to cut taxes, opting to keep the tax rate at 70 percent. That's because Republicans used to be fiscal conservatives who believed in balanced budgets. Jimmy Carter held firm to the 70 percent tax rate throughout his presidency as well, but cut the taxes on the poorest Americans from 14 percent to nothing.

### **Reagan's Darwinism**

Then along came the now iconic Ronald Reagan, who, engaging in what George H. W. Bush called “voodoo economics,” slashed the tax rate for the richest Americans by 20 percent, instituting the largest tax cut in history, with the maximum rate set at 50 percent. The working poor, people earning less than \$2,750, got a tax cut of two percent, which amounted to \$55 or less, while those earning \$5 million or more

got a cut of \$1 million dollars or more. Poor and middle-class beneficiaries of chump change tax cuts saw themselves nickel and dimed ad nauseam by increasing fees, school tuition, and local taxes, all of which offset the lost income from the upper-crust tax cuts.

Reagan financed his cuts through deficit spending and cuts to programs that benefited the majority of working Americans, such as higher education. As the deficits grew, his administration cut more programs that served poor and middle-class Americans, using the “savings” to service the national debt and offset more tax cuts for the rich.

In 1987 Reagan cut taxes for the richest Americans by 11.5 percent, to 38.5 percent, while raising tax rates on the working poor, with people earning \$2,750 seeing their rate increase 36 percent, from 11 percent to 15 percent. Desperately poor workers – those earning a taxable income of between one penny and \$1,500 – saw their tax rate jump from zero percent, as in nothing, to 11 percent. I can only term this last part of the tax bill of 1986 as meanspirited and economically sadistic, netting insignificant revenue for the government while exasperating the economic stress on an already suffering population.

This was class war. Plain and simple. Class war and unabashed greed. This was those who could afford to live in luxury taking from those who couldn't afford to live. I can't see any other way to describe it.

A year later Reagan again cut the taxes for the wealthiest Americans by another 10.5 percent, while raising the taxes on the poorest workers from 11 to 15 percent. They didn't teach you that in your high school history classes, did they?

This is where taxes stayed until George H. W. Bush raised them to 31 percent in 1991. Bill Clinton brought taxes back near 1987 levels, combating the federal deficit by raising the maximum tax bracket to 39.6 percent – still more than 30 percent less than it was when Reagan first took of-

fice. Then came George W. Bush, who cut the top rate to 35 percent while starting a trillion-dollar war.

#### **It never sucked to be rich**

Mull over these numbers. Think about the Eisenhower tax structure, whereby the richest Americans paid 91 percent of their income in taxes. Think about the Nixon and Ford administrations, when they paid 70 percent. Even under those tax structures – rates that, if restored, could both rescue Wall Street and underwrite a modern New Deal for Main Street – it didn't suck to be rich. It really didn't. CEOs did not quit their jobs to enjoy lower tax rates as taxi drivers. Maybe their private jets were smaller than they would have liked, or perhaps they couldn't afford that eighth house (sorry, John the Senator), but life didn't suck, at least not for want of luxuries.

So yes. There is class war in America. We – those of us who work for paychecks – didn't start it. Nor have we even been fighting it. We've just been ducking low in our foxholes and enjoying whatever crumbs came our way. That's because life hasn't really sucked for the American middle class, either. You see, while we've been taking a hit in the American class war, we've been kicking ass in the global class war.

My favorite sociologist recently explained this to me. We're all supposed to aspire to be middle class. It's the American Dream – dreamt for us before any of us were born, and drummed into our heads by corporate mass culture. We are supposed to aspire not to restore social equality at home, but to exploit social inequality in the global free market. The American dream is an endless supply of cheap booty manufactured by the hungriest, most exploited people on the planet. While our share of the national wealth has been shrinking, our standard of living has been buoyed because we benefit from the nose-dive their share of the global wealth has taken.

These are the people who ultimately pay for the obscene standard of living that

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the beneficiaries of the Reagan tax cuts enjoy today: the child laborer working 20-hour days assembling garments in one of Mumbai's zari factories; the 1.5 million girls breathing toxic plastic fumes in the toy-making sweatshops of China's Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces; the electronic waste sorter knee-deep in silicon dust in Nanyang; Haitians toiling away making Mickey Mouse garments in Port au Prince; and Hondurans picking bananas amid carcinogenic pesticides in Atlántida. This is how Wal-Mart keeps prices low enough for struggling American workers to afford Christmas.

Sure, the American middle class is hurting. And it's shrinking. But it's not hurting nearly as badly as the people who stock the stores where middle-class consumers will be shopping for bargains this Christmas season. It's good that Barack Obama talked about the middle class. But for his presidency to succeed he has to make sure that this is where the conversation begins, not where it ends.

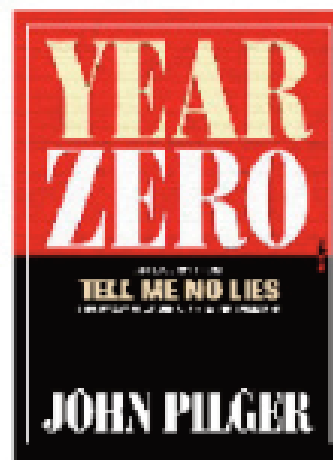
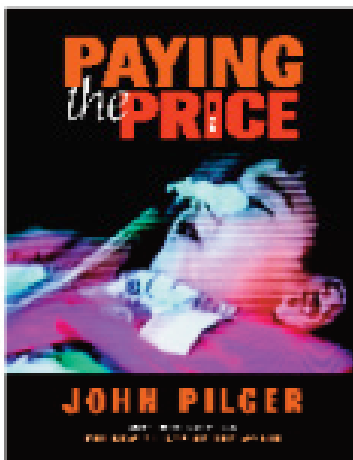
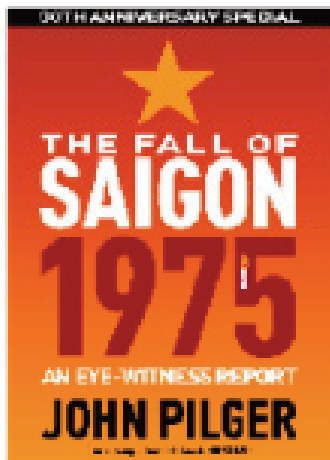
The real conversation has to be about social justice, about making America truly

shine once again as a beacon of hope. We need to make healthcare and education accessible and put people to work building a 21st-century, environmentally sustainable infrastructure.

This is more important than buying island getaways for billionaires. We need to restore hope. And to restore hope, we need to restore a tax structure that can rebuild opportunity and sustain hope. We can begin restoring hope by repealing not only the Bush tax cuts for the rich but the Reagan tax codes that ushered in this meanspirited era. The richest Americans, the one percent that have soaked up so much of the world's wealth, will be fine. And they won't take their marbles and run off. They're part of America just like we are. They need to understand that the era of greed is over. We're all in this together. It's not about redistributing the wealth. It's about sharing the wealth and working together to tackle the challenges we face. **CT**

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# Cheering for Morgan Stanley

**Chellis Glendinning** travels to a dinner party in Santa Fe to discover what happens now the investment party's over

**I**t was September 23 – and Bear Stearns, Lehman Brothers, and A.I.G. had already tanked. Morgan Stanley, still holding on by bloodless knuckles, had just been sold in bulk to Japan's Mitsubishi UFJ Group.

That day, as the world of capitalism was spinning off its axel, I received two pieces of mail here in northern New Mexico. The first was a hand-penned letter assembled with attention to the planet's dwindling forests, on the backside of a used printout. It was from Richard Heinberg. After publication of his *The Party's Over: Oil, War and the Fate of Industrial Societies*, he had become an internationally known expert on Peak Oil. "The collapse we've all known was coming is upon us," he wrote. With goose bumps quivering across my gut, I slowly tore the second envelope open. Inside was a formal invitation. From Morgan Stanley. I was invited to attend a "special complimentary evening" for "the first 100 guests" to hear presentations by five of the nation's top investment funds, chow down vegetarian fare at Santa Fe's most exclusive gated community in honor of a certain account executive whose time at Morgan Stanley had topped 25 years, and take in a keynote lecture from a .... did I read this right? .... a, uh ... Life Success Coach.

Appreciation for irony is my strong suit. I inherited it from my mother who had

an eye for clashing realities, and although alone in the kitchen, a guffaw erupted like a fart. The world as it had been constructed since the days of the British Empire was banging into its own contradictions, and granted the aforementioned event had been anticipated before the sub-prime crisis began roaring domino-like through the collective lifeblood, the recommendation of the experts in the field was to bring on today's rendition of Norman Vincent Peale.

## **Goldman croaked**

By the time the dinner party rolled around the Dow had plunged hundreds of points, Goldman Sachs had croaked and been saved, the House of Representatives had temporarily refused a corporate bailout package, with one Congress member calling for "iron bracelets" instead of "golden parachutes," Iceland had declared bankruptcy, the Bank of Scotland had gone under, Belgium had bailed out the banking-insurance giant Fortis NV, and the F.B.I. was investigating Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, Lehman, and A.I.G. for mortgage fraud.

It was evident that to pass into the world of shaky finance, I was going to have to attire myself in an unusual manner. Ever since the likes of Bertelsmann had taken over the publishing business, book sales for non-cookbook/non-horror novels had plummeted and with them advances to mid-list

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**Ten minutes later, we emerged: Chris in black jeans now and his polyester shirt festooned with cuff links and a Kokopelli bolo tie; my Wal-Mart shoes replaced by way-too-big, way-too-pointy black pumps – on loan**

authors like myself, the lecture circuit had dried up for progressive speakers with the exception of Amy Goodman and Noam Chomsky, and I had taken to selling off my dear mother's Hudson Bay coats to costume myself in more modern garb at Santa Fe's cast-off clothing boutique, Act 2.

To boot, I had just been informed that the smallest account Morgan Stanley had ever accepted – mine – was now \$100 in arrears.

Upon throwing the doors to my closet open, I saw immediately that my options were slim. The brightly-colored coats long gone, I pegged together an outfit that appeared to me, by New Mexico cowboy standards, to suffice. Stuffing it into a plastic bag, I headed to the capital.

I got dressed in a public bathroom at the rail yard. But as I exited the stall and caught a glimpse in the mirror, I could see that my favorite jeans were sporting a detail I had never before noticed: pre-planned holes. My Bolivian peasant shawl did not glam things up one bit, and my Wal-Mart shoes constituted an upside-down version of a bad-hair day. Twenty minutes to go before the fund managers were slated to tell us where it was at, investment-wise, I skipped to the final stage of death and dying – in this case, acceptance of fashion failure – and dashed to meet my date.

Chris Wells has given his life to creating ecologically-informed All Species Day celebrations in Latin America, the Southwest, and Sweden, and he has made no money doing it. He pulled up in a muffler-less '72 Saab stuffed with boxes of crumpled clothes. When he jumped out, I gasped. Chris was donned in a striped polyester shirt, untucked; those athletic shoes that look like sandals, ratty from miles of bicycle riding; and . . . . white shorts.

"Chris!" I howled, knowing full well that I myself had but the fragile last of a Wal-Mart slipper to stand on. "I told you to dress up, man! You look like a homeless person!" Out of the corner of my eye I could see onlookers chuckling at the spectacle,

and then the coup de grace of long-buried but suddenly relevant fashion-eze spilled forth: "You can't wear shorts! It's f\*\*cking past Labor Day!!" A mere 100 feet across the parking lot from Act 2, I grabbed his hand and headed over.

Ten minutes later, we emerged: Chris in black jeans now and his polyester shirt festooned with cuff links and a Kokopelli bolo tie; my Wal-Mart shoes replaced by way-too-big, way-too-pointy black pumps – on loan.

You have to prove your worthiness to get in at Quail Run. If I had been thinking, which I wasn't because I was twisted in knots about the frayed threads on my knees, I would have removed the Venezuelan, Cuban, and Bolivian flags from the dash of my aging army Jeep – but really, why bother? the Che Guevara decal on the back window would still have been there. I waved my Morgan Stanley invitation – and we slipped past the gate.

I think Quail Run must have been the set for *My Best Friend's Wedding*. It is marked by as-far-as-the-eye-can-see grass the color of the green stripes on my mother's Hudson Bay coats. The club house, fitness facilities, condominiums, and swimming pool are samples of an architectural style that will be written up in history books to come: the melding of the faux-Pueblo Santa Fe Style invented by Anglo newcomers in the 1930s with the construction-company Fanta Se Style concocted by this post-Dances with Wolves wave of Ralph-Lauren-clad golfers.

We slithered in to the plump chairs against the back wall of the meeting room. Its ceilings were a good 20 feet high, insipid pastels of desert scenes adorned the walls, and Morgan Stanley, Eaton Vance, Van Kampen, Calvert, and IVY were aligned on the stage. I scoped out the anthro-scene: dark suits, ties, hard shoes for the men; velvet jackets, taffeta skirts, four-inch patent leather heels for the ladies. And the scene scoped us out. I mean, could the eyes of the fund managers have possibly landed on Chris' impeccable turquoise neck wear?



No. They dropped to his shoes and stayed there for an inordinate moment bulging at the fleshy toes sticking through. I hoped to God we were passing for that class of rich eccentrics who like to go around a la Chauncey Gardner.

The suit behind the podium was painting a picture of the economy the color of a New Mexico sunset. 80-90% of the time that the market takes a bit of a tumble, he was saying, it bounces up within months to even more remunerative vibrancy. I had the feeling that the investors in the room had come, yes, to honor she who had been chipping away at the glass ceiling these last 25 years. But they had also accepted the invitation because they were freaked out. Nary a registered letter nor even a postcard had followed the sale of Morgan Stanley to Mitsubishi. Would Morgan Stanley become just a regular bank like Valley National where they would write checks and deposit cash? Or would it continue to dish out investment advice and move monies? And most pressing: was anybody's stash worth anything anymore?

But the fund managers' firms had shelled out the bucks for this gala affair for 100, and damn if they weren't going to make their pitch.

#### **Inscrutable coup**

The second manager regaled us with stories of China, and it was at this point that I began to smell the sulfur. I mean, wasn't the planet going to hell in a hand basket from rampant development? And hadn't this news, long known in the grassroots communities I was used to hanging around, finally reached at least ... NPR? But no. The man waved a cashmere sleeve into the air and pronounced that in the land of our last, greatest, and most inscrutable investment coup, one coal-fired plant was being thrown online every month! Roads were being built willy-nilly! Every six weeks a new city the size of Santa Fe's downtown was popping up where Mao's minions had once marched! For the savvy investor, Chi-

na was where it was at. And besides, the Chinese character for something-or-other, nobody could quite recall what, meant both Risk and Opportunity.

This is where Warren Buffett met Quail Run. I had apparently been misinformed. I had thought that Warren Buffett was a dude at the top of the heap with a little too much cash on his hands. But here in the sunset room at Quail Run, the man was God's gift to the aforementioned Chinese character. To buy when the market is at its lowest was the smartest and bravest thing an investor could do. That is, of course, if said investor were not \$100 in arrears.

Chris and I had a pre-arranged agreement that our eyeballs would never meet. I probably would have broken the pact at this point were it not for the timely announcement of dinner, and suddenly the pack of uncertain investors was whisked into the hors d'oeuvres room for braised red peppers and eggplant. Chris was glancing about for the open bar I had promised and I am certain that things would have gone in a different direction if it had indeed been open, but I had overlooked the cogent detail that the evening's honoree was a teetotaler of the health-food-freak variety. True gonzo journalism down the drain, I made a sober beeline for the Calvert Fund manager. He was Honduran, bleary from taking the Red Eye from D.C., and, as we say in northern New Mexico, un nuevo. Now here's someone I can talk politics with, I thought.

By the time the pack had been reformed around plates of organic walnut salad, mashed turnips, and ravioli, Chris and I found ourselves among a group of sedately-dressed Los Alamos lawyers, doctors, and housewives. I turned to the Calvert guy. Several nations in Latin America had bucked the World Bank to start their own financial institutions, I said, and how did his socially-minded investment company view this interesting move? I think I caught him just as his forehead was about to drop into the turnip mash – it was after all way past bedtime in the nation's capitol – but

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he twitched long enough to offer that Brazil was the only country in Latin America worth investing in. It had gone full-tilt boogey into bio-fuels and unlike Venezuela where suitcases of money from only-Hugo-knows-where were appearing, Brazil could be counted on. Let's forget for a moment that the sugar and soy plantations plowed for the world's Mitsubishis (see: everything is connected) are not producing food for Brazilians and that the world's Mitsubishis are heaping on the climate change (more of same), I could see that we were not talking politics; we were talking bottom line.

#### **Canned rock music**

Things move fast in the world of finance and, as reported the next day by the analyst group Ladenburg Thalmann, while we were speaking the very viability of Morgan Stanley was being reviewed. Also as we spoke, ear-piercing canned rock music began to blare across the dining room, and after several moments of high expectation, our Life Success Coach made her entrance. It was an entrance more suited to the Hollywood Bowl than a dining room encased in adobe, but there she was – all 5'3" of her, blonde in a shimmering white suit, and looking like a cheerleader for Columbine High School.

I mean, she was bouncy. Perky. Pert. Full of fanfare. We don't have people like that where I live in the northern mountains. We have Korean-War vets and chile farmers in raggy old flannel shirts, gangsta' low-riders with bling, Taco Bell workers, heroin addicts looking for a fix. And even in this room of Morgan Stanley investors, the median hair color was ashen white; the median psychic tonality, financial anxiety masked by dinner-table etiquette. I caught a glimpse of a glass of Chardonnay at the next table, its stem clutched by an elderly heiress who, with her ruddy cheeks, appeared to be such a friend of wine that she had ferreted out her own bar.

Yes, the life coach was of a different ilk. To her everything was beyond-exciting,

every waking moment an opportunity for full-out celebration, every nod on the street a chance to help a stranger avert suicide. Her own brush with self-inflicted death had laid the basis for her life's work, and given the memories of the Depression of which there were a few in the room, suicide was indeed a timely reference.

The L.A. housewives thought the coach was the cat's pajamas, and so the pact for no eye contact went into full operation. But, after an hour and a half of "You're About To Kill Yourself!" followed by "Get Up! Get Up! You Can Do It!" Chris scrawled a sentence on the flyer offering Personal Coaching for \$333/month and pushed it toward me. It read: "Got to get out of here."

I was desperately trying to apply a blend of the cheerleader's message with that of the Chinese character: every problem, a beyond-fabulous opportunity. But to arise in a room full of seated investors – now deadened by an overwhelm of enthusiasm, whose bottom-line dedication was respect for the evening's honoree – was fraught with veritable risk.

If there was a lesson embedded in financial collapse, it was that things do indeed change – and sure enough the pack was suddenly herded to either the booth where the coach was, in good capitalist fashion, signing copies of her book. Or to the desert table.

Chris and I made a dash for the apple cobbler. Then in a wink we were outside the rarified vacuum of investment banking, trundling up Old Santa Fe Trail in an army Jeep, on gas possibly manufactured as an excellent investment in Brazil, toward a winter as uncertain as it had been 80 years before. I kind of wished I still had a Hudson Bay coat.

**CT**

*Chellis Glendinning is the author of six books, including My Name Is Chellis and I'm in Recovery from Western Civilization and Off the Map: An Expedition Deep into Empire and the Global Economy. She lives in Chimayó, New Mexico*

# The source of their riches

**Paul D'Amato** wonders what it is exactly that the wealthy do to 'earn' the vast fortunes they possess

**E**conomist Paul Samuelson, who won the Nobel Prize in 1970 for raising “the general analytical and methodological level in economic science,” had this to say in a recent column in the *Washington Post*:

By and large, the poor aren't poor because the rich are rich. They're usually poor for their own reasons: family breakdown, low skills, destructive personal habits and plain bad luck . . . The larger truth is that much of the income of the rich and well-to-do comes from what they do.”

Funny how the destructive personal habits (alcoholism, drug addiction), family breakdown (rich people divorce all the time), low skills (do rich people have any skills?) and plain bad luck (ask Lehman Brothers) of the fabulously wealthy never seems to leave them in the ditch of poverty.

These people do not do anything that could be described as socially useful work. They invest other people's money and collect profits and interest without having to lift a finger or break a sweat. On the other hand, there are more than 7 million people in the US, according to official statistics, whose work does not pay them enough to lift them out of poverty. Is there really no connection between these things?

Let's indulge Mr. Samuelson for a moment and consider that idea that “much”

of the income of the rich comes from what they do, and that the poor are just poor because they are lazy and unlucky. On a certain level, part of what Samuelson says is irrefutable: rich people definitely “do” things to get rich. The question is, what exactly do they do?

In a classic Saturday Night Live skit, Steve Martin explains how to be a millionaire and never pay taxes: “Steve...how can I be a millionaire and never pay taxes?” he asks himself. He answers: “First...get a million dollars.” Samuelson's explanation isn't any more illuminating than this, and he's not even funny.

## Poverty and wealth

Samuelson's argument reminded me of a statement by the 19th century French economist, Sismondi, who wrote: “Exertion today is separated from its recompense; it is not the same man that first works, and then reposes; but it is because the one works that the other rests.”

Sismondi makes a clear connection between poverty and wealth – those who do not work live off the wealth produced by the labor of others. The father of bourgeois economics, Adam Smith, was also far more honest in his assessment of wealth and poverty than Mr. Samuelson. “It may very justly be said,” Smith explained, “that the people who clothe the whole world are in

**Funny how the destructive personal habits (alcoholism, drug addiction), family breakdown (rich people divorce all the time), low skills (do rich people have any skills?) and plain bad luck (ask Lehman Brothers) of the fabulously wealthy never seems to leave them in the ditch of poverty**

**Are we really to believe that billionaires like Bill Gates (net worth: \$58 billion) and Warren Buffet (net worth: \$62 billion) actually performed intellectual or manual labor that is worth more than the GDP of entire countries**

rag themselves.”

Logical conclusion: the poor are indeed poor because the rich are rich. This is the only possible explanation for why some people have billions of dollars and others live on \$1 a day—that wealth is based on the extorted labor of the many on behalf of the few.

Are we really to believe that billionaires like Bill Gates (net worth: \$58 billion) and Warren Buffet (net worth: \$62 billion) actually performed intellectual or manual labor that is worth more than the GDP of entire countries—more than 10 times, for example, the GDP of Nicaragua (\$5.7 billion), with a population of 5.6 million people?

Keep in mind that Bill and Warren continue to be paid no matter what they are doing: skiing, playing the horses, brushing lint off their coats or complaining to servants. Most of us ordinary mortals only get paid when we work, but rich people magically make money even when they are sleeping. And the truth is, we don't even get paid for all the work we do.

We'd be on surer footing if we listen to the famous robber baron, John D. Rockefeller: "I would rather earn 1 percent off a [sic] 100 people's efforts than 100 percent of my own efforts." I suppose this is what made him so lucky, and his employees so unlucky.

#### **Hackneyed prejudices**

What Samuelson is offering here are a string of hackneyed prejudices masquerading as analysis: blame the poor for their own poverty. When we read these things, we wonder how anyone could ever consider economics to be a science, or that Mr. Samuelson could have possibly raised its analytical level.

But it should not surprise us that respected Nobel Prize-winning economists are more apt to obscure rather than illuminate the truth. As Karl Marx once wrote, the conquest of political power by the rising capitalist class sounded the knell of scientific bourgeois economy. It was thenceforth

no longer a question, whether this theorem or that was true, but whether it was useful to capital or harmful, expedient or inexpedient, politically dangerous or not. In place of disinterested inquirers, there were hired prizefighters; in place of genuine scientific research, the bad conscience and the evil intent of apologetic.

Sincere economic inquiry was replaced by what Marx called "vulgar economics."

The once popular (and now thoroughly discredited) theory, known as "rational expectations theory," which claimed that financial markets are self-correcting and tend toward equilibrium, is the most infamous recent example of vulgar economics.

If this were not enough to expose the unscientific nature of modern economics, two of the founders of Long-Term Capital Management, the multibillion-dollar hedge fund that collapsed in 1998 and almost brought down the world financial system, were Harvard-educated Nobel Prize-winning economists who had devised a technique for valuing stock market options.

It has long been a common argument of the vulgar economists that capitalists don't get their profits from the proceeds of unpaid labor, but rather from their own "abstinence." Profit, according to the 19th-century economist John Stuart Mill, writing in 1848, represents a "recompense" for the capitalist's "forbearing to consume his capital for his own uses" — his "remuneration for abstinence."

According to this logic, if the capitalist is going to be so altruistic as to skimp on his own needs in order to invest his hard-earned capital, he should get a little back in return. Yet Mill is forced to admit that the surplus that accrues to capitalists must come from somewhere. "The cause of profit," he admits, "is that labor produces more than is required for its support." It cannot be put more clearly or more simply than that.

It is certainly not abstinence by which corporations are able to concentrate in their hands the principle means of production in

society. On the contrary, it is the forced abstinence of the working class—that it does not receive the full product of its labor, but hands part of it over free to the capitalist class – that explains profit.

It is the job of vulgar economists like Samuelson to convince us all that we should continue in our “forbearance” toward our exploiters, by telling us little fairy tales that aren’t much better than what we learned as kids about the tooth fairy.

The truth is, capitalist investors perform no useful function in society. They are not designers; they are not engineers; they are not planners or managers; they do

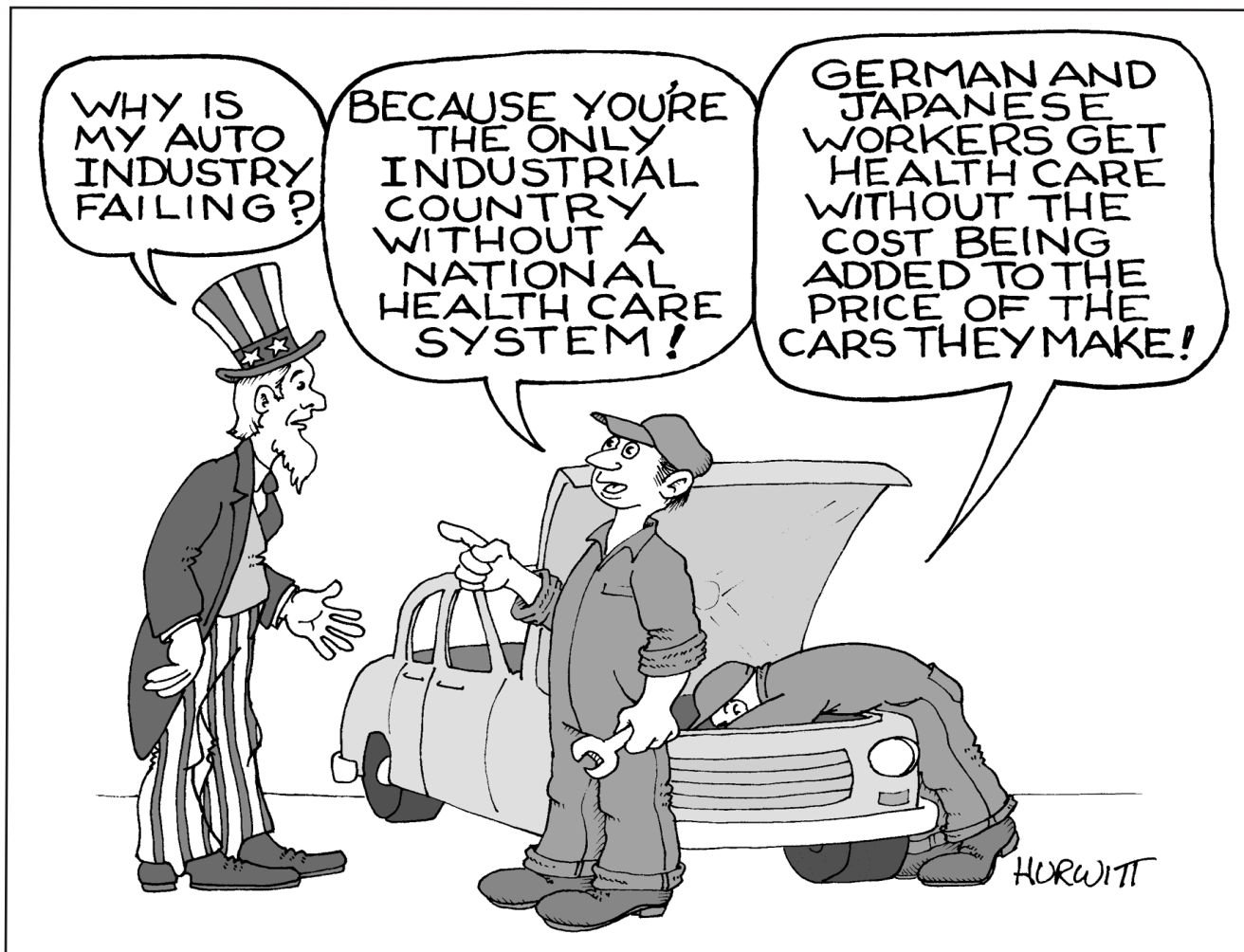
not make anything; they do not transport anything; they do not create anything. As Frederick Engels wrote many decades ago, “the existence of the ‘retired’ shareholding capitalist” has become “not only superfluous, but a perfect nuisance.” **CT**

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**The truth is, capitalist investors perform no useful function in society**

## HURWITT’S EYE

Mark Hurwitz



# I'm tired of getting screwed

The American worker doesn't want a hand out. Never did. But we do want a hand up from the government, says **Rick Kepler**

**We are working longer and harder, but our paychecks keep shrinking! Where are those productivity gains going then? Not into our pockets**

I am an American worker, and you are damn right I want the wealth to be shared and spread. I am talking about the wealth my hard work helped to create, but was taken from me by George Bush's base, the very rich, or as I know them, my corporate bosses. For the past eight years I have watched W.'s and McCain's (Country Club First) base grab the largest share of our country's wealth. Where did they take it from? They took it from my family's pocketbook, and my coworkers' families' pocketbooks. They stole the wealth that I was trying to build for me and my family when they stripped my pension plan from me and told me to invest in a 401k. Then they stole most of that 401k and other workers' 401k savings with this economic meltdown. This was a massive transfer of wealth from the workers' pockets into the already stuffed pockets of the rich. My retirement savings and my coworkers' savings all across America have been looted by the corporate bosses, who just got bailed out while we got left out. Again!

American workers, whether black, brown, white, red, yellow, or rainbow color, have been fleeced over these past eight years. We are the ones who go to work every day. We don't own our places of work, nor do we help manage them. We just go in and do the job. And we must be doing

one hell of a good job because we are told that we are the most productive workers in the world. We are working longer and harder, but our paychecks keep shrinking! Where are those productivity gains going then? Not into our pockets. Our standard of living has been going down these past eight years (\$2,000 less in family income since W. took office) This is another damn transfer of wealth into the hands of the extremely rich.

Their greed is insatiable. Take our family's health care. They do. They keep passing on their increased costs to us, or they just drop coverage for the worker completely. That means we either join the 50,000,000 who have no health care, or we end up having to buy it privately, thus eating up a huge portion of our family's income. If we manage to hang onto our health care plans, our deductibles, co-pays, and out-of-pay contributions keep skyrocketing. This amounts to another massive transfer of wealth from our pockets into the overflowing pockets of our corporate bosses.

The list goes on for the American worker. We saw overtime pay stripped from millions of workers during this past nightmare eight years. The worker was still working overtime, but due to a new "boss law" passed by W. and McCain's party that assists these thieves, the workers didn't receive overtime pay because they were declared exempt.

They also weakened the workers' health and safety standards or just plain didn't enforce the laws already on the books. As a result, the American worker pays the price in lost days due to accidents from unsafe conditions or from lingering, expensive illnesses suffered from unhealthy working conditions. This too is a massive transfer of wealth from our pockets into our corporate bosses' bulging pockets.

To further sweeten their own pots, they took full-time jobs and converted them to part-time with no benefits, or they just made their employees line up and reapply for their exact same jobs at half the pay. Are we beginning to see what a true transfer of wealth looks like? So, do I want to see a spreading of the wealth? You bet your sweet hind-end I do. But all I ask of Obama is to give me and my co-workers the ability to retrieve some of the wealth that has been stolen from us.

#### **Attack on workers**

Strengthen the laws that give workers the right to organize and bargain for a contract with our bosses. The current laws on the books have been torn to shreds by W. and McCain on behalf of their base. This is just part of their attack on American workers. Under globalization, the bosses seek a much cheaper workforce, which always means non-union, which means "can't fight back." That is why they have gutted the laws that protect workers. The laws that once gave us a level playing field with our

bosses have been rendered useless, including our legal right to strike. That law said I had a right to strike, and could.

The American worker doesn't want a handout. Never did. We do want a hand up from our government. We still believe and have hope that this is a government of, by and for the people. We do want to know that our government will finally stand with us against this onslaught, this Robin Hood in reverse, being conducted by the bosses against the workers.

The bosses know that W. and McCain have been on their side for the past eight years – and so do we workers. We just want our government to now stand on our side as we stand up against this corporate attempt to create third world working conditions right here in America. Restore our right to fight for a better living for ourselves and our families, and let the power of pissed-off workers, united in struggle, spread corporate America's stolen wealth back into the pockets of those whose pockets got picked these last eight years – the American worker. **CT**

*Rick Kepler has driven beer trucks in New Orleans, Louisiana; Colorado Springs, Colorado and Oakland, California. He has tended bar in San Francisco, and worked on the railroad and loading docks in Ohio. Currently he's a Teamsters organizer who speaks to thousands of unorganized workers every year. This essay originally appeared at [www.truthout.org](http://www.truthout.org)*

**Under globalization, the bosses seek a much cheaper workforce, which always means non-union, which means "can't fight back." That is why they have gutted the laws that protect workers**

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# A year since Chrysler murdered my uncle

**Derek Wright** tells how Jon Kelley Wright was killed in a gruesome and utterly preventable workplace “accident”

**I'll never forget how my uncle told me that on his first week on the job, one of these crucibles was derailed and fell to the ground, crushing and incinerating one of the workers**

**O**n September 22, 2007, the Chrysler Corporation murdered my uncle, Jon Kelley Wright. After working more than 22 years at the die casting plant in Kokomo, Ind., he was crushed to death by the machine he operated, in a gruesome but utterly preventable workspace disaster.

Widely known as “the safest operator in that plant” by his coworkers, Kelley had long been an outspoken critic of management’s dangerous practices and an advocate for safety on the job.

Early in 2007, my uncle and some of his coworkers demanded meetings with management about the terrible condition of the safety equipment on their die casting machines. Management said that it wasn’t “cost effective” to fix the problems. Since management knew about the faulty safety equipment for months, and the company refused to fix it, I’ve stopped referring to my uncle’s death as a workplace “accident.”

Kelley produced transmission cases for Chrysler vehicles. The die casting plant where he worked is a loud and dangerous place. The ceiling of the building is a network of rails, where giant crucibles of molten aluminum fly overhead to replenish the enormous die casting machines.

I’ll never forget how my uncle told me that on his first week on the job, one of these crucibles was derailed and fell to the

ground, crushing and incinerating one of the workers. It’s no wonder that Kelley was so concerned with workplace safety.

The die casting machines for transmission cases are huge, and these days, they’re mostly automated. A series of sensors signal a computer with the exact state of the machine, whether the last part has been properly ejected, whether it’s ready to cast another part, and so on. The job of a die cast operator in today’s auto-parts industry mostly involves watching the machine to make sure it keeps working, and to debug any problems that might arise.

For the large parts, such as transmission cases, debugging a problem or making an adjustment often involves opening up the machine and walking inside. One of the sensors on the machine notices when the door is open and completely shuts down everything else. When the door is open, it is supposed to be impossible for the machine to function.

For months in the Kokomo plant, these sensors had been malfunctioning. At least the sensor was designed to “fail safe,” meaning that when it wasn’t working, it told the computer that the door was open (and therefore, the machine was disabled), even when the door was closed.

Early in the morning, on September 22, my uncle’s machine apparently froze up. The computer claimed that the part that



had just been cast wasn't properly ejected. As usual, Kelley opened up the machine and went inside to pull the part and adjust the pneumatic pins that are supposed to eject the transmission cases after they cool off.

Apparently, it's common for these pins to get out of alignment, since they're just screwed into place (one of my uncle's coworkers later told me that the pins wouldn't malfunction so often if Chrysler stopped cutting corners and just welded them into position, instead of relying on the cheaper but weaker screws).

However, even though the door was still wide open, as soon as Kelley got the pins adjusted, the machine fired another part with my uncle still inside.

Every one of Kelley's coworkers who came to the funeral said that he was probably the safest operator in the plant, and one of the most outspoken about health and safety issues. None of them can believe that he did something stupid or careless to put himself in harm's way.

When they got to the machine and opened it up to find my uncle's remains, they looked over the whole machine and discovered that someone had put a glove over the sensor that was supposed to see if the door was open, rendering it useless (such that it always thought the door was closed). No one knows where this glove came from. Some of his coworkers said that management had removed the glove before Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) arrived.

Many things about the situation remain a mystery, and will probably never be known. Two things, however, are certain. First, there's no way Kelley knew that glove was there, or he never would have gone inside the machine. Second, that glove would never have been there if Chrysler replaced the faulty sensors as soon as workers in the plant reported the problems.

Chrysler's immediate response to the incident was to shut down the whole plant for 24 hours. According to my uncle's co-

workers, this shutdown served two purposes: to clean up the place before OSHA arrived and to allow OSHA to begin its official investigation.

The next day, Chrysler brought in some "grief counselors" to talk to the other workers on the line and convince them to get back to work. The coworkers were furious (and still grieving the loss), and basically told these counselors they had no idea what they were talking about. Then, one of the workers on the line stood up and said, "If you don't feel like you're ready to safely operate these machines again right now, go home," and the entire shift left the plant, most of them going out for breakfast together to continue talking and grieving.

Some of the newspaper stories about the "accident" reported that production was halted for two days, but the second day was a voluntary shutdown by Kelley's coworkers. At some point during these two days, Chrysler went through the plant and finally fixed or replaced the door sensors on the die casting machines, though it's unclear if that was before or after OSHA came through.

### **Modest bouquet**

My uncle's funeral was heart wrenching, inspiring and enraging. When the immediate family first arrived at the funeral home, we were overwhelmed with all the flowers that people had sent. The funeral director said they had never had so many flowers for someone.

However, as we read through all the cards, we came upon one modest bouquet right next to the coffin that pushed me from grief mixed with joy into rage. The card read "Our condolences to the family of the deceased employee – Chrysler LLC."

They couldn't even be bothered to put his name there? And how dare they sign it "LLC" to remind us of their "limited liability corporation" status?

After quickly polling the rest of my family on their feelings, they agreed to let me do something about it, so I promptly re-

**Even though the door was still wide open, as soon as Kelley got the pins adjusted, the machine fired another part with my uncle still inside**

**Something about the image of my uncle frying fish all night for his coworkers really touched me. In the midst of an incredibly loud, dirty, dangerous, inhumane place, here was Kelley, trying to give it some humanity**

moved Chrysler's "condolences" from the room, and we moved around some other bouquets to give more prominent display to the ones from our cousins and the UAW local my uncle belonged to.

Once the guests started arriving, it was incredible to hear story after story about how much Kelley was loved and respected in the plant. One story in particular stuck with me, since I had heard similar ones from my uncle before he was killed.

Kelley loved to fish, and he loved a good fish fry. At least once a year, usually after a successful fishing trip with some of his coworkers, he'd bring a giant outdoor fryer and a few big bags of fish fillets into work. The person on the machine next to his would watch his machine all night, and Kelley would spend most of the shift frying fish for his coworkers. They'd just spread out newspapers on the floor of the plant, as if it was a picnic.

Something about the image of my uncle frying fish all night for his coworkers really touched me. In the midst of an incredibly loud, dirty, dangerous, inhumane place, here was Kelley, trying to give it some humanity. I love him for that, and it was clear from everyone who came to the funeral that they do, too.

Since the funeral, I've learned more than I ever wanted to know about the inner workings of a company like Chrysler.

First of all, it's company policy to pay for the funeral services of workers they've killed. Furthermore, at least in Indiana, they've set up a scholarship fund for the children of killed workers to attend college – so long as they go to one of the public Indiana schools.

They're obviously trying to blunt the worst of the anger – there'd probably be rebellion if the families had to pay the bills for these funerals. I have to assume that the scholarship fund works as a tax shelter for the company, in addition to providing whatever PR benefits they can get out of it.

I learned that my aunt is eligible to collect 500 weeks of workers' compensation payments at a percentage of my uncle's paycheck at the time he was killed. However, signing the form to start collecting payments would absolve Chrysler of any legal liability regarding Kelley's death.

It also seems that management has gone on the offensive in terms of intimidating the other workers in the plant. Before and during the funeral, coworker after coworker expressed their rage, and proudly asserted their willingness to testify to the facts of the case and the events of the previous several months.

When our family's lawyer approached them to do exactly that, not a single coworker was willing – all had been frightened off by the fear of losing their jobs. Apparently, Chrysler has figured out how much it costs to kill one of their workers, and decided that, in the infamous words of Bill Clinton's former Secretary of State Madeline Albright, "the price, we think, is worth it."

#### **5,840 killed**

As painful as this experience has been, it is not unique. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 5,840 people were killed on the job in 2006. That's 16 people a day. If there was a gang murdering 16 people

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a day, even for a few days, that would be headline news around the country. But this group of corporate killers goes on killing, day after day, year after year.

At most, the individual cases make the local news (rarely as headlines). This lethal gang is composed of the managers and bureaucrats making the cold calculation that it is cheaper and more profitable to set up scholarship funds for the children of murdered workers and, when forced, pay out small settlements than it is to operate a plant with enough safety precautions that no one would be killed on the job. Instead of doing jail time for their murderous computations, these people get bonuses and promotions.

My uncle's early and preventable death has been a tragic loss for our family, his coworkers and all who knew him. Kelley named me as the beneficiary on one of his modest life insurance policies, and to turn some of my grief and anger into positive action, I have decided to use the money to endow the Jon Kelley Wright Workers' Memorial Fund, through the Center for Economic Research and Social Change.

This fund will allow Haymarket Books to publish an annual series of books about

the labor movement and other struggles of working people to change the world. The first title in the series is *The Labor Wars* by Sidney Lens.

I hope that the Jon Kelley Wright Workers' Memorial Book Series will inspire others to dedicate their lives to the struggle for a world where safety on the job is more important than profits, and that it will help keep the memory of my beloved uncle alive. So we're inviting anyone else who has lost someone they love in a workplace disaster to memorialize their loved one through this book series, and we'll print all of the names on the dedication page of each book. **CT**

*This essay was first published in the International Socialist Review at [www.isreview.com](http://www.isreview.com)*

*To find out more about the Jon Kelley Wright Workers' Memorial Fund, please visit [www.workersmemorialfund.org](http://www.workersmemorialfund.org), where you can also contact the fund. To support this project, you can give a tax-deductible donation to the fund by writing a check payable to "CERSC," writing "Workers Memorial Fund" in the memo line, and sending it to:*

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**We're inviting anyone else who has lost someone they love in a workplace disaster to memorialize their loved one through this book series**

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# Tough times for the really smart

Top pay for top performance? Not if you're the boss, says **Sam Pizzigati**

**Over his years at Goldman, including eight as CEO, Paulson had amassed a stake in the company worth an estimated "\$500 million when he cashed out"**

This hasn't been a great fall for the brilliant, bright shining superstars who sit at the top of America's economic ladder. Their genius suddenly seems suspect. From Wall Street to Silicon Valley to Hedge Fund America, the smart boys are reeling.

Consider, for instance, Hank Paulson, our embattled US treasury secretary.

Paulson came to the Treasury Department two years ago from Goldman Sachs, the nation's most widely acclaimed investment bank. Over his years at Goldman, including eight as CEO, Paulson had amassed a stake in the company worth an estimated "\$500 million when he cashed out."

No one on Wall Street begrudged Paulson a penny of that.

In a "fiercely competitive market for intellectual talent," Wall Streeters believed, Paulson's brilliance had helped establish Goldman "as the pre-eminent firm in its class." Revenues at Goldman, during Paulson's wildly successful CEO stint, soared from \$8.5 to \$46 billion, profits from \$2.4 billion to \$11.6 billion.

This past September, with the US economy starting to sink into crisis, commentators found this track record a welcome source of comfort. The President may be clueless, went the conventional wisdom, but at least the nation had real smarts at the Treasury.

"This former investment banker," a *Newsweek* cover story pronounced, "may be the right man at the right time."

Now, two months later, Paulson's reputation for brilliance has run into the same ditch as the US economy. The bailout appears to have been bungled almost from the start. Last week, at a House hearing on Capitol Hill, Congressman Gary Ackerman from New York blasted Paulson for "flying a \$700 billion plane by the seat of your pants."

Meanwhile, over in Silicon Valley, Jerry Yang recently announced he would be stepping down as the CEO of Yahoo, the now troubled Internet powerhouse.

Yang, a Stanford doctoral student in electrical engineering, co-founded Yahoo in 1995, then rode the dot.com bubble to billionaire status. He personified, as much as anyone, the staggering smarts of twenty-somethings at the "wired" cutting-edge.

Yang would move aside, as the Yahoo top gun, in 2001, after hand-picking his successor, Terry Semel, from the entertainment industry. Semel would go on to have a phenomenally lucrative half-dozen years. He cleared \$230 million in stock option profits in 2004, then raked in \$71.7 million worth of compensation in 2006, over twice the take-home of any executive that year in Silicon Valley.

Unfortunately, Yahoo didn't do nearly so

well, losing market share right and left. The Yahoo board ended up showing Semel the door midway through 2007.

To the rescue came Yang. Yahoo's founding genius, observers hoped, would nobly save the company. Not quite. Over an 18-month span as CEO, the billionaire has bumbled from one ill-considered move to another.

Yang, as one industry analyst explained to the *New York Times*, has spent his time "completely botching" a possible merger with Microsoft – and masterminding "multiple company restructurings that have done little to restore confidence of any of Yahoo's shareholders, employees, or customers."

Yahoo is currently laying off 10 percent of the company's 15,000 employees.

Citigroup, the world's largest bank just a blink ago, has just announced plans to lay off over 30 times that many employees, 20 percent of the firm's workforce.

Last week, the bank liquidated a Citi investment fund that had once managed \$4.2 billion, the ninth time over recent months the bank "has had to liquidate or bail out a vehicle in its alternative investment division." The news helped drive Citi shares down to a 16-year low. The bank, worth \$180 billion a year ago, now carries just a \$20 billion market value.

Citi's catastrophic plummet, the *Wall Street Journal* intoned recently, illustrates "what happens when the market loses all

confidence in a company's ability to do, well, anything."

That's bad news for Citi CEO Vikram Pandit. He's now rumored on the way out, less than a year after taking the bank's top slot. The Citi board had held enormously high hopes for the 51-year-old Pandit. How high? To bring Pandit's smarts into the Citi fold, the bank's board shelled out \$800 million to buy the hedge fund he had started just the year before. That transaction netted Pandit \$165 million.

Then in January, a month after naming Pandit CEO, Citi's board handed him a stock incentive package worth another \$30 million. You have to keep smart people engaged, after all.

Or so holds the boardroom wisdom of Wall Street and Corporate America. And these all must be smart people, right? How do we know? They're all rich. **CT**

*Sam Pizzigati has been editor of Too Much – [www.toomuchonline.org](http://www.toomuchonline.org) – America's only newsletter devoted to challenging excessive income and wealth, ever since the publication first appeared in 1995. His latest book, Greed and Good: Understanding and Overcoming the Inequality that Limits Our Lives (Apex Press, 2004), examines just how concentrated wealth is poisoning every aspect of our contemporary lives, from our economy and politics to our health and happiness.*

**In January, a month after naming Pandit CEO, Citi's board handed him a stock incentive package worth another \$30 million. You have to keep smart people engaged, after all**

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# Blood money

Susan Rosenthal on the slow collapse of Canada's health service

**The Canadian government says it can't afford to fully fund the medical system. But it sings a different tune when business comes calling**

**A**fter years of battling penny-pinching governments to get more funding for health care, I was amazed to see those same governments fling open the treasury doors to the corporate sector.

**WHERE'S THE MONEY FOR HEALTH CARE?**

The Canadian government says it can't afford to fully fund the medical system. But it sings a different tune when business comes calling. As a result, the needs of sick people are being sacrificed to support "sick" businesses.

## **Heather's kidney stone**

Heather Caron is a 64-year-old retired teacher whose kidney is being sacrificed to the god of profit.

Thirty years ago, Heather developed a kidney stone large enough to block the flow of urine, so that her kidney became swollen and distressed. She went to the hospital, where a non-invasive attempt to remove the stone failed. Within 48 hours of being diagnosed, she had emergency surgery to remove the stone. She was kept in hospital for three weeks while she recovered. Fortunately, her kidney suffered no lasting damage.

On October 30 this year, Heather developed another stone in the same kidney. Again, the stone was blocking the flow of

urine. Again, her kidney was swollen and distressed. A CAT scan confirmed the diagnosis. And that's where the similarity ends.

This time, the blocked kidney is not treated as an emergency, requiring immediate surgery. Instead, Heather is sent home with a prescription for powerful pain-killers and told to return on November 11, at which time the doctor will try to remove the stone using a non-invasive procedure. She anxiously inquires if waiting so long will damage her kidney. The doctor confirms that it will, but tells her there are no earlier appointments.

On November 11, Heather's kidney stone became too large to be removed easily. She was scheduled for in-patient surgery in December, 40 days after her diagnosis! Not only that, Heather must find someone to transport her home the day of the surgery and take care of her at home, or her surgery will be canceled.

Heather is beyond stressed. When she explains that her previous blocked kidney was treated as an emergency, the doctors reply, "Things are different now." When she goes to a different hospital, the doctor tells her, "We can't help you any faster. We've got a line-up of people at our door for this surgery. If you're in pain, take drugs. If you develop an infection, take antibiotics. Good luck, and good bye."

Heather sits in my office shaking with fear. She feels trapped in a horrible nightmare where no one seems to care that her kidney is dying a little more each day. She wonders if she's being neglected because she's an older woman. She asks. "Do you think I'm expecting too much?" I can barely contain my rage.

### **A deficit of humanity**

Things have changed. Thirty years ago, the Canadian medical system was funded well enough to provide Heather with timely treatment. Today, cost-cutting is more important than patient care. It's true, the world economy is sinking into recession, and all governments face growing budget deficits. But that's no reason to deny people essential services.

A budget deficit is simply the difference between what governments raise in taxes and what they spend. As we have seen, these two factors can be juggled to meet political needs.

In boom times, budget surpluses are spent on tax cuts and corporate subsidies. In hard times, business is subsidized by cutting social programs. And, at all times, the war machine is amply funded. Financial deficits aren't the problem. The problem is the deficit of humanity that favors profits over people.

The billions of dollars being lavished on banks and other corporations is blood money. It's available only because people like Heather are being robbed of their kidneys, their health and their lives.

In Canada, the mainstream media, the medical profession and the government are colluding to deny the crisis in the medical system, or using it to promote more privatization and more rationing.

When I tell Heather's story, some people are outraged (as I was). However, others tell me that she's "lucky" to "only" have to wait 40 days instead of three months!

Heather wonders if she's crazy to protest what others accept as "normal." If

she hadn't had such a different experience 30 years ago, she might also accept this shameful neglect. How did we fall so far?

The unrelenting cuts to the medical system and the widespread acceptance of rationing remind me of the story of the frog in the pot of cool water on the stove.

At first the frog feels fine. As the water slowly heats, he feels a little sleepy, but he is not alarmed. As the water continues to heat, the frog falls asleep and doesn't notice that he's cooked for dinner.

What's the solution?

Appealing to the capitalists is useless. They don't have the same morality that we do.

To them, nothing matters more than protecting the profitability of the capitalist system. When they need medical care, they have no problem getting the best service available.

Unlike capitalists, health workers and patients share a common interest. However, health workers are denied the power to decide what services are funded. We are caught between increasingly desperate patients on one side and cost-cutting bureaucrats on the other. While we work to relieve human misery, our social role demands that we function within the system as it is. That's why most health workers go along with rationing. But it doesn't have to be that way.

Health workers have a choice. We can become as heartless as the system we serve, or we can organize and fight for patients' rights.

The people in power have created this crisis with THEIR short-sighted greed for profit. Now they're demanding that WE sacrifice our health, our lives, our homes, our jobs and our futures to bail them out. Let them clean up their own mess! People's needs must come first. There's no deficit of people willing to work to provide for one another. If capitalism cannot make human welfare a priority, then we need to organize a social system that can.

**CT**

**Thirty years ago, the Canadian medical system was funded well enough to provide Heather with timely treatment. Today, cost-cutting is more important than patient care**

**Susan Rosenthal** is the author of *Striking Flint* (1996), *Power and Powerlessness* (2006) and *Class, Health and Health Care* (2008). She is a founding member of *International Health Workers for People Over Profit*. Her website is [www.susanrosenthal.com](http://www.susanrosenthal.com)

# Clearing up the mess

John Maynard Keynes had the answer to the crisis we're facing; but it was blocked and then forgotten, writes **George Monbiot**

**International debt wrecks people's development, trashes the environment and threatens the global system with periodic crises**

Poor old Lord Keynes. The world's press has just been blackening his name. Not intentionally: most of the dunderheads reporting the G20 summit which took place in mid-November really do believe that he proposed and founded the International Monetary Fund. It's one of those stories that passes unchecked from one journalist to another.

The truth is more interesting. At the Bretton Woods conference in 1944, John Maynard Keynes put forward a much better idea. After it was thrown out, Geoffrey Crowther – then the editor of the *Economist* magazine – warned that “Lord Keynes was right ... the world will bitterly regret the fact that his arguments were rejected.”<sup>1</sup> But the world does not regret it, for almost everyone – the *Economist* included – has forgotten what he proposed.

One of the reasons for financial crises is the imbalance of trade between nations. Countries accumulate debt partly as a result of sustaining a trade deficit. They can easily become trapped in a vicious spiral: the bigger their debt, the harder it is to generate a trade surplus. International debt wrecks people's development, trashes the environment and threatens the global system with periodic crises.

As Keynes recognised, there is not much that the debtor nations can do. Only the countries which maintain a trade surplus

have real agency, so it is they who must be obliged to change their policies. His solution was an ingenious system for persuading the creditor nations to spend their surplus money back into the economies of the debtor nations. He proposed a global bank, which he called the International Clearing Union. The bank would issue its own currency – the bancor – which was exchangeable with national currencies at fixed rates of exchange. The bancor would become the unit of account between nations, which means it would be used to measure a country's trade deficit or trade surplus<sup>2,3,4</sup>.

## **Overdraft facility**

Every country would have an overdraft facility in its bancor account at the International Clearing Union, equivalent to half the average value of its trade over the past five years. To make the system work, the members of the Union would need a powerful incentive to clear their bancor accounts by the end of the year: to end up with neither a trade deficit nor a trade surplus. But what would the incentive be?

Keynes proposed that any country racking up a large trade deficit (equating to more than half of its bancor overdraft allowance) would be charged interest on its account. It would also be obliged to reduce the value of its currency and to prevent the export of capital. But – and this was



the key to his system – he insisted that the nations with a trade surplus would be subject to similar pressures. Any country with a balance of payments surplus which was more than half the size of its overdraft facility would be charged interest, at 10%\*. It would also be obliged to increase the value of its currency and to permit the export of capital. If by the end of the year its credit balance exceeded the total value of its permitted overdraft, the surplus would be confiscated. The nations with a surplus would have a powerful incentive to get rid of it. In doing so, they would automatically clear other nations' deficits.

When Keynes began to explain his idea, in papers published in 1942 and 1943, it detonated in the minds of all who read it. The British economist Lionel Robbins reported that “it would be difficult to exaggerate the electrifying effect on thought throughout the whole relevant apparatus of government . . . nothing so imaginative and so ambitious had ever been discussed”<sup>5</sup>. Economists all over the world saw that Keynes had cracked it. As the Allies prepared for the Bretton Woods conference, Britain adopted Keynes's solution as its official negotiating position.

### **One country said No**

But there was one country – at the time the world's biggest creditor – in which his proposal was less welcome. The head of the US delegation at Bretton Woods, Harry Dexter White, responded to Lord Keynes's idea thus: “We have been perfectly adamant on that point. We have taken the position of absolutely no”<sup>6</sup>. Instead he proposed an International Stabilisation Fund, which would place the entire burden of maintaining the balance of trade on the deficit nations. It would place no limits on the surplus that successful exporters could accumulate. He also suggested an International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which would provide capital for economic reconstruction after the war. White, backed by the financial clout of the US Treasury,

prevailed. The International Stabilisation Fund became the International Monetary Fund. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development remains the principal lending arm of the World Bank.

The consequences, especially for the poorest indebted countries, have been catastrophic. Acting on behalf of the rich world, imposing conditions which no free country would tolerate, the IMF has bled them dry. As Joseph Stiglitz has shown, the Fund compounds existing economic crises and creates crises where none existed before. It has destabilised exchange rates, exacerbated balance of payments problems, forced countries into debt and recession, wrecked public services and destroyed the jobs and incomes of tens of millions of people<sup>7</sup>.

The countries the Fund instructs must place the control of inflation ahead of other economic objectives; immediately remove their barriers to trade and the flow of capital; liberalise their banking systems; reduce government spending on everything except debt repayments; and privatise the assets which can be sold to foreign investors. These happen to be the policies which best suit predatory financial speculators<sup>8</sup>. They have exacerbated almost every crisis the IMF has attempted to solve.

You might imagine that the United States, which since 1944 has turned from the world's biggest creditor to the world's biggest debtor, would have cause to regret the blinkered position it took at Bretton Woods. But Harry Dexter White ensured that the US could never lose. He awarded it special veto powers over any major decision made by the IMF or the World Bank, which means that it will never be subject to the Fund's unwelcome demands. The IMF insists that the foreign exchange reserves maintained by other nations are held in the form of dollars. This is one of the reasons why the US economy doesn't collapse, no matter how much debt it accumulates<sup>9,10</sup>.

In November, the leaders of the G20 nations admitted that “the Bretton Woods Institutions must be comprehensively re-

**The IMF insists that the foreign exchange reserves maintained by other nations are held in the form of dollars. This is one of the reasons why the US economy doesn't collapse, no matter how much debt it accumulates**

**As the global financial crisis deepens, the rich nations will be forced to recognise that their problems cannot be solved by tinkering with a system that is constitutionally destined to fail**

formed.”<sup>11</sup> But the only concrete suggestions they made were that the IMF should be given more money and that poorer nations “should have greater voice and representation.” We’ve already seen what this means: a tiny increase in their voting power which does nothing to challenge the rich countries’ control of the Fund, let alone the US veto<sup>12</sup>. Is this the best they can do? No. As the global financial crisis deepens, the rich nations will be forced to recognise that their problems cannot be solved by tinkering with a system that is constitutionally destined to fail. But to understand why the world economy keeps running into trouble, they first need to understand what was lost in 1944.

**CT**

*\*Erratum: Professor Tony Thirlwall, an expert on this subject, writes to tell me that “The proposed interest rate on credit and debit balances was 1% if the balance was more than 25% of quota and a further 1% if the balance went above 50% of quota.”*

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

**Notes**

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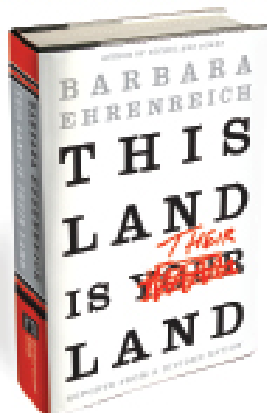
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# South Africa: The liberation's betrayal

**John Pllger** describes the social and economic catastrophe that replaced the ANC's promise to end the poverty of the majority

**T**he recent political rupture in South Africa is being presented in the outside world as the personal tragedy and humiliation of one man, Thabo Mbeki. It is reminiscent of the beatification of Nelson Mandela at the death of apartheid. This is not to diminish the power of personalities, but their importance is often as a distraction from the historical forces they serve and manage. Frantz Fanon had this in mind when, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, he described the “historic mission” of much of Africa’s post-colonial ruling class as “that of intermediary [whose] mission has nothing to do with transforming the nation: it consists, prosaically, of being the transmission line between the nation and capitalism, rampant though camouflaged.”

Mbeki’s fall and the collapse of Wall Street are concurrent and related events, as they were predictable. Glimpse back to 1985 when the Johannesburg stock market crashed and the apartheid regime defaulted on its mounting debt, and the chieftains of South African capital took fright. In September that year a group led by Gavin Relly, chairman of the Anglo American Corporation, met Oliver Tambo, the ANC president, and other resistance officials in Zambia. Their urgent message was that a “transition” from apartheid to a black-governed liberal democracy was possible only

if “order” and “stability” were guaranteed. These were euphemisms for a “free market” state where social justice would not be a priority.

Secret meetings between the ANC and prominent members of the Afrikaner elite followed at a stately home, Mells Park House, in England. The prime movers were those who had underpinned and profited from apartheid – such as the British mining giant, Consolidated Goldfields, which picked up the bill for the vintage wines and malt whisky scooped around the fireplace at Mells Park House. Their aim was that of the Pretoria regime – to split the ANC between the mostly exiled “moderates” they could “do business with” (Tambo, Mbeki and Mandela) and the majority who made up the those resisting in the townships known as the UDF.

The matter was urgent. When FW de Klerk came to power in 1989, capital was haemorrhaging at such a rate that the country’s foreign reserves would barely cover five weeks of imports. Declassified files I have seen in Washington leave little doubt that Dj28

e Klerk was on notice to rescue capitalism in South Africa. He could not achieve this without a compliant ANC.

Nelson Mandela was critical to this. Having backed the ANC’s pledge to take over the mines and other monopoly in-

**Glimpse back to 1985 when the Johannesburg stock market crashed and the apartheid regime defaulted on its mounting debt, and the chieftains of South African capital took fright**

**Thabo Mbeki's downfall is no more than the downfall of a failed economic system that enriched the few and dumped the poor.**

dustries – “a change or modification of our views in this regard is inconceivable” – Mandela spoke with a different voice on his first triumphant travels abroad. “The ANC,” he said in New York, “will reintroduce the market to South Africa”. The deal, in effect, was that whites would retain economic control in exchange for black majority rule: the “crown of political power” for the “jewel of the South African economy”, as Ali Mazrui put it.

When, in 1997, I told Mbeki how a black businessman had described himself as “the ham in a white sandwich”, he laughed agreement, calling it the “historic compromise”, which others were called it a betrayal. However, it was De Klerk who was more to the point. I put it to him that he and his fellow whites had got what they wanted and that for the majority, the poverty had not changed. “Isn’t that the continuation of apartheid by other means?” I asked. Smiling through a cloud of cigarette smoke, he replied, “You must understand, we’ve achieved a broad consensus on many things now.”

Thabo Mbeki’s downfall is no more than the downfall of a failed economic system that enriched the few and dumped the poor. The ANC “neo liberals” seemed at times ashamed that South Africa was, in so many ways, a third world country. “We seek to establish,” said Trevor Manuel, “an environment in which winners flourish.” Boasting of a deficit so low it had fallen to the level of European economies, he and his fellow “moderates” turned away from the public economy the majority of South Africans desperately wanted and needed. They inhaled the hot air of corporate-speak. They listened to the World Bank and the IMF; and soon they were being invited to the top table at the Davos Economic Forum and to G-8 meetings, where their “macro-economic achievements” were lauded as a model. In 2001, George Soros put it rather more bluntly. “South Africa,” he said, “is now in the hands of international capital.”

Public services fell in behind privatisa-

tion, and low inflation presided over low wages and high unemployment, known as “labour flexibility”. According to the ANC, the wealth generated by a new black business class would “trickle down”. The opposite happened. Known sardonically as the wabenzi because their vehicle of choice was a silver Mercedes Benz, black capitalists proved they could be every bit as ruthless as their former white masters in labour relations, cronyism and the pursuit of profit. Hundreds of thousands of jobs were lost in mergers and “restructuring” and ordinary people retreated to the “informal economy”. Between 1995 and 2000, the majority of South Africans fell deeper into poverty. When the gap between wealthy whites and newly enriched blacks began to close, the gulf between the black “middle class” and the majority widened as never before.

In 1996, the office of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was quietly closed down, marking the end of the ANC’s “solemn pledge” and “unbreakable promise” to put the majority first. Two years later, the United Nations Development Programme described the replacement, GEAR, as basically “no different” from the economic strategy of the apartheid regime in the 1980s.

This seemed surreal. Was South Africa a country of Harvard-trained technocrats breaking open the bubbly at the latest credit rating from Duff & Phelps in New York? Or was it a country of deeply impoverished men, woman and children without clean water and sanitation, whose infinite resource was being repressed and wasted, yet again? The questions were an embarrassment as the ANC government endorsed the apartheid regime’s agreement to join the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which effectively surrendered economic independence, repaid the \$25 billion of apartheid-era inherited foreign debt. Incredibly, Manuel even allowed South Africa’s biggest companies to flee their financial home and set up in London.

Certainly, Thabo Mbeki speeded his own political demise with his strange strictures on HIV/Aids, his famous aloofness and isolation and the corrupt arms deals that never seemed to go away.

It was the premeditated ANC economic and social catastrophe that saw him off. For further proof, look to the United States today and the smoking ruin of the “neo liberalism” model so cherished by the ANC’s leaders. And beware those successors of Mbeki now claiming that, unlike him, they

have the people’s interests at heart as they continue the same divisive policies. South Africa deserves better. **CT**

The War on Democracy, directed by **John Pilger & Chris Martin**, won Best Documentary at the prestigious One World Media Awards in London on 12 June 2008. It beat a field that included the documentary Oscar winner, Taxi to the Dark Side. This essay was originally published in the Mail & Guardian, Johannesburg

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# Starving for change

If Barack Obama does not radically redirect the nation's resources to assist the working class and the poor, the USA will become a third-world country, writes **Chris Hedges**

**The swelling numbers waiting outside homeless shelters and food pantries around the country, many of them elderly or single women with children, have grown by at least 30 percent since the summer**

**E**lba Figueroa worked as a nurse's aide until she got Parkinson's disease. She lost her job. She lost her health care. She receives \$703 a month in government assistance. Her rent alone costs \$750. And so she borrows money from friends and neighbors every month to stay in her apartment. She laboriously negotiates her wheelchair up and down steps and along the frigid sidewalks of Trenton, N.J., to get to soup kitchens and food pantries to eat.

"Food prices have gone up," the 47-year-old Figueroa said, waiting to get inside the food pantry run by the Crisis Ministry of Princeton and Trenton. "I don't have any money. I run out of things to eat. I worked until I physically could not work anymore. Now I live like this."

The pantry, which occupies a dilapidated three-story art deco building in Old Trenton, one of the poorest sections of the city, is one of about two dozen charities that struggle to provide shelter and food to the poor. Those who qualify for assistance are permitted to come once a month and push a shopping cart in a U shape around the first floor where, clutching a piece of paper with allotted points, they can stock up on items using the pantry's point system according to the number of people in a household. The shelves of the pantry hold bags of rice, jars of peanut butter, maca-

roni and cheese and cans of beets, corn and peas. Two refrigerated cases hold eggs, chickens, fresh carrots and beef hot dogs. "All Fresh Produce 2 pounds = 1 point," a sign on the glass door of the refrigerated unit reads. Another reads: "1 Dozen EGGS equal 3 protein points. Limit of 1 dozen per household."

The swelling numbers waiting outside homeless shelters and food pantries around the country, many of them elderly or single women with children, have grown by at least 30 percent since the summer. General welfare recipients receive \$140 a month in cash and another \$140 in food stamps. This is all many in Trenton and other impoverished areas have to live on.

Trenton, a former manufacturing center that has a 20 percent unemployment rate and a median income of \$33,000, is a window into our current unraveling. The financial meltdown is plunging the working class and the poor into levels of destitution unseen since the Depression. And as the government squanders taxpayer money in fruitless schemes to prop up insolvent banks and investment houses, citizens are callously thrown onto the street without work, a place to live or enough food.

The statistics are already grim. Our banking and investment system, holding perhaps \$2 trillion in worthless assets, cannot be saved, even with the \$700 bil-

lion of taxpayer money recklessly thrown into its financial black hole. Our decline is irrevocable. The number of private sector jobs has dropped for the past 10 months and at least a quarter of all businesses say they plan to cut more jobs over the next year. The nation's largest banks, including Citigroup, face collapse. Retail sales fell in October by the largest monthly drop on record. Auto companies are on the edge of bankruptcy. The official unemployment figures, which duplicitously mask real unemployment that is probably now at least 10 percent nationwide, are up to 6.1 percent and headed higher. We have lost 1.2 million jobs since January. Young men of color have 50 percent unemployment rates in cities such as Trenton. Twelve million houses are worth less than their mortgages and a million people will lose their homes this year in foreclosures. The current trends, if not swiftly reversed, mean that one in 33 home owners will face foreclosure.

#### **40 increase in hungriest**

There are now 36.2 million Americans who cope daily with hunger, up by more than 3 million since 2000, according to the Food Research and Action Center in Washington, D.C. The number of people in the worst-off category – the hungriest – rose by 40 percent since 2000, to nearly 12 million people.

“We are seeing people we have not seen for a long time,” said the Rev. Jarret Kerbel, director of the Crisis Ministry’s food pantry, which supplies food to 1,400 households in Trenton each month. “We are seeing people who haven’t crossed that threshold for five, six or seven years coming back. We are seeing people whose unemployment has run out and they are struggling in that gap while they reapply and, of course, we are seeing the usual unemployed.”

The Crisis Ministry, like many hard-pressed charities, is over budget and food stocks are precariously low. Donations are on the decline. There are days when soup kitchens in Trenton are shut down because

they have no food.

“We collected 170 bags of groceries from a church in Princeton and it was gone in two days,” Kerbel said. “We collected 288 bags from a Jewish center in Princeton and it was gone in three days. What you see on the shelves is pretty much what we have.”

The largesse of Congress to Wall Street bankers and investors does not extend to the growing ranks of the poor. The US Department of Agriculture’s Emergency Food Assistance Program donated \$240 million in surplus food in 2003 to food banks and other programs. Those donations fell last year to \$59 million.

States, facing dramatic budget shortfalls, are slashing social assistance programs, including Medicaid, social services and education. New Jersey’s shortfall has tripled to \$1.2 billion and could soar to \$5 billion for the next fiscal year. Tax revenue has fallen to \$211 million less than projected. States are imposing hiring freezes, canceling raises and cutting back on services big and small, from salting and plowing streets in winter to heating assistance programs. Unemployment insurance funds, especially with the proposed extension of benefits, are running out of money. Governors such as Arnold Schwarzenegger in California and David A. Paterson in New York have called special legislative sessions to deal with the crisis.

If Barack Obama continues to turn to the elites who created the mess, if he does not radically redirect the nation’s resources to assist the working class and the poor, we will become a third-world country. We will waste gargantuan amounts of money we cannot afford on our military, our national security state and bloated corporations while we damn the middle and working class to the whims, idiocy and greed of an entrenched, corporate oligarchy. Obama’s appointments of Timothy Geithner as treasury secretary and Lawrence Summers as director of the National Economic Council are ominous signals that these elites remain entrenched.

Dolores Williams, 57, sat in the cramped

**We will waste gargantuan amounts of money we cannot afford on our military, our national security state and bloated corporations while we damn the middle and working class to the whims, idiocy and greed of an entrenched, corporate oligarchy**

While our nation crumbles, physically and morally, while our empire implodes, while our economy tanks, the bankrupt elites who got us here play the merry-go-round game of power in Washington

waiting room at the Crisis Ministry clutching a numbered card, waiting for it to be called. She has lived in a low-income apartment block known as The Kingsbury for a year. Two residents, she said, recently jumped to their deaths from the 19th floor. She had a job at Sam's Club but lost it. No one, she says, is hiring. She is desperate.

She handed me a copy of the *Trentonian*, a local paper. The headline on the front page read: "Gangster Slammed for Bicycle Drive-By." It was the story of the conviction of a man for a fatal drive-by shooting from a bicycle. The paper, as I flipped through it, was filled with stories like these, the result of social, economic and moral collapse. Poverty breeds more than hunger. It destroys communities. There was a report about a 56-year-old woman who was robbed and pistol-whipped in the middle of the afternoon. There was an article about the plight of four children whose two parents had been shot and seriously wounded. "Libraries OK Now, but Future Is Murky" a headline read. Another announced: "Still No Arrests in Hooker Slayings."

"It is like this every day," Williams said.

So while our nation crumbles, physically and morally, while our empire implodes, while our economy tanks, the bankrupt

elites who got us here play the merry-go-round game of power in Washington. They will continue to oversee our demise, including the obscene drain of our military and security budget, which now accounts for half of all discretionary spending. Pentagon officials have reportedly asked the Obama transition team for \$581 billion, an increase of \$67 billion. This increase does not, of course, include the \$3 trillion for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. We will pay these loans later.

Banks, automotive companies and investment firms, all sinking under the weight of their own incompetence and greed, head to Washington, usually in private jets, to engage in the largest looting of the treasury in American history. And Congress doles out our money without oversight in the greatest transference of wealth upwards in modern times.

As this pitiful march of folly rolls forward, children in Trenton and across America go to bed hungry. **CT**

*Chris Hedges, a Pulitzer prize-winning reporter, is a Senior Fellow at the Nation Institute. His latest book is Collateral Damage: America's War Against Iraqi Civilians*

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# Smarter cars, not stupid decisions

**William John Cox** has a three-point plan for saving the US auto industry, beginning with . . . nationalization

**W**hen the Big Three CEOs recently descended on Washington in their fancy corporate jets with inflated egos and high hopes for a juicy piece of the government's \$8.6 trillion corporate welfare pie, they were sent home hungry to do their homework and to write an essay about how they plan to spend bailout funds.

Undoubtedly, when they return the executives will each have a business plan in hand, and Congress *will* give them \$25 billion of taxpayer funds to gamble with. Equally without doubt, the money will be wasted, they will not learn from their mistakes, and they will be back again, and again, and again.

The Big Three have a track record of making really stupid decisions. Manufacturers have recklessly spent thousands of dollars per vehicle on advertising to convince drivers that they really want big gas-guzzling cars and trucks instead of the smaller fuel-efficient vehicles they really need. The car companies have foolishly peddled financing and leasing deals far beyond the financial means of their buyers, and they have vigorously opposed realistic fuel economy standards.

Overall, new car sales are down 32 percent this year and October was the worst sales month since World War II. Ford lost

\$3.3 billion and General Motors lost \$4.2 billion in the third quarter, and they are quickly burning through their cash reserves. Chrysler has not reported its most recent losses, but its sales are down 31 percent and its estimated losses were \$1.28 billion in the first half of 2008.

With sales grinding to a halt and their credit ratings plummeting, the Big Three cannot borrow sufficient funds in the credit markets to survive. Like drunks on a freeway, they are racing down the fast lane without a seat belt, holding a bottle in one hand and flipping off the public with the other, daring everyone else to stop them before they crash.

The auto companies have corporate partners, manufacturing facilities and distributors in all other developed nations. Their business dealings are so entangled with foreign economies that their failure would have worldwide repercussions.

Bankruptcy would likely force a liquidation of assets rather than a judicially-supervised reorganization and would, at best, result in the destruction of the automobile unions and employees' retirement and healthcare benefit plans. However, every American worker and taxpayer would pay the price.

Elimination of the American automobile industry would send shock waves through the economy, causing the failure of thou-

**Manufacturers have recklessly spent thousands of dollars per vehicle on advertising to convince drivers that they really want big gas-guzzling cars and trucks instead of the smaller fuel-efficient vehicles they really need**

**Instead of making one of the most wrongheaded and stupid decisions in the history of financing, shouldn't Congress simply nationalize the automobile industry for the benefit of the American public?**

sands of automobile parts suppliers and car dealerships. Auto parts supply companies are among the top industrial employers in 19 states, and one out of every ten jobs in America is supported, in one way or another, by the automobile industry. It is estimated that the failure of General Motors alone could result in the loss of more than 15 million jobs.

Failure of the Big Three would only benefit foreign corporations who would swoop in to buy up the surplus manufacturing capacity, such as computerized robots, at bargain basement prices, and the balance of payments deficit would soar beyond calculation in the absence of domestic competition.

President-elect Obama opposes a “blank check” for the industry and says that “we should help the auto industry, but what we should expect is that ... any help that we provide is designed to assure a long-term, sustainable auto industry and not just kicking the can down the road.”

The Democratic majority in Congress appears ready to provide a \$25 billion Emergency Bridge Loan to the auto makers by either tapping into the Wall Street Bail-out funds or by redirecting money already approved for retooling old factories to produce more fuel-efficient vehicles. Companies receiving loans would have to give an equity stake to the government and would be charged 5% interest for the first five years and 9% thereafter. Companies could not pay dividends to common stockholders and would have to agree to a \$250,000 annual pay cap for executives.

If the Emergency Bridge Loan is the best Congress can come up, the can *will* just be “kicked down the road” – but not very far. General Motors burned \$6.9 billion, Ford burned \$7.7 billion, and Chrysler burned \$3 billion in just the third quarter of 2008. Simple arithmetic tells us that \$25 billion will not even get them as far as July 2009 before the Big Three CEOs will return with their extortionary threats against the economy and still without a clue.

The American automobile industry can be saved; however salvation requires America's elected representatives, including its new president, to get off their knees and to begin to think outside of the box. The industry has to be forced to make smarter cars instead of stupid decisions for its own good and for the benefit of everyone.

#### **Phase One – Nationalization**

As of the closing bell at the NYSE on Friday, November 28, the market capitalization (share price times number of outstanding shares) value of Ford was \$6.43 billion; General Motors was only worth \$3.2 billion and Chrysler was essentially worthless. In other words, the Big Three can be purchased *entirely* for less than half of what they are trying to borrow.

If the American people are going to invest \$25 billion in the Big Three, shouldn't they get something more than an “equity stake?” Why not take the whole shebang and save some money at the same time?

Instead of making one of the most wrongheaded and stupid decisions in the history of financing, shouldn't Congress simply nationalize the automobile industry for the benefit of the American public? Anything less is a fraud on the taxpayers executed by those in a position of trust.

There is precedent for the nationalization of an entire industry. As America's railroads began to fail, Congress created Amtrak in 1971 as a quasi-governmental corporation to nationalize rail passenger service. Although it has never been profitable, Amtrak continues to provide rail passenger service under conditions where it would not be available otherwise.

When the bankrupt Penn Central Railroad threatened in 1973 to end all operations unless it was provided with government aid, Congress ultimately nationalized Penn Central and a number of other freight lines into the Consolidated Rail Corporation. The story of “Conrail” has an even happier ending than Amtrak, in that it ultimately became profitable and was re-

privatized in 1987.

Nationalization could force the Big Three to produce safer, more practical and more fuel efficient vehicles that could compete with foreign imports. Bankruptcy could be avoided, the union rights of workers could be protected, and employees' health and retirement plans could be salvaged.

Each of the nationalized corporations could have its own board of directors and officers; however, policy for the entire industry should be developed by a National Board of Trustees. The right to appoint trustees, directors and officers could be shared by Congress and the president.

### Phase Two – Standardization

Conversion to the production of energy efficient vehicles cannot be accomplished immediately; however, there are some steps that could be quickly taken by a National Board of Trustees to restore consumer faith in American products and to provide financing liquidity for dealers and consumers.

The General Motors Acceptance Corporation, Ford Motor Credit Company and Chrysler Financial should be consolidated into a single entity initially capitalized by the government to make low interest purchase money loans to consumers and dealers. The creation and securitization of auto loans should be strictly regulated and audited to ensure solvency as well as profits.

The consolidated automobile credit company should also underwrite a 10-year comprehensive bumper to bumper warranty on every vehicle sold by American manufacturers.

The Board of Trustees should impose manufacturing standardization of vehicles and accessories wherever possible to improve safety and to reduce costs. Patents on new technology should be held by the Board and licensed to American automobile corporations without cost.

All vehicles should be manufactured around several standard "safety-cage" designs to ensure survivability in most acci-

idents. There is no reason why race car drivers are able to walk away from 250 mph collisions and the members of the motoring public are disabled and die in low-speed accidents.

There could be common designs for two-, four-, and six-seat passenger and commercial vehicles and trucks, and individual companies should be encouraged to innovate in exterior design, interiors and accessories.

Currently, each manufacturer of all-electric and hybrid vehicles has to independently design and manufacture the large batteries that provide electric power to drive trains. These batteries are expensive to design and produce and can pose environmental disposal hazards at the end of their lifetimes.

Although Toyota has sold a million Prius hybrids, it is reportedly still losing money on each one because of the initial (almost \$5,000) cost of the battery pack. Toyota provides an eight-year, 100,000 mile warranty on the batteries, and each of the 38 modules can be replaced individually at a cost of \$138. Toyota offers a \$200 bounty to ensure that all batteries are returned to the company, and it recycles every part of the battery, including the precious metals, plastic, plates, steel case and wiring.

State-of-the-art electric power batteries are currently using nickel metal hydride technology and are designed to last for the lifetime of the cars. Research is now focused on the next generation of lithium ion batteries to reduce costs and to increase battery power. Rechargeable lithium ion batteries may pose even less of an environmental hazard than current technology.

The production of a set of standardized, interchangeable batteries for the different basic automobile designs would allow manufacturing savings for all vehicles. For example, two-passenger cars would not require the same battery power as four- and six-passenger vehicles. Moreover, the batteries should be designed for easy replacement by service stations allowing the swap-

**Currently, each manufacturer of all-electric and hybrid vehicles has to independently design and manufacture the large batteries that provide electric power to drive trains. These batteries are expensive to design and produce and can pose environmental disposal hazards at the end of their lifetimes**

**Americans should be able to travel for free throughout the United States as a matter of national privilege. Workers could get to their jobs without having to slave an hour each day just to pay for getting there**

ping of recharged batteries in all-electric vehicles to extend their range of travel.

Moreover, the outdated automobile lead-acid battery should be replaced entirely with a standard, less environmentally threatening modern battery for all vehicles. America is currently dumping 40,000 metric tons of lead in its landfills every year.

Finally, the Board of Trustees should endorse national tailpipe emission standards supportive of the needs of the most polluted states. In December 2007, the Bush administration's Environmental Protection Agency denied California's request to set higher emission standards than that required by the federal government. Every state should be fully supported in its effort to improve its own air quality.

### **Phase Three – Future Transportation**

President-elect Obama has called on the country to build “wind farms and solar panels, fuel-efficient cars and the alternative energy technologies that can free us from our dependence on foreign oil and keep our economy competitive in the years ahead.” He has said, “We'll put people back to work rebuilding our crumbling roads and bridges, modernizing schools that are failing our children and building wind farms and solar panels, fuel-efficient cars and the alternative energy technologies that can free us from our dependence on foreign oil and keep our economy competitive in the years ahead.”

This all sounds good, but how does Obama plan to make all of this happen? By 2025, the US will have to import three-quarters of its expected thirty million barrels per day of consumption. Two of every three barrels of oil used in the US is burned by cars and trucks and that basic fact must be the central focus of any American transportation policy.

The final phase of forcing the American automobile industry to meet future transportation needs should oversee the improvement of the Interstate Highway System and most major streets and highways

in America to provide a constant source of electromagnetic energy sufficient to power a standard automobile anywhere in America at no cost to the operator.

The technology exists to design triple-hybrid cars to operate primarily on electromagnetic energy supplied by a mutual inductance interface embedded under the surface of all highways and freeways. In addition, they can be equipped with small fuel efficient internal combustion engines to supplement rechargeable batteries for trips on local streets and byways.

Americans should be able to travel for free throughout the United States as a matter of national privilege. Workers could get to their jobs without having to slave an hour each day just to pay for getting there. Everyone would have more money to spend on vacations, and would be able to tour the country, see the grand sights, and visit with friends and relatives along the way.

Space-based solar technology can provide an inexhaustible, safe, pollution free supply of energy and is a far more logical solution than petroleum, ethanol or nuclear-fueled hydrogen systems. Satellites in orbit around the Earth and/or collectors on the moon's surface can be engineered to convert the sun's radiant energy into electricity 24 hours a day, which can be safely transmitted by microwave beams to receiving antennas on Earth.

Space solar power is not a new idea. NASA and the Department of Energy have been studying the issue for the past 30 years and have found it to be technically feasible. However, given the domination of the Bush administration by the oil industry, no research and development has been done on space solar power since 2001.

If America initially dedicated space solar power to energize its national highways, the US could begin to restrict the use of its remaining fossil fuels to the manufacturing of synthetic materials and purposes other than energy. Ultimately, the entire national economy could be powered by space solar power and other renewable sources of en-

ergy, such as surface solar and wind power systems.

Although there are substantial costs associated with the development of space solar power, it makes far more sense to spend the space exploration budget on developing an efficient and reliable power supply for the future, than upon stupid and ineffective missile defense systems. On the other hand, the development of space solar power would solve one of the last major stumbling blocks to space exploration – reducing the cost of moving material from Earth to orbit.

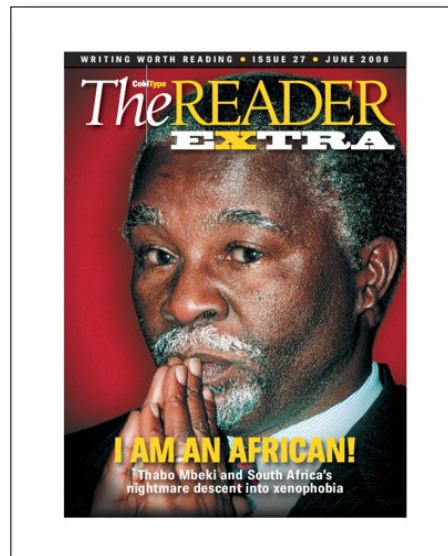
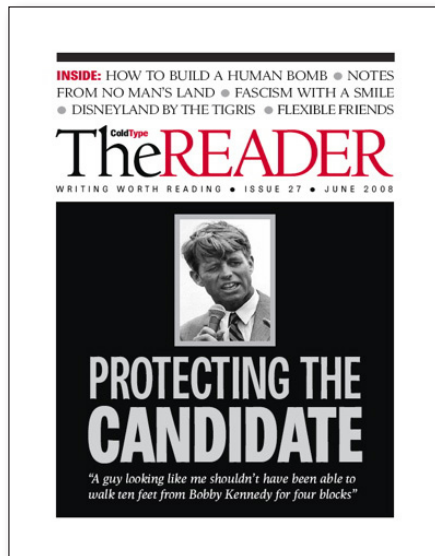
With funding for the space shuttle ending in 2012 and for the space station in 2017, America must decide upon a realistic policy for space exploration, or else it will be left in the dust by other nations, such as Japan,

China, and the European Union, who are rapidly developing futuristic space projects. The first nation that captures and effectively makes use of space solar energy to provide low-cost transportation will dominate the world economy for generations to come and will become a much healthier and far more secure society. **CT**

*William John Cox is a retired supervising prosecutor for the State Bar of California. As a police officer he wrote the Policy Manual of the Los Angeles Police Department and the Role of the Police in America for a national advisory commission. He is author of You're Not Stupid! Get the Truth: A Brief on the Bush Presidency, and is currently working on a fact-based fictional political philosophy*

**The development of space solar power would solve one of the last major stumbling blocks to space exploration – reducing the cost of moving material from Earth to orbit**

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# Afghanistan: Another untold story

**Michael Parenti** says it would be a good idea if Barack Obama took a history lesson before sending more troops to Afghanistan

**The Taraki government proceeded to legalize labor unions, and set up a minimum wage, a progressive income tax, a literacy campaign, and programs that gave ordinary people greater access to health care, housing, and public sanitation**

**B**arack Obama is on record as advocating a military escalation in Afghanistan. Before sinking any deeper into that quagmire, we might do well to learn something about recent Afghan history and the role played by the United States.

Less than a month after the 11 September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, US leaders began an all-out aerial assault upon Afghanistan, the country purportedly harboring Osama bin Laden and his al Qaeda terrorist organization. More than twenty years earlier, in 1980, the United States intervened to stop a Soviet “invasion” of that country. Even some leading progressive writers, who normally take a more critical view of US policy abroad, treated the US intervention against the Soviet-supported government as “a good thing.” The actual story is not such a good thing.

## **Some Real History**

Since feudal times the landholding system in Afghanistan had remained unchanged, with more than 75 percent of the land owned by big landlords who comprised only 3 percent of the rural population. In the mid-1960s, democratic revolutionary elements coalesced to form the People’s Democratic Party (PDP). In 1973, the king was deposed, but the government that

replaced him proved to be autocratic, corrupt, and unpopular. It in turn was forced out in 1978 after a massive demonstration in front of the presidential palace, and after the army intervened on the side of the demonstrators.

The military officers who took charge invited the PDP to form a new government under the leadership of Noor Mohammed Taraki, a poet and novelist. This is how a Marxist-led coalition of national democratic forces came into office. “It was a totally indigenous happening. Not even the CIA blamed the USSR for it,” writes John Ryan, a retired professor at the University of Winnipeg, who was conducting an agricultural research project in Afghanistan at about that time.

The Taraki government proceeded to legalize labor unions, and set up a minimum wage, a progressive income tax, a literacy campaign, and programs that gave ordinary people greater access to health care, housing, and public sanitation. Fledgling peasant cooperatives were started and price reductions on some key foods were imposed.

The government also continued a campaign begun by the king to emancipate women from their age-old tribal bondage. It provided public education for girls and for the children of various tribes.

A report in the San Francisco Chronicle

(17 November 2001) noted that under the Taraki regime Kabul had been “a cosmopolitan city. Artists and hippies flocked to the capital. Women studied agriculture, engineering and business at the city’s university. Afghan women held government jobs – in the 1980s, there were seven female members of parliament. Women drove cars, traveled and went on dates. Fifty percent of university students were women.”

The Taraki government moved to eradicate the cultivation of opium poppy. Until then Afghanistan had been producing more than 70 percent of the opium needed for the world’s heroin supply. The government also abolished all debts owed by farmers, and began developing a major land reform program. Ryan believes that it was a “genuinely popular government and people looked forward to the future with great hope.”

But serious opposition arose from several quarters. The feudal landlords opposed the land reform program that infringed on their holdings. And tribesmen and fundamentalist mullahs vehemently opposed the government’s dedication to gender equality and the education of women and children.

Because of its egalitarian and collectivist economic policies the Taraki government also incurred the opposition of the US national security state. Almost immediately after the PDP coalition came to power, the CIA, assisted by Saudi and Pakistani military, launched a large scale intervention into Afghanistan on the side of the ousted feudal lords, reactionary tribal chieftains, mullahs, and opium traffickers.

A top official within the Taraki government was Hafizulla Amin, believed by many to have been recruited by the CIA during the several years he spent in the United States as a student. In September 1979, Amin seized state power in an armed coup. He executed Taraki, halted the reforms, and murdered, jailed, or exiled thousands of Taraki supporters as he moved toward establishing a fundamentalist Islamic state. But within two months, he

was overthrown by PDP remnants including elements within the military.

It should be noted that all this happened before the Soviet military intervention. National security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski publicly admitted – months before Soviet troops entered the country – that the Carter administration was providing huge sums to Muslim extremists to subvert the reformist government. Part of that effort involved brutal attacks by the CIA-backed mujahideen against schools and teachers in rural areas.

In late 1979, the seriously besieged PDP government asked Moscow to send a contingent of troops to help ward off the mujahideen (Islamic guerrilla fighters) and foreign mercenaries, all recruited, financed, and well-armed by the CIA. The Soviets already had been sending aid for projects in mining, education, agriculture, and public health. Deploying troops represented a commitment of a more serious and politically dangerous sort. It took repeated requests from Kabul before Moscow agreed to intervene militarily.

#### **Jihad and Taliban, CIA style**

The Soviet intervention was a golden opportunity for the CIA to transform the tribal resistance into a holy war, an Islamic jihad to expel the godless communists from Afghanistan. Over the years the United States and Saudi Arabia expended about \$40 billion on the war in Afghanistan. The CIA and its allies recruited, supplied, and trained almost 100,000 radical mujahideen from forty Muslim countries including Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Algeria, and Afghanistan itself. Among those who answered the call was Saudi-born millionaire right-winger Osama bin Laden and his cohorts.

After a long and unsuccessful war, the Soviets evacuated the country in February 1989. It is generally thought that the PDP Marxist government collapsed immediately after the Soviet departure. Actually, it retained enough popular support to fight on

**The Soviet intervention was a golden opportunity for the CIA to transform the tribal resistance into a holy war, an Islamic jihad to expel the godless communists from Afghanistan**

**None of this was of much concern to leaders in Washington who got along famously with the Taliban. As recently as 1999, the US government was paying the entire annual salary of every single Taliban government official**

for another three years, outlasting the Soviet Union itself by a year.

Upon taking over Afghanistan, the mujahideen fell to fighting among themselves. They ravaged the cities, terrorized civilian populations, looted, staged mass executions, closed schools, raped thousands of women and girls, and reduced half of Kabul to rubble. In 2001 Amnesty International reported that the mujahideen used sexual assault as “a method of intimidating vanquished populations and rewarding soldiers.”

Ruling the country gangster-style and looking for lucrative sources of income, the tribes ordered farmers to plant opium poppy. The Pakistani ISI, a close junior partner to the CIA, set up hundreds of heroin laboratories across Afghanistan. Within two years of the CIA’s arrival, the Pakistan-Afghanistan borderland became the biggest producer of heroin in the world.

Largely created and funded by the CIA, the mujahideen mercenaries now took on a life of their own. Hundreds of them returned home to Algeria, Chechnya, Kosovo, and Kashmir to carry on terrorist attacks in Allah’s name against the purveyors of secular “corruption.”

In Afghanistan itself, by 1995 an extremist strain of Sunni Islam called the Taliban – heavily funded and advised by the ISI and the CIA and with the support of Islamic political parties in Pakistan – fought its way to power, taking over most of the country, luring many tribal chiefs into its fold with threats and bribes.

The Taliban promised to end the factional fighting and banditry that was the mujahideen trademark. Suspected murderers and spies were executed monthly in the sports stadium, and those accused of thievery had the offending hand sliced off. The Taliban condemned forms of “immorality” that included premarital sex, adultery, and homosexuality. They also outlawed all music, theater, libraries, literature, secular education, and much scientific research.

The Taliban unleashed a religious reign

of terror, imposing an even stricter interpretation of Muslim law than used by most of the Kabul clergy. All men were required to wear untrimmed beards and women had to wear the burqa which covered them from head to toe, including their faces. Persons who were slow to comply were dealt swift and severe punishment by the Ministry of Virtue. A woman who fled an abusive home or charged spousal abuse would herself be severely whipped by the theocratic authorities. Women were outlawed from social life, deprived of most forms of medical care, barred from all levels of education, and any opportunity to work outside the home. Women who were deemed “immoral” were stoned to death or buried alive.

None of this was of much concern to leaders in Washington who got along famously with the Taliban. As recently as 1999, the US government was paying the entire annual salary of every single Taliban government official. Not until October 2001, when President George W. Bush had to rally public opinion behind his bombing campaign in Afghanistan did he denounce the Taliban’s oppression of women. His wife, Laura Bush, emerged overnight as a full-blown feminist to deliver a public address detailing some of the abuses committed against Afghan women.

If anything positive can be said about the Taliban, it is that they did put a stop to much of the looting, raping, and random killings that the mujahideen had practiced on a regular basis.

In 2000 Taliban authorities also eradicated the cultivation of opium poppy throughout the areas under their control, an effort judged by the United Nations International Drug Control Program to have been nearly totally successful. With the Taliban overthrown and a Western-selected mujahideen government reinstalled in Kabul by December 2001, opium poppy production in Afghanistan increased dramatically.

The years of war that have followed have taken tens of thousands of Afghani lives. Along with those killed by Cruise missiles,



Stealth bombers, Tomahawks, daisy cutters, and land mines are those who continue to die of hunger, cold, lack of shelter, and lack of water.

### The holy crusade for oil and gas

While claiming to be fighting terrorism, US leaders have found other compelling but less advertised reasons for plunging deeper into Afghanistan. The Central Asian region is rich in oil and gas reserves. A decade before 9/11, *Time* magazine (18 March 1991) reported that US policy elites were contemplating a military presence in Central Asia. The discovery of vast oil and gas reserves in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan provided the lure, while the dissolution of the USSR removed the one major barrier against pursuing an aggressive interventionist policy in that part of the world.

US oil companies acquired the rights to some 75 percent of these new reserves. A major problem was how to transport the oil and gas from the landlocked region. US officials opposed using the Russian pipeline or the most direct route across Iran to the Persian Gulf. Instead, they and the corporate oil contractors explored a number of alternative pipeline routes, across Azerbaijan and Turkey to the Mediterranean or across China to the Pacific.

The route favored by Unocal, a US based oil company, crossed Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Indian Ocean. The intensive negotiations that Unocal entered into with the Taliban regime remained unresolved by 1998, as an Argentine company placed a competing bid for the pipeline. Bush's war against the Taliban rekindled UNOCAL's hopes for getting a major piece of the action.

Interestingly enough, neither the Clinton nor Bush administrations ever placed Afghanistan on the official State Department list of states charged with sponsoring terrorism, despite the acknowledged presence of Osama bin Laden as a guest of the Taliban government. Such a "rogue state" designation would have made it impossible

for a US oil or construction company to enter an agreement with Kabul for a pipeline to the Central Asian oil and gas fields.

In sum, well in advance of the 9/11 attacks the US government had made preparations to move against the Taliban and create a compliant regime in Kabul and a direct US military presence in Central Asia. The 9/11 attacks provided the perfect impetus, stampeding US public opinion and reluctant allies into supporting military intervention.

One might agree with John Ryan who argued that if Washington had left the Marxist Taraki government alone back in 1979, "there would have been no army of mujahideen, no Soviet intervention, no war that destroyed Afghanistan, no Osama bin Laden, and no September 11 tragedy." But it would be asking too much for Washington to leave unmolested a progressive leftist government that was organizing the social capital around collective public needs rather than private accumulation.

US intervention in Afghanistan has proven not much different from US intervention in Cambodia, Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Nicaragua, Grenada, Panama, and elsewhere. It had the same intent of preventing egalitarian social change, and the same effect of overthrowing an economically reformist government. In all these instances, the intervention brought retrograde elements into ascendance, left the economy in ruins, and pitilessly laid waste to many innocent lives.

The war against Afghanistan, a battered impoverished country, continues to be portrayed in US official circles as a gallant crusade against terrorism. If it ever was that, it also has been a means to other things: destroying a leftist revolutionary social order, gaining profitable control of one of the last vast untapped reserves of the earth's dwindling fossil fuel supply, and planting US bases and US military power into still another region of the world.

In the face of all this Obama's call for "change" rings hollow. **CT**

**Neither the Clinton nor Bush administrations ever placed Afghanistan on the official State Department list of states charged with sponsoring terrorism, despite the acknowledged presence of Osama bin Laden as a guest of the Taliban government**

**Michael Parenti's recent books are** *Contrary Notions: The Michael Parenti Reader* and *the forthcoming God and His Demons*. For further information, visit [www.michaelparenti.org](http://www.michaelparenti.org)

# Operation Enduring Disaster

Giving sweets to villages ravaged by US bombs is not the answer to Afghanistan's problems, says **Tariq Ali**

**It has, by now, become obvious to the Pentagon that Afghan President Hamid Karzai and his family cannot deliver what is required and yet it is probably far too late to replace him with UN ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad**

Afghanistan has been almost continuously at war for 30 years, longer than both World Wars and the American war in Vietnam combined. Each occupation of the country has mimicked its predecessor. A tiny interval between wars saw the imposition of a malignant social order, the Taliban, with the help of the Pakistani military and the late Benazir Bhutto, the prime minister who approved the Taliban takeover in Kabul.

Over the last two years, the US/NATO occupation of that country has run into serious military problems. Given a severe global economic crisis and the election of a new American president – a man separated in style, intellect, and temperament from his predecessor – the possibility of a serious discussion about an exit strategy from the Afghan disaster hovers on the horizon. The predicament the US and its allies find themselves in is not an inescapable one, but a change in policy, if it is to matter, cannot be of the cosmetic variety.

Washington's hawks will argue that, while bad, the military situation is, in fact, still salvageable. This may be technically accurate, but it would require the carpet-bombing of southern Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan, the destruction of scores of villages and small towns, the killing of untold numbers of Pashtuns and the dispatch to the region of at least 200,000 more troops

with all their attendant equipment, air, and logistical support. The political consequences of such a course are so dire that even Dick Cheney, the closest thing to Dr. Strangelove that Washington has yet produced, has been uncharacteristically cautious when it comes to suggesting a military solution to the conflict.

It has, by now, become obvious to the Pentagon that Afghan President Hamid Karzai and his family cannot deliver what is required and yet it is probably far too late to replace him with UN ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad. On his part, fighting for his political (and probably physical) existence, Karzai continues to protect his brother Ahmad Wali Karzai, accused of being involved in the country's staggering drug trade, but has belatedly sacked Hamidullah Qadri, his transport minister, for corruption.

Qadri was taking massive kickbacks from a company flying pilgrims to Mecca. Is nothing sacred?

## **A deteriorating situation**

Of course, axing one minister is like whistling in the wind, given the levels of corruption reported in Karzai's government, which, in any case, controls little of the country. The Afghan president parries Washington's thrusts by blaming the US military for killing too many civilians from the air. The bombing of the village of Aziza-

bad in Herat province last August, which led to 91 civilian deaths (of which 60 were children), was only the most extreme of such recent acts. Karzai's men, hurriedly dispatched to distribute sweets and supplies to the survivors, were stoned by angry villagers.

Given the thousands of Afghans killed in recent years, small wonder that support for the neo-Taliban is increasing, even in non-Pashtun areas of the country. Many Afghans hostile to the old Taliban still support the resistance simply to make it clear that they are against the helicopters and missile-armed unmanned aerial drones that destroy homes, and to "Big Daddy" who wipes out villages, and to the flames that devour children.

Last February, Director of National Intelligence Michael McConnell presented a bleak survey of the situation on the ground to the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence:

"Afghan leaders must deal with the endemic corruption and pervasive poppy cultivation and drug trafficking. Ultimately, defeating the insurgency will depend heavily on the government's ability to improve security, deliver services, and expand development for economic opportunity.

"Although the international forces and the Afghan National Army continue to score tactical victories over the Taliban, the security situation has deteriorated in some areas in the south and Taliban forces have expanded their operations into previously peaceful areas of the west and around Kabul. The Taliban insurgency has expanded in scope despite operational disruption caused by the ISAF [NATO forces] and Operation Enduring Freedom operations. The death or capture of three top Taliban leaders last year – their first high level losses – does not yet appear to have significantly disrupted insurgent operations."

Since then the situation has only deteriorated further, leading to calls for sending in yet more American and NATO troops – and creating ever deeper divisions inside

NATO itself. In recent months, Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, the British Ambassador to Kabul, wrote a French colleague (in a leaked memo) that the war was lost and more troops were not a solution, a view reiterated recently by Air Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup, the British Defense Chief, who came out in public against a one-for-one transfer of troops withdrawn from Iraq to Kabul. He put it this way:

"I think we would all take some persuading that there would have to be a much larger British contingent there... So we also have to get ourselves back into balance; it's crucial that we reduce the operational tempo for our armed forces, so it cannot be, even if the situation demanded it, just a one for one transfer from Iraq to Afghanistan, we have to reduce that tempo."

The Spanish government is considering an Afghan withdrawal and there is serious dissent within the German and Norwegian foreign policy elites. The Canadian foreign minister has already announced that his country will not extend its Afghan commitment beyond 2011. And even if the debates in the Pentagon have not been aired in public, it's becoming obvious that, in Washington, too, some see the war as unwinnable.

Enter former Iraq commander General David Petraeus, center stage as the new CentCom commander. Ever since the "success" of "the surge" he oversaw in Iraq (a process designed to create temporary stability in that ravaged land by buying off the opposition and, among other things, the selective use of death squads), Petraeus sounds, and behaves, more and more like Lazarus on returning from the dead – and before his body could be closely inspected.

The situation in Iraq was so dire that even a modest reduction in casualties was seen as a massive leap forward. With increasing outbreaks of violence in Baghdad and elsewhere in Iraq, however, the talk of success sounds ever hollower. To launch a new "surge" in Afghanistan now by send-

**Even if the debates in the Pentagon have not been aired in public, it's becoming obvious that, in Washington, too, some see the war as unwinnable**

**The effect of the war on those carrying out the orders is leaving scars just as deep as the imprints of previous imperial wars**

ing more troops there will simply not work, not even as a public relations triumph. Perhaps some of the 100 advisers that General Petraeus has just appointed will point this out to him in forceful terms.

### **Flight path to disaster**

Obama would be foolish to imagine that Petraeus can work a miracle cure in Afghanistan. The cancer has spread too far and is affecting US troops as well. If the American media chose to interview active-duty soldiers in Afghanistan (on promise of anonymity), they might get a more accurate picture of what is happening inside the US Army there.

I learned a great deal from Jules, a 20-year old American soldier I met recently in Canada. He became so disenchanting with the war that he decided to go AWOL, proving – at least to himself – that the Afghan situation was not an inescapable predicament. Many of his fellow soldiers, he claims, felt similarly, hating a war that dehumanized both them and the Afghans. “We just couldn’t bring ourselves to accept that bombing Afghans was no different from bombing the landscape” was the way he summed up the situation.

Morale inside the Army there is low, he told me. The aggression unleashed against Afghan civilians often hides a deep depression. He does not, however, encourage others to follow in his footsteps. As he sees it, each soldier must make that choice for himself, accepting with it the responsibility that going AWOL permanently entails. Jules was convinced, however, that the war could not be won and did not want to see any more of his friends die. That’s why he was wearing an “Obama out of Afghanistan” t-shirt.

Before he revealed his identity, I mistook this young soldier – a Filipino-American born in southern California – for an Afghan. His features reminded me of the Hazara tribesmen he must have encountered in Kabul. Trained as a mortar gunner and paratrooper from Fort Benning,

Georgia, he was later assigned to the 82nd Airborne at Fort Bragg. Here is part of the account he offered me:

“I deployed to Southeastern Afghanistan in January 2007. We controlled everything from Jalalabad down to the northernmost areas of Kandahar province in Regional Command East. My unit had the job of pacifying the insurgency in Paktika, Paktia, and Khost provinces – areas that had received no aid, but had been devastated during the initial invasion. Operation Anaconda [in 2002] was supposed to have wiped out the Taliban. That was the boast of the military leaders, but ridiculed by everyone else with a brain.”

He spoke also of how impossible he found it to treat the Afghans as subhumans:

“I swear I could not for a second view these people as anything but human. The best way to fashion a young hard dick like myself – dick being an acronym for ‘dedicated infantry combat killer’ – is simple and the effect of racist indoctrination. Take an empty shell off the streets of L.A. or Brooklyn, or maybe from some Podunk town in Tennessee... and these days America isn’t in short supply... I was one of those no-child-left-behind products...”

“Anyway, you take this empty vessel and you scare the living shit out of him, break him down to nothing, cultivate a brotherhood and camaraderie with those he suffers with, and fill his head with racist nonsense like all Arabs, Iraqis, Afghans are Hajj. Hajj hates you. Hajj wants to hurt your family. Hajj children are the worst because they beg all the time. Just some of the most hurtful and ridiculous propaganda, but you’d be amazed at how effective it’s been in fostering my generation of soldiers.”

As this young man spoke to me, I felt he should be testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The effect of the war on those carrying out the orders is leaving scars just as deep as the imprints of previous imperial wars. Change we can believe in must include the end of this, which

means, among other things, a withdrawal from Afghanistan.

In my latest book, *The Duel: Pakistan on the Flight Path of American Power*, I have written of the necessity of involving Afghanistan's neighbors in a political solution that ends the war, preserves the peace, and reconstructs the country. Iran, Russia, India, and China, as well as Pakistan, need to be engaged in the search for a political solution that would sustain a genuine national government for a decade after the withdrawal of the Americans, NATO, and their quisling regime. However, such a solution is not possible within the context of the plans proposed by both present Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and President-elect Barack Obama, which focus on a new surge of American troops in Afghanistan.

The main task at hand should be to create a social infrastructure and thus preserve the peace, something that the West and its horde of attendant non-governmental organizations have failed to do. School buildings constructed, often for outrageous sums, by foreign companies that lack furniture, teachers, and kids are part of the surreal presence of the West, which cannot last.

Whether you are a policymaker in the next administration or an AWOL veteran of the Afghan War in Canada, Operation Enduring Freedom of 2001 has visibly become Operation Enduring Disaster. Less clear is whether an Obama administration can truly break from past policy or will just create a military-plus add-on to it. Only a total break from the catastrophe that George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, and Donald Rumsfeld created in Afghanistan will offer pathways to a viable future.

For this to happen, both external and domestic pressures will probably be needed. China is known to be completely opposed to a NATO presence on, or near, its borders, but while Beijing has proved willing to exert economic pressure to force policy changes in Washington – as it did when the Bank of China “cut its exposure to agency debt last summer,” leaving US Treasury Secretary Paulson with little option but to functionally nationalize the mortgage giants – it has yet to use its diplomatic muscle in the region.

But don't think that will last forever. Why wait until then? Another external pressure will certainly prove to be the already evident destabilizing effects of the Afghan war on neighboring Pakistan, a country in a precarious economic state, with a military facing growing internal tensions.

Domestic pressure in the US to pull out of Afghanistan remains weak, but could grow rapidly as the extent of the debacle becomes clearer and NATO allies refuse to supply the shock-troops for the future surge.

In the meantime, they're predicting a famine in Afghanistan this winter. **CT**

*Tariq Ali, writer, journalist, filmmaker, contributes regularly to a range of publications including the Guardian, the Nation, and the London Review of Books. His most recent book, just published, is The Duel: Pakistan on the Flight Path of American Power (Scribner, 2008). In a two-part video, released by TomDispatch.com, he offers critical commentary on Barack Obama's plans for Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as on the tangled US-Pakistani relationship.*

**Whether you are a policymaker in the next administration or an AWOL veteran of the Afghan War in Canada, Operation Enduring Freedom of 2001 has visibly become Operation Enduring Disaster**

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# Will you continue to ignore Gaza's suffering?

**Kathleen and Bill Christison** write a plea to Barack Obama to end the misery of Palestinians suffering at the hands of Israel

**Israel broke the four-month-old ceasefire on November 4, when an Israeli unit entered the Gaza Strip and attacked an area in the central Strip, claiming that Palestinians were digging a tunnel and intended to "kidnap" an Israeli soldier**

**P**alestine and Palestinian suffering have always taken a back seat in the world's attention while the United States starts this war, finishes off that war, or expands it; while the world deals with wars and economic crises; while the attention of the compassionate is taken up by starvation and pestilence and war in Sudan or in Congo or Rwanda or Somalia. Throughout these crises – quite legitimate crises all – Palestine is always left to molder, sometimes at a more rapid pace in more inhumane circumstances than at other times.

Right now, the circumstances could not be more inhumane. Right now, the paramount Palestinian crisis is in Gaza, where Israel – with active political and ongoing financial backing from the United States – is blockading a tiny, horribly overcrowded piece of land and consciously depriving its 1.5 million people of all of the essentials of life: of food, of medicines, of equipment to keep hospitals running, of fuel for cooking, of fuel for producing electricity, of fuel for running generators, of fuel for automobiles, of spare parts for sewage treatment plants (so that plants break down and sewage pours into the streets and, in quantities in the millions of liters, into the Mediterranean), of clean fresh water.

You might want to believe, Mr. Obama, that this is all the Palestinians' own fault

because they have been firing rockets into civilian areas of Israel and they deserve all the punishment they are receiving. But, in fact, Mr. Obama, if you were paying attention, and if you really cared, you would know that Israel started this latest round. Israel broke the four-month-old ceasefire on November 4, when an Israeli unit entered the Gaza Strip and attacked an area in the central Strip, claiming that Palestinians were digging a tunnel and intended to "kidnap" an Israeli soldier. When Hamas responded to this ceasefire violation with rockets, Israel imposed a total blockade on the already besieged territory and closed all entry and exit points.

That was over four weeks ago. Four weeks, in which Gaza's inhabitants have lived with dwindling food supplies, virtually no electricity, little heat as winter approaches, no medicines, no life. In those weeks, Israel has opened the border to one or two small food shipments, but this is like a drop in the ocean for a million and a half people already living in poverty. Within ten days of the Israeli closure, UNRWA, the United Nations refugee relief organization that provides food to Gaza's huge refugee population, had run out of food for the 750,000 people it regularly feeds. Two-thirds of Gaza's population are refugees who have already been living a miserable life in camps for over 60 years. Well over

half of the total Gaza population are children.

The who-struck-John in this latest round is not what matters, Mr. Obama – not that it was Israel that broke the ceasefire, not that you and your Israel-supporting advisers might believe that the Palestinian response to the Israeli incursion should be counted, bullet for bullet, an “overreaction”: multiple rockets in retaliation for one tiny little incursion. What matters is that this is collective punishment – punishing an entire civilian population for the actions of a few militants. What matters is that this is punishing people simply because they are Palestinians, non-Jews, intruding on Zionism’s desire for exclusive Jewishness in Palestine. What matters is the scale of the oppression under which Palestinians live, thanks to Israel and to us, its US enabler.

For this latest blockade is not the first, and it is not a new phenomenon in the long history of the Palestinian attempt to survive Israel’s domination. The international embargo of Gaza, demanded by Israel and led by the United States, has been in effect for almost three years, since Hamas was democratically elected in January 2006 to head the Palestinian legislature and government. The blockade was further tightened in June 2007, when Hamas thwarted a US-inspired coup attempt by its Palestinian rival Fatah and took over control of Gaza. But even these last three years in Gaza’s troubled history are only a more severe version of the misery Gaza has been enduring for decades.

### Israel’s strategy

American economist Sara Roy, a student of Gaza’s sufferings through the last several decades, long ago concluded that Israel’s strategy throughout the occupation has been not simply to let Gaza’s economy drift but rather to pursue a strategy of what she calls “de-development,” ensuring that Gaza can develop no economic base at all, by actively depriving it of economic resources and the institutional development capabil-

ities needed to create and sustain a thriving economy. Israeli journalist Amira Hass, another student of Gaza who lived there for several years in the 1990s, has written that even the Oslo peace process proved so oppressive in Gaza that it became synonymous “with mass internment and suffocating constriction.”

(It is worthy of note, Mr. Obama, that both of these experts on Gaza are women, both are Jewish, and both are the daughters of Holocaust survivors. Both know far better whereof they speak and are far richer in compassion than all of the pro-Israel lobbyists among your advisers who have succeeded in tying your tongue.)

The result of these years and these various stages of enforced misery comes as no surprise. According to a recent report by the International Red Cross, there has been progressive deterioration in “food security,” meaning the assured supply of enough nutritious food for a healthy life, for 70 per cent of Gaza’s population. The dramatic fall in living standards caused by the international embargo has resulted in a widespread shift in diet from meats, fruit, and vegetables to foods, including cereals and sugar, that are “alarmingly” deficient in iron and Vitamins A and D. What the Red Cross terms chronic malnutrition is steadily rising and will have long-term consequences. Forty per cent of the population is classified as “very poor,” living on considerably less than \$1 per day.

For God’s sake, Mr. Obama, this is intolerable. Yet you remain silent.

Several years ago, a woman in Norway wrote us in response to an article about some other Israeli atrocity against the Palestinians, and we have had her plea posted over a computer ever since. “What is the worth of a civilization,” she wondered, “that has no eyes and ears for the suffering and agony of the people under Israel’s bombs?”

“What is the worth of a civilization” that can turn aside from these horrors? This is a hard, hard judgment. But it fits. It fits your

**The international embargo of Gaza, demanded by Israel and led by the United States, has been in effect for almost three years, since Hamas was democratically elected in January 2006 to head the Palestinian legislature and government**

## END THE INHUMANITY

**Mary Robinson, former president of Ireland and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, recently condemned the blockade after a visit to Gaza, calling the situation there ten times worse than when she last visited in 2001**

behavior, your silence, Mr. Obama. In fact, much of the rest of civilization has finally begun to notice what is happening in Gaza – much too late, but anything is better than perpetual silence.

The UN secretary general called for an end to the blockade of Gaza at the beginning of this month; the president of the UN General Assembly has advocated a boycott and sanctions against Israel for its behavior; the EU parliament has taken note; various other international organizations – including the International Red Cross, the World Bank, the UN Human Rights Commission, and a large coalition of mostly British charitable organizations, among others – have expressed deep concern at the state of utter collapse in Gaza that is the direct result of the long-running embargo, imposed on Gaza by the United States and Israel.

Mary Robinson, former president of Ireland and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, recently condemned the blockade after a visit to Gaza, calling the situation there ten times worse than when she last visited in 2001. Gazans have no

hope, she said.

This is a US-created, US-supported humanitarian disaster, Mr. Obama. For God's sake, why can't you – why won't you – stop it? All it would take is a call by you for an immediate end to the blockade and embargo. The symbolic value of such a call, which would put meat on the bones of your talk about compassion and on your call for tearing down the walls between peoples, could be massive. The impact on Gazans would be beyond description. **CT**

*Kathleen and Bill Christison have been writing on Palestine and traveling there for several years. Kathleen is the author of two books on the Palestinian situation and US policy on the issue, while Bill has written numerous articles on US foreign policies, mostly for CounterPunch. They have co-authored a book, forthcoming in mid-2009 from Pluto Press, on the Israeli occupation and its impact on Palestinians, with over 50 of their photographs. Thirty years ago, they were analysts for the CIA, but this is a part of their past they would now prefer to forget.*

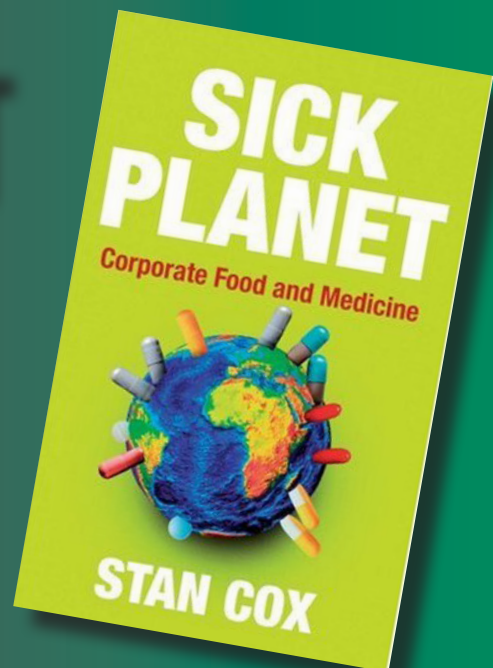
# SICK PLANET

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# Salvation in a news broadcast

Ramzy Baroud on Gaza's relationship with the news media

**W**hen Gaza's electricity is in working order, most Palestinians in the impoverished and overcrowded Strip huddle around their television screens. It's neither "American Idol" nor "Dancing with the Stars" that brings them together. It's the news.

Gazans' relationship to news media is both complex and unique. Like most Palestinians everywhere, they intently watch and listen to news broadcasts the world over, with the hope that salvation will arrive in the form of a news bulletin. Evidently, salvation is yet to be aired.

That infatuation is hardly coincidental, however, as their purpose of reading, listening and watching is unmistakable. Palestinians deeply care about what the rest of the world is saying about their plight and struggle. Most importantly, they wonder if anyone out there cares.

During the first Intifada's long and harsh Israeli military curfews in Gaza, my family would gather around a small radio, always nervous that the batteries would die, leaving us with a total news blackout; a horrible scenario by Gaza's standards.

The Israeli army used to habitually cut off electricity and water for whatever refugee camp that was targeted for a crackdown. The practice persists to this day in Gaza, but on a much larger scale, where

fuel is denied, food and medical supplies are alarmingly scarce, and water generators are in a pitiable state. So-called collective punishment has always been the pinnacle of Israel's policy towards the miserable Strip. Some things never change.

Regardless, somehow Gaza miraculously manages. The people of that tiny stretch of land find ways to cope with their ample tragedies, as they did the moment the first caravan of refugees, parched and desperate, made their way into Gaza following the 1948 Nakba. They weep for their loss, bury their dead, ask God for mercy, and, once again, return home to huddle around their radios, seeking a glimpse of hope in news broadcasts.

## Love-hate relationship

Today, their trust, or lack thereof in any news station depends largely on whether that particular station is committed to articulating their suffering and tragedy, as it is seen from their viewpoint, not that of an Israeli army's spokesperson; thus their love-hate relationship with major news networks like the BBC, Voice of America and others. Although most Palestinians in Gaza find Al-Jazeera network most understanding to their plight, they can never forgive it for providing a platform for Israeli government and army officials. Still, most Palestinians tune in to Al-Jazeera

**They weep for their loss, bury their dead, ask God for mercy, and, once again, return home to huddle around their radios, seeking a glimpse of hope in news broadcasts**

## WAITING FOR CHANGE

**When international officials, such as UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon or former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson call on Israel to ease or end the sanctions on Gaza, Gazans move a bit closer to their televisions**

as a trustworthy outlet whenever tragedy strikes, and it often does.

News from Gaza and news about Gaza has hardly ever been as grim as it is these days. Every single day, there are statements attributed to UN officials and human rights organisations, decrying the siege on Gaza, the strangulation of a whole population, and the deafening silence of the international community towards what is now perceived as the world's most pressing humanitarian catastrophe. Palestinians in Gaza listen ever intently. They hope, although apprehensively, that perhaps the United States will pressure Israel to ease its siege, to allow medical access for the terminally ill, to restore fuel supplies. Yet day after day, the situation worsens and little is done to rectify the injustice.

When international officials, such as UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon or former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson call on Israel to ease or end the sanctions on Gaza, Gazans move a bit closer to their televisions. They insist on believing that Israel will eventually heed the calls, but always to no avail.

### **Civilization destroyed**

It was "almost unbelievable" that the world did not care about "a shocking violation of so many human rights" in Gaza, said Robinson, who is also former president of Ireland, as reported on the BBC on November 4. "Their whole civilisation has been destroyed, I'm not exaggerating," she said.

On that same day, Israel moved into Gaza with the intent of provoking a fight and ending the shaky truce with Hamas, which has largely held since June. The army killed six Palestinians and wounded three.

John Ging, director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in Gaza, told the *Washington Post* on November 15, "This is a disastrous situation, and it's getting worse and worse... It is unprecedented that the UN is unable to get its

supplies in to a population under such obvious distress; many of these families have been subsisting on this ration for years, and they are living hand-to-mouth."

Then, on November 20, the same official reported that Israel reversed a decision to let 70 truckloads of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip.

Philip Luther of Amnesty International decried "Israel's latest tightening of its blockade [which] has made an already dire humanitarian situation markedly worse."

"Chronic malnutrition is on a steadily rising trend and micronutrient deficiencies are of great concern," said a leaked report by the Red Cross, as reported in the *Independent*. The report said that Israeli restrictions are causing "progressive deterioration in food security for up to 70 per cent of Gaza's population".

Gazans are still flipping through the channels and cranking the radio dials, left and right, as these calls continue to fall on deaf ears. They wonder why their plight is not treated with the same urgency as that of the Red Sea piracy or even that of eastern Congo, despite the fact that their misery has perpetuated for generations, and is worsening. They also pass by Arabic channels and wonder about the seemingly never-ending party, while Gaza has been reduced to total desolation. They listen to Fatah and Hamas officials spewing insults and fighting over government positions that don't exist and territories that hold no sovereignty. They shake their heads in dismay and carry on, for perhaps tomorrow will bring with it some good news – for once. **CT**

**Ramzy Baroud** ([www.ramzybaroud.net](http://www.ramzybaroud.net)) is an author and editor of *PalestineChronicle.com*. His work has been published in many newspapers, journals and anthologies around the world. His latest book is *The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People's Struggle* (Pluto Press, London).

# The ideology of no ideology

No amount of flowery post-election rhetoric should deter tough scrutiny of the next president's decisions, says **Norman Solomon**

In the middle of November, *New York Times* columnist David Brooks informed readers that Barack Obama's picks "are not ideological." The incoming president's key economic advisers "are moderate and thoughtful Democrats," while Hillary Clinton's foreign-policy views "are hardheaded and pragmatic."

A day later, the *Times* front page reported that the president-elect's choices for secretaries of State and Treasury "suggest that Mr. Obama is planning to govern from the center-right of his party, surrounding himself with pragmatists rather than ideologues."

Then, hours before Obama's formal announcement of his economic team, *USA Today* explained that he is forming a Cabinet with "records that display more pragmatism than ideology."

The ideology of no ideology is nifty. No matter how tilted in favor of powerful interests, it can be a deft way to keep touting policy agendas as common-sense pragmatism – virtuous enough to draw opposition only from ideologues.

Meanwhile, the end of ideology among policymakers is about as imminent as the end of history.

But – in sync with the ideology of no ideology – deference to corporate power isn't ideological. And belief in the US government's prerogative to use military force

anywhere in the world is a matter of credibility, not ideology.

Ideological assumptions gain power as they seem to disappear into the prevailing political scenery. So, for instance, reliably non-ideological ideological journalists sit at the studio table every Friday night on the PBS "Washington Week" program, which is currently funded by similarly non-ideological outfits including Boeing, the National Mining Association and Constellation Energy ("the nation's largest supplier of competitive electricity to large commercial and industrial customers," with revenues of \$21 billion last year).

Along the way, the ideology of no ideology can corral even normally incisive commentators. So, as news broke about the nominations of Timothy Geithner and Lawrence Summers to top economic posts, former Labor Secretary Robert Reich wrote an article praising "the members of Obama's new economic team." Reich declared: "All are pragmatists. Some media have dubbed them 'centrists' or 'center-right,' but in truth they're remarkably free of ideological preconception. ... They are not visionaries but we don't need visionaries when the economic perils are clear and immediate. We need competence. Obama could not appoint a more competent group."

Competence can be very good. But "free of ideological preconception"? I want to

**Reliably non-ideological ideological journalists sit at the studio table every Friday night on the PBS "Washington Week" program, which is currently funded by similarly non-ideological outfits including Boeing, the National Mining Association and Constellation Energy**

As for competence, it seems that claims of non-ideology often go hand-in-hand with overblown claims of economic mastery

meet these guys. If they really don't have any ideological preconceptions, they belong in the book of Guinness World Records.

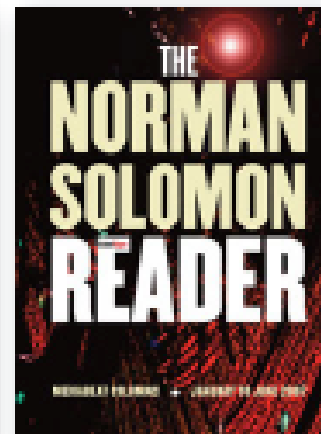
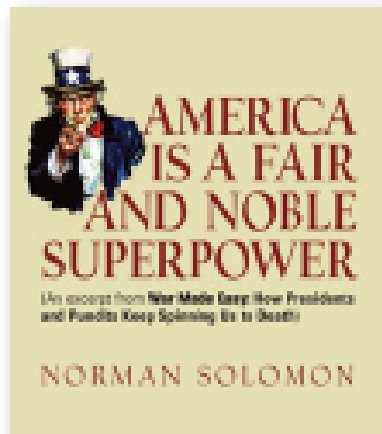
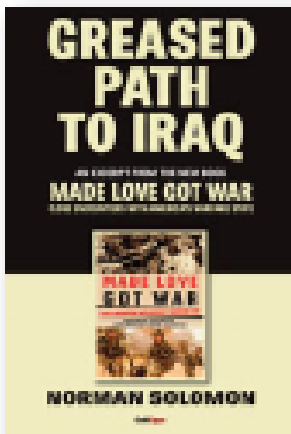
As for competence, it seems that claims of non-ideology often go hand-in-hand with overblown claims of economic mastery. "Geithner and Summers are credited with expertise in crisis management," economist Mark Weisbrot pointed out, "but we better hope they don't manage the current crisis like they did in East Asia, Russia, Argentina or any of the other countries that Treasury was involved in during the 1990s with their help. They helped bring on the East Asian crisis in 1997 by pressuring the governments in the region to de-regulate international financial flows, which was the main cause of the crisis. Then they insisted that all bailout money go through the IMF, and delayed aid until most of the damage

was done. Then they attached damaging conditions" to the aid.

After all is said and done, the ideology of no ideology is just like any other ideology that's apt to be much better at promoting itself than living up to its pretenses. No amount of flowery rhetoric or claims of transcendent non-ideology should deter tough scrutiny. And Judge Judy's injunction should apply to the ideology of no ideology as much as to any ideology that owns up to being one: "Don't pee on me and tell me it's raining." **CT**

*Norman Solomon is the author of War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death. The book has been adapted into a documentary film of the same name. For information, go to: [www.normansolomon.com](http://www.normansolomon.com)*

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# Robert Gates: As bad as Rumsfeld?

Ray McGovern examines the record of the secretary of defense

**A**s Bad As Rumsfeld?" The title jars, doesn't it. The more so, since Defense Secretary Robert Gates found his predecessor, Donald Rumsfeld, such an easy act to follow. But the jarring part reflects how malnourished most of us are on the thin gruel served up by the Fawning Corporate Media (FCM).

Over the past few months, Defense Secretary Robert Gates has generated accolades from FCM pundits – like the *Washington Post's* David Ignatius – that read like letters of recommendation to graduate school. This comes as no surprise to those of us familiar with Gates' dexterity in orchestrating his own advancement. What DOES come as a surprise is the recurring rumor that President-elect Barack Obama may decide to put new wine in old wine-skins by letting Gates stay.

I suspect that those in Obama's circle who are promoting Gates may be the same advisers responsible for Obama's most naïve comment of the recent presidential campaign: that the 'surge' of US troops into Iraq in 2007-08 succeeded beyond our wildest dreams.

Succeeded? You betcha – the surge was a great success in terms of the administration's overriding objective. The aim was to stave off definitive defeat in Iraq until President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney could swagger from the West

Wing into the western sunset on Jan. 20, 2009. As author Steve Coll has put it, "The decision [to surge] at a minimum guaranteed that his [Bush's] presidency would not end with a defeat in history's eyes. By committing to the surge [the president] was certain to at least achieve a stalemate."

According to Bob Woodward, Bush told key Republicans in late 2005 that he would not withdraw from Iraq, "even if Laura and [first-dog] Barney are the only ones supporting me." Later, Woodward made it clear that Bush was well aware in fall 2006 that the US was losing. Suddenly, with some fancy footwork, it became Laura, Barney – and Robert Gates. And at the turn of 2006-07 the short-term fix was in.

## **But please, no more troops!**

By the fall of 2006 it had become unavoidably clear that a new course had to be chosen and implemented in Iraq, and virtually every sober thinker seemed opposed to sending more troops. The senior military, especially CENTCOM commander Gen. John Abizaid and his man on the ground, Gen. George Casey, emphasized that sending still more US troops to Iraq would simply reassure leading Iraqi politicians that they could relax and continue to take forever to get their act together.

Here, for example, is Gen. Abizaid's answer at the Senate Armed Services Com-

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mittee, Nov. 15, 2006 to Sen. John McCain, who had long been pressing vigorously for sending 20,000 more troops to Iraq:

“Senator McCain, I met with every divisional commander, General Casey, the corps commander, General Dempsey, we all talked together. And I said, in your professional opinion, if we were to bring in more American troops now, does it add considerably to our ability to achieve success in Iraq? And they all said no. And the reason is because we want the Iraqis to do more. It is easy for the Iraqis to rely upon to us do this work. I believe that more American forces prevent the Iraqis from doing more, from taking more responsibility for their own future.”

The US ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad sent a classified cable to Washington warning that “proposals to send more US forces to Iraq would not produce a long-term solution and would make our policy less, not more, sustainable,” according to a New York Times retrospective on the surge by Michael R. Gordon published on Aug. 31, 2008.

Khalilzad was arguing, unsuccessfully, for authority to negotiate a political solution with the Iraqis.

There was also the establishment-heavy Iraq Study Group, created by Congress and led by Republican stalwart James Baker and Democrat Lee Hamilton. After months of policy review during 2006 – with Gates as a member – it issued a final report on Dec. 6, 2006, which began with the ominous sentence, “The situation in Iraq is grave and deteriorating.” The report called for:

“A change in the primary mission of US Forces in Iraq that will enable the United States to begin to move its combat forces out of Iraq responsibly... By the first quarter of 2008...all combat brigades not necessary for force protection could be out of Iraq.”

Robert Gates, who was CIA director under President George H. W. Bush and then president of Texas A&M, had returned to

the Washington stage as a member of the Iraq Study Group. While on the ISG, he evidenced no disagreement with its emerging conclusions – at least not until Bush asked him in early November if he might like to become secretary of defense.

Never one to let truth derail ambition, Gates suddenly saw things quite differently. After Bush announced his nomination on Nov. 8, Gates quit the ISG, but kept his counsel about its already widely reported recommendations.

### **Gates to the rescue**

Gates would do what he needed to do to become defense secretary. At his confirmation hearing on Dec. 5, he obscured his opinions by telling the Senate Armed Services Committee only that “all options are on the table in terms of Iraq.” Many Democrats, however, assumed that Gates would help persuade Bush and Cheney to implement the ISG’s recommendation of a troop drawdown.

With unanimous Democratic support and only two conservative Republicans opposed, Gates was confirmed by the full Senate on Dec. 6, the same day the ISG report was formally released.

Yet, the little-understood story behind Bush’s decision to catapult Robert Gate into his Pentagon perch hinges on the astonishing fact that Donald Rumsfeld, of all people, was pulling a Robert McNamara; that is, he was going wobbly on a war based largely on his own hubris-laden, misguided advice. As Robert Parry of Consortiumnews.com has reported, in the fall of 2006 Rumsfeld was having a reality attack. In Rumsfeldian parlance, the man had come face to face with a “known known.”

On Nov. 6, 2006, a day before the mid-term elections, Rumsfeld sent a memo to the White House. In the memo Rumsfeld acknowledged, “Clearly, what US forces are currently doing in Iraq is not working well enough or fast enough.” The rest of his memo sounded very much like the emerging troop-drawdown conclusions of the

Iraq Study Group report.

The first 80 percent of Rumsfeld's memo addressed "Illustrative Options," including his preferred – or "above the line" – options like "an accelerated drawdown of US bases...to five by July 2007" and withdrawal of US forces "from vulnerable positions – cities, patrolling, etc....so the Iraqis know they have to pull up their socks, step up and take responsibility for their country."

Finally, Rumsfeld had begun to listen to his generals and others who knew which end was up.

The hurdle? Bush and Cheney were not about to follow Rumsfeld's example in going wobbly. Like Robert McNamara at a similar juncture during Vietnam, Rumsfeld had to be let go before he caused a president to "lose a war."

Acutely sensitive to this political bugaboo, Rumsfeld included the following sentences at the end of the preferred-options section of his Nov. 6 memo:

"Announce that whatever new approach the US decides on, the US is doing so on a trial basis. This will give us the ability to re-adjust and move to another course, if necessary, and therefore not 'lose.'" (emphasis added)

The remainder of the memo listed "Below the Line – less attractive options." The top three in the "less attractive" category were:

- Continue on the current path.
- Move a large fraction of all US forces into Baghdad to attempt to control it.
- Increase Brigade Combat Teams and US forces substantially.

In other words, a surge. (It is a safe bet that people loyal to Rumsfeld at the National Security Council alerted him to the surge-type of plans being hatched off line by neo-conservative strategists, and that he and his generals wanted to bury them well "below the line.")

But in the White House's view, Rumsfeld had outlived his usefulness. One can assume that he floated these trial balloons with Cheney and others, before he sent

over the actual memo on Nov. 6, 2006. What were Bush and Cheney to do?

#### Exit left

It was awkward. Right up to the week before the mid-term election on Nov. 7, 2006, President Bush had kept insisting that he intended to keep Rumsfeld in place for the next two years. Suddenly, the president had to deal with Rumsfeld's apostasy.

The secretary of defense had strayed off the reservation and he was putting his "above-the-line" recommendations in writing, no less. Rumsfeld had let reality get to him, together with the very strong protestations of all senior uniformed officers save one – the ambitious David Petraeus, fingered to become Petraeus ex machina for the White House. With the bemedaled Petraeus in the wings, the White House just needed a new Pentagon chief who could be counted on to take Rumsfeld's place, do the White House's bidding, and trot out Petraeus as needed.

On Nov. 5, 2006, Bush had a one-on-one with Gates in Crawford and the deal was struck. Forget the torturously hammered-out recommendations of the Iraq Study Group; forget what the military commanders were saying. Gates suddenly found the surge an outstanding idea.

Well, not really. That's just what he let Bush believe. Gates is second to none – not even Petraeus – in ambition and self-promotion. He wanted to be secretary of defense, to be back at center stage in Washington after nearly 14 years in exile from the big show. And so he quickly agreed to tell Gen. Abizaid to retire; offer Gen. Casey a sinecure as Army chief of staff, providing he kept his mouth shut; and eagle-scout his way through Senate confirmation with the help of pundits like Ignatius composing panegyrics in honor of "Gates the realist."

So relieved were the Senators to be rid of the hated-but-feared Rumsfeld, that the Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on Dec. 5 on Gates' nomination had the aura of a pajama party (I was there).

**With the bemedaled Petraeus in the wings, the White House just needed a new Pentagon chief who could be counted on to take Rumsfeld's place, do the White House's bidding, and trot out Petraeus as needed**

**One would be tempted to laugh at Bush's self-absorption – and Gates' ambition – were we not talking about the completely unnecessary killing of over 1,000 US troops – a quarter of all US troops killed in this godforsaken war/occupation**

Gates told them bedtime stories. He said he thought there were no new ideas to be had in addressing the conflict in Iraq, and vowed to show “great deference to the judgment of generals.” (sic)

It was hardly two years ago, but memories fade and the FCM, of course, is no help in shedding light on what actually happened. Gates did his part in getting rid of Abizaid and Casey, but the administration faltered embarrassingly in coming up with a rationale to “justify” the surge. The truth, of course, was not an option. The White House could not exactly say, “We simply cannot live with the thought of losing a war before we leave town.”

On Dec. 20, 2006, President Bush told the *Washington Post* that he was “inclined to believe we do need to increase our troops, the Army and Marines.” He added, tellingly, “There’s got to be a specific mission that can be accomplished with the addition of more troops.” And he said he would look to Gates, just back from a quick trip to Baghdad, to help explain.

By way of preliminary explanation for the surge, President Bush wandered back and forth between “ideological struggle” and “sectarian violence.” He told the *Post*, “I’m going to keep repeating this over and over again, that I believe we’re in an ideological struggle” and, besides, “sectarian violence [is] obviously the real problem we face.” (sic)

When it became clear that those dogs wouldn’t hunt, the White House justified the surge as necessary to give Iraqi government leaders “breathing space” to work out their differences. Breathing space for the leading Iraqi officials was the rationale offered by Bush in a major address on Jan 10, 2007. Pulling out all the stops, he raised the specter of another 9/11, and spoke of the “decisive ideological struggle of our time.”

Bush dismissed those who “are concerned that the Iraqis are becoming too dependent on the United States” and those whose “solution is to scale back America’s efforts in Baghdad – or announce a phased

withdrawal of our combat forces.” The president did warn that the year ahead would be “bloody and violent, even if our strategy works.”

One would be tempted to laugh at Bush’s self-absorption – and Gates’ ambition – were we not talking about the completely unnecessary killing of over 1,000 US troops – a quarter of all US troops killed in this godforsaken war/occupation.

In reality, by throwing 20,000-30,000 additional troops into Baghdad, Bush and Cheney were the ones who got the two-year breathing space.

But what about that? What about the thousand-plus US troops killed during the surge? The tens of thousand Iraqis? The hundreds of thousands displaced from their homes in the Baghdad area?

I fear the attitude was this: Nobody important will get killed; just a bunch of Iraqis and GIs mostly from small-town and inner-city America. And, anyway, our soldiers and Marines all volunteered, didn’t they? (I almost did something violent to the last person I heard say that.)

Bush, Cheney, and Gates apparently deemed it a small price to pay for enabling them to blame a successor administration for the inevitable withdrawal from America’s first large-scale war of aggression.

And sure enough, in late 2006 a small group of “neo-conservatives,” including members of Bush’s National Security Council, came up with a plan called “Changing the Dynamics: Surge and Fight, Create Breathing Space and Then Accelerate the Transition.” It called for a substantial troop increase in Baghdad and other hot spots.

### **Rumsfeld out, Gates in: Clear sailing**

The FCM missed it (surprise, surprise) but one did not have to be a crackerjack intelligence analyst to see what was happening. At the time, Col. W. Patrick Lang, USA (retired), and I wrote a piece in which we exposed the chicanery and branded such a surge strategy “nothing short of immoral, in view of the predictable troop losses and



the huge number of Iraqis who would meet violent injury and death.”

Surprisingly, we were joined by Sen. Gordon Smith, R-Oregon, who explained to ABC’s George Stephanopoulos why Smith had said on the Senate floor that US policy on Iraq may be “criminal.”

“You can use any adjective you want, George. But I have long believed that in a military context, when you do the same thing over and over again without a clear strategy for victory, at the expense of your young people in arms, that is dereliction. That is deeply immoral.”

### Go West, Young Man

There are a host of reasons why Robert Gates should not be asked to stay on by President-elect Obama. Robert Parry has put together much of Gates’ history in his 2004 book, *Secrecy & Privilege*; readers may also wish to see what former intelligence analysts and I, who knew Gates at CIA, have written by going to Consortiumnews.com’s Gates archive.

For me, Gates’ role in the unnecessary killing of still more Americans and Iraqis is quite enough to disqualify him. I have known him for almost 40 years; he has always been transparently ambitious, but he is also bright. He knew better; and he did it anyway.

One can only hope that, once President-elect Obama has time to focus seriously on prospective cabinet appointments, he will discount advice from those taken in by the cheerleading for Gates or from the kind of

dullard who suggested Obama finesse the FCM’s simplistic embrace of the surge by saying it “succeeded beyond our wildest dreams.”

For Gates, Rumsfeld was an extremely easy act to follow. But, at least in one sense, Gates is worse than Rumsfeld, for Rumsfeld had finally begun to listen to the right people and adjust. It now seems the height of irony that the adjustments he proposed in his memo of Nov. 6, 2006 would have had most US troops out of Iraq by now.

But can one portray Gates as worse than Rumsfeld across the board? I think not. When you crank in torture, lying, and total disrespect for law, Rumsfeld has the clear edge in moral turpitude.

Still, I suspect this matters little to the thousands now dead because of the surge that Gates did so much to enable – and to the families of the fallen.

Surely, it should not be too much to expect that President-elect Obama find someone more suitable to select for secretary of defense than an unprincipled chameleon like Gates. **CT**

*Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, the publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour. He is a member of the Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS). McGovern was Robert Gates’ branch chief at the start of Gates’ career as a CIA analyst; he never asked McGovern for a letter of recommendation. First published at [www.consortiumnews.com](http://www.consortiumnews.com)*

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# Think first. Ask questions later

Barack Obama may prove as a big a disappointment as Nelson Mandela, who promised much but delivered little to improve the lot of the South African masses, says **William Blum**

How nice, how marvelously nice it would be to have an American president who was infused with progressive values and political courage

Okay, let's get the obvious out of the way. It was historic. I choked up a number of times, tears came to my eyes, even though I didn't vote for Obama. (I voted for Ralph Nader for the fourth time in a row.)

During the past eight years when I've listened to news programs on the radio each day I've made sure to be within a few feet of the radio so I could quickly change the station when that preposterous man Bush or one of his disciples came on; I'm not a masochist, I suffer fools very poorly, and I get bored easily.

Sad to say, I'm already turning the radio off sometimes when Obama comes on. He doesn't say anything, or not enough, or not often enough. Platitudes, clichés, promises without substance, "hope and change", almost everything without sufficient substance, "change and hope", without specifics, designed not to offend. What exactly are the man's principles? He never questions the premises of the empire. Never questions the premises of the "War on Terror". I'm glad he won for two reasons only: John McCain and Sarah Palin, and I deeply resent the fact that the American system forces me to squeeze out a drop of pleasure from something so far removed from my ideals. Obama's votes came at least as much from people desperate for relief from neo-conservative suffocation as from

people who genuinely believed in him. It's a form of extortion – Vote for Obama or you get more of the same. Those are your only choices.

Is there reason to be happy that the insufferably religious George W. is soon to be history? "I believe that Christ died for my sins and I am redeemed through him. That is a source of strength and sustenance on a daily basis." That was said by someone named Barack Obama.<sup>1</sup> The United States turns out religious fanatics like the Japanese turn out cars. Let's pray for an end to this.

As I've mentioned before, if you're one of those who would like to believe that Obama has to present center-right foreign policy views to be elected, but once he's in the White House we can forget that he misled us repeatedly and the true, progressive man of peace and international law and human rights will emerge ... keep in mind that as a US Senate candidate in 2004 he threatened missile strikes against Iran<sup>2</sup>, and winning that election apparently did not put him in touch with his inner peacenik. He's been threatening Iran ever since.

The world is in terrible shape. I don't think I have to elucidate on that remark. How nice, how marvelously nice it would be to have an American president who was infused with progressive values and political courage. Just imagine what could be

done. Like a quick and complete exit from Iraq. You can paint the picture as well as I can. With his popularity Obama could get away with almost anything, but he'll probably continue to play it safe. Or what may be more precise, he'll continue to be himself; which, apparently, is a committed centrist.

He's not really against the war. Not like you and I are. During Obama's first four years in the White House, the United States will not leave Iraq. I doubt that he'd allow a complete withdrawal even in a second term. Has he ever unequivocally called the war illegal and immoral? A crime against humanity? Why is he so close to Colin Powell? Does he not know of Powell's despicable role in the war? And retaining George W. Bush's Defense Secretary, Robert Gates, a man against whom it would not be difficult to draw up charges of war crimes? Will he also find a place for Rumsfeld? And Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano, a supporter of the war, to run the Homeland Security department? And General James Jones, a former NATO commander (sic), who wants to "win" in Iraq and Afghanistan, and who backed John McCain, as his National Security Adviser? Jones is on the Board of Directors of the Boeing Corporation and Chevron Oil. Out of what dark corner of Obama's soul does all this come?

As Noam Chomsky recently pointed out, the election of an indigenous person (Evo Morales) in Bolivia and a progressive person (Jean-Bertrand Aristide) in Haiti were more historic than the election of Barack Obama.

He's not really against torture either. Not like you and I are. No one will be punished for using or ordering torture. No one will be impeached because of torture. Michael Ratner, president of the Center for Constitutional Rights, says that prosecuting Bush officials is necessary to set future anti-torture policy.

"The only way to prevent this from happening again is to make sure that those

who were responsible for the torture program pay the price for it. I don't see how we regain our moral stature by allowing those who were intimately involved in the torture programs to simply walk off the stage and lead lives where they are not held accountable."<sup>3</sup>

As president, Obama cannot remain silent and do nothing; otherwise he will inherit the war crimes of Bush and Cheney and become a war criminal himself. Closing the Guantanamo hell-hole means nothing at all if the prisoners are simply moved to other torture dungeons. If Obama is truly against torture, why does he not declare that after closing Guantanamo the inmates will be tried in civilian courts in the US or resettled in countries where they clearly face no risk of torture? And simply affirm that his administration will faithfully abide by the 1984 Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment, of which the United States is a signatory, and which states: "The term 'torture' means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining information or a confession ... inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or any other person acting in an official capacity."

The convention affirms that: "No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political stability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture."

Instead, Obama has appointed former CIA official John O. Brennan as an adviser on intelligence matters and co-leader of his intelligence transition team. Brennan has called "rendition" – the kidnap-and-torture program carried out under the Clinton and Bush administrations – a "vital tool", and praised the CIA's interrogation techniques for providing "lifesaving" intelligence.<sup>4</sup>

Obama may prove to be as big a disappointment as Nelson Mandela, who did

**As president, Obama cannot remain silent and do nothing; otherwise he will inherit the war crimes of Bush and Cheney and become a war criminal himself. Closing the Guantanamo hell-hole means nothing at all if the prisoners are simply moved to other torture dungeons**

**Mandela was freed from prison on the assumption of the Apartheid leaders that he would become president and pacify the restless black population while ruling as a non-radical, free-market centrist without undue threat to white privilege. It's perhaps significant that in his autobiography he declines to blame the CIA for his capture in 1962 even though the evidence to support this is compelling**

painfully little to improve the lot of the masses of South Africa while turning the country over to the international forces of globalization.

I make this comparison not because both men are black, but because both produced such great expectations in their home country and throughout the world. Mandela was freed from prison on the assumption of the Apartheid leaders that he would become president and pacify the restless black population while ruling as a non-radical, free-market centrist without undue threat to white privilege. It's perhaps significant that in his autobiography he declines to blame the CIA for his capture in 1962 even though the evidence to support this is compelling.<sup>5</sup>

It appears that Barack Obama made a similar impression upon the American power elite who vetted him in many fund-raising and other meetings and smoothed the way for his highly unlikely ascendancy from obscure state senator to the presidency in four years. The financial support from the corporate world to sell "Brand Obama" was extraordinary.

Another comparison might be with Tony Blair. The Tories could never have brought in university fees or endless brutal wars, but New Labour did. The Republicans would have had a very difficult time bringing back the draft, but I can see Obama reinstating it, accompanied by a suitable slogan, some variation of "Yes, we can!"

I do hope I'm wrong, about his past and about how he'll rule as president. I hope I'm very wrong.

Many people are calling for progressives to intensely lobby the Obama administration, to exert pressure to bring out the "good Obama", force him to commit himself, hold him accountable. The bold reforms of Roosevelt's New Deal were spurred by widespread labor strikes and other militant actions soon after the honeymoon period was over. At the moment I have nothing better to offer than that. God help us.

**The future as we used to know it has ceased to exist. And other happy thoughts.**

Reading the accounts of the terrorist horror in Mumbai has left me as pessimistic as a dinosaur contemplating the future of his grandchildren. How could they do that? ... destroying all those lives, people they didn't even know, people enjoying themselves on vacation ... whatever could be their motivation? Well, they did sort of know some of their victims; they knew they were Indians, or Americans, or British, or Zionists, or some other kind of infidel; so it wasn't completely mindless, not totally random. Does that help to understand? Can it ease the *weltschmerz*? You can even make use of it.

The next time you encounter a defender of American foreign policy, someone insisting that something like Mumbai justifies Washington's rhetorical and military attacks against Islam, you might want to point out that the United States does the same on a regular basis.

For seven years in Afghanistan, almost six in Iraq, to give only the two most obvious examples ... breaking down doors and machine-gunning strangers, infidels, traumatizing children for life, firing missiles into occupied houses, exploding bombs all over the place, pausing to torture ... every few days dropping bombs on Pakistan or Afghanistan, and still Iraq, claiming they've killed members of al-Qaeda, just as bad as Zionists, bombing wedding parties, one after another, 20 or 30 or 70 killed, all terrorists of course, often including top al-Qaeda leaders, the number one or number two man, so we're told; so not completely mindless, not totally random; the survivors say it was a wedding party, their brother or their nephew or their friend, mostly women and children dead; the US military pays people to tell them where so-and-so number-one bad guy is going to be; and the US military believes what they're told, so Bombs Away! ... Does any of that depress you like Mumbai?

Sometimes they bomb Syria instead, or kill people in Iran or Somalia, all bad guys ... “US helicopter-borne troops have carried out a raid inside Syria along the Iraqi border, killing eight people including a woman, Syrian authorities say” reports the BBC.<sup>6</sup> ... “The United States military since 2004 has used broad, secret authority to carry out nearly a dozen previously undisclosed attacks against Al Qaeda and other militants in Syria, Pakistan and elsewhere, according to senior American officials. ... The secret order gave the military new authority to attack the Qaeda terrorist network anywhere in the world, and a more sweeping mandate to conduct operations in countries not at war with the United States,” the *New York Times* informs us.<sup>7</sup> So it’s all nice and legal, not an attack upon civilization by a bunch of escaped mental patients. Maybe the Mumbai terrorists also have a piece of paper, from some authority, saying that it’s okay what they did. ... I’m feeling better already.

### **The mythology of the War on Terrorism**

On November 8, three men were executed by the government of Indonesia for terrorist attacks on two night clubs in Bali in 2002 that took the lives of 202 people, more than half of whom were Australians, Britons and Americans.

The Associated Press<sup>8</sup> reported that “the three men never expressed remorse, saying the suicide bombings were meant to punish the United States and its Western allies for alleged atrocities in Afghanistan and elsewhere.”

During the recent US election campaign, John McCain and his followers repeated a sentiment that has become a commonplace – that the War on Terrorism has been a success because there hasn’t been a terrorist attack against the United States since September 11, 2001; as if terrorists killing Americans is acceptable if it’s done abroad. Since the first American strike on Afghanistan in October 2001 there have been literally scores of terrorist attacks against

American institutions in the Middle East, South Asia and the Pacific, more than a dozen in Pakistan alone: military, civilian, Christian, and other targets associated with the United States. The year following the Bali bombings saw the heavy bombing of the US-managed Marriott Hotel in Jakarta, Indonesia, the site of diplomatic receptions and 4th of July celebrations held by the American Embassy. The Marriott Hotel in Pakistan was the scene of a major terrorist bombing just two months ago. All of these attacks have been in addition to the thousands in Iraq and Afghanistan against US occupation, which Washington officially labels an integral part of the War on Terrorism. Yet American lovers of military force insist that the War on Terrorism has kept the United States safe.

Even the claim that the War on Terrorism has kept Americans safe at home is questionable. There was no terrorist attack in the United States during the 6½ years prior to the one in September 2001; not since the April 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City. It would thus appear that the absence of terrorist attacks in the United States is the norm.

An even more insidious myth of the War on Terrorism has been the notion that terrorist acts against the United States can be explained, largely, if not entirely, by irrational hatred or envy of American social, economic, or religious values, and not by what the United States does to the world; i.e., US foreign policy.

Many Americans are mightily reluctant to abandon this idea. Without it the whole paradigm – that we are the innocent good guys and they are the crazy, fanatic, bloodthirsty bastards who cannot be talked to but only bombed, tortured and killed – falls apart. Statements like the one above from the Bali bombers blaming American policies for their actions are numerous, coming routinely from Osama bin Laden and those under him.<sup>9</sup>

Terrorism is an act of political propaganda, a bloody form of making the world

**An even more insidious myth of the War on Terrorism has been the notion that terrorist acts against the United States can be explained, largely, if not entirely, by irrational hatred or envy of American social, economic, or religious values, and not by what the United States does to the world; i.e., US foreign policy**

## ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

**Sarah Palin and her American supporters resent what they see as the East Coast elite, the intellectuals, the cultural snobs, the politically correct, the pacifists and peaceniks, the agnostics and atheists, the environmentalists, the fanatic animal protectors, the food police, the health gestapo, the socialists, and other such leftist and liberal types**

hear one's outrage against a perceived oppressor, graffiti written on the wall in some grim, desolate alley. It follows that if the perpetrators of a terrorist act declare what their motivation was, their statement should carry credibility, no matter what one thinks of their cause or the method used to achieve it.

### **Just put down that stereotype and no one gets hurt.**

Sarah Palin and her American supporters resent what they see as the East Coast elite, the intellectuals, the cultural snobs, the politically correct, the pacifists and peaceniks, the agnostics and atheists, the environmentalists, the fanatic animal protectors, the food police, the health gestapo, the socialists, and other such leftist and liberal types who think of themselves as morally superior to Joe Sixpack, Joe the Plumber, National Rifle Association devotees, red-necks, and all the Bush supporters who have relished the idea of having a president no smarter than themselves. It's stereotyping gone wild. So in the interest of bringing some balance and historical perspective to the issue, allow me to remind you of some forgotten, or never known, factoids which confound the stereotypes.

\* Josef Stalin studied for the priesthood.

\* Adolf Hitler once hoped to become a Catholic priest or monk; he was a vegetarian and was anti-smoking.

\* Hermann Goering, while his Luftwaffe rained death upon Europe, kept a sign in his office that read: "He who tortures animals wounds the feelings of the German people."

\* Adolf Eichmann was cultured, read deeply, played the violin.

\* Benito Mussolini played the violin.

\* Some Nazi concentration camp commanders listened to Mozart to drown out the cries of the inmates.

\* Charles Manson was a staunch anti-

vivisectionist.

\* Radovan Karadzic, the Bosnian Serb leader, charged with war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, had been a psychiatrist specializing in depression; the author of a published book of poetry as well as children's books, often with themes of nature; and a practitioner of alternative medicine.

I'm not really certain to what use you might put this information to advance toward our cherished national goal of becoming a civilized society, but I feel a need to disseminate it. If you know of any other examples of the same type, I'd appreciate your sending them to me.

The examples above are all of "bad guys" doing "good" things. There are of course many more instances of "good guys" doing "bad" things. **CT**

### **Notes**

1. Washington Post, August 17, 2008
2. Chicago Tribune, September 25, 2004
3. Associated Press, November 17, 2008
4. New York Times, October 3, 2008
5. Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (1994) p.278; William Blum, *Rogue State*, chapter 23, "How the CIA sent Nelson Mandela to prison for 28 years"
6. BBC, October 26, 2008
7. New York Times, November 9, 2008
8. Associated Press, November 9, 2008
9. See my article at: <http://www.killing-hope.org/superogue/terintro.htm>

**William Blum** is the author of: *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War 2*; *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower*; *West-Bloc Dissident: A Cold War Memoir*; and *Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire*. His web site is [www.killinghope.org](http://www.killinghope.org)

# Child soldiers in the United States

The United States has broken international pledge not to recruit children under 17, says **Sherwood Ross**

**I**n violation of its pledge to the United Nations not to recruit children into the military, the Pentagon “regularly target(s) children under 17,” the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) says.

The Pentagon “heavily recruits on high school campuses, targeting students for recruitment as early as possible and generally without limits on the age of students they contact,” the ACLU states in a 46-page report titled *Soldiers of Misfortune*.

This is in violation of the US Senate’s 2002 ratification of the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Pentagon recruiters are enrolling children as young as 14 in the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) in 3,000 middle-, junior-, and high schools nationwide, causing about 45 percent of the quarter of million students so enrolled to enlist, a rate much higher than in the general student population. Clearly, this is the outcome of underage exposure.

In some cities, such as Los Angeles, high school administrators have been enrolling reluctant students involuntarily in JROTC as an alternative to overcrowded gym classes! In Lincoln high school, enrollees were not told JROTC was involuntary. In Buffalo, N.Y., the entire incoming freshman class at Hutchinson Central Technical High School, (average age 14), was involuntarily

enrolled in JROTC. In Chicago, graduating eighth graders (average age 13) are allowed to join any of 45 JROTC programs.

“Wartime enlistment quotas (for Iraq and Afghanistan) have placed increased pressure on military recruiters to fill the ranks of the armed services,” an ACLU report says. Trying to fill its quotas without reinstituting a draft “has contributed to a rise in...allegations of misconduct and abuse by recruiters” that “often goes unchecked.”

The Pentagon also spends about \$6 million a year to flog an online video game called “America’s Army” to attract children as young as 13, “train them to use weapons, and engage in virtual combat and other military missions...learn how to fire realistic Army weapons such as automatic rifles and grenade launchers and learn how to jump from airplanes,” the ACLU reports. As of Sept., 2006, 7.5 million users were registered on the game’s website, which is linked to the Army’s main recruiting website.

And when Pentagon recruiters sign 17-year-olds into the inactive reserves under the Future Soldiers Training Program, (the idea being to let them earn their high school diploma), they frequently don’t tell the children they can withdraw with no penalty.

“Over the years, we have had reports

**In some cities, such as Los Angeles, high school administrators have been enrolling reluctant students involuntarily in JROTC as an alternative to overcrowded gym classes!**

## WAR BABIES

**Given the Bush regime's plunge into criminal wars of aggression that defy international law and the Geneva conventions, there is no reason why military recruitment of any kind should be allowed on any college campus, much less in the secondary schools.**

*Sherwood Ross is a Miami-based public relations consultant and columnist who previously worked for the Chicago Daily News, as a radio commentator, and as a columnist for wire services. Reach him at sherwoodr1@yahoo.com*

from students who were told that if they change their minds, they would be considered deserters in war time and could be hunted down and shot," the New York City-based Youth Activists-Youth Allies said. One young woman was told if she backed out of her enlistment her family would be deported. And Bill Galvin, of the Center on Conscience and War, said one young man who changed his mind about enlisting and was told by his recruiter: "If you don't report, that's treason and you will be shot."

Singled out by the Pentagon for intense recruitment drives are urban centers such as Los Angeles and New York. The latter, in which low-income students account for 51% of all high school enrollment and where 71% are black or Latino, contains three of the nation's top 32 counties for Army enlistment. In Los Angeles, 91% of the students are non-white and 75% are low-income.

And the Coalition Against Militarism in Our Schools says the 30 JROTC programs in Los Angeles Unified School District (with 4,754 students) are "Located in the most economically depressed communities of the city."

African-Americans make up 16% of the civilian population of military age but 22% of the Army's enlisted personnel, the ACLU notes. It charges bluntly: "The US military's practice of targeting low-income youth and students of color in combination with exaggerated promises of financial rewards for enlistment, undermines the voluntariness of their enlistment..."

JROTC also runs a Middle School Cadet Corp for children as young as 11, that militarizes them even before they graduate elementary school. "Florida, Texas, and Chicago, offer military-run after-school programs to sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-graders...(that) involve drills with wooden rifles and military chants...and military history." Children wear uniforms to school once a week for inspection.

While the US claims "no one under age

17 is eligible for recruitment," the Pentagon's Joint Advertising Market Research & Studies database(JAMRS) scoops up data on eleventh graders, typically just 16. JAMRS has data on 30 million Americans between age 16 and 25 for recruitment purposes.

The ACLU says this data includes "e-mail addresses, grade point averages, college intentions, height and weight information, schools attended, courses of study, military interests, and racial and ethnic data" as well as Social Security numbers.

In the face of grim casualty reports from the Middle East, Pentagon recruiters appear increasingly desperate to make their quotas.

About one in five, the New York Times reported in 2004, was found to have engaged in "recruiting improprieties" ranging from "threats and coercion to making false promises to young people that they would not be sent to Iraq."

Given the Bush regime's plunge into criminal wars of aggression that defy international law and the Geneva conventions, there is no reason why military recruitment of any kind should be allowed on any college campus, much less in the secondary schools. If the United States truly wished to spread democracy, (rather than seize oil fields), it would be assigning vast numbers of Peace Corps recruiters to college campuses, and the budgets of the Peace Corps and the Defense Department would be reversed.

As Eugene Debs, the presidential candidate on the Socialist ticket who went to prison for speaking against World War One, (he polled 913,000 votes in 1920) once said: "I would no more teach children military training than I would teach them arson, robbery or assassination."

The fact that the Pentagon is having such a daunting time these days filling its ranks as it wages an illegal war speaks very well for the intelligence of the American people. That's no excuse, though, for the Defense Department to illegally recruit impressionable children. **CT**



# In search of the General

**David Pratt** becomes the first British foreign correspondent to interview rebel leader general Laurent Nkunda since the beginning of the current crisis in the Congo

**H**e is an elusive man. But then rebel leaders usually are. For the last few weeks, General Laurent Nkunda and his fighters have laid siege to the eastern Congolese city of Goma, advancing to within a few miles of its heart. Throughout this time however, the precise whereabouts of Nkunda himself have remained a well-guarded secret.

For weeks we had worked on establishing links with Nkunda's 5,000 man strong rebel group, the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP). Known to us only as "Bertrand" our contact inside the rebel ranks had told us during countless telephone exchanges how difficult it would be getting to the general.

In the tense and volatile atmosphere of besieged Goma, our first attempt proved Bertrand to be right. Journeying by road from the city through Congolese government lines towards the village of Sake, we ran slap into a makeshift roadblock. Doggedly refusing to raise the heavy tree branch barrier that blocked our way, a group of Congolese soldiers eyed us suspiciously.

"I must call my brigade commander to check your authorisation," insisted one, clearly wary of our intention to enter rebel held territory, from where we hoped to move deeper into the bush for our planned rendezvous with Nkunda.

Within minutes we were summoned to

the local Congolese army base. There for the next two hours, attempts to convince the brigade commander we only wanted to assess the humanitarian situation in this sensitive frontline area fell on deaf ears, and in no uncertain terms we were ordered back to Goma.

The following day, Bertrand again organised an alternative route. A two-hour drive that took us across districts that had seen some of the worst fighting.

Passing first through the human catastrophe that is the village of Kibati, where tens of thousands of civilian Congolese uprooted by the fighting have taken refuge, we headed out along the road strewn with spent ammunition and the decomposing bodies of dead soldiers from both sides near Kibumba, before reaching the rebel stronghold of Rutshuru.

Here Nkunda's people were in celebratory mood. Hundreds had gathered in the overgrown grass of the tumbledown football stadium to hear the renegade general's younger brother Captain Seco Mihigo deliver a rousing speech.

For a moment it was as if we had found Laurent Nkunda himself. Bearing an uncanny resemblance to his more famous older brother, Seco Mihigo on finishing his rallying cry and brandishing a spear, came down among the crowd to dance with locals watched over by his brooding body-

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guards. As the rally broke up and the rain began to fall, we waited on confirmation of the next and most hazardous stage of our journey through the vast, inhospitable Virunga National Park.

“There’s no way we can go there without an armed escort, it’s full of FDLR” insisted one of our drivers.

Comprised of remnants of the Hutu extremists responsible for the genocide in neighbouring Rwanda in 1994, the FDLR (Democratic Liberation Forces of Rwanda) fight alongside the Congolese government against Nkunda.

An hour later accompanied by a truck full of Nkunda’s men laden with heavy machine guns and rocket propelled grenade launchers, we drove into the park, constantly vulnerable from any ambush that might come from the dense bush lining either side of the dirt track along which our vehicles trundled.

Here there was no stopping for anyone or anything. At one point when two exotic long-legged heron-like birds stood in the road ahead, our driver drove straight through them. In an instant, the beautiful birds were splattered across the windscreen of our jeep in a feathery mush that would have traumatised David Attenborough.

Late into the night we drove, snaking our way along muddy rutted tracks flanking steep drops and climbing to an altitude of over 7,000 feet in hill country famous too for the other type of gorilla that lurks there. By midnight however we were stuck, our vehicles sunk in the glutinous Congolese mud with no chance of being dug out in the pitch black.

“We must walk, there is no choice,” insisted our guide as we bedded down for a bitterly cold night in the high bush country, ready to make a start at first light.

What followed in the eerie, humid, misty dawn, was a punishing six-hour march. Led by rebel fighters, our small group forded rivers and streams, waded through calf deep mud, and collapsed exhausted, before motorcycles dispatched from the town of

Kichanga, arrived to ferry us to our final rendezvous with Nkunda.

The Congolese rainy season thundered down on a nondescript compound of shacks on the outskirts of Kichanga, when General Laurent Nkunda finally made his appearance. Here he was at last. The rebel warlord on whom an international arrest warrant has been issued for alleged war crimes long before his latest offensive that has forced a quarter of a million people from their homes.

### **Drenched guard of honour**

Tall, lanky, and dressed in a green beret and camouflage fatigues, he was greeted by a drenched guard of honour and flanked by two menacing bodyguards carrying assault rifles. Today Nkunda claims he is saving his Tutsi people from another genocide.

“Let me say we want only three things,” he began when asked about his motives and what drives him. We want security, we want to have an army, a national army. Not an army like what you saw in Goma looting, raping and killing its own people,” he told me clenching the black silver-topped cane that has become one of his trademarks.

It struck me that Nkunda seemed fond of theatrical props like this, in much the same way as did that other former Congolese strongman, Sese Seko Mobutu. I put it to Nkunda, that he talked about security, getting rid of corruption, and improving the economy, but was he prepared to pursue these aims militarily at any cost no matter how much it upsets the international community?

“If I can get it by talks it can be a good way, but if not we are ready to give our blood,” he answered emphatically, showing glimpses of an almost messianic demeanour.

Nkunda is angry over what he says is the Congolese government’s collusion with Hutu forces. He also says it has betrayed the Congolese people by granting China rights to the country’s vast mineral wealth, and undoing that deal he says is worth dy-



General Nkunda: "I could have gone to university in the United States, but here I am"

By now the general was in full flight, telling how that if Congo accepted the Chinese contracts it would be under colonial rule for the next sixty years

ing and suffering for.

"That's the cost of freedom, instead of being ruled by those who would have us live in poverty forever, you have to suffer for freedom sometimes," he argued.

But just who was it that would have to take the pain for these aims to be realised? As Nkunda spoke I noticed that stuck to the wall behind him were two posters. One entitled: 'The Capture and Death of Saddam.' The other emblazoned with the message "Halt The Violence". Why they were there or whether he had noticed the irony of their messages, I have no idea.

By now the general was in full flight, telling how that if Congo accepted the Chinese contracts it would be under colonial rule for the next sixty years. National identity had been eroded he argued, observing again ironically that as far as the government is concerned, "You are only Congolese when you are dying on the frontline."

Congo was corrupt he said, claiming that there are only 60,00 soldiers in the

Congolese army but money is being paid for 300,000.

#### **No persecution**

On the perennially sensitive issue of Hutu and Tutsi relations, he maintains that he does not persecute Hutus. "There are around 25,000 Hutus here in Kichanga, if I was against these people why would I have created a humanitarian corridor," he said by way of justification.

When pressed that many of his people would undoubtedly suffer in the pursuit of his political ambitions, his response was fiery. "When they are suffering I am suffering," he shouted back, looking straight at me. "I, too, have suffered, and my family have suffered. I could have gone to university in the United States, but here I am."

Whatever the accuracy of Nkunda's definition, there is little doubt that for years Congo has been a case study in suffering. In the past weeks alone the situation has become unimaginably worse.

Did he really understand what the cur-

## INTO AFRICA

**British charity Save the Children says there has been a sharp rise in the number of children being abducted and made to fight for Nkunda's rebel forces and other paramilitary groups**

rent fighting meant for countless hundreds of thousands of lives blighted by the war, he and others prosecuted.

Lives like that of an eleven-year-old boy ironically named Dependence, who lost a leg in earlier fighting, and found himself walking for miles from Kibumba to Kibati on crutches to flee the latest bloodletting. Or the young life of a 14-month-old girl in the hospital in Rutshuru suffering wounds from a gunshot that first passed through her mother killing her outright while she worked the fields with her daughter strapped to her on back.

According to the father, it was impossible to tell which side the bullet came from, but in such instances what matters most is that once again civilians were caught in Congo's crossfire. British charity Save the Children says there has been a sharp rise in the number of children being abducted and forced to fight for Nkunda's rebel forces and other paramilitary groups. Before the recent fighting, there were an estimated 3,000 child soldiers across the country, but that number is expected to be far higher.

Certainly during my time in the bush and travelling in both rebel held and government controlled areas, time and again I saw armed child fighters. Some could have been barely 10 or 11 years old.

Many displaced families I spoke with near Kibati, also said they feared returning to their homes because of forced recruitment of their young men

### **Civilians shot**

In November, Nkunda's rebel fighters were accused of shooting dead civilians in their homes in the town on Kiwanja, just outside Rutshuru. UN soldiers and journalists say they found the bodies of at least a dozen men when they entered Kiwanja. Two days ago when I was in Rutshuru, just a few miles from Kiwanja, thousands of ordinary people were once again on the move to escape battles between Nkunda fighters

and Pareco Mai-Mai forces, the general also claims are backed by the Congolese government.

According to witnesses Nkunda's forces moved from house to house killing those they suspected of being sympathetic to the Mai-Mai militia. "They knocked on the doors, when the people opened, they shot them," said Simo Bramporiki whose wife and child were killed during the night.

One woman showed reporters the bodies of five men inside her house, one of them her husband, and two more lying outside. Reports indicate there was nothing to suggest the men, most of whom were wearing civilian clothing, were fighters.

What is going on in Democratic Republic of Congo is a tragedy of epic proportions. Speak to aid workers and others here and they will tell you that at last the world is waking up to what has been going on here for a long time now. Why the world should now suddenly care has puzzled many, but at least observers say, Congo is for once no longer ignored.

In the course of my journey to meet General Laurent Nkunda, I was reminded of how vast, complicated and entrenched the problems of Congo are.

At face value some of what Nkunda says about this huge country's political and economic woes has a validity and resonance. Warlord, rebel leader, revolutionary, self proclaimed saviour of a nation, or just or just another of Africa's 'big men' on the make, only time of course will tell just what General Laurent Nkunda really is.

Should he turn out to be the latter, it will be the last thing Congo needs, and the suffering and sacrifice he so eloquently speaks of will surely go on. **CT**

*David Pratt is foreign editor of the Sunday Herald, in Glasgow, Scotland, where this article first appeared. His latest book is Intifada: Palestine and Israel – The Long Day of Rage*

# To grandmother's house we go

David Irving has a few words for readers to ponder before tucking into their holiday dinners

**A**t the sight of pork chops you sometimes wince. You can't quite forget the brutality of the worker who slammed the little piglets from over his head, bashing them down on the concrete floor and then throwing them on a heap of other dying, mortally wounded piglets all writhing in a suffering mass of cruelty and pain. You wish you'd never seen the video. But that's what PETA does, investigative reporting no one can deny. You even mentioned the video to the guys at work, how a supervisor shoved a cane up a sow's vagina, how the workers beat the pigs with metal gate rods, how another supervisor kicked a pig in the genitals and face and said: "You gotta beat on the bitch. Make her cry."

"What kind of crap do you watch anyway," Frank, your boss at the newspaper asks.

"Yeah! What's with you Baker," Charlie Morrison says. "Don't we have enough going on in the world without this kind of idiocy?"

Somebody else says something about the radical PETA people being at it again.

The other guys, too. They don't want to hear. Don't want to know about it. Go tell someone else. They all gave you that look that says "What kind of weird person are you, anyway." And these are the good guys. All upstanding, liberal, progressives

just like you. Didn't you march against the war in Vietnam? Didn't you write letters to the editor against Bush's war in Iraq? Didn't you vote for Obama? Don't you support gay rights? And yes, you support the rights of the poor. Yes, you're on the side of blacks, the Latinos. Make that all minorities. And yes, you're on the side of women's rights. Yes, you want equal pay for equal work.

So what do they want anyway? Do they want you to stop eating meat too? Just because some redneck bashed some baby pigs on a concrete floor? Like hell! You've got to draw the line someplace, you know. Yes, yes, yes! You know all about it. So what if the world population is going to double in the next twenty years or so to 8.8 billion. So what that the consumption of meat will double in the next forty meaning more and more and more livestock to butcher in a world that already slaughters easily 25 billion animals a year for food. And yes, it's true the livestock industry either directly or indirectly takes up 30% of the world's ice-free land, so says the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. And yes, how much land will it take up when the consumption of livestock doubles? And yes, all the corn, soy, grain, and water used to feed these animals depletes the world's tropical rain forests whereas if it were used properly it could eliminate hunger in the

**Do they want you to stop eating meat too? Just because some redneck bashed some baby pigs on a concrete floor? Like hell! You've got to draw the line someplace, you know**

## LAST WORDS

**Judy grins brightly at the guests who are fidgeting and lowering their eyes. Timmy Twimbly, Judy's little brother, covers his mouth with his hand and snickers**

world and all the social problems that go along with that. And yadda, yadda, yadda, yes America has 5% of the world's population but consumes 15% of the world's meat, and yes, you know all this meat produces one fifth of the earth's greenhouse emissions. Stop already! Enough! Let's not get carried away. You eat meat, and that's all there is to it! The wife doesn't even want you to hang around with vegan types. There was that one guy you knew, that artist guy, and she put a stop to that real fast. Vegan? No way.

Besides, it happened out in Iowa on a farm producing ham for Hormel Foods. What could anyone expect you to do about that? Who knows what they'll do out in the boonies. It's not your fault! They'll prosecute the case out in Iowa and it will be gone, down the drain. No one will even know about it. Anyway, you have enough on your mind.

Business is slowing and you might not get that Christmas bonus you've been expecting. More than that, your father died last year. Heart attack. Your mother went the year before. Cancer. You just want peace of mind. You just want never to be reminded of those ghastly images of the piglets. To be comfortable. That's what you want. No more worry. Isn't that what everyone wants? You're a serious liberal. A progressive. That takes thought. It takes heart. It takes soul. It takes understanding. It takes guts. You're in the vanguard of the world, working towards a progressive society with equal rights for all. There! Now that's where you draw the line all right.

### **Turkey day**

Well at least turkey day is coming up! That's always a blast. The wife will be away visiting her sister, so it's good to have a place to go when the big day comes. The relatives will be there. Friends. And your boss too. A chance to make a good impression. A few good jokes, a little wine. All will be merry. Cranberry sauce. Candied sweet potatoes. Stuffing. Mashed potatoes, and thick,

brown gravy.

At last the day arrives and all come together with one like mind thankful finally that the long nightmare of the Bush regime is almost at an end. This is one year when the Thanksgiving prayer recounting life's blessings will really mean something. You gladly join in holding hands around the table while your boss says the prayer sending out blessings to the world and especially the people of Iraq.

"What a beautiful, beautiful big bird," Helen Twimbly says as soon as the prayer is finished and everyone is reaching for the napkins on their plates and putting them on their laps. The guests nod their agreement. Grandpa tucks his napkin under his shirt like a bib. A smile creeps up on little Miss Judy Twimbly's mischievous face.

"Know what?" Judy asks sweetly.

"What's that, dear," Helen asks patiently. She smiles around the table to get everyone's attention. Her precocious daughter is speaking.

"We had a substitute teacher in last week for lit, Mr. Dickson," Judy continues.

"Is that right dear? How interesting."

"Well Mr. Dickson, he said that turkeys have been engineered to produce these big fat turkey breasts everyone wants, so that now the turkeys can hardly walk. They can't even breed anymore so they have to be artificially inseminated! You should see how it's done. It's disgusting."

Judy grins brightly at the guests who are fidgeting and lowering their eyes. Timmy Twimbly, Judy's little brother, covers his mouth with his hand and snickers. Frank clears his throat and taps his fingers beside his plate. Mr. Twimbly glares at his daughter with looks that could kill.

"Honey!" Helen says flustered, the red creeping into her cheeks. "How many times have I told you not to tell inappropriate stories at dinner. Now then. Would someone please pass the corn bread and send along the butter too."

The corn bread is sitting next to you so you pass it to the left. At the same time

the cranberry sauce comes at you from the right. You take it, scoop out a portion on your plate and pass it left.

Your cousin Jimmy is cutting the turkey. He asks if you'd like dark or white. You look at the big bird with the huge breast sitting basted and brown in the center of the table, just one of 72 million other turkeys decorating tables across the country on Thanksgiving Day. One leg has already been cut away, and Grandpa holds it clutched in his hand as he begins to gnaw at it. Jimmy is carving the air with the serrated knife waiting for your reply. Suddenly the bird begins to writhe in pain. Its features change and it's the little piglet lying on the pile of all the other little bloodied piglets bashed and battered. You shake your head and rub your eyes and the bird is back on the table again. A sigh of relief escapes your lips.

"Make it dark, Jimmy!" you cackle. You know the dark meat contains more cholesterol, but what the hell, it's Thanksgiving Day. You wonder why you cackled like that. You vaguely wonder about your cholesterol count. You know you should get it checked, but you quickly put that out of mind. All you want is peace. Everyone is stuffed after dinner and you slowly wander into the living room. The sound of dishes and silverware being washed and put away drifts out from the kitchen. The guests are beginning to congregate in the living room and the conversation is slow and sporadic.

Little Judy Twimbly sees you sprawled alone in the arm chair in the corner and minces over to you with little tiny steps carrying the *New York Times*. She leafs through it mechanically, looking you mischievously in the eye and points to an article.

"Will you just look at this," she says. "I've never read anything so disgusting in my life."

She hands you the paper and waits ex-

pectantly. You're suspicious, but you take the bait and begin to read.

"An animal rights group on Tuesday released undercover videotapes taken at the nation's premier poultry-breeding operation [The Aviagen Turkeys plant in Lewisburg, West Virginia]...The scenes show stomach-turning brutality. Workers are seen smashing birds into loading cages like basketballs, stomping heads and breaking necks, apparently for fun, even pretending to rape one...After seeing the video Tuesday, company representatives said they 'condemn the abuse of any of the animals in our care and will take swift action to address these issues.' They promised an investigation that could lead to the employees being fired."

You glance up at Judy with alarm. The piglets in your mind are beginning to squirm.

"I know what I'm going to do when I grow up?" Judy says insolently. "I'm going to become an undercover investigator just like that and protect innocent animals. You won't see a dead bird on my Thanksgiving Day table when I'm your age."

You feel Judy's triumphant eyes boring into you waiting for a reply. **CT**

*David Irving is an animal rights activist who has written numerous essays defending our non-human brethren. His novel in progress, In the Shadow of the Innocents, focuses on vivisection. He has written short stories, fairy tales, and just completed a novel about the 14th century mystic Meister Eckhart. David is also an accomplished musician and composer who has played French horn with ensembles such as the Oakland Symphony and San Francisco Ballet. His compositions have been performed in the US and Europe. For further information see [www.davidirving-composer.com](http://www.davidirving-composer.com)*

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