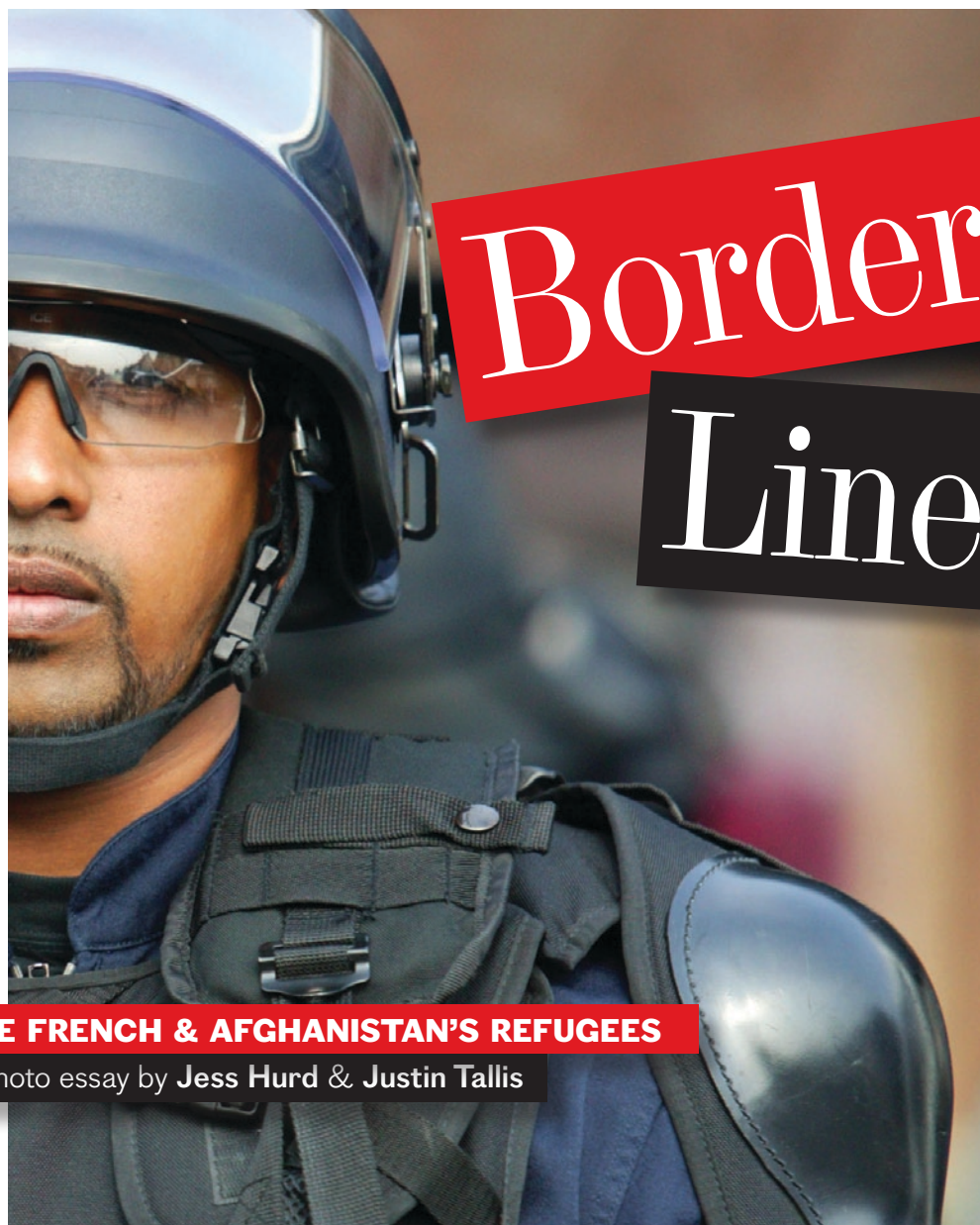


INSIDE: TORTURE, WHAT TORTURE? ● FINAL WEEK OF MY PARENTS' LIFE ● DIE, ZOMBIE-NEWSPAPERS, DIE! ● THANKS FOR BUYING OUR TOXIC PLASTIC

The ^{ColdType} READER

WRITING WORTH READING ● ISSUE 37 ● JULY 2009



Border

Lines

THE FRENCH & AFGHANISTAN'S REFUGEES

A photo essay by Jess Hurd & Justin Tallis

The ^{ColdType} READER



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Cover Photograph: Justin Tallis, www.reportdigital.co.uk

Welcome to a dying industry

Barbara Ehrenreich has some advice for a class of graduating journalists at a California university

The following is the text of Barbara Ehrenreich's commencement address to the University of California, Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism Class of 2009.

The dean gave me some very strict instructions about what to say today. No whining and no crying at the podium. No wringing of hands or gnashing of teeth. Be upbeat, be optimistic, he said – adding that it wouldn't hurt to throw in a few tips about how to apply for food stamps.

So let's get the worst out of the way right up front: You are going to be trying to carve out a career in the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. You are furthermore going to be trying to do so within what appears to be a dying industry. You have abundant skills and talents – it's just not clear that anyone wants to pay you for them.

Well, you are not alone.

How do you think it feels to be an auto-worker right now? And I've spent time with plenty of laid-off paper-mill workers, construction workers and miners. They've got skills; they've got experience. They just don't have jobs.

So let me be the first to say this to you: Welcome to the American working class.

You won't get rich, unless of course you develop a sideline in blackmail or bank rob-

bery. You'll be living some of the problems you report on – the struggle for health insurance, for child care, for affordable housing. You might never have a cleaning lady. In fact, you might be one. I can't tell you how many writers I know who have moonlighted as cleaning ladies or waitresses. And you know what? They were good writers. And good cleaning ladies, too, which is no small thing.

Let me tell you about my own career, which I think is relevant, not because I'm representative or exemplary in any way, but because I've seen some real ups and downs in this business. I didn't start out to be a freelance writer or a journalist, but after a number of false starts and digressions, I discovered that's what I really loved doing. In about 1980, I was a single mother of two small children, and my work quota was four articles or columns a month. I did my research at the public library. I bought my clothes at Kmart or consignment stores. The kids did not get any special lessons or, when the time came, SAT prep courses.

Then came the fat times, in the '90s, which I realize now were an anomaly in the history of journalism. The industry was booming; editors would take me out for three-course lunches in Manhattan. I'll never forget one of those lunches: It was with the top editor of *Esquire*, and I was trying to pitch him a story on poverty.

You have abundant skills and talents – it's just not clear that anyone wants to pay you for them. Well, you are not alone

We are part of the working class, which is exactly how journalists have seen themselves through most of American history – as working stiffs. We can be underpaid, we can be jerked around, we can be laid off arbitrarily – just like any autoworker or mechanic or hotel housekeeper or flight attendant

He looked increasingly bored as we got through the field greens with goat cheese, the tuna carpaccio and so forth – until we finally got to the death-by-chocolate dessert, and he finally said, “OK, do your thing on poverty – but make it upscale.”

It was still an uphill struggle to write what I cared about, but at least I was getting generously paid up to \$10 a word by *Time* magazine. Imagine that – \$10 a word. Most Americans would be happy to make \$10 an hour.

An industry falls apart

Then, bit by bit, it all began to fall apart. The newsweeklies: *Time* let me go in 1997. The book-publishing industry was in tatters by 2005. And then the newspapers began to shrink within my hands or actually disappear. I was beginning to feel a certain kinship with blacksmiths and elevator operators when the recession hit in 2008, and every single income stream I had began to dry up.

But it was the recession, of course, that saved me from self-pity. I began to get sick and tired of the typical media recession story – which was about rich people having to cut back on the hours they spend with their personal trainers. All right, I realize those are man-bites-dog stories compared to a story about a laid-off roofer being evicted from his trailer home. But it seemed to me that the recession had absolutely eliminated the poor and the working class from the media consciousness. Once again, they had disappeared from sight.

So a couple of weeks ago, I pitched a certain well-known newspaper a series of re-

ported essays on precisely this topic. They took it – but at about only one-quarter of what they had paid me for writing columns five years ago, barely enough to cover expenses. That bothered me. But then I had a kind of epiphany and realized: I’ve got to do this anyway. I’m on a mission, and I’ll do whatever it takes.

Which brings me back to the subject of journalism as a profession. We are not part of an elite. We are part of the working class, which is exactly how journalists have seen themselves through most of American history – as working stiffs. We can be underpaid, we can be jerked around, we can be laid off arbitrarily – just like any autoworker or mechanic or hotel housekeeper or flight attendant.

But there is this difference: A laid-off autoworker doesn’t go into his or her garage and assemble cars by hand. But we – journalists – we can’t stop doing what we do.

As long as there is a story to be told, an injustice to be exposed, a mystery to be solved, we will find a way to do it. A recession won’t stop us. A dying industry won’t stop us. Even poverty won’t stop us, because we are all on a mission here. That’s the meaning of your journalism degree. Do not consider it a certificate promising some sort of entitlement. Consider it a license to fight.

In the ‘70s, it was gonzo journalism. For us right now, it’s guerrilla journalism, and we will not be stopped.

Barbara Ehrenreich is the author of This Land is Their Land: Reports From a Divided Nation (Holt Paperbacks, April 2009).

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JOE BAGEANT**
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Die, zombie newspapers, die!

Daily newspapers really died a generation ago, and now their corpses are following suit, says **Michael I. Niman**

Headlines and TV news leads are abuzz with obituaries for the newspaper business, as if the industry had suddenly curled up and died. Sure, the nation's top newspapers are in financial turmoil. A few major dailies recently shuttered their doors. Most papers are downsizing staff. Some, like the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Los Angeles Times*, physically shrunk, trimming their waistslines by about three inches. *The Detroit News/Free Press* and *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* are moving away from printed paper and going virtual. Denver's 150-year-old *Rocky Mountain News*, the 128-year-old *Cincinnati Post*, and the 87-year-old *Albuquerque Tribune* have recently closed down entirely and gone to the compost pile. Hence, the post-mortem for the industry.

Like much of what we've been reading in our daily newspapers, however, the story about the collapse of journalism is old news. Newspapers have been dead for quite a while. The only twist is that their rancid zombie bodies have finally followed suit. I know this sounds cruel, and I'm no doubt raising the ire of legions of coupon-clippers, crossword enthusiasts, and dog-smackers, but let's look at the history here.

The collapse of the newspaper industry was predicated by its loss of biodiversity. The monopoly model grew to dominate the industry by the middle of the 20th

century. In almost every American city, the dominant paper, buoyed by a growing economy of scale, drove its competition out of business. By the end of the century, approximately 98 percent of American cities were one-newspaper towns.

The monopolies threatened democracy, with the dailies often acting as regional news gatekeepers whose spin dominated local politics. Their power put them above reproach; few politicians ever took on the local daily and lived, at least career-wise, to tell about it. And they jacked up advertising prices, sometimes to the point of threatening the very existence of struggling businesses.

With their regional monopolies, newspapers regularly generated double-digit returns for their Wall Street investors, becoming one of the nation's most profitable industries. The romance of the cub reporter out chasing hot leads, ferreting out corruption, scooping the competition, and saving democracy, however, was dead. Newspapers, as profit generators, more and more were taken over by conglomerates in business not to inform, educate, and agitate, but simply to make money, like any other whore on the street.

The monopoly model gave newspapers a good run financially, but it was short-lived because publishers grew fat and arrogant as they sat on their thumbs, viewing their

Newspapers, as profit generators, more and more were taken over by conglomerates in business not to inform, educate, and agitate, but simply to make money, like any other whore on the street

When was the last time you read a story in the auto section critical of a car, or a story in the real estate section critical of irresponsible development patterns?

growing profits more as an entitlement than as something they would have to work to earn. Without competition, they cut staff, even in good financial times, greedily bleeding their papers for ever-increasing profit margins. Generic wire service stories replaced hard-hitting local reporting, and papers lost their significance as sources of local news.

The profit-whore model meant that newspapers avoided biting the hands that fed them. This meant avoiding stories that pissed off advertisers, friends of advertisers, and the folks that advertisers sucked up to. It also meant avoiding any controversy that could in any way upset any party that might one day think of advertising. Between these two censored categories lie most of the stories that make newspapers both necessary and vibrant.

In its more extreme form, the profit-whore model meant not only trying not to offend but actually sucking up to advertisers. Hence, newspapers replaced hard news with soft, advertising-driven fluff stories and entire advertiser-driven sections of the paper.

Think about it. When was the last time you read a story in the auto section critical of a car, or a story in the real estate section critical of irresponsible development patterns?

On the macro level, the “suck up to power and don’t ask questions” mandate to which newspapers adhered left us, for example, with nearly every major newspaper in the United States shamelessly parroting subsequently discredited Bush administration propaganda in the lead-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. In fact, many media critics now argue that the pro-war bias of American newspapers was a key factor in allowing the Bush administration to lead the nation into war. Alternative news sources, residing mostly in cyberspace, countered this false information with what has proven to be prescient analysis and more accurate information – but they couldn’t counter the misinformation disseminated by newspa-

pers.

Look over Project Censored’s tally of the most important but least reported stories of the past 20 years. They choose 25 mind-boggling stories each year – stuff like Halliburton selling nuclear technology to Iran, Halliburton getting contracts to build detention centers in the US, and Dick Cheney’s Halliburton stock rising 3,000 percent during the Iraq war. These stories cover the gamut from government allowances for carcinogens in our food and water to the destruction of habeas corpus and basic human rights protections and the wholesale corporate plunder of natural resources.

Yet, in any given year, you can count the number of these stories broken by daily newspapers on your thumbs – and usually have a thumb or two left over. Newspapers have let us down. That’s why we’ve turned to other sources for our news.

Sure, the newsprint model of squishing forests into paper pulp is dated in the digital age, but that’s not why these massive news organizations are dying. Today’s major newspapers have, on average, a century or so of brand-building under their belts. They should be the principle recognized players in the news industry, in every medium. These should be strong brands well placed to dominate a convergent media landscape – but after a generation of suck-up-manship, their brands, and hence, their value on Wall Street, are trash. After leading us into war with Judith Miller’s mindless cheerleading for the Bush administration, why should we trust the New York Times for information about Iraq? And, really, why the hell should we pay for their misinformation?

Many of the stories we’re reading and watching about the collapse of newspapers are authored by papers whining about their own self-induced demise, or by similarly run and equally whorish TV news organizations, prematurely gloating about the death of newspapers as they follow closely down the same path to irrelevance. Missing

from this analysis is coverage about the consequent growth of democratic media organizations that actually challenge the status quo and report on dangerous and troubling news stories. In this context, the story isn't one of a generation racing toward illiteracy and apathy, but a much more hopeful story about a media revolution. Let's look at this as a market adjustment, with the value of the propaganda model plummeting. This is not a bad development.

Big media won't die garcefully, however. No. They're wheeling out a host of wonks – so-called experts – to tell us that newspapers have been killed off by, get this, Craig's List.

Think about that. It seems the mysterious loss of classified revenue turned out to be the silver bullet laying the undead to rest. But (and seldom does anyone ask) why did the dailies lose their classified ads? Coincidentally, this loss came on the heels of their readership dwindling. And many of those ads migrated not to Craig's List but to the weekly alternative papers that have been picking up the reporting slack as the big guys shied away from dangerous stories. This is the market at work – Friedman, not Marx. Where do you look when you want to rent an apartment? And the weeklies didn't inherit these ads from dead relatives – they worked for them around the same time the dailies stopped working.

For journalism to thrive, journalists need to be paid. Critics of democratic media are quick to point out that the market cannot support a million on-line information venues, and small media organizations can only afford small salaries for all but a handful of workers. So, the argument goes, we need a new model to finance quality media.

True indeed. But this same argument often operates on the premise that the old model – big monopoly newspapers – were doing that, and the death of the big boys now means the end of journalism as a profession.

The remuneration system by which professional journalists are paid has been

way out of wack for a long time, rewarding some of the worst, most spineless, boot-licking writers while punishing hard-working, risk-taking journalists. Let's look at the *New York Post*, for example – clearly one of the nation's worst, sensationalist, fear-mongering, xenophobic rags. They employ some of the highest-paid “journalists” in the industry. Meanwhile, in the same city, the hard-hitting, award-winning *Indypendent* (yes, it's spelled with a “y”) relies on volunteer writers for some of the best local investigative reporting in the country.

If we stop rewarding lackeys for selling out their supposed profession, that's not a bad thing. Finding revenue streams to pay good journalists is a whole other issue.

The bottom line here is that while there might not be a future for soulless, zombie monopoly newspapers, there is a future for journalism.

I'm reminded of a meeting I had a few years back with a delegation of Ukrainian journalists. They were all middle-aged, which means they trained as journalists in a totalitarian Soviet society where there was no journalism. Still, generation after generation, aspiring journalists learned skills they were barred from using. Then the empire collapsed, and when it collapsed, there were journalists waiting to come out of hibernation.

Maybe that's the story here. Perhaps the collapse of self-censored monopoly papers will finally break the stronghold that mediocrity has held over journalism for a generation. Maybe this means that good journalists won't have to hold day jobs in other professions to support themselves. Perhaps it means weasels will no longer edit newspapers.

Or maybe not much will change other than the venue in which misinformation and trivia is delivered. In any event, I'm not shedding any tears for corporate media. **CT**

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

The bottom line here is that while there might not be a future for soulless, zombie monopoly newspapers, there is a future for journalism

The world sucks and we think it's gravity

Fred Reed looks behind the headlines and finds a sorry, sad and confused world out there

I hear you asking, “Fred, what arrogance, even by your vertiginous standards. You aren’t an economist. What makes you think you know anything about economics?”

I’m going to take poison. Every time I read the headlines, I want to take poison. Always they are a concentrated tale of avarice, wretched judgment, murderousness, and lugubrious taste. I’m thinking potassium cyanide. To sleep, perchance to dream....

Headlines: “Chrysler Heads Back to Bankruptcy Court Friday”; “Crash Diet: GM Getting in Shape for Chapter Eleven” “Economy Sinks at a 5.7 Percent Rate in 1Q.”

We’re a Second World country and working on Third, I tell you. We probably won’t be able to make our own cars before long. The economy is croaking. So what we need to do is have a lot of expensive foreign wars. Anybody can see it. You can’t run your own country? Then kill a bunch of thirteenth-century peasants. That’ll fix it.

I think I may have to take over the economy. Yes, I hear you asking, “Fred, what arrogance, even by your vertiginous standards. You aren’t an economist. What makes you think you know anything about economics?”

To which I reply, “What makes you think economists know anything about economics? Who got us into this mess, me or economists? I have never bought anything on credit in my life, and I have zero debt. Would you rather have me running things, or economists?”

Headline: “North Korea Tests Missiles.”

Oh good. North Korea has the Bomb and, now, missiles of short range. Short is how long the range is to Seoul and the American bases in South Korea. Bad juju, says my astute military mind. And so Hillary Clinton, former First Housewife turned Millie Metternich and expert on all things foreign, wants sanctions against North Korea. This makes perfect sense. They’ve got nuclear weapons, so let’s piss them off. Sanctions will have no effect on their Bomb, but may make them desperate enough to use it. What could be a better idea?

Remember when George W. Hufflepuff was never going to let the malignant Northerners have the Bomb? No, indeed. He was going to pyong their yang if they even thought about it. That worked, didn’t it? Now President Blackbush is making threatening noises at Korea as if he could do anything about it. He’s going to make those heathen behave, and put the cost on the national credit card with the Bank of China.

Moonie Boy Scout

Headline: “Army Chief: US Can Fight N. Korea if Necessary.” Yes. General George Casey, Army chief of staff, says we’re ready. In the accompanying photo he has the daft look of a Moonie Boy Scout. I have thought that officers must be issued some form of

psychological disturbance when they sign up. Anyway, the US economy is rattling its death rattle, industry either leaves the country or goes tits sunward, America is now the world's greatest debtor nation, and this dazed silver-haired bull dog wants another war. Why? What's wrong with the wars we've got?

Headline: "Israel Dismisses US Demand on Settlements." I guess that doesn't leave much doubt about who controls Washington. Israel, being utterly dependent on the United States for its existence, is the one country that Washington should be able to dictate to. If the US were an independent country, and told the Knesset to wear tutus and toe shoes, in ten minutes they'd be grunting their way through Swan Lake. I don't know, though. Given how the US manages its own foreign policy, I can see why the Israelis might not be enthusiastic about American suggestions.

Headline: "Senator Lautenberg: US Won't Be Upset if Israel Strikes Iran." Well, Senator Lautenberg, presumably an Arab, won't be upset. But with which Americans has he consulted? Me? I guess I missed his call.

Real answer: He has consulted with Congress, 535 commoditized temple monkeys pawing through the ruins of America in search of bribes. The bicameral whorehouse on Capitol Hill works like a vending machine. You put coins in the slot, select your law, and the desired legislation slides out.

Thing is, Israel can't attack Iran without an American OK, which Iran knows, so that puts us at war with Iran, and our Iraqi colony shares a long border with Iran, while Israel doesn't. Something to think about. Should we ever take up thinking.

Headline: "Study: Israeli Attack on Iran Unlikely to Work." If I were an Israeli, I'd worry about that too. Right now, Iran and Israel are making unpleasant noises at each other, but no more. What if Israel, that least Jewish of countries, attacks but doesn't kill Iran's nuclear program? Bombing is an act

of war. It would give Iran every moral and legal right to bomb back with anything it had, or might make soon. Kerblooey.

Both America and Israel are accustomed to attacking countries that can't hit back. There is such a thing as getting too comfortable.

Headline: "White House: Solomayor Says She Chose Word Poorly." She is Blackbush's choice for the Supreme Mausoleum. Court, I meant. Apparently what she said was that a "wise Latina woman" would reach better decisions than "a white male." Oh. Then why have a Supreme Court at all? We could just replace it with a wise Latina woman. I wonder who she has in mind.

My thought was, oh god, more smug misandry. More man-bashing from an angry brown female who doesn't know how her car works. I'm happy with Latinos on the Court, or women or blacks or Jews. But not another wielder of mortal boredom, blathering about white males.

See why cyanide appeals?

Backward countries

Headline: "Pakistani Army Retakes Largest Town in Swat Valley."

Once more we see the iron claws of the Pentagon digging at the eyeballs of backward countries. Have we no shame? (No.) We want the gas of the Caspian Basin so we invade Afghanistan, yelling and honking about democracy and terror. Next we start murdering Pakistanis from the air with really fun drones, and now we force the Pakis to kill their own people. This is the Southeast Asian paradigm. We killed a million Vietnamese for no particular reason, savaged Laos, brought Pol Pot to power, and then went home to swim at Malibu. Iran, however, is a rogue country.

New headline, just popped up: "Gates: Nuclear Armed North Korea Not Acceptable." What the hell does that mean? They are nuclear-armed. You either nuke them, invade them, or accept them. Which? Anything any country does is acceptable unless you are prepared and able not to accept it.

Once more we see the iron claws of the Pentagon digging at the eyeballs of backward countries. Have we no shame? (No.)

STATE OF CONFUSION

Fizzing and blowing serves only to advertise impotence.

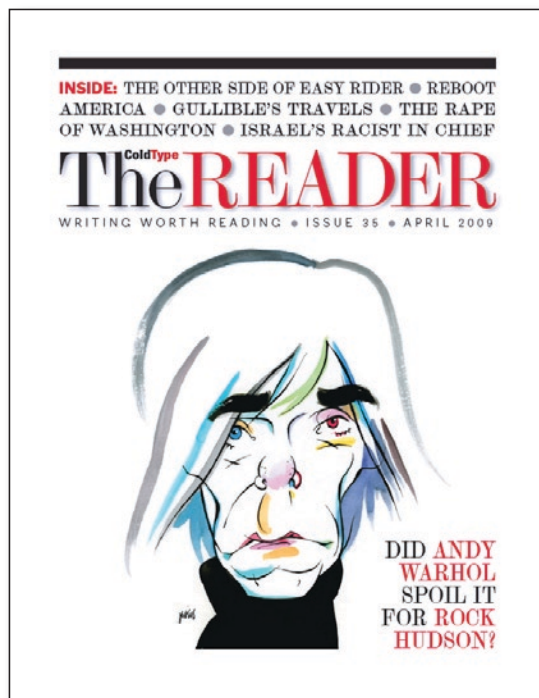
Headline: "Swine Flu in Ecuador." I guess that explains why it isn't in Mexico: It's somewhere else. For weeks Mexico has been standing on its head to repel the dread epidemic. Schools closed, bars closed, public events were canceled, the government handed out little masks. No flu. I'm thinking of importing a case and charging people to look at it. It would be a bigger draw than

a three-headed goat. We have yet to see a case of flu.

I can't stand it. I'm off to Farmacia Guadalajara for something deadly. There are limits. **CT**

Fred Reed has worked on staff for Army Times, The Washingtonian, Soldier of Fortune, Federal Computer Week, and The Washington Times. His web site is www.fredoneverything.net

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Grand theft auto

Greg Palast tells how Stevie the Rat bankrupted GM and screwed the autoworkers

Screw the autoworkers. They may be crying about General Motors' bankruptcy today. But dumping 40,000 of the last 60,000 union jobs into a mass grave won't spoil Jamie Dimon's day.

Dimon is the CEO of JP Morgan Chase bank. While GM workers are losing their retirement health benefits, their jobs, their life savings; while shareholders are getting zilch and many creditors getting hosed, a few privileged GM lenders – led by Morgan and Citibank – expect to get back 100% of their loans to GM, a stunning \$6 billion.

The way these banks are getting their \$6 billion bonanza is stone cold illegal.

I smell a rat.

Stevie the Rat, to be precise. Steven Rattner, Barack Obama's 'Car Czar' – the man who essentially ordered GM into bankruptcy this morning.

When a company goes bankrupt, everyone takes a hit: fair or not, workers lose some contract wages, stockholders get wiped out and creditors get fragments of what's left. That's the law. What workers don't lose are their pensions (including old-age health funds) already taken from their wages and held in their name.

But not this time. Stevie the Rat has a different plan for GM: grab the pension funds to pay off Morgan and Citi.

Here's the scheme: Rattner is demanding the bankruptcy court simply wipe away the

money GM owes workers for their retirement health insurance. Cash in the insurance fund would be replaced by GM stock. The percentage may be 17% of GM's stock – or 25%. Whatever, 17% or 25% is worth, well ... just try paying for your dialysis with 50 shares of bankrupt auto stock.

Yet Citibank and Morgan, says Rattner, should get their whole enchilada – \$6 billion right now and in cash – from a company that can't pay for auto parts or worker eye exams.

So what's wrong with seizing workers' pension fund money in a bankruptcy? The answer, Mr. Obama, Mr. Law Professor, is that it's illegal.

In 1974, after a series of scandalous take-downs of pension and retirement funds during the Nixon era, Congress passed the Employee Retirement Income Security Act. ERISA says you can't seize workers' pension funds (whether monthly payments or health insurance) any more than you can seize their private bank accounts. And that's because they are the same thing: workers give up wages in return for retirement benefits.

The law is darn explicit that grabbing pension money is a no-no. Company executives must hold these retirement funds as "fiduciaries." Here's the law, Professor Obama, as described on the government's own web site under the heading, "Health

So what's wrong with seizing workers' pension fund money in a bankruptcy? The answer, Mr. Obama, Mr. Law Professor, is that it's illegal

PENSION WOES

Pensions are wiped away and two connected banks don't even get a haircut? How come Citi and Morgan aren't asked, like workers and other creditors, to take stock in GM?

*Economist and journalist **Greg Palast**, a former trade union contract negotiator, is author of the New York Times bestsellers *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy* and *Armed Madhouse*. He is a GM bondholder and card-carrying member of United Automobile Workers Local 1981.*

Plans and Benefits.”

“The primary responsibility of fiduciaries is to run the plan solely in the interest of participants and beneficiaries and for the exclusive purpose of providing benefits.”

Every business in America that runs short of cash would love to dip into retirement kitties, but it's not their money any more than a banker can seize your account when the bank's a little short. A plan's assets are for the plan's members only, not for Mr. Dimon nor Mr. Rubin.

Yet, in effect, the Obama Administration is demanding that money for an elderly auto worker's spleen should be siphoned off to feed the TARP babies. Workers go without lung transplants so Dimon and Rubin can pimp out their ride. This is another “Guantanamo” moment for the Obama Administration – channeling Nixon to endorse the preventive detention of retiree health insurance.

Filching GM's pension assets doesn't become legal because the cash due the fund is replaced with GM stock. Congress saw through that switch-a-roo by requiring that companies, as fiduciaries, must “...act prudently and must diversify the plan's investments in order to minimize the risk of large losses.”

By “diversify” for safety, the law does not mean put 100% of worker funds into a single busted company's stock. This is dangerous business: The Rattner plan opens the floodgate to every politically-connected or down-on-their-luck company seeking to drain health care retirement funds.

House of Rubin

Pensions are wiped away and two connected banks don't even get a haircut? How come Citi and Morgan aren't asked, like workers and other creditors, to take stock in GM?

As Butch said to Sundance, who ARE these guys? You remember Morgan and Citi. These are the corporate Welfare Queens who've already sucked up over a third of a trillion dollars in aid from the US

Treasury and Federal Reserve. Not coincidentally, Citi, the big winner, has paid over \$100 million to Robert Rubin, the former US Treasury Secretary. Rubin was Obama's point-man in winning banks' endorsement and campaign donations (by far, his largest source of his corporate funding).

With GM's last dying dimes about to fall into one pocket, and the Obama Treasury in his other pocket, Morgan's Jamie Dimon is correct in saying that the last twelve months will prove to be the bank's “finest year ever.” Which leaves us to ask the question: is the forced bankruptcy of GM, the elimination of tens of thousands of jobs, just a collection action for favored financiers?

And it's been a good year for Rattner. While the Obama Administration made a big deal out of Rattner's youth spent working for the Steelworkers Union, they tried to sweep under the chassis that Rattner was one of the privileged, select group of investors in Cerberus Capital, the owners of Chrysler. “Owning” is a loose term. Cerberus “owned” Chrysler the way a cannibal “hosts” you for dinner. Cerberus paid nothing for Chrysler – indeed, they were paid billions by Germany's Daimler Corporation to haul it away. Cerberus kept the cash, then dumped Chrysler's bankrupt corpse on the US taxpayer.

(“Cerberus,” by the way, named itself after the Roman's mythical three-headed dog guarding the gates of hell. Subtle these guys are not.)

While Stevie the Rat sold his interest in the Dog from Hell when he became Car Czar, he never relinquished his post at the shop of vultures called Quadrangle Hedge Fund. Rattner's personal net worth stands at roughly half a billion dollars. This is Obama's working class hero.

If you ran a business and played fast and loose with your workers' funds, you could land in prison. Stevie the Rat's plan is nothing less than Grand Theft Auto Pension.

It doesn't make it any less of a crime if the President drives the getaway car. **CT**

An auto giant falls and workers pay the price

Despite complaints by right-wing blowhards about the bankruptcy and government takeover of auto giant GM, it's the auto workers, their families and communities who are getting screwed, writes **Alan Maas**

The bankruptcy and government takeover of General Motors marks the end of an era in which U.S. capitalism could claim to offer an “American dream” of rising standards of living for working people – and highlights a grim future for workers under American capitalism.

GM was once the quintessential industrial powerhouse, synonymous with the dominance of U.S. capitalism worldwide. Now GM is a symbol of the decline of U.S. capitalism.

From AIG to GM, American capitalists' short-term obsession with profits and their religious faith in the free market contributed mightily to an epic collapse. Even before the auto industry's crash, the current recession had already shattered the lives of millions of working people in the U.S.

For the last 30 years, workers have been forced to compensate for stagnant or falling wages with ever-increasing amounts of debt. The financial meltdown and the housing bust put an end to that, wiping out tens of billions of dollars in household wealth. Now comes rising unemployment, reductions in wages and benefits, and deep cuts in public spending on education and health care. The bankruptcy of GM – and Chrysler before it – will only accelerate those trends.

But none of that bothers right-wingers

in Congress or conservative commentators. To them, the deal that gives the federal government 60 percent control over GM is further evidence of President Barack Obama's “socialism.”

“What we've done...it's the road toward socialism, government intervention in the market in a big way,” said Sen. Richard Shelby (R-Ala.). “I'm sure they haven't cut enough, and there aren't enough concessions there.” Shelby, of course, was all for handing out government money when the state of Alabama gave \$530 million in tax breaks to BMW, Honda and Toyota to get those automakers to build factories in his state – all non union, of course.

The *Wall Street Journal* editorial page sounded a similar theme. “The new agreement simplifies some work rules and job descriptions but makes no reductions in hourly pay, pensions or health care for active workers,” the *Journal* complained. It was forgetting that the United Auto Workers (UAW) agreed to forgive a \$20 billion debt that GM owes the union for a retiree health care fund. Instead, the UAW health care trust fund will get 17.5 percent of company stock – which is highly unlikely to ever be worth enough to pay for retirees' health care.

At Chrysler, the UAW health care trust fund will get 55 percent of company stock under the takeover by Fiat – but that's even

Shelby, of course, was all for handing out government money when the state of Alabama gave \$530 million in tax breaks to BMW, Honda and Toyota to get those automakers to build factories in his state – all nonunion, of course

UNION BUSTING

While media commentators may complain about GM's terrible management and disastrous investment decisions, they concentrate their fire on "overpaid" autoworkers for causing the company's problems – even though labor costs account for less than 10 percent of GM vehicles' costs

more likely to force cuts in retiree health care. And at both Chrysler and GM, the UAW gave up the right to strike until 2015 – and contract negotiations will apparently be replaced by arbitration.

So despite the complaints of right-wing blowhards, it's autoworkers, their families and communities who are getting screwed. With 14 GM plants set to close, the company's UAW workforce will be downsized from 64,000 today to just 40,000 – compared to 450,000 in the late 1970s.

And as better-paid autoworkers retire, most will be replaced with new hires earning just about half the current top wage of about \$28 per hour, thanks to a contract concession made several years ago.

That means that the UAW, once the pacesetter in winning improvements in wages and conditions for U.S. workers, is now collaborating with Corporate America in its race to the bottom. As *Labor Notes'* Jane Slaughter put it, "From now on, working for the auto companies will be just another bust-your-hump factory job."

Worst recession

The impact of GM'S collapse – and that of Chrysler before it – marks the convergence of three crises: the worst recession since the 1930s; the resulting acceleration of a long-term decline of decently paid, unionized manufacturing jobs; and the rollback of what little exists of a welfare state in the U.S.

Under these conditions, the impact of the auto crisis will radiate throughout the economy – not only in its direct effects on related industries like auto parts and steel, but in setting an example for employers who are determined to cut wages and benefits.

Of course, even in its heyday, GM was never the utopia for autoworkers that right-wingers imagine. The company was notorious for the brutal pace of its assembly lines, its militaristic discipline and constant attempts to undermine union power in the workplace. If the company set the

standards for blue-collar wages and benefits, it's only because the union was powerful enough to fight for them and win.

Over the last 30 years, however, the UAW has been unwilling or unable to resist continuous cuts in jobs. Hourly pay was effectively limited to increases in the rate of inflation. And now, as the Obama administration triumphantly proclaims, "the concessions that the UAW agreed to are more aggressive than what the Bush administration originally demanded in its loan agreement with GM."

But none of this is good enough for anti-union forces, which never forgave the UAW for its radical beginnings in the 1930s that included illegal factory occupations and clashes with police and the National Guard.

While media commentators may complain about GM's terrible management and disastrous investment decisions, they concentrate their fire on "overpaid" autoworkers for causing the company's problems – even though labor costs account for less than 10 percent of GM vehicles' costs.

The auto crisis should be an opportunity to forge ahead in new directions for the U.S. economy – to meet goals the Obama administration claims it supports, like creating jobs and supporting green industries.

But as former labor secretary Robert Reich pointed on the public radio program *Marketplace*, the government isn't spending \$50 billion to save jobs, since the Obama administration's plans call for the elimination of 21,000 positions at GM. The only logic to the government intervention, Reich argued, is to soften the economic blows from GM's unraveling:

But if the purpose is to help the Midwest adapt to industrial decline, investing that much money in GM seems an inefficient way to accomplish it. Wouldn't it be better to use the money to convert GM and other declining manufacturing companies into producing what America needs, such as light rail systems and new energy efficient materials, and training laid-off autowork-

ers for the technician jobs of the future?

Filmmaker Michael Moore made a similar argument, calling for the conversion of GM factories to social needs, modeled on the changeover from car manufacturing to military production during the Second World War:

President Obama, now that he has taken control of GM, needs to convert the factories to new and needed uses immediately: Don't put another \$30 billion into the coffers of GM to build cars. Instead, use that money to keep the current workforce – and most of those who have been laid off – employed so that they can build the new modes of 21st century transportation. Let them start the conversion work now.

Crushing the union

Instead, the Obama administration is using bankruptcy as a means to beat down the UAW and lure private capital into taking over a profitable “new GM” that's rid of its debt and unwanted assets. “The [administration's] GM/auto task force plan for bankruptcy and restructuring – shaped by a secretive, unaccountable group of Wall Street expats without expertise in the industry – seems designed above all to per-

petuate GM as a corporate entity,” wrote left-wing journalist Robert Weissman.

The GM and Chrysler bankruptcy proceedings fit perfectly with Obama's banker-friendly economic policy: a thinly disguised state capitalism in which the government bails out and props up failed companies, but hides behind private managers in order to dodge political responsibility for everything from rising home foreclosures and the bankers' outrageous executive pay to auto factory closures.

The collapse of GM is a signal moment in the history of U.S. capitalism. A stronger and more militant labor movement could seize the opportunity to call for new economic priorities that not only maintain good-paying manufacturing jobs, but create millions more of them.

Instead, the bankers and their enablers in the Obama administration are calling the shots. That means the autoworkers and other workers will keep paying the price for this crisis – until they're organized enough to fight back.

CT

Alan Maas is editor of Socialist Worker. This article originally appeared on the Socialist Worker web site at www.socialistworker.org

We cannot escape most of what was already set in motion before our birth, such as being moved around by larger forces, for necessary employment, or alleged opportunity, or for “quality of life” as measured by consumption (a corporate yardstick if ever there was one)

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Britain's real expenses scandal

It's thousand times bigger than the one Britain's inflamed about, so why doesn't it ignite public anger?, asks **George Monbiot**

Somehow, over the past four weeks, the £5bn for widening four sections of motorway has mutated into £6.2bn for widening two

For a moment, my heart leapt. The headline on the front of a recent *Daily Mail* contained the words travel, scandal, extortionate and £6.2. I imagined, until I read it properly, that it referred to the £6.2bn contract to expand the M25 motorway, which has just been signed. Some hope. "The £6.2m bill: Scandal of how MPs are taking taxpayers for a ride with extortionate travel expenses" referred to a rip-off precisely 100th of the size of the travel expenses scandal that interests me.

I understand the public anger and fascination about MPs' expenses, and the burning question of whether you can obtain capital gains tax exemption on your second duck house. But it is microscopic by comparison to the corruption that has been bubbling along merrily for 15 years in the UK, unmolested by the tabloid press.

In April, the widening of four sections of the M25 was to have cost you and me £5bn. This was already a spectacular rip-off. The Campaign for Better Transport had calculated that the same amount of extra road space – if it were really needed – could have been created for £478m¹. But somehow, over the past weeks, the £5bn for widening four sections of motorway has mutated into £6.2bn for widening two². In Sicily, officials agree to terms like this with the help of dainty gifts like horse's heads

and waistcoats full of fish. In the UK, the government volunteers them without any obvious inducement.

There's nothing remarkable about this inflation: it appears to be an inherent property of the government's private finance initiative schemes. The PFI allows consortiums of banks, construction and service companies to build and run our public infrastructure. Though the government maintains that this offers better value than using public money, in reality the numbers behind all PFI projects are rigged^{3,4}. While the government retains much of the risk, the investors keep the profits, which often run to many times the value of the schemes. The public liability incurred so far by the private finance initiative is £215bn⁵. Much of this spending (half? three-quarters? – the deals are so complex and opaque that we will never know for sure) is pure pork fat. One day the repayments will destroy Britain's public finances. This extravagance makes our MPs look like ascetics.

But this waste will never feature on the front page of the *Daily Mail* – or any page at all. Though it purports to speak for the lower middle classes, the *Mail* serves the rentier class, which benefits from these deals. The issue is also so complex that it is hard to see how it could be conveyed in a tabloid story. You have only to write the words private finance initiative to lose 90%

of your readers.

Across twelve years of researching this issue, I have kept running into the brick wall of public indifference. I have used every conceivable device to try to convey the scope and scale of this rip-off. None of them works. Like the academics Jean Shaoul and Allyson Pollock, the magazines *Private Eye* and *Red Pepper* and the *Sunday Telegraph*'s columnist Liam Halligan, all of whom have spent years exposing this scandal, I appear to have been wasting my time. The issue is too remote and too complex to ignite public indignation. The scheme's obscurity has protected it from the outrage now being directed towards MPs.

But just in case anyone is still reading, I'll try again. The terms offered by the new M25 scheme are so generous that an orang utan in a suit and tie couldn't fail to clean up. The new price appears to represent the cost to the government of keeping the banks in the deal. The scheme is meant to be ready in time for the Olympics, but the companies involved have spun out the negotiations for so long – demanding ever more outrageous terms – that the government is now prepared to pay almost any price to get the road widened on time, regardless of future liabilities. The option of tackling the problem by reducing the volume of traffic – an orbital coach network is the most obvious solution – was never considered. When Alistair Darling was transport secretary, he was asked about this alternative in the Commons. He dismissed it out of hand⁶.

One of the consistent features of PFI is that the projects are reverse-engineered to meet the demands of corporate investors. This, for example, is how the £30m public scheme to refurbish Coventry's two hospitals became a £410m private scheme to knock them both down and rebuild one of them – containing fewer beds and fewer doctors and nurses⁷. The old scheme was too cheap to attract private money. Similarly, an orbital bus system offers only modest profits.

Last year, the Treasury promised to bring private finance deals onto the government's balance sheets, in order to meet international financial reporting standards. Most PFI schemes don't count as public debt, which is one of the reasons why the government finds them attractive. (The other is that this corporate welfare bought New Labour the support of business groups and sections of the rightwing press). But on May 13th, at the height of the MPs' expenses scandal, the Treasury quietly reneged on this promise⁸.

In opposition, when Labour opposed PFI, Alistair Darling complained that "apparent savings now could be countered by the formidable commitment on revenue expenditure in years to come"⁹. Now, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, he has decided to keep disguising this commitment from the public. Government departments will publish two sets of accounts: one which keeps PFI schemes on the books to meet international standards, another that keeps them off the books in order to conceal the extent of public liabilities¹⁰. This is what Enron did: it produced different sets of accounts for different audiences.

The Treasury issued no press release to announce this change of policy, and refuses to send me its guidance to government departments, which explains how the new rules will work. The private finance initiative, like parliament, has been protected for years by secrecy and obfuscation.

We never could afford this extravagance, but to keep squandering money on PFI schemes today, when we know how much trouble government finances are in, is lunacy. Last month the ratings agency Standard & Poor's warned that the UK's credit rating could be cut¹¹. No one in this government appears to care about the extra, unacknowledged debt it is loading onto future administrations through PFI. Because these schemes run for 25 or 30 years, their liabilities are someone else's problem.

The health secretary Alan Johnson has just called for a "root and branch look at

But just in case anyone is still reading, I'll try again. The terms offered by the new M25 scheme are so generous that an orang utan in a suit and tie couldn't fail to clean up

The Conservatives, for all David Cameron's talk of "re-instating accountability" have no intention of scrapping PFI

how our democracy works"¹². Is the notion that this might include a re-appraisal of the private finance initiative too much to hope for? Yes. There is no tabloid campaign against this corruption, nor will there ever be. The Conservatives, for all David Cameron's talk of "re-instating accountability" have no intention of scrapping PFI. The real British expenses scandal appears to be immune to exposure. **CT**

George Monbiot's latest book is Bring On The Acopalypse, Essays on Self-Destruction.

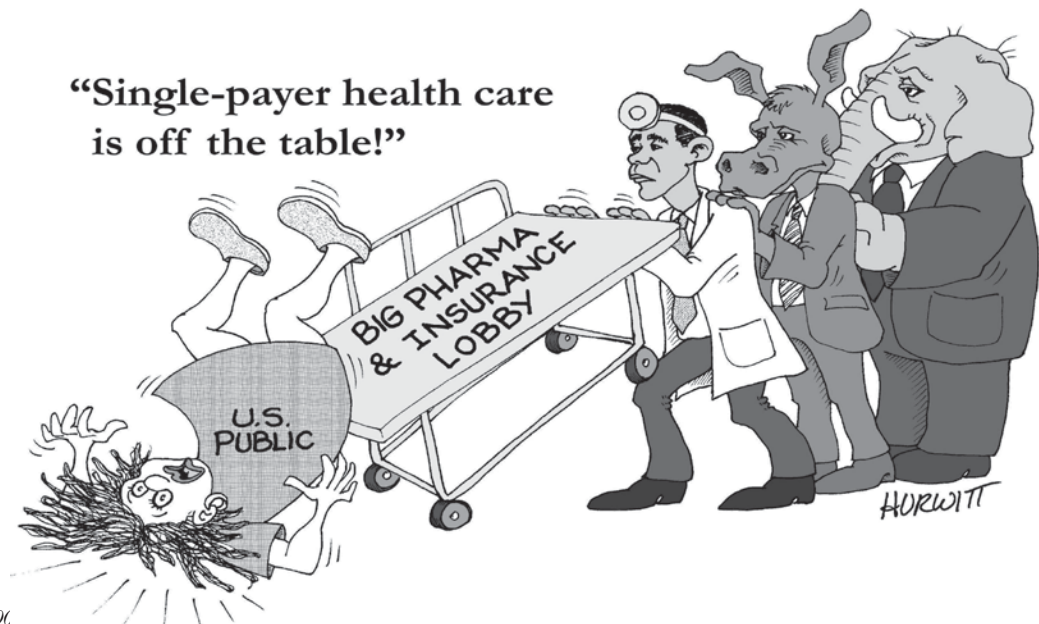
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HURWITT'S EYE

Mark Hurwitt



The depth of corruption

John Pilger on the corruption of democracy in Britain

The theft of public money by members of parliament, including government ministers, has given Britons a rare glimpse inside the tent of power and privilege. It is rare because not one political reporter or commentator, those who fill tombstones of column inches and dominate broadcast journalism, revealed a shred of this scandal. It was left to a public relations man to sell the “leak”. Why?

The answer lies in a deeper corruption, which tales of tax evasion and phantom mortgages touch upon but also conceal. Since Margaret Thatcher, British parliamentary democracy has been progressively destroyed as the two main parties have converged into a single-ideology business state, each with almost identical social, economic and foreign policies. This “project” was completed by Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, inspired by the political monoculture of the United States. That so many Labour and Tory politicians are now revealed as personally crooked is no more than a metaphor for the anti-democratic system they have forged together.

Their accomplices have been those journalists who report Parliament as “lobby correspondents” and their editors, who have “played the game” wilfully, and have deluded the public (and sometimes themselves) that vital, democratic differences

exist between the parties. Media-designed opinion polls based on absurdly small samplings, along with a tsunami of comment on personalities and their specious crises, have reduced the “national conversation” to a series of media events, in which the withdrawal of popular consent – as the historically low electoral turnouts under Blair demonstrated – has been abused as apathy.

Having fixed the boundaries of political debate and possibility, self-important paladins, notably liberals, promoted the naked emperor Blair and championed his “values” that would allow “the mind [to] range in search of a better Britain”. And when the bloodstains showed, they ran for cover. All of it had been, as Larry David once described an erstwhile crony, “a babbling brook of bullshit”.

How contrite their former heroes now seem. On 17 May, the Leader of the House of Commons, Harriet Harman, who is alleged to have spent £10,000 of taxpayers’ money on “media training”, called on MPs to “rebuild cross-party trust”. The unintended irony of her words recalls one of her first acts as social security secretary more than a decade ago – cutting the benefits of single mothers. This was spun and reported as if there was a “revolt” among Labour backbenchers, which was false. None of Blair’s new female MPs, who had been elected “to

The unintended irony of her words recalls one of her first acts as social security secretary more than a decade ago – cutting the benefits of single mothers

Britain's "Justice" Secretary, Jack Straw, blocked publication of crucial cabinet minutes from March 2003 about the planning of the invasion of Iraq, even though the Information Commissioner, Richard Thomas, has ordered their release

end male-dominated, Conservative policies", spoke up against this attack on the poorest of poor women. All voted for it.

The same was true of the lawless attack on Iraq in 2003, behind which the cross-party Establishment and the political media rallied. Andrew Marr stood in Downing Street and excitedly told BBC viewers that Blair had "said they would be able to take Baghdad without a bloodbath, and that in the end the Iraqis would be celebrating. And on both of those points he has been proved conclusively right." When Blair's army finally retreated from Basra in May, it left behind, according to scholarly estimates, more than a million people dead, a majority of stricken, sick children, a contaminated water supply, a crippled energy grid and four million refugees.

Criminal invasion

As for the "celebrating" Iraqis, the vast majority, say Whitehall's own surveys, want the invader out. And when Blair finally departed the House of Commons, MPs gave him a standing ovation – they who had refused to hold a vote on his criminal invasion or even to set up an inquiry into his lies, which almost three-quarters of the British population wanted.

Such venality goes far beyond the greed of the uppity Hazel Blears.

"Normalising the unthinkable", Edward Herman's phrase from his essay *The Banality of Evil*, about the division of labour in state crime, is applicable here. On 18 May, the *Guardian* devoted the top of one page to a report headlined, "Blair awarded \$1m prize for international relations work". This prize, announced in Israel soon after the Gaza massacre, was for his "cultural and social impact on the world". You looked in vain for evidence of a spoof or some recognition of the truth. Instead, there was his "optimism about the chance of bringing peace" and his work "designed to forge

peace".

This was the same Blair who committed the same crime – deliberately planning the invasion of a country, "the supreme international crime" – for which the Nazi foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop was hanged at Nuremberg after proof of his guilt was located in German cabinet documents. Last February, Britain's "Justice" Secretary, Jack Straw, blocked publication of crucial cabinet minutes from March 2003 about the planning of the invasion of Iraq, even though the Information Commissioner, Richard Thomas, has ordered their release. For Blair, the unthinkable is both normalised and celebrated.

"How our corrupt MPs are playing into the hands of extremists," said the cover of a recent issue of *New Statesman* magazine. But is not their support for the epic crime in Iraq already extremism? And for the murderous imperial adventure in Afghanistan? And for the government's collusion with torture?

It is as if our public language has finally become Orwellian. Using totalitarian laws approved by a majority of MPs, the police have set up secretive units to combat democratic dissent they call "extremism". Their de facto partners are "security" journalists, a recent breed of state or "lobby" propagandist. On 9 April, the BBC's Newsnight programme promoted the guilt of 12 "terrorists" arrested in a contrived media drama orchestrated by the Prime Minister himself. All were later released without charge.

Something is changing in Britain that gives cause for optimism. The British people have probably never been more politically aware and prepared to clear out decrepit myths and other rubbish while stepping angrily over the babbling brook of bullshit. **CT**

John Pilger's latest book, Freedom Next Time, is now available in paperback

He kept us safe (except when he didn't)

David Michael Green wonders why the Republicans keep bragging about how Bush saved his country from terror

I'm really sick to death of hearing the Bush administration people brag about how they kept us safe from terrorists, matrimonially inclined homosexuals, and other really mean people.

Sure, I understand why they do it. And, no, I'm not referring to the fact that regressives seem to be congenital liars, or that, because they themselves are so existentially frightened, they understand instinctively just how the politics of fear work.

No doubt all of that is part of the equation. But I think the bigger reason that we are continually exposed to this insane mantra is because, despite their delusional tendencies, even conservatives recognize the paucity of plausible alternative claims.

I mean, would you want to go to the public bragging about having booted two wars, one based entirely on lies, and both strung out now about twice the length of America's involvement in World War II? Would you run for office touting your party's achievements at doubling the size of the national debt? Would you point to Hurricane Katrina and say "Heckuva job, Bushie", expecting the public to agree?

The truth is that, yes, regressives almost always lie, and, yes, they love to play the politics of fear, but the key reason that they brag about having kept the country safe during the Bush years is because it's the only claim they can plausibly make with-

out being laughed out of the room.

In fact, though, they should be laughed out of the room for making what is in reality the most absurd claim of all. And then they should consider themselves damn lucky only to be laughed at.

Disingenuous regressives (and what other kind are there?) who try to sell you on this notion want you to believe that the Bush administration somehow began on September 12, 2001. They love to tell you about how the country was protected from terrorist attack after 9/11. But that's odd, isn't it? I always thought the job of the president was to protect the country for the entire length of his administration, not just nine-tenths of it.

Safe from attack?

It gets even odder still if you inject a little bit of logic into dissecting their argument, always a hugely dangerous enterprise from the perspective of regressive mythology. That is, let's just take them for a moment on their own terms, for the sake of argument. We're supposed to be impressed that George W. Bush kept the country safe from major terrorist attack. But of his forty-two predecessors in the Oval Office, can you think of any single one who failed to meet that test? Me neither.

Indeed, only one president experienced a major foreign terrorist attack on his watch

I mean, would you want to go to the public bragging about having booted two wars, one based entirely on lies, and both strung out now about twice the length of America's involvement in World War II?

POLITICS OF FEAR

When I say that George W. Bush is the only president to have “experienced” a major terrorist attack on his watch, that is the most charitable possible reading of events

over the two and a quarter centuries the United States has existed. His name was Bush, George W. Somehow, they don't mention that part. Of course, the joys of having conservatives around have always included the pleasure of hearing lies to cover truth, bluster to mask fear, and arrogance bluffing for insecurity. Likewise, the folks running hither and yon squawking about how they kept us safe are actually the only ones in the entire history of this country who, simply, did not. Did. Not.

Yet, in fact, this is only the beginning of the crime (and I won't even comment on the many strands of compelling evidence suggesting that some or all of the official 9/11 story is a fabrication). When I say that George W. Bush is the only president to have “experienced” a major terrorist attack on his watch, that is the most charitable possible reading of events. Even if one does manage to intrude upon regressive hallucinations by pointing out that, uh sorry, it wasn't Jimmy Carter who was president of the United States on 9/11, any regressive worthy of his stripes will demonstrate great umbrage at the suggestion that Bush might have prevented that day's attacks.

And, you know, personally, I suspect that blocking secretly-planned terrorist strikes is pretty tricky business, even for the best of governments at the top of their game. And so, ordinarily I'd be inclined to cut any president some serious slack on this question, assuming there was a competent team making its best efforts at the admittedly difficult project of swatting flies in the dark, with the necessity of getting them all.

And it is precisely this widely held sense of fair play upon which regressives prey when they implicitly exonerate the Bush administration for the failure of 9/11. But there are two crucial flaws to this unstated (because it is never challenged, and therefore doesn't need to be spoken) line of thought, and they are in fact monstrous in both scope and effect.

The first is the notion – generally implicit, but sometimes stated by people like

Condoleezza Rice – that nobody could have seen this sort of attack coming. She, for example, has noted that when one used to think of terrorist airplane hijackings, those scenarios involved simply flying the plane to Cuba or some such place and demanding a ransom. Leave aside that some security officials did, in fact, game out precisely the possibility of hijacking airplanes and crashing them into buildings. And leave aside the odd twist of logic that this approach entails, suggesting that mere ‘regular’ hijackings would be acceptable and unnecessary to guard against.

Even apart from all that, what is so galling about this lame defense is that it comes from the very same people who consistently criticized the Clinton administration for supposedly being weak on terrorism. In fact, Richard Clarke, who served both presidents, in addition to Bush's father and Ronald Reagan, has indicated emphatically – despite the fact that he's a Republican who voted for Bush in 2000 – that Clinton was far more serious about combating terrorism than his successor was.

Changing history

It's well beyond outrageous for regressives to simultaneously attack the Clinton administration for its failures at preempting terrorist attacks – against the World Trade Center, against the USS Cole, against American embassies in Africa – and yet fully exonerate Bush, heroically even, for 9/11. Unless I'm reading my history book upside down again (as I am sometimes wont to do 'cause it makes so much more sense that way), the Bush administration came after Clinton. They had no excuse for being less vigilant against an Al Qaeda attack, especially given their fondness for labeling Clinton as weak on terrorism.

But the second implicit logic underlying the exoneration of the Bush administration for 9/11 is even more gratuitous. It's the unspoken presumption that the administration did everything it could and simply couldn't prevent the attack any more than

all the will and all the effort in the world could stop a tsunami coursing across the ocean from reaching its destination.

But here's what Clarke said in 2004, and it's important to remember that he was not some off-the-pigs-counterculture-be-ret-wearing-dope-smoking-stuck-forever-in-1968-radical-Mao-spouting-militant, but, rather, the very man that George W. Bush hired to head his anti-terrorism efforts: "Frankly, I find it outrageous that the president is running for re-election on the grounds that he's done such great things about terrorism. He ignored it. He ignored terrorism for months, when maybe we could have done something to stop 9/11. Maybe. We'll never know. I think he's done a terrible job on the war against terrorism."

Clarke had good reasons to say these things, too. He had tried in vain for eight months to get a meeting of top Bush administration officials on the question of terrorism and the Al Qaeda threat. Nobody would take the matter seriously. He finally got his meeting, but it was one week prior to 9/11, and the administration still had little interest in terrorism, because it was already entirely focused on Iraq. His meeting got hijacked, so to speak.

The myth of basic Bush administration competence in fighting terrorism is similarly shattered by George Tenet's efforts of a similar nature. The CIA director was also hearing alarm bells going off like crazy in the weeks before 9/11. Unable to shake the administration out of its stupor, Tenet finally resorted to calling an emergency meeting with National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice. He still could not manage to move the Bush team into action. She wasn't interested.

And then there's the president himself. He was famously briefed on August 6, 2001, one month before the attack, with an urgent report entitled, "Bin Laden Determined To Strike In US". Bush was in Crawford, Texas, chainsawing brush, pretending to be a Texan, and playing cowboys and In-

dians. What was his reaction to this seven alarm emergency? This president – who, by the way, spent more time on vacation than any other American president in history – remained on vacation for an entire month prior to 9/11.

Even more telling was Bush's immediate reaction to this briefing. He telegraphed his level of concern by responding to the CIA briefer who presented him with the report using these infamous words: "All right. You've covered your ass, now."

Unless one lives with Alice, the Mad Hatter and the Queen of Hearts in some sort of LSD-soaked Wonderland – which I'm increasingly convinced all regressives in fact do – it's impossible to reconcile these historical facts with any plausible argument that the Bush administration was competent, or even seriously concerned, about fighting terrorism. If there is any doubt about this whatsoever, just try replacing the name Bush in these stories with Obama. The lunatics on the right are literally already calling Obama a socialist, communist, and fascist, while worrying out loud about his secret plan to turn America into a Muslim paradise. Imagine what they would say about him if his top terrorism advisor and his CIA director warned him of a looming attack, he responded to that warning by accusing them of bureaucratic ass-covering and by spending the next month on vacation, and then 3000 Americans died in an attack he failed to take seriously.

Tea parties on steroids

Given what they already say about Obama, or Clinton, and given a repeat of these same set of facts that actually do apply to George Bush, I could quite literally imagine a massive, angry and violent march on Washington – think tea parties on steroids, complete with roid rage – in which the president's life would literally be in danger. And you know what? People should be incredibly angry at any president so incompetent, so negligent, and so cavalier.

Unable to shake the administration out of its stupor, Tenet finally resorted to calling an emergency meeting with National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice. He still could not manage to move the Bush team into action. She wasn't interested

POLITICS OF FEAR

Even middle Americans, who long ago migrated from supporting George Bush out of fear to despising the little puke for all the manifold and righteous reasons there are to choose from, still buy into the myth that Bush kept us safe

But, of course, George Bush's job approval ratings only skyrocketed in the wake of 9/11, and he remains a favorite of regressives unto this day, who also miraculously completely buy into the myth of George the Protector, the guy who kept us safe (except when he didn't). So much so that even the former vice president could wait only a week or two into the new administration to begin lining up the predicate for blame should the United States experience another terrorist attack during the Obama administration.

In the end, all of this is powerful testament to the skill regressives possess at bludgeoning and marketing. Even middle Americans, who long ago migrated from supporting George Bush out of fear to despising the little puke for all the manifold and righteous reasons there are to choose from, still buy into the myth that Bush kept us safe. Nobody ever blames him for 9/11, despite the fact that there is ample evidence overwhelmingly demonstrating his administration's complete failure leading up to that day.

Historical accuracy

And, miraculously, nobody thinks of him with any sort of historical accuracy on this question. Not only is he not the president who kept us safe, he is indeed precisely the opposite. He is the one president – out of forty-four, serving for over two centuries time – on whose watch a massive terrorist attack took place.

Even as Barack Obama endears himself to America by returning the careening, hurtling eighteen wheeler to the middle-of-the-road – right there with Jim Hightower's proverbial yellow stripes and dead armadillos – and even as the Republican Party finds new ways each week to commit political suicide by increment, attitudes on this question still remains nothing short of astonishing.

Those among us – including tens of millions who voted for Bush not just once, but twice – wishing to dismiss the last eight years as some sort of aberrant nightmare should stop for a long moment to consider the meaning of Bush administration mythology on the question of terrorism and national security.

Maybe it's true that regressive freaks can no longer plausibly run around bragging about how great the boy king was on economics, or fighting bad guys abroad. Woo-hoo. Yep, we've come a long way, for sure.

But surely it is a measure of this society's profoundly pathetic and unyielding political immaturity that these lunatics can still get away with lauding the former president with the monumental claim of keeping America safe, when in fact he did just the opposite. What kind of country is it where so manifestly absurd and oxymoronic a line as that goes unchallenged?

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Honor for a sailor who foiled an Israeli attack

Ray McGovern on the bravery of the sailors of the USS Liberty who were attacked by the Israeli aircraft and torpedo boats

What's the difference between murder and massacre? The answer is Terry Halbardier, whose bravery and ingenuity as a 23-year-old Navy seaman spelled the difference between the murder of 34 of the USS Liberty crew and the intended massacre of all 294.

The date was June 8, 1967; and for the families of the 34 murdered and for the Liberty's survivors and their families, it is a "date which will live in infamy" – like the date of an earlier surprise attack on the U.S. Navy.

The infamy is two-fold: (1) the Liberty, a virtually defenseless intelligence collection platform prominently flying an American flag in international waters, came under deliberate attack by Israeli aircraft and three 60-ton Israeli torpedo boats off the coast of the Sinai on a cloudless June afternoon during the six-day Israeli-Arab war; and (2) President Lyndon Johnson called back carrier aircraft dispatched to defend the Liberty lest Israel be embarrassed – the start of an unconscionable cover-up, including top Navy brass, that persists to this day.

Given all they have been through, the Liberty survivors and other veterans – who joined Halbardier to celebrate his belated receipt of the Silver Star – can be forgiven for having doubted that this day would ever come. In the award ceremony at the Visalia

(California) office of Rep. Devin Nunes, the Republican congressman pinned the Silver Star next to the Purple Heart that Halbardier found in his home mailbox three years ago.

Nunes said, "The government has kept this quiet I think for too long, and I felt as my constituent he [Halbardier] needed to get recognized for the services he made to his country."

Nunes got that right. Despite the many indignities the Liberty crew has been subjected to, the mood in Visalia was pronouncedly a joyous one of Better (42 years) Late Than Never. And, it did take some time to sink in: Wow, a gutsy congressman not afraid to let the truth hang out on this delicate issue.

Treatment accorded the skipper

As we gathered in Congressman Nunes's office, I could not get out of my head the contrast between this simple, uncomplicated event and the rigmarole that senior Navy officers went through to pin a richly deserved Medal of Honor on another hero of that day, the Liberty's skipper, Captain William McGonagle.

Although badly wounded by Israeli fire on June 8, 1967, McGonagle was able to keep the bombed, torpedoed, napalmed Liberty afloat and limping toward Malta, where what was left of the bodies of the 34

The Liberty, a virtually defenseless intelligence collection platform prominently flying an American flag in international waters, came under deliberate attack by Israeli aircraft and three 60-ton Israeli torpedo boats off the coast of the Sinai on a cloudless June afternoon during the six-day Israeli-Arab war

USS LIBERTY REMEMBERED

Were it not for Halbardier's bravery, ingenuity, and technical expertise, the USS Liberty would surely have sunk, taking down much – if not all – of the crew. Israeli commando helicopters were ready to take care of any personnel still that survived the sinking

crewmen killed and the 174 wounded could be attended to.

Do the math: yes, killed and wounded amounted to more than two-thirds of the Liberty crew of 294.

I remembered what a naval officer involved in McGonagle's award ceremony told one of the Liberty crew: "The government is pretty jumpy about Israel...the State Department even asked the Israeli ambassador if his government had any objections to McGonagle getting the medal."

When McGonagle received his award, the White House (the normal venue for a Medal of Honor award) was all booked up, it seems, and President Johnson (who would have been the usual presenter) was unavailable. So it fell to the Secretary of the Navy to sneak off to the Washington Navy Yard on the banks of the acrid Anacostia River, where he presented McGonagle with the Medal of Honor and a citation that described the attack but not the identity of the attackers.

Please don't misunderstand. The Liberty crew is not big on ceremony. They are VERY-not-big on politicians who wink when Navy comrades are killed and wounded at sea.

Getting the truth out

The Liberty survivors are big on getting the truth out about what actually happened that otherwise beautiful day in June 1967. Last month's award of the Silver Star to Terry Halbardier marked a significant step in the direction of truth telling. Is it too much to hope that the example set by Nunes may embolden other lawmakers to right the wrongs done to their Liberty-veteran constituents – and thus to chip away at what's left of the cover-up?

Halbardier said he accepted his Silver Star on behalf of the entire 294-man crew. He and fellow survivor Don Pageler expressed particular satisfaction at the wording of the citation, which stated explicitly – with none of the usual fudging – the identity of the attackers: "The USS Liberty

was attacked by Israeli aircraft and motor torpedo boats in the East Mediterranean Sea..." In the past, official citations, like Captain McGonagle's, had avoided mentioning Israel by name when alluding to the attack.

I think former U.S. Ambassador Edward Peck put it best in condemning this kind of approach as "obsequious, unctuous subservience to the peripheral interests of a foreign nation at the cost of the lives and morale of our own service members and their families." Strong words for a diplomat. But right on target.

Were it not for Halbardier's bravery, ingenuity, and technical expertise, the USS Liberty would surely have sunk, taking down much – if not all – of the crew. Israeli commando helicopters were ready to take care of any personnel still that survived the sinking.

The first thing the Israeli aircraft bombed and strafed were the Liberty's communications antennae and other equipment. They succeeded in destroying all the antennae that were functional. One antenna on the port side, though, had been out of commission and had escaped damage.

In receiving the Silver Star, Halbardier made light of his heroism, claiming that he was just a guy from Texas who could do a whole lot with simple stuff like baling wire. (In the infantry we called this kind of thing a "field expedient.") In any case, with his can-do attitude and his technical training, he figured he might be able to get that particular antenna working again. But first he would have to repair a cable that had been destroyed on deck and then connect the antenna to a transmitter.

The deck was still being strafed, but Halbardier grabbed a reel of cable, ran out onto the deck, and attached new cable to the antenna so a radioman could get an SOS out to the 6th fleet in the Mediterranean.

Voila. "Mayday" went out; almost immediately the Israeli aircraft and torpedo ships broke off the attack and went back to

base; the Israeli government sent a quick apology to Washington for its unfortunate “mistake;” and President Johnson issued orders to everyone to make believe the Israelis were telling the truth – or at least to remain silent.

To their discredit, top Navy brass went along, and the Liberty survivors were threatened with court martial and prison if they so much as mentioned to their wives what had actually happened. They were enjoined as well from discussing it with one another. As Liberty crewman Don Pageler put it, “We all headed out after that, and we didn’t talk to each other.”

The circumstances were ready-made for serious Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

The stories shared by Liberty survivors after the award ceremony, including descriptions of the macabre but necessary effort to reassemble torpedoed body parts, and the plague of survivor’s guilt, were as heart-rending as any I have heard. They are stories that should be shared more widely for those muzzled far too long – those who, even 42 years later, might be helped by being in contact with other Liberty survivors, and being able to talk about it.

These were the deep emotional scars to supplement the ones all over Halbardier’s body, some of which he uncovered when asked by the local press gathered there in Visalia. Typically, Halbardier made light of the shrapnel that had to be plucked out of his flesh, emphasizing that he was lucky compared to some of the other crew.

No mistake

Despite Israeli protestations, the accumulated evidence, including intercepted voice communications, is such that no serious observer believes Israel’s “Oops” excuse of a terrible mistake.

The following exchanges are excerpts of testimony from U.S. military and diplomatic officials given to Alison Weir, founder of “If Americans Knew” and author of *American Media Miss the Boat*:

Israeli pilot to ground control: “This is

an American ship. Do you still want us to attack?”

Ground control: “Yes, follow orders.”

Pilot: “But sir, it’s an American ship – I can see the flag!”

Ground control: “Never mind; hit it!”

Haviland Smith, a CIA officer stationed in Beirut during the Six-Day War, says he was told that the transcripts were “deep-sixed,” because the U.S. government did not want to embarrass Israel.

Equally telling is the fact that the National Security Agency (NSA) destroyed voice tapes seen by many intelligence analysts, showing that the Israelis knew exactly what they were doing.

I asked a former CIA colleague, who was also an analyst at that time, what he remembered of those circumstances. Here is his e-mail reply:

“The chief of the analysts studying the Arab-Israeli region at the time told me about the intercepted messages and said very flatly and firmly that the pilots reported seeing the American flag and repeated their requests of confirmation of the attack order. Whole platoons of Americans saw those intercepts. If NSA now says they do not exist, then someone ordered them destroyed.”

One need hardly add at this point that the destruction of evidence without investigation is an open invitation to repetition in the future.

Think interrogation videotapes, for example.

As for the legal side: the late Captain Ward Boston, unburdened himself on his accomplice role as the Navy lawyer appointed as senior counsel to Adm. Isaac Kidd, who led a one-week (!) investigation and then followed orders to pronounce the attack on the Liberty a case of “mistaken identity.”

Boston signed a formal declaration on Jan. 8, 2004, in which he said he was “outraged at the efforts of the apologists for Israel in this country to claim that this attack was a case of ‘mistaken identity.’” Boston

The stories shared by Liberty survivors after the award ceremony, including descriptions of the macabre but necessary effort to reassemble torpedoed body parts, and the plague of survivor’s guilt, were as heart-rending as any I have heard

USS LIBERTY REMEMBERED

The Israeli attack admittedly amounted to starting a war of aggression, and the occupied West Bank territories and the Golan Heights – gained by the Israelis in the 1967 war – remain occupied to this day.

continued:

“The evidence was clear. Both Adm. Kidd and I believed with certainty that this attack ... was a deliberate effort to sink an American ship and murder its entire crew ... Not only did the Israelis attack the ship with napalm, gunfire, and missiles, Israeli torpedo boats machine-gunned three life-boats that had been launched in an attempt by the crew to save the most seriously wounded – a war crime ...

“I know from personal conversations I had with Adm. Kidd that President Lyndon Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara ordered him to conclude that the attack was a case of ‘mistaken identity’ despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary.”

W. Patrick Lang, Col., USA (ret.), who was the Defense Intelligence Agency’s top analyst for the Middle East for eight years, recounted the Israeli air attacks as follows:

“The flight leader spoke to his base to report that he had the ship in view, that it was the same ship he had been briefed on, and that it was clearly marked with the U.S. flag...

“The flight commander was reluctant. That was very clear. He didn’t want to do this. He asked them a couple of times, ‘Do you really want me to do this?’ I’ve remembered it ever since. It was very striking. I’ve been harboring this memory for all these years.”

Lang, of course, is not alone. So too Terry Halbardier, who told those assembled last Wednesday, “I think about it [the attack on the Liberty] every day.”

Why sink the ship?

What we know for sure is, as the independent commission headed by former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Thomas Moorer put it, the attack “was a deliberate attempt to destroy an American ship and kill her entire crew.”

What we do not know for sure is why the Israelis wanted that done. Has no one dared ask the Israelis?

One view is that the Israelis did not want the United States to find out they were massing troops to seize the Golan Heights from Syria and wanted to deprive the U.S. of the opportunity to argue against such a move.

James Bamford offers an alternative view in his excellent book, *Body of Secrets*. Bamford adduces evidence, including reporting from an Israeli journalist eyewitness and an Israeli military historian, of wholesale killing of Egyptian prisoners of war at the coastal town of El Arish in the Sinai. The Liberty was patrolling directly opposite El Arish in international waters but within easy range to pick up intelligence on what was going on there. And the Israelis were well aware of that.

But the important thing here is not to confuse what we know (the deliberate nature of the Israeli attack) with the ultimate purpose behind it, which remains open to speculation.

Also worth noting is the conventional wisdom prevalent in our Fawning Corporate Media (FCM) that Egypt forced Israel into war in June 1967. An excellent, authoritative source has debunked that – none other than former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin! In an unguarded moment in 1982, when he was prime minister, he admitted publicly:

“In June 1967, we had a choice. The Egyptian army concentrations in the Sinai approaches do not prove that [Egyptian President] Nasser was really about to attack us. We must be honest with ourselves. We decided to attack him.”

Thus, the Israeli attack admittedly amounted to starting a war of aggression, and the occupied West Bank territories and the Golan Heights – gained by the Israelis in the 1967 war – remain occupied to this day.

The post WWII tribunal at Nuremberg distinguished a “war of aggression” from other war crimes, terming it the “supreme international crime, differing from other war crimes only in that it contains the ac-

cumulated evil of the whole.”

Perhaps the attempt to sink the Liberty and finish off all survivors qualifies as one of those accumulated evils.

Terry Halbardier summed it up this way on Wednesday:

“There’s lots of theories but let’s just say they didn’t want us listening in to what they wanted to do.”

Getting away with murder

In sum, on June 8, 1967, the Israeli government learned that it could get away with murder, literally, and the crime would be covered up, so strong is the influence of the Israel Lobby in our Congress – and indeed, in the White House. And those USS Liberty veterans who survived well enough to call for an independent investigation have been hit with charges of, you guessed it, anti-Semitism.

Does all this have relevance today? Of course.

Benjamin Netanyahu, the new Israeli Prime Minister has now had an up-close-and-personal chance to take the measure of our new president and has already thumbed his nose at Barack Obama’s plea for a halt in illegal construction of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories.

The Israelis seem convinced they remain in the catbird’s seat, largely because of the Israel Lobby’s influence with U.S. lawmakers and opinion makers – not to mention the entrée the Israelis enjoy to the chief executive himself by having one of their staunchest allies, Rahm Emanuel, in position as White House chief of staff.

The recent Obama-Netanyahu encounter reminded me very much of the meeting in Vienna between another young American president and Nikita Khrushchev in early June 1961. The Soviets took the measure of President John Kennedy, and we got the Cuban missile crisis, bringing the world close to nuclear destruction.

Netanyahu is currently whipping up frenzy and fear in the face of what he calls the “existential threat” posed by Iran –

frenzy about the “danger” from Iran that could lead to military action of some kind. So confident is Netanyahu of the solidity of his position with movers and shakers in the U.S. that he may be sorely tempted to mount the kind of provocation that would be aimed at confronting Obama with an unwelcome choice between joining an Israeli attack on Iran or facing dire political consequences at home.

And nothing is outlandish any more. Remember Seymour Hersh’s report about Cheney’s office conjuring up plots as to how best to trigger a war with Iran?

“The one that interested me [SH] the most was why don’t we build – we in our shipyard – build four or five boats that look like Iranian PT boats. Put Navy Seals on them with a lot of arms. And next time one of our boats goes to the Straits of Hormuz, start a shoot-up.”

President Obama might want to think about delivering a pointed message via a senior U.S. military officer. It worked last time.

In early July 2008, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Mike Mullen, was sent to Israel to read the riot act to then-Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who seemed to be itching to start hostilities with Iran while Bush and Cheney were still in office.

We learned from the Israeli press that Mullen, to his credit, went so far as to warn the Israelis not to even think about another incident like the attack on the USS Liberty on June 8, 1967 – that the Israelis should disabuse themselves of the notion that U.S. military support would be knee-jerk automatic if Israel somehow provoked open hostilities with Iran.

This is the only occasion of which I am aware when a U.S. official of such seniority braced Israel about the Liberty incident. A gutsy move, especially with Cheney and Elliott Abrams then in the White House, two hawks who would bless – or even encourage – an Israeli provocation that would make it very difficult for Washington to avoid springing to the defense of its “ally.”

Benjamin Netanyahu, the new Israeli Prime Minister has now had an up-close-and-personal chance to take the measure of our new president and has already thumbed his nose at Barack Obama’s plea for a halt in illegal construction of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories

USS LIBERTY REMEMBERED

Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey? Lautenberg, who has visited Israel 80 times since 1968, spoke with the *Jerusalem Post* last month and pledged full support for pretty much whatever Israel wants to do

The Israelis know that Mullen knows that the attack on the Liberty was deliberate. Mullen could have raised no more neuralgic an issue to take a shot across an Israeli bow than to cite the attack on the Liberty. The *Jerusalem Post* reported that Mullen cautioned that a Liberty-type incident must be avoided in any future military actions in the Middle East.

Will Netanyahu give more weight to Mullen or to pro-Israel politicians like Sen. Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey? Lautenberg, who has visited Israel 80 times since 1968, spoke with the *Jerusalem Post* and pledged full support for pretty much whatever Israel wants to do:

“Israel didn’t ask us permission to drop bombs twice on Syrian nuclear facilities. I don’t hear America scolding Israel for what it did then. Hypothetically, if Israel were able to get rid of Iran’s nuclear bomb-making capability, I’m sure that America would not send Israel a chastising email message. We have to give Israel the courtesy of [allowing it to] make its own decisions.”

For good measure, Lautenberg said Israel “won’t return to the ’67 borders. They are insufficient to permit Israel to function.”

Let me ask again: Will Netanyahu give more weight to Mullen over Lautenberg and a pro-Israel U.S. Secretary of State (Hillary Clinton) who spoke about “obliterating” Iran during last year’s campaign?

In gauging President Obama’s clout with the Washington power-brokers, Netanyahu is likely to draw conclusions more from things like Obama’s inability, or reluctance, to turn off the feckless, counterproductive sabotage squads inside Iran, than from any warnings Netanyahu may have heard from the president to please not attack Iran.

Seems we are pretty much back where we were a year ago, when it looked like Olmert might mount some kind of provocation involving Iran. Perhaps President Obama should send Adm. Mullen back to Israel. And perhaps this time Mullen should take Terry Halbardier with him. **CT**

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, the publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. After serving as an Army infantry/intelligence officer, he spent a 27-year career as a CIA analyst. He is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

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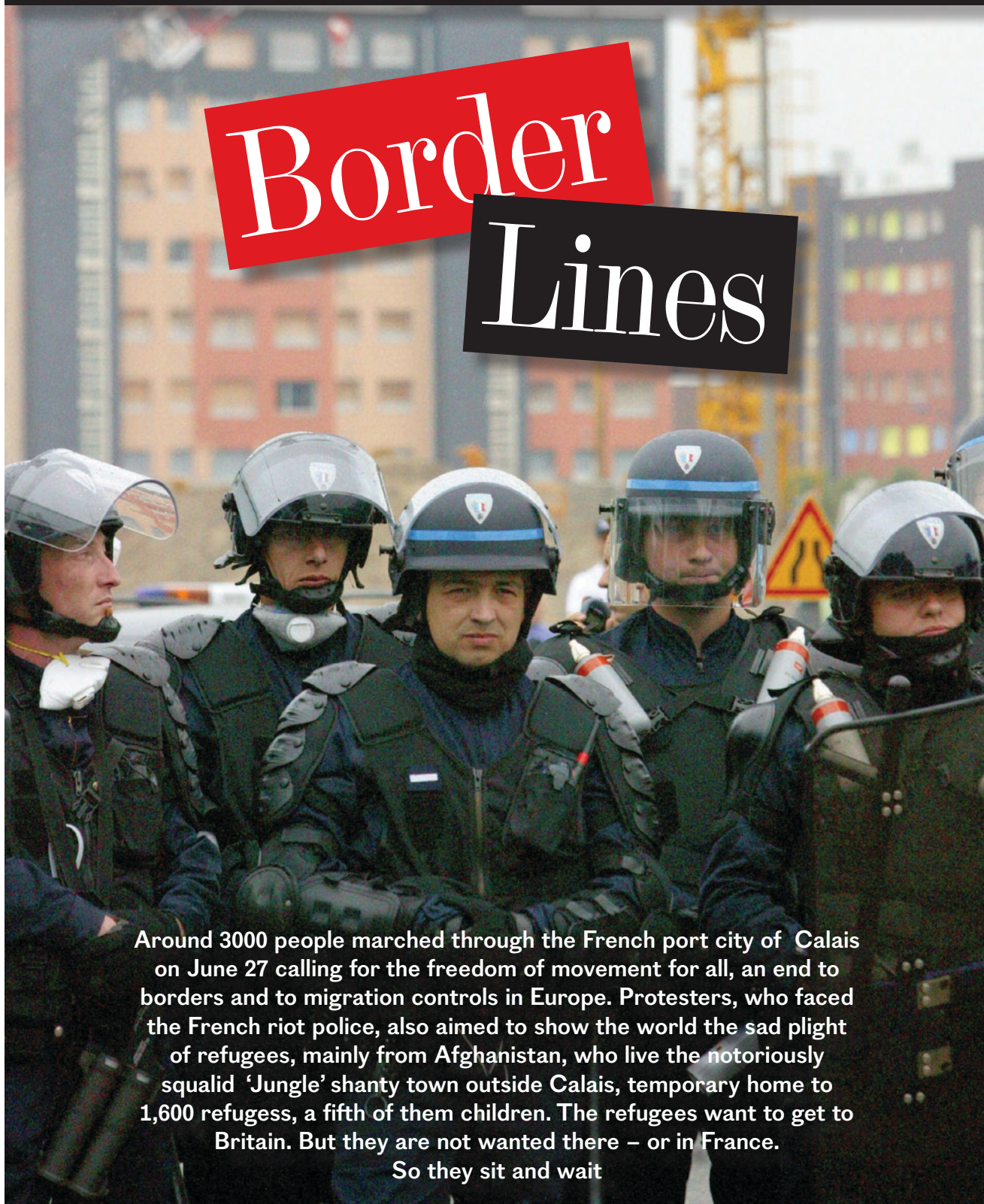
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THE FRENCH & AFGHANISTAN'S REFUGEES

A photo essay by **Jess Hurd & Justin Tallis**

Border Lines



Around 3000 people marched through the French port city of Calais on June 27 calling for the freedom of movement for all, an end to borders and to migration controls in Europe. Protesters, who faced the French riot police, also aimed to show the world the sad plight of refugees, mainly from Afghanistan, who live the notoriously squalid 'Jungle' shanty town outside Calais, temporary home to 1,600 refugees, a fifth of them children. The refugees want to get to Britain. But they are not wanted there – or in France.

So they sit and wait

Justin Tallis (www.reportdigital.co.uk/)

Border Lines

Jess Hurd (www.reportdigital.co.uk)



Demonstrators cram the streets of Calais, calling for an end to borders

Jess Hurd (www.reportdigital.co.uk)



Overstepping the mark



Whose freedom is he protecting?

Justin Tallis (www.reportdigital.co.uk)

Justin Tallis (www.reportdigital.co.uk)



Seeking freedom: a teenager sits and waits in the Jungle camp

Jess Hurd (www.reportdigital.co.uk)



Refugees line up for food served by volunteers

Where home is a tent in a wood

Border Lines



Halt the expulsions . . . no photos please!



"It's as beautiful as a burning jail"



"The state and the army are feeding themselves off the blood of migrant workers"



Refugees find time for a game of cricket

Much ado about nothing?

William Blum on the Iranian election, the President, Al Franken and the Cold war

What is there about the Iranian election of June 12 that has led to it being one of the leading stories in media around the world every day since? Elections whose results are seriously challenged have taken place in most countries at one time or another in recent decades. Countless Americans believe that the presidential elections of 2000 and 2004 were stolen by the Republicans, and not just inside the voting machines and in the counting process, but prior to the actual voting as well with numerous Republican Party dirty tricks designed to keep poor and black voters off voting lists or away from polling stations. The fact that large numbers of Americans did not take to the streets day after day in protest, as in Iran, is not something we can be proud of. Perhaps if the CIA, the Agency for International Development (AID), several US government-run radio stations, and various other organizations supported by the National Endowment for Democracy (which was created to serve as a front for the CIA, literally) had been active in the United States, as they have been for years in Iran, major street protests would have taken place in the United States.

The classic “outside agitators” can not only foment dissent through propaganda, adding to already existing dissent, but they can serve to mobilize the public to strong-

ly demonstrate against the government. In 1953, when the CIA overthrew Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh, they paid people to agitate in front of Mossadegh’s residence and elsewhere and engage in acts of violence; some pretended to be supporters of Mossadegh while engaging in anti-religious actions. And it worked, remarkably well.¹ Since the end of World War II, the United States has seriously intervened in some 30 elections around the world, adding a new twist this time, twittering. The State Department asked Twitter to postpone a scheduled maintenance shutdown of its service to keep information flowing from inside Iran, helping to mobilize protesters.² The *New York Times* reported: “An article published by the Web site True/Slant highlighted some of the biggest errors on Twitter that were quickly repeated and amplified by bloggers: that three million protested in Tehran last weekend (more like a few hundred thousand); that the opposition candidate Mir Hussein Mousavi was under house arrest (he was being watched); that the president of the election monitoring committee declared the election invalid last Saturday (not so).”³

In recent years, the United States has been patrolling the waters surrounding Iran with warships, halting Iranian ships to check for arms shipments to Hamas or for other illegal reasons, financing and “edu-

If such a “debate” had been held in the Soviet Union during the Cold War (“Detente With The United States Is Going Nowhere”), the American mainstream media would unanimously have had a jolly time making fun of it.

ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

“Iran would be unlikely to use its missiles in an attack [against Israel] because of the certainty of retaliation”

cating” Iranian dissidents, using Iranian groups to carry out terrorist attacks inside Iran, kidnaping Iranian diplomats in Iraq, kidnaping Iranian military personnel in Iran and taking them to Iraq, continually spying and recruiting within Iran, manipulating Iran’s currency and international financial transactions, and imposing various economic and political sanctions against the country.⁴

“I’ve made it clear that the United States respects the sovereignty of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and is not at all interfering in Iran’s affairs,” said US President Barack Obama with a straight face on June 23. Some in the Iranian government [have been] accusing the United States and others outside of Iran of instigating protests over the elections. These accusations are patently false and absurd.”⁵

“Never believe anything until it’s officially denied,” British writer Claud Cockburn famously said.

In his world-prominent speech to the Middle East on June 4, Obama mentioned that “In the middle of the Cold War, the United States played a role in the overthrow of a democratically elected Iranian government.” So we have the president of the United States admitting to a previous overthrow of the Iranian government while the United States is in the very midst of trying to overthrow the current Iranian government. This will serve as the best example of hypocrisy that’s come along in quite a while.

So why the big international fuss over the Iranian election and street protests? There’s only one answer. The obvious one. The announced winner, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, is a Washington ODE, an Officially Designated Enemy, for not sufficiently respecting the Empire and its Israeli partner-in-crime; indeed, Ahmadinejad is one of the most outspoken critics of US foreign policy in the world.

So ingrained is this ODE response built into Washington’s world view that it appears to matter not at all that Mousavi,

Ahmadinejad’s main opponent in the election and very much supported by the protesters, while prime minister 1981-89, bore large responsibility for the attacks on the US embassy and military barracks in Beirut in 1983, which took the lives of more than 200 Americans, and the 1988 truck bombing of a US Navy installation in Naples, Italy, that killed five persons. Remarkably, a search of US newspaper and broadcast sources shows no mention of this during the current protests.⁶ However, the *Washington Post* saw fit to run a story on June 27 that declared: “the authoritarian governments of China, Cuba and Burma have been selectively censoring the news this month of Iranian crowds braving government militias on the streets of Tehran to demand democratic reforms.”

Can it be that no one in the Obama administration knows of Mousavi’s background? And do none of them know about the violent government repression on June 5 in Peru of the peaceful protests organized in response to the US-Peru Free Trade Agreement? A massacre that took the lives of between 20 and 25 indigenous people in the Amazon and wounded another 100.⁷ The Obama administration was silent on the Peruvian massacre because the Peruvian president, Alan Garcia, is not an ODE.

And neither is Mousavi, despite his anti-American terrorist deeds, because he’s opposed to Ahmadinejad, who competes with Hugo Chavez to be Washington’s Number One ODE. *Time* magazine calls Mousavi a “moderate”, and goes on to add: “It has to be assumed that the Iranian presidential election was rigged,” offering as much evidence as the Iranian protestors, i.e., none at all.⁸ It cannot of course be proven that the Iranian election was totally honest, but the arguments given to support the charge of fraud are not very impressive, such as the much-repeated fact that the results were announced very soon after the polls closed. For decades in various countries election results have been condemned for being withheld for many hours or days.

Some kind of dishonesty must be going on behind the scenes during the long delay it was argued. So now we're asked to believe that some kind of dishonesty must be going on because the results were released so quickly. It should be noted that the ballots listed only one electoral contest, with but four candidates.

Phil Wilayto, American peace activist and author of a book on Iran, has observed:

"Ahmadinejad, himself born into rural poverty, clearly has the support of the poorer classes, especially in the countryside, where nearly half the population lives. Why? In part because he pays attention to them, makes sure they receive some benefits from the government and treats them and their religious views and traditions with respect. Mousavi, on the other hand, the son of an urban merchant, clearly appeals more to the urban middle classes, especially the college-educated youth. This being so, why would anyone be surprised that Ahmadinejad carried the vote by a clear majority? Are there now more yuppies in Iran than poor people?"⁹

All of which is of course not to say that Iran is not a relatively repressive society on social and religious issues, and it's this underlying reality which likely feeds much of the protest; indeed, many of the protesters may not even have strong views about the election per se, particularly since both Ahmadinejad and Mousavi are members of the establishment, neither is any threat to the Islamic theocracy, and the election can be seen as the kind of power struggle you find in virtually every country. But that is not the issue I'm concerned with here. The issue is Washington's long-standing goal of regime change. If the exact same electoral outcome had taken place in a country that is an ally of the United States, how much of all the accusatory news coverage and speeches would have taken place? In fact, the exact same thing did happen in a country that is an ally of the United States, three years ago when Felipe Calderon appeared

to have stolen the presidential election in Mexico and there were daily large protests for more than two months; but the American and international condemnation was virtually non-existent compared to what we see today in regard to Iran.

Iranian leaders undertook a recount of a random ten per cent of ballots and re-certified Ahmadinejad as the winner. How honest the recount was I have no idea, but it's more than Americans got in 2000 and 2004.

By what standard shall we judge Barack Obama?

Many of my readers have been upset with me for my criticisms of President Obama's policies. Following my last two reports, more than a dozen have asked to be removed from my mailing list. But if you share my view that the numerous atrocities US foreign policy is responsible for constitute the greatest threat to world peace, prosperity and happiness, then I think you have to want leaders who are unambiguously opposed to America's military adventures, because those interventions are unambiguously harmful. There's nothing good to be said about dropping powerful bombs on crowds of innocent people, invading their land, overthrowing their government, occupying the country, breaking down the doors of the citizens, killing the father, raping the mother, traumatizing the children, torturing those opposed to all this ... Barack Obama has no problem with this, if we judge him by his policies and not his rhetoric.

And neither does Al Franken, who's about to become a Democratic Senator from Minnesota. The former Saturday Night Live comedian would like you to believe that he's been against the war in Iraq since it began, but he's gone to Iraq four times to entertain the troops. Does that make sense? Why does the military bring entertainers to soldiers? To lift the soldiers' spirits. Why does the military want to lift the soldiers' spirits? A happier soldier does

American anti-Castroites have long blamed Cuban's deficient Internet access on the proverbial "communist suppression", when the technical availability and prohibitive cost were to a large extent in the hands of American corporations. Microsoft, for example, bars Cuba from using its Messenger instant messaging service

ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

Until now, the world has been told repeatedly by Washington that these men are “the worst of the worst”. Small wonder that no country or community wants them near. But if they’ve been tried and acquitted, this situation should change markedly

his job better. And what’s the soldier’s job? All the charming things listed above. Doesn’t Franken know what these guys do? He criticized the Bush administration because they “failed to send enough troops to do the job right.”¹⁰ What “job” did the man think the troops were sent to do that had not been performed to his standards because of lack of manpower? Did he want them to be more efficient at killing Iraqis who resisted the occupation?

Franken has been lifting soldiers’ spirits for a long time. This past March he was honored by the United Service Organization (USO) for his ten years of entertaining troops abroad. That includes Kosovo in 1999, as imperialist an occupation as you’ll want to see. He called his USO experience “one of the best things I’ve ever done.”¹¹ Franken has also spoken at West Point, encouraging the next generation of imperialist warriors. Is this a man to challenge the militarization of America at home and abroad? No more so than Obama.

Tom Hayden wrote this about Franken in 2005 when Franken had a regular program on the Air America radio network:

“Is anyone else disappointed with Al Franken’s daily defense of the continued war in Iraq? Not Bush’s version of the war, because that would undermine Air America’s laudable purpose of rallying an anti-Bush audience. But, well, Kerry’s version of the war, one that can be better managed and won, somehow with better body armor and fewer torture cells. This morning Franken was endorsing Sen. Joe Biden’s proposal to send 5,000 NATO troops to close the Syrian-Iraq border, bring in foreign trainers for the Iraqi officer corps, and put Iraqis to work cleaning up the destruction of our invasion. ... Now that Bush has manipulated us into the invasion, Franken thinks we have no choice but to ... stay until we crush the insurgents. It’s a humanitarian excuse for open-ended American occupation. And it’s shared widely by the professional political and pundit class who think of themselves as the conscience of

the American establishment and the leadership of the Democratic Party.”¹²

I know, I know, I’m taking away all your heroes. But such people shouldn’t be your heroes. You can learn to see through the liberal, Democratic Party apologists for the empire. Only a week ago, documents released by the Nixon Library in California revealed that five days before US and South Vietnamese troops made their surprise invasion of Cambodia on April 29, 1970 – which elicited widespread, angry protests in the US, resulting in the fatal shootings by the National Guard of students at Kent State University in Ohio – President Richard Nixon got approval for the invasion from the top Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, Sen. John Stennis of Mississippi. Stennis told the president: “I will be with you. ... I commend you for what you are doing.”¹³

Long live the Cold War

President Manuel Zelaya of Honduras was overthrown in a military coup June 28 because he was about to conduct a non-binding survey of the population, asking the question: “Do you agree that, during the general elections of November 2009 there should be a fourth ballot to decide whether to hold a Constituent National Assembly that will approve a new political constitution?”

One of the issues that Zelaya hoped a new constitution would deal with is the limiting of the presidency to one four-year term. He also expressed the need for other constitutional changes to make it possible for him to carry out policies to improve the life of the poor; in countries like Honduras, the law is not generally crafted for that end.

At this writing it’s not clear how matters will turn out in Honduras, but the following should be noted:

The United States, by its own admission, was fully aware for weeks of the Honduran military’s plan to overthrow Zelaya. Washington says it tried its best to change

the mind of the plotters. It's difficult to believe that this proved impossible. During the Cold War it was said, with much justification, that the United States could discourage a coup in Latin America with "a frown".

The Honduran and American military establishments have long been on very fraternal terms. And it must be asked: In what way and to what extent did the United States warn Zelaya of the impending coup? And what protection did it offer him? The response to the coup from the Obama administration can be described with adjectives such as lukewarm, proper but belated, and mixed.

It is not unthinkable that the United States gave the military plotters the go-ahead, telling them to keep the traditional "golpe" bloodiness to a minimum. Zelaya was elected to office as the candidate of a conservative party; he then, surprisingly, moved to the left and became a strong critic of a number of Washington policies, and an ally of Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and Evo Morales of Bolivia, both of whom the Bush administration tried to overthrow and assassinate.

Following the coup, National Public Radio (NPR) showed once again why progressives refer to it as National Pentagon Radio. The station's leading news anchor, Robert Siegel, interviewed Johanna Mendelson Forman, of the conservative think tank, Center for Strategic and International Studies:

Siegel: "There hasn't been a coup in Latin America for quite a while."

Forman: "I think the last one was in 1983"

Siegel did not correct her.¹⁴

This is ignorance of considerable degree. There was a coup in Venezuela in 2002 that briefly overthrew Hugo Chavez, a coup in Haiti in 2004 that permanently overthrew Jean-Bertrand Aristide, and a coup in Pan-

ama in 1989 that permanently overthrew Manuel Noriega. Is it because the US was closely involved in all three coups that they have been thrown down the Orwellian Memory Hole?

CT

Notes

1. William Blum, *Killing Hope*, chapter 9
2. Associated Press, June 16, 2009
3. New York Times, June 21, 2009
4. See Seymour Hersh, *New Yorker* magazine, June 29, 2008; ABC News, May 22, 2007; and Paul Craig Roberts in *CounterPunch*, June 19-21, 2009 for descriptions of some of these and other anti-Iran covert activities.
5. White House press conference, June 23, 2009
6. The only mention is by Jeff Stein in "CQ Politics" [Congressional Quarterly], online, June 22, 2009, "according to former CIA and military officials".
7. Center for International Policy (Washington, DC) report, June 16, 2009
8. *Time* magazine, June 29, 2009, p.26
9. AlterNet.org, June 14, 2009; Wilayto is the author of "In Defense of Iran: Notes from a U.S. Peace Delegation's Journey through the Islamic Republic"
10. *Washington Post*, February 16, 2004
11. *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis), March 26, 2009
12. *Huffington Post*, sometime in June 2005, but it may no longer be there.
13. *Washington Post*, June 30, 2009
14. NPR, *All Things Considered*, June 29, 2009

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

It is not unthinkable that the United States gave the military plotters the go-ahead, telling them to keep the traditional "golpe" bloodiness to a minimum

The other apartheid state

Ronnie Kasrils points out the major difference in tactics between South Africa and Israel: South Africa didn't bomb its Bantustans

Verwoerd would have been well aware of Israel's dispossession of indigenous Palestinian in 1948 – the year his apartheid party similarly came to power – of the unfolding destruction of their villages, the premeditated massacres and the systematic ethnic cleansing

May I start by quoting a South African who emphatically stated as far back as 1961 that “The Jews took Israel from the Arabs after the Arabs had lived there for a thousand years. Israel like South Africa, is an apartheid state” (Rand Daily Mail, 23 November 1961). Those were not the words of Nelson Mandela, Archbishop Tutu or Ruth First, but were uttered by none other than the architect of apartheid itself, racist Prime Minister, Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd.

He was irked by the criticism of apartheid policy and Harold Macmillan's “Winds of Change” speech and the growing international outcry following the Sharpeville massacre, in contrast to the West's unconditional support for Zionist Israel.

To be sure Verwoerd was correct. Both apartheid South Africa and Zionist Israel were colonial, settler states created on the basis of the harsh dispossession of the land and birthright of the indigenous people. This is unblushingly documented in Israel's case from the time of Herzl through Jabotinsky, Ben Gurion, Menachem Begin, Moshe Dayan to Sharon et al. Both states preached and implemented a policy based on racial ethnicity; the sole claim of Jews in Israel and whites in South Africa to exclusive citizenship; monopolized rights in law regarding the ownership of land, property, business; superior access to education, health, social,

sporting and cultural amenities, pensions and municipal services at the expense of the original indigenous population; the virtual monopoly membership of military and security forces, and privileged development along their own racial supremacist lines – even both countries marriage laws are designed to safeguard racial “purity”. The fact that the Palestinian minority within Israel is allowed to vote hardly redresses the injustice in all other matters of basic human rights. In any case those Palestinians allowed to stand for election to the Knesset do so on condition that they dare not question Israel's existence as a Jewish state.

The so-called “non-whites” in apartheid South Africa, indigenous Africans, others of mixed race or of Asiatic origin – like second or third class non-Jews in Israel itself let alone the military occupied areas – were consigned to a non-citizenship status of Kafkaesque existence, subject to all manner of discrimination and prejudice, such as the laws prohibiting their free movement, access to work and trade, dictating where they could reside and so forth.

Verwoerd would have been well aware of Israel's dispossession of indigenous Palestinian in 1948 – the year his apartheid party similarly came to power – of the unfolding destruction of their villages, the premeditated massacres and the systematic ethnic cleansing.

Within a few short years of coming to power in 1948 South Africa's apartheid regime was ruthlessly cleansing cities and towns of so-called "black spots" – where the "non-whites" lived, socialized, studied and traded – bulldozing homes, loading families onto military trucks, and forcibly relocating them to distant settlements. Unlike the "native reserves" – soon to be reconstituted as Bantustans – these were not too far away from industrial areas because the economy thrived on a quota of cheap black labor.

Whilst Verwoerd did not live to see the division of Palestinian territory after the 1967 Six Day War, and the subsequent creation of miniscule Bantustans in the West Bank and Gaza, he would have greatly admired and approved of the machinations that enclosed the Palestinians in their own ghettoized prisons. This after all was the Verwoerdian grand plan, and the reason why Jimmy Carter could so readily identify the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) as being akin to apartheid. In fact the Bantustans consisted of 13% of apartheid South Africa, uncannily comparable to the derisory, ever shrinking pieces of ground Israel consigns to the Palestinians – where it is estimated that well over one-third of the OPT comprises the illegal settlement blocks and security grid system with their bizarre Jewish-only roads. The effect of this is that the 22% of pre-1967 West Bank territory is effectively a mere 12% of historic pre-1948 Palestine.

Not like a Bantustan

When former deputy foreign minister Aziz Pahad and I visited Yasser Arafat in his demolished headquarters in Ramallah as part of a South African delegation in 2004, he pointed around him and said "See this is nothing but a Bantustan!" No, we responded, pointing out that no Bantustan, in fact not even our townships, had been bombed by warplanes, pulverised by tanks. To a wide-eyed Arafat we pointed out that Pretoria pumped in funds, constructed impressive administration buildings, even allowed for Bantustan airlines to service the

Mickey Mouse capitals in order to impress the world that they were serious about so-called "separate development." The Bantustans were not even fenced-in.

What Verwoerd admired too was the impunity with which Israel exercised state violence and terror to get its way, without hindrance from its Western allies, increasingly key amongst them the USA. What Verwoerd and his ilk came to admire in Israel, and seek to emulate in the southern African region, was the way the Western powers permitted an imperialist Israel to use its unbridled military with impunity in expanding its territory and holding back the rising tide of Arab nationalism in its neighborhood.

After the Six Day War, Verwoerd's successor John Vorster, infamously stated: "The Israelis have beaten the Arabs before lunchtime. We will eat the African states for breakfast." He added the latter warning in the face of the independent African states support for the armed liberation struggles growing in our region.

But it was not only the racial doctrine of Israel that excited apartheid's leaders, it was the use of the biblical narrative as the ideological rationale to justify its vision, aims and methods.

The early Dutch pioneers, the Afrikaners, had used Bible and gun as colonizers elsewhere, to carve out their exclusive fortress bastion in South Africa's hinterland. Like the biblical Israelites they claimed to be "God's chosen people" with a mission to tame and civilize the wilderness; disregarding the productivity and industriousness of people who had tilled the soil and traded for centuries – claiming it was only they who would make the land flow with milk and honey. They invoked a covenant with God to deliver their enemies into their hands and to bless their deeds. Until the advent of South Africa's democracy, the racial history books generally taught that the white man arrived in South Africa more or less as the so-called "Bantu tribes" from the north were wandering across the Limpopo River – and that they were pioneer settlers in a land devoid of

No Bantustan, in fact not even our townships, had been bombed by warplanes, pulverised by tanks

SECOND-CLASS CITIZENS

It can be claimed, without exaggeration, that any South African, whether involved in the freedom struggle, or motivated by basic human decency, who visits the Occupied Palestinian Territories is shocked to the core at the situation they encounter

people.

Such a colonial racist mentality which rationalized the genocide of the indigenous peoples of the Americas and Australasia, in Africa from Namibia to the Congo and elsewhere, most clearly has its echoes in Palestine. What is so shameless about this latter-day colonial sham is that Zionist Israel has been permitted by the West to aspire to such a goal even into the 21st Century.

It is by no means difficult to recognize from afar, as Verwoerd had been able to do, that Israel is indeed an apartheid state. Verwoerd's successor, Balthazar John Vorster visited Israel after the 1973 October War, when Egypt in a rare victory regained the Suez Canal and later in a peace agreement the Sinai from Israel. After that Israel and South Africa were virtually twinned as military allies for Pretoria helped supply Israel militarily in the immediacy of its 1973 setback and Israel came to support apartheid South Africa at the height of sanctions with weaponry and technology – from naval ships and the conversion of supersonic fighter planes to assistance in building six nuclear bombs and the creation of a thriving arms industry.

For the liberation movements of southern Africa, Israel and apartheid South Africa represented a racist, colonial axis. It was noted that people like Vorster had been Nazi sympathizers, interned during World War II – yet feted as heroes in Israel and incidentally never again referred to by South African Zionists as an anti-Semite! This did not surprise those that came to understand the true racist nature and character of Zionist Israel.

It is instructive to add that in its conduct and methods of repression, Israel came to resemble more and more apartheid South Africa at its zenith – even surpassing its brutality, house demolitions, removal of communities, targeted assassinations, massacres, imprisonment and torture of its opponents and the aggression against neighboring states.

Certainly we South Africans can identify the pathological cause, fuelling the hate, of

Israel's political-military elite and public in general, giving rise to more and more extreme racist postures from its elected representatives – as evidenced by the outcome of its most recent national elections. Neither is it difficult for anyone acquainted with colonial history to understand the way in which deliberately cultivated race hate inculcates a justification for the most atrocious and inhumane actions against even defenseless civilians – women, children, the elderly amongst them as recently witnessed in Gaza. It is from such unbridled racism that genocidal wars and holocausts are fuelled.

It can be claimed, without exaggeration, that any South African, whether involved in the freedom struggle, or motivated by basic human decency, who visits the Occupied Palestinian Territories is shocked to the core at the situation they encounter and agrees with Archbishop Tutu's many observations, including his most recent, that such things happen in Israel, "including collective punishment", that never happened in apartheid South Africa. (London *Guardian*, 28 May, 2009).

I want to recall here the words of an Israeli Cabinet Minister, Aharon Cizling in 1948, after the savagery of the Deir Yassin massacre of 240 villagers became known. He said: "Now we too have behaved like Nazis and my whole being is shaken." (Tom Segev – "The First Israelis")

The veteran British MP, Gerald Kaufman, long time friend of Israel, was reported as remarking that a spokeswoman of the Israeli Defence Force, talked like a Nazi, when she coldly dismissed the deaths of defenseless civilians in Gaza – many women and children amongst them. We dare not allow what is chillingly obvious to be excluded like some elephant in the room from our discourse: the inexorable rise of fascists like Avigdor Lieberman to powerful positions in Israel; the threat of the expulsion of the 1948 Palestinians; the implementation of Jabotinsky's "Iron Wall." The Knesset has voted by a large majority a law threatening imprisonment for anyone denying that Israel is a Jew-

ish and democratic state; a law prohibiting anyone from advocating a bi-national state is under discussion; so too a bill that seeks to imprison for three years anyone mourning the “Nakba.” None other than Tsipi Livni argues in tandem. These have been described as “a factory of racist laws with a distinct fascist odour”, by Uri Avnery (Israeli writer and peace activist).

It needs to be frankly raised that if the crimes of the Holocaust are at the top end of the scale of human barbarity in modern times, where do we place the human cost of what has so recently occurred in Gaza, the numerous bloodstained milestone since 1948 or the crimes in Lebanon in 1983 and 2006?

How do we evaluate the inhumanity of dropping bombs and blazing white phosphorous on civilian populations, burning people alive, roasting and gassing them in a Gaza ghetto under relentless siege with no place to run or hide. For 22 days relentless bombardment whole families vaporized before the horrified eyes of a surviving parent or child.

Guernica, Lidice, the Warsaw Ghetto, Deir Yassin, Mai Lei, Sabra and Shatilla, Sharpeville are high on that scale – and the perpetrators of the slaughter in Gaza are the off-spring of holocaust victims yet again, in Cizling’s words, behaving like Nazis. This must not be allowed to go unpunished and the international community must demand they be tried for crimes of conflict and crimes against humanity. For the lesson is that if the perpetrators are not stopped in their tracks such crimes will get greater and spread not only to engulf the entire Middle East and Iran, but beyond. And of course with Israel a key ally in the USA’s national interests, there will be no end to this bloody saga – with the Palestinians targeted to go the way of the extinct peoples of the former colonial era.

But such a fate must not be allowed to happen. Dare we believe that an America led by Barack Obama will make a difference? Some raise the hope that after 15 years the stalled Road Map might spring back to life and with it the chimera of a Two-State solu-

tion. One notes that President Obama only calls for a freeze in settlement construction – and precious little else. Can 12% or a few percent more in horse-trading provide for a viable Palestinian state? One doubts it. We await with interest the results of this conference’s deliberations. May I remind you of Edward Lear’s “Alice in Wonderland”, where a lost Alice asks a caterpillar seated on a toadstool the way. He asks her where does she want to go but the bewildered Alice does not know. “Well”, answers the caterpillar, “If you do not know where you are going any road will do.”

Are we naïve to believe that academics can help us find our bearings and point out the correct direction. I want to believe that those worth their salt can help. May your deliberations here be productive. Bear in mind the work of Justice Richard Goldstone’s UN investigative team that has been met by Israel’s point-blank refusal to cooperate into the Gaza bloodbath. Dozens of survivors have been interviewed in Gaza, one of whom watched Israeli soldiers shoot his elderly mother and sister dead as they fled their home waving white flags. “The committee was just like all the others who have come,” said Majed Hajjaj. “there are lots of reports written, but there’s nothing more than ink on paper.” Those could be lines straight from Edward Lear.

I began this address by quoting Dr. Verwoerd. I conclude with this quote from Nelson Mandela who famously stated in 1997: “The UN took a strong stand against apartheid; and over the years an international consensus was built, which helped to bring an end to this iniquitous system. But we know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians.” (Pretoria, December 4, 1997). Just as a united, national movement of a determined people, reinforced by international solidarity actions embracing the peaceful weapons of boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) – including many academic initiatives – won freedom for all South Africans, so too can this be the case in the Holy Land.

CT

It needs to be frankly raised that if the crimes of the Holocaust are at the top end of the scale of human barbarity in modern times, where do we place the human cost of what has so recently occurred in Gaza, the numerous bloodstained milestone since 1948 or the crimes in Lebanon in 1983 and 2006?

Ronnie Kasrils
served as a minister in the ANC-led government. Kasrils gave this speech at an international conference in Cape Town, South Africa, organized around the topic “Re-envisioning Israel/Palestine”

Beating children: All in a day's work

Dissident Israeli soldiers highlight brutality against of Palestinian kids, writes **Jonathan Cook**

According to one soldier's testimony, a boy of about 15 was given "a slap that brought him to the ground"

The rights of Palestinian children are routinely violated by Israel's security forces, according to a new report that says beatings and torture are common. In addition, hundreds of Palestinian minors are prosecuted by Israel each year without a proper trial and are denied family visits.

The findings by Defence for Children International (DCI) come in the wake of revelations from Israeli soldiers and senior commanders that it is "normal procedure" in the West Bank to terrorise Palestinian civilians, including children.

Col Itai Virob, commander of the Kfir Brigade, disclosed last month that to accomplish a mission, "aggressiveness towards every one of the residents in the village is common". Questioning included slaps, beatings and kickings, he said.

As a result, Gabi Ashkenazi, the head of the armed services, was forced to appear before the Israeli parliament to disavow the behaviour of his soldiers. Beatings were "absolutely prohibited", he told legislators.

Col Virob made his remarks during court testimony in defence of two soldiers, including his deputy commander, who are accused of beating Palestinians in the village of Qaddum, close to Nablus. One told the court that "soldiers are educated towards aggression in the IDF [army]".

Col Virob appeared to confirm his ob-

servaion, saying it was policy to "disturb the balance" of village life during missions and that the vast majority of assaults were "against uninvolved people".

Last month, further disclosures of ill-treatment of Palestinians, some as young as 14, were aired on Israeli TV, using material collected by dissident soldiers as part of the Breaking the Silence project, which highlights army brutality.

Two soldiers serving in the Harub battalion said they had witnessed beatings at a school in the West Bank village of Hares, south-west of Nablus, in an operation in March to stop stone-throwing. Many of those held were not involved, the soldiers said.

During a 12-hour operation that began at 3am, 150 detainees were blindfolded and handcuffed from behind, with the nylon restraints so tight their hands turned blue. The worst beatings, the soldiers said, occurred in the school toilets.

According to one soldier's testimony, a boy of about 15 was given "a slap that brought him to the ground". He added that many of his comrades "just knee [Palestinians] because it's boring, because you stand there 10 hours, you're not doing anything, so they beat people up".

The picture from serving soldiers confirms the findings of DCI, which noted that many children were picked up in general

sweeps after disturbances or during late-night raids of their homes.

Its report includes a selection of testimonies from children it represented in 2008 in which they describe Israeli soldiers beating them or being tortured by interrogators.

One 10-year-old boy, identified as Ezzat H, described an army search of his family home for a gun. He said a soldier slapped and punched him repeatedly during two hours of questioning, before another soldier pointed a rifle at him: "The rifle barrel was a few centimetres away from my face. I was so terrified that I started to shiver. He made fun of me."

Another boy, Shadi H, aged 15, said he and his friend were forced to undress by soldiers in an orange grove near Tulkarm while the soldiers threw stones at them. They were then beaten with rifle butts.

Jameel K, aged 14, described being taken to a military camp where he was assaulted and then had a rope tightened around his neck in a mock execution.

Yehuda Shaul, of *Breaking the Silence*, said soldiers treated any Palestinian older than 12 or 13 as an adult. "For the first time a high-ranking soldier [Col Virob] has joined us in raising the issue – even if not intentionally – that the use of physical violence against Palestinians is not exceptional but policy. A few years ago no senior officer would have had the guts to say this," he said.

The DCI report also highlights the systematic use of torture by interrogators from the army and the secret police, the Shin Bet, in an attempt to extract confessions from children, often in cases involving stone-throwing.

Islam M, aged 12, said he was threatened with having boiling water poured on his face if he did not admit throwing stones and was then pushed into a thorn bush. Another boy, Abed S, aged 16, said his hands and feet were tied to the wall of an interrogation room in the shape of a cross for a day and then put in solitary confinement for 15 days.

Last month, the United Nations Committee Against Torture, a panel of independent experts, expressed "deep concern" at Israel's treatment of Palestinian minors.

According to the DCI report, some 700 children are convicted in Israel's military courts each year, with children older than 12 denied access to lawyers in interrogation. It adds that interrogators routinely blindfold and handcuff child detainees during questioning and use techniques including slaps and kicks, sleep deprivation, solitary confinement, threats to the child and his family, and tying the child up for long periods.

Supreme Court ban

Such practices were banned by Israel's Supreme Court in 1999 but are still widely documented by Israeli human rights groups.

DCI says it has been disturbed by reports from several children of a special tiny cell, referred to as No 36, at a detention centre near Haifa. The cell has no windows or ventilation, its walls are dark and a dim light is kept on 24 hours a day.

In 95 per cent of cases, children are convicted on the basis of signed confessions written in Hebrew, a language few of them understand.

Once sentenced, the children are held in violation of international law in prisons in Israel where most are denied visits from family and receive little or no education.

DCI also criticises "a culture of impunity" among the Shin Bet, noting that not one of 600 complaints of torture filed against its interrogators during the second intifada has led to a criminal investigation.

Yesh Din, an Israeli human rights group, reported in November that soldiers too rarely face disciplinary action over illegal behaviour.

Army data from 2000 to the end of 2007 revealed that the military police had indicted soldiers in only 78 of 1,268 investigations. Most soldiers received minor sentences.

Academic studies suggest that Israeli

In 95 per cent of cases, children are convicted on the basis of signed confessions written in Hebrew, a language few of them understand

SUFFER THE CHILDREN

In one of the most disturbing testimonies, a soldier said he had witnessed his commander attacking a four-year-old boy playing in the sand in Gaz

soldiers have been routinely using violence against Palestinian civilians, including children, for many years.

In late 2007 Israelis were shocked by the testimonies collected by clinical psychologist Nufar Yishai-Karin from 21 soldiers with whom she shared her military service during the early 1990s.

The soldiers told her of incidents in which bystanders were shot or assaulted. In one of the most disturbing testimonies, a soldier said he had witnessed his commander attacking a four-year-old boy playing in the sand in Gaza.

“He broke his hand here at the wrist. Broke his hand at the wrist, broke his leg here. And started to stomp on his stomach,

three times, and left ... The next day I go out with him on another patrol, and the soldiers are already starting to do the same thing.”

Such revelations have grown in number since the Breaking the Silence began drawing attention to the army’s mistreatment of Palestinians in 2004. **CT**

Jonathan Cook is a writer and journalist based in Nazareth, Israel. His latest books are “Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East” (Pluto Press) and “Disappearing Palestine: Israel’s Experiments in Human Despair” (Zed Books). His website is www.jkcook.net



The Grim Reaper joins the picket at Lindsey oil refinery in Lincolnshire, where 647 striking contract workers were sacked. Photo: John Harris, June 23, 2009

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Absurdity is the norm in the Gaza Strip

Stephanie Westbrook on the blockade of Gaza by Israel and Egypt

Upon returning home from Gaza, a friend commented, “It must have been horrifying seeing all the destruction.” And it was. The 22-day Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip laid waste to an already ravaged territory.

The landscape is dotted with piles of rubble of bombed out buildings, the twisted iron and aluminum of destroyed factories, once green fields reduced to sand and dirt by Israeli tanks, apartments with 2 meter holes in the walls and toppled minarets of mosques turned to ruins.

But as devastating as bearing witness to the destruction was, it was the absurdities of the siege, the total blockade of Gaza imposed by Israel and Egypt, that really affected me. Gaza itself remains frozen in time; for nearly five months after the ceasefire, aside from a few rare cases in which cinder blocks have been used to fill gaping holes in the sides of buildings, no reconstruction whatsoever has begun. The blockade keeps the necessary building materials out of Gaza.

While traveling throughout Gaza with a delegation of mostly U.S. citizens organized by CodePink, the absurdities of the siege presented themselves over and over.

At Al Shifa Hospital, the largest in Gaza, we saw state of the art isotope scan and radio therapy machines in the oncology department that cannot operate because the

radioactive material as well as a calibration tool have been refused entry by Israel. A row of dialysis machines sat unused, lacking the required fluids.

As medical conditions in Gaza deteriorate due to the siege, many look for medical care abroad. However, the sealed borders prevent them from traveling. We met the director of an orphanage who had already lost the vision in one eye, was losing it in the other, but had been unable to obtain permission to travel to Egypt for eye care.

Power outages are regular occurrences. The Gaza power plant simply cannot keep up with the demand due to a lack of fuel, which is blocked by Israel, as is supplemental electricity produced in Israel. There are both scheduled blackouts of 8-10 hours, as well as spontaneous outages.

While touring the Al Shifa Hospital, the Minister of Health apologized for the heat in the room, saying their generator must be reserved for higher priority uses than air conditioning. Families are forced to carry their loved ones up the stairs, the elevators shut down during blackouts.

The centers working to create employment opportunities for Gaza’s women inevitably fall prey to the siege. Power cuts bring the sewing machines making dresses and linens to a standstill. Even the embroidery thread used to make traditional handicrafts must be smuggled in through

We met the director of an orphanage who had already lost the vision in one eye, was losing it in the other, but had been unable to obtain permission to travel to Egypt for eye care.

UNDER SIEGE

In late May, Israel began dropping thousands of leaflets near the border areas warning the people of Gaza not to come within 300 meters of the border or they would be fired upon

the tunnels.

The siege has also taken its toll on the father figure. According to Dr. Zeyada of the Gaza Community Mental Health Program, with well over 50% unemployment due to the siege, children see their fathers as unable to provide for them. And during the war, they saw that their fathers were also unable to protect them. Children have started looking to other role models, and make easy targets for those who, unfortunately, have no desire for peace.

Education suffers under the siege. At a UN vocational training center in Khan Younis, the library consists of roughly 12 bookcases, but only two had any books at all, with half being photocopied manuals. The textbooks destined for the center have been held up in a storage facility in Jerusalem; the Israelis simply refused to allow them in. The center is also unable to get the raw materials for their metal and woodworking courses.

Sharif, a university student studying business administration in his second year, is understandably proud of having top marks in his faculty.

His friends have nicknamed him 'The Genius.' Sharif has been awarded a scholarship at Portland University in Oregon starting this fall. Unfortunately, the irrationality of the siege is likely to prevent him from being allowed to go. "If I can't get authorization by August, there goes my scholarship."

A professor at Al Aqsa University has been offered a position at the University of Manchester, however, he has been denied permission to travel. Professors are also unable to travel to attend international conferences. And students of the English department have a tough time finding native speakers with which to practice the language; getting into Gaza is almost as difficult as getting out!

Numerous projects for which funding has already been approved are currently suspended for the simple fact that the materials to complete them are not allowed

in. Turkey has donated funds for a new university library and PalTel, the Palestinian telecommunications company, has allocated funds for an Information Technology Center. Both projects remain in limbo, victims of the siege.

An official with the UN Relief and Works Agency remarked that it is also a problem to get the actual banknotes in. UNRWA, which provides services to more than 1 million registered refugees in the Gaza Strip, is often only able to get money in to pay the salaries of their 10,000 employees, while money to fund projects is blocked.

Not only are Palestinians restricted in their movement in and out of Gaza, but also within. In late May, Israel began dropping thousands of leaflets near the border areas warning the people of Gaza not to come within 300 meters of the border or they would be fired upon. Farmers are forced to risk their lives in order to work their fields that fate has placed too close to the border. The same restrictions are imposed on Palestinian fishermen. The sound of shots pierce the silence nightly, as Israeli gunboats fire on fishing boats that dare to venture far enough away from the shore in order to catch fish to sell and provide a living for their families.

These are the absurdities that have become the norm in Gaza. But perhaps most absurd of all is how anyone can believe that Israel's severity in the closures, the destruction of the economy and social fabric of the Gaza Strip, will serve to convince Palestinians to place their trust in international law.

What we in the international community must do is to heed the call we heard repeatedly from the people of Gaza: work to break the siege so that they can take care of themselves. **CT**

Stephanie Westbrook is a founding member of U.S. Citizens for Peace & Justice in Rome, Italy (<http://www.peaceandjustice.it>) and currently serves on the group's coordinating committee

Thanks for buying our toxic plastic

Would you believe the plastics industry wants to use a pregnant woman to promote the benefits of a product that harms unborn children?, asks **Elaine Shannon**

It's 1960. Embattled tobacco industry reps, accused by the Federal Trade Commission and health groups of hawking products that kill people, retreat to a sumptuous hideaway and devise a campaign to salvage cigarettes by, among other things, targeting women.

Soon after the confab at Miami's luxe hotel Fontainebleau, long, slender cigarettes appear, most prominently Virginia Slims, cultivating feminists with its "You've come a long way baby" pitch. The tobacco business comes roaring back, and by 1968, women account for 47 percent of the American market.

Though smoking rates have declined since the 1990s, when anti-smoking sentiment hit a tipping point in the U.S., surveys indicate as many teenage girls as boys smoke, and 18 percent of adult women still smoke.

Flash forward to last month. Embattled food and chemical industry reps, trying to head off a nationwide ban of the toxic plastic chemical bisphenol A (BPA) in cans, bottles and other food containers, huddle in a back room of Washington's exclusive Cosmos Club – and decide to target women.

Their dilemma: over the past dozen years, BPA, a synthetic estrogen, has been found to disrupt the endocrine system, even in trace doses. Bills to ban the chemi-

cal from baby bottles and other children's food containers are before Congress, the California legislature and other state and local lawmaking bodies. Recently, the baby bottle industry yielded to pressure from state officials and consumer groups and agreed to turn to non-BPA plastic.

The canning industry, in the bullseye because it coats the insides of virtually all food cans produced in the U.S. with BPA-rich epoxy lining (Eden Foods, the rare exception, uses non-BPA can linings), is in no mood to compromise. The chemical industry, which rakes in an estimated \$6 billion in global BPA sales annually, is downright hostile to the idea of limiting BPA to things you don't eat on, like cell phones, computer casings and washing machine paint.

The Cosmos klatch minutes, which give a new meaning to the word cynical, leaked in a heartbeat to the *Washington Post*, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* and Environmental Working Group. The conversation, it seems, comes straight out of Big Tobacco's playbook.

In a scene that could have been lifted from *Thank You for Smoking*, novelist Christopher Buckley's brilliant take on Washington lobbyists, an industry note-taker and emailer recounted:

"Attendees believe a balance of legislative and grassroots outreach (to young mothers ages 21-35 and students) is imper-

Bills to ban the chemical from baby bottles and other children's food containers are before Congress, the California legislature and other state and local lawmaking bodies

TARGETING WOMEN

Fear tactics work well on impoverished, historically exploited people who don't have time to read those dry scientific reports because they're working two or three jobs trying to hold their families together, and paying top dollar for medical care when their kids get really sick because they don't have health insurance

ative to the stability of their industry. “

Presumably, the industry reps focused on women because they make family purchasing decisions and care about health. The notetaker added: Their ‘holy grail’ spokesperson would be a “pregnant young mother who would be willing to speak around the country about the benefits of BPA.”

I couldn't make this up. Even Chris Buckley couldn't make this up.

Imagine: top lobbyists, among them Kathleen M. Roberts of the canning industry's North American Metal Packaging Alliance, slip into the glittering Beaux Arts mansion that houses the formerly all-male Cosmos to concoct a media campaign that centers on a pliant pregnant pitchwoman.

But who? What young mother will agree to tout a product that dozens of scientific studies have shown causes permanent damage to the reproductive systems of her embryos?

Surely not anyone who has read even a bit of the evidence that BPA disrupts the development of the reproductive system and brain, that it may harm the cardiovascular system, cause cellular changes leading to breast and prostate cancer, trigger diabetes and obesity and impede the body's response to chemotherapy.

Scare tactics

There's more. The notetaker wrote: “Attendees suggested using fear tactics (e.g. “Do you want to have access to baby food anymore?”) as well as giving control back to consumers (e.g. you have a choice between the more expensive product that is

frozen or fresh or foods packaged in cans) as ways to dissuade people from choosing BPA-free packaging.”

What the notetaker didn't note was that there are alternatives to BPA. Japan abandoned BPA can linings back in 1998 because students and young adults were turning up with alarming blood levels of the toxic chemical. Another tawdry moment: according to the email, the lobbyists decided that: “Focusing on the impact of BPA bans on minorities (Hispanic and African American) and poor is also important.”

Translation, if this passage needs any: fear tactics work well on impoverished, historically exploited people who don't have time to read those dry scientific reports because they're working two or three jobs trying to hold their families together, and paying top dollar for medical care when their kids get really sick because they don't have health insurance.

EWG has posted the entire email at this link <http://www.ewg.org/node/27982> so you can read it for yourself.

But for you young mothers and fathers who don't have time today, here are a few words you won't find: Safe. Healthy. Truth. Fact. Honesty. Candor. Integrity.

The tobacco industry didn't throw those words around either. That worked well, didn't it? **CT**

Elaine Shannon is a 30-year veteran investigative journalist who most recently worked for Time Magazine. She is now Editor-in-Chief at Environmental Working Group (www.ewg.org)

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Iran had a democracy, then we took it away

Chris Hedges thinks we ought to remember what happened to Iran's last democratically-elected president

Iransians do not need or want us to teach them about liberty and representative government. They have long embodied this struggle. It is we who need to be taught. It was Washington that orchestrated the 1953 coup to topple Iran's democratically elected government, the first in the Middle East, and install the compliant shah in power. It was Washington that forced Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh, a man who cared as much for his country as he did for the rule of law and democracy, to spend the rest of his life under house arrest. We gave to the Iranian people the corrupt regime of the shah and his savage secret police and the primitive clerics that rose out of the swamp of the dictator's Iran. Iranians know they once had a democracy until we took it away.

The fundamental problem in the Middle East is not a degenerate and corrupt Islam. The fundamental problem is a degenerate and corrupt Christendom. We have not brought freedom and democracy and enlightenment to the Muslim world. We have brought the opposite. We have used the iron fist of the American military to implant our oil companies in Iraq, occupy Afghanistan and ensure that the region is submissive and cowed. We have supported a government in Israel that has carried out egregious war crimes in Lebanon and Gaza and is daily stealing ever greater portions

of Palestinian land. We have established a network of military bases, some the size of small cities, in Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Kuwait, and we have secured basing rights in the Gulf states of Bahrain, Qatar, Oman and the United Arab Emirates. We have expanded our military operations to Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Egypt, Algeria and Yemen. And no one naively believes, except perhaps us, that we have any intention of leaving.

We are the biggest problem in the Middle East. We have through our cruelty and violence created and legitimized the Mahmoud Ahmadinejads and the Osama bin Ladens. The longer we lurch around the region dropping iron fragmentation bombs and seizing Muslim land the more these monsters, reflections of our own distorted image, will proliferate. The theologian Reinhold Niebuhr wrote, "Perhaps the most significant moral characteristic of a nation is its hypocrisy." But our hypocrisy no longer fools anyone but ourselves. It will ensure our imperial and economic collapse.

The history of modern Iran is the history of a people battling tyranny. These tyrants were almost always propped up and funded by foreign powers. This suppression and distortion of legitimate democratic movements over the decades resulted in the 1979 revolution that brought the Iranian clerics

The longer we lurch around the region dropping iron fragmentation bombs and seizing Muslim land the more these monsters, reflections of our own distorted image, will proliferate

AMERICAN HYPOCRISY

Especially ludicrous is the sight of people in Washington calling for intervention on behalf of democracy in Iran when just last year they were calling for the bombing of Iran

to power, unleashing another tragic cycle of Iranian resistance.

“The central story of Iran over the last 200 years has been national humiliation at the hands of foreign powers who have subjugated and looted the country,” Stephen Kinzer, the author of *All the Shah’s Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror*, told me. “For a long time the perpetrators were the British and Russians. Beginning in 1953, the United States began taking over that role. In that year, the American and British secret services overthrew an elected government, wiped away Iranian democracy, and set the country on the path to dictatorship.”

“Then, in the 1980s, the U.S. sided with Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq war, providing him with military equipment and intelligence that helped make it possible for his army to kill hundreds of thousands of Iranians,” Kinzer said. “Given this history, the moral credibility of the U.S. to pose as a promoter of democracy in Iran is close to nil. Especially ludicrous is the sight of people in Washington calling for intervention on behalf of democracy in Iran when just last year they were calling for the bombing of Iran. If they had had their way then, many of the brave protesters on the streets of Tehran today – the ones they hold up as heroes of democracy – would be dead now.”

Washington has never recovered from the loss of Iran – something our intelligence services never saw coming. The overthrow of the shah, the humiliation of the embassy hostages, the laborious piecing together of tiny shreds of paper from classified embassy documents to expose America’s venal role in thwarting democratic movements in Iran and the region, allowed the outside world to see the dark heart of the American empire. Washington has demonized Iran ever since, painting it as an irrational and barbaric country filled with primitive, religious zealots. But Iranians, as these street protests illustrate, have proved in recent years far more courageous in the defense of de-

mocracy than most Americans.

Where were we when our election was stolen from us in 2000 by Republican operatives and a Supreme Court that overturned all legal precedent to anoint George W. Bush president? Did tens of thousands of us fill the squares of our major cities and denounce the fraud? Did we mobilize day after day to restore transparency and accountability to our election process? Did we fight back with the same courage and tenacity as the citizens of Iran? Did Al Gore defy the power elite and, as opposition candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi has done, demand a recount at the risk of being killed?

Balancing out

President Obama retreated in his Cairo speech into our spectacular moral nihilism, suggesting that our crimes matched the crimes of Iran, that there is, in his words, “a tumultuous history between us.” He went on: “In the middle of the Cold War, the United States played a role in the overthrow of a democratically elected Iranian government. Since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has played a role in acts of hostage-taking and violence against U.S. troops and civilians.” It all, he seemed to say, balances out.

I am no friend of the Iranian regime, which helped create and arm Hezbollah, is certainly meddling in Iraq, has persecuted human rights activists, gays, women and religious and ethnic minorities, embraces racism and intolerance and uses its power to deny popular will. But I do not remember Iran orchestrating a coup in the United States to replace an elected government with a brutal dictator who for decades persecuted, assassinated and imprisoned democracy activists. I do not remember Iran arming and funding a neighboring state to wage war against our country. Iran never shot down one of our passenger jets as did the USS Vincennes – caustically nicknamed Robocruiser by the crews of other American vessels – when in June 1988 it fired missiles at an Airbus filled with Ira-

nian civilians, killing everyone on board. Iran is not sponsoring terrorism within the United States, as our intelligence services currently do in Iran. The attacks on Iranian soil include suicide bombings, kidnappings, beheadings, sabotage and “targeted assassinations” of government officials, scientists and other Iranian leaders. What would we do if the situation was reversed? How would we react if Iran carried out these policies against us?

We are, and have long been, the primary engine for radicalism in the Middle East. The greatest favor we can do for democracy activists in Iran, as well as in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Gulf and the dictatorships that dot North Africa, is withdraw our troops from the region and begin to speak to Iranians and the rest of the Muslim world in the civilized language of diplomacy, respect and mutual interests.

Great Satan?

The longer we cling to the doomed doctrine of permanent war the more we give credibility to the extremists who need, indeed yearn for, an enemy that speaks in their crude slogans of nationalist cant and violence. The louder the Israelis and their idiot allies in Washington call for the bombing of Iran to thwart its nuclear ambitions, the happier are the bankrupt clerics who are ordering the beating and murder of demonstrators. We may laugh when crowds supporting Ahmadinejad call us “the Great Satan,” but there is a very palpable reality that has informed the terrible algebra of their hatred.

Our intoxication with our military prowess blinds us to all possibilities of hope and mutual cooperation. It was Mohammed Khatami, the president of Iran from 1997 to 2005 – perhaps the only honorable Middle East leader of our time – whose refusal to

countenance violence by his own supporters led to the demise of his lofty “civil society” at the hands of more ruthless, less scrupulous opponents. It was Khatami who proclaimed that “the death of even one Jew is a crime.” And we sputtered back to this great and civilized man the primitive slogans of all deformed militarists. We were captive, as all bigots are, to our demons, and could not hear any sound but our own shouting. It is time to banish these demons. It is time to stand not with the helmeted goons who beat protesters, not with those in the Pentagon who make endless wars, but with the unarmed demonstrators in Iran who daily show us what we must become.

The fight of the Iranian people is our fight. And, perhaps for the first time, we can match our actions to our ideals. We have no right under post-Nuremberg laws to occupy Iraq or Afghanistan. These occupations are defined by these statutes as criminal “wars of aggression.” They are war crimes. We have no right to use force, including the state-sponsored terrorism we unleash on Iran, to turn the Middle East into a private gas station for our large oil companies. We have no right to empower Israel’s continuing occupation of Palestine, a flagrant violation of international law. The resistance you see in Iran will not end until Iranians, and all those burdened with repression in the Middle East, free themselves from the tyranny that comes from within and without. Let us, for once, be on the side of those who share our democratic ideals.

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*.*

The longer we cling to the doomed doctrine of permanent war the more we give credibility to the extremists who need, indeed yearn for, an enemy that speaks in their crude slogans of nationalist cant and violence

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25 years in jail! For smoking pot?

Congressman's idea is obscene, says **Paul Armentano**

Representative Kirk's website also alleges that the five-time-elected Congressman is "pro-science." Unless, of course, we're talking about cannabis – in which case he is actually "pro-ideology" and "anti-science."

They say that every action spurs an opposite reaction. Well, that certainly seems to be the case in Congress.

Just days after Massachusetts Democrat Rep. Barney Frank, along with 13 cosponsors, reintroduced HR 2835, the Medical Marijuana Patient Protection Act of 2009 in Congress, Republican Rep. Mark Kirk (Illinois) has called for federal legislation to sentence certain first-time marijuana offenders to up to 25 years in prison.

In a story headed, "U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk to push tougher sentences for more-potent marijuana" the *Chicago Tribune* wrote:

"U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk will call for legislation Monday that would toughen drug-trafficking laws regarding a highly potent form of marijuana, with penalties of up to 25 years in prison for a first-time offense.

"The law would target offenders who sell or distribute marijuana that has a THC content exceeding 15 percent.

"... Drug dealers are increasingly cross-breeding plants to produce high-potency variants of marijuana, which are called 'kush' in street slang when they have 20 percent THC, Lake County Sheriff Mark Curran said. 'When you amplify the strength of it, you are increasing the harm to the system,' said Curran, who supports the legislation, which would amend a federal law. 'They are more dangerous behind

the wheel of a vehicle. It's not a good idea to have people that messed up.'

"... The Republican North Shore lawmaker said he plans to release more information during a news conference in Chicago on Monday, where he will be joined by representatives from the Lake County Sheriff's Department, the Lake County Metropolitan Enforcement Group and Waukegan Police Department."

Okay, where to begin? Well, we can start with U.S. Representative Mark Kirk. According to the Congressman's website, Rep. Kirk is "pro-personal responsibility." Unless, of course, we're talking about allowing responsible adults (or patients) the choice to relax (or medicate) in the privacy of their own homes with a substance that is objectively safer than alcohol (or most prescription pharmaceuticals). Then, naturally, all bets are off.

Representative Kirk's website also alleges that the five-time-elected Congressman is "pro-science." Unless, of course, we're talking about cannabis – in which case he is actually "pro-ideology" and "anti-science." After all, if Rep. Kirk was truly interested in the science of cannabis he would already know that:

1) According to a 2008 review (see page 12) of marijuana potency by the University of Mississippi, the average THC in domestically grown marijuana – which comprises

the bulk of the U.S. market – is less than five percent, a figure that’s remained unchanged for nearly a decade.

2) THC – regardless of potency – is virtually non-toxic to healthy cells or organs, and is incapable of causing a fatal overdose. Currently, doctors may legally prescribe a FDA-approved pill that contains 100 percent THC, and curiously, nobody among Rep. Kirk’s staff or at the Lake County Sheriff’s office seems to be overly concerned about its potential health effects.

3) Survey data gleaned from cannabis consumers in the Netherlands – where users may legally purchase pot of known quality – indicates that most cannabis consumers prefer less potent pot, just as the majority of those who drink alcohol prefer beer or wine rather than 190 proof Everclear or Bacardi 151. When consumers encounter unusually strong varieties of marijuana, they adjust their use accordingly and smoke less.

Of course, if Rep. Kirk was really concerned about potential risks posed by supposedly stronger marijuana, he would support regulating the sale of drug (as opposed to jailing first-time pot sellers for a quarter of a century) so that its potency would be consistent and this information would be publicly displayed to the consumer. This same advice applies to the members of the Lake County Sheriff’s Department and the Waukegan Police Department – who claim “we don’t make the laws; we just enforce them” – yet seem to have no problem whatsoever lobbying for increased federal pot penalties while on company time.

Fortunately, the likelihood is that Rep. Kirk’s proposed legislation will be all bark

and no bite. One, I suspect that few if any of Rep. Kirk’s colleagues in Congress will even consider supporting such an asinine measure. Two, even if such legislation were to become law (and it won’t) – who would test each and every seized marijuana sample for THC potency and who would pay for it? Currently, only the University of Mississippi engages in such potency testing, which is highly expensive and requires the use of a gas chromatography mass spectrometer device. In short, it appears that the misguided Congressman from Illinois is simply trying to make headlines.

One can’t blame him for trying. After all, in Britain, unsubstantiated claims regarding the dangers of often-talked-about-but-never-actually-defined supposedly “lethal” ‘skunk’ weed caused a national frenzy and resulted in Parliament hastily deciding to reclassify pot possession offenses from a verbal warning to up to five years in jail. Never mind that, under Britain’s short-lived experiment with decriminalization, marijuana potency actually fell – as did the number of adolescents using the drug.

Of course, as the latest actions of the so-called “pro-science, pro-personal liberty” Congressman show, facts play virtually no role in political drug policy debate, and ignorance hardly disqualifies someone from holding elected office.

CT

Paul Armentano is the deputy director of NORML (the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws), and is the co-author of the book Marijuana Is Safer: So Why Are We Driving People to Drink (2009, Chelsea Green).

Of course, if Rep. Kirk was really concerned about potential risks posed by supposedly stronger marijuana, he would support regulating the sale of drug (as opposed to jailing first-time pot sellers for a quarter of a century) so that its potency would be consistent and this information would be publicly displayed to the consumer

**READ THE BEST OF
JOE BAGEANT**

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Redneck view of the Obamarama

Financial stimulus for the working class? Fat chance
of us rednecks seeing that happening, writes **Joe Bageant**

“So, two millionaires in their armored limo drop by a soup kitchen, and this is supposed to make me feel good about my country?”

When it comes to expressing plain truths, few are as gifted as American rednecks. During recent travels in the Appalachian communities of West Virginia, Tennessee and Kentucky I’ve collected scores of their comments on our national condition and especially President Barack Obama.

In America, all successful politicians are first and foremost successfully marketed brands. In fact, the Obama campaign was named *Advertising Age’s* 2008 marketer of the year. George W. Bush’s brand may have “collapsed,” as they say on Madison Avenue, but things don’t change much. Rednecks instinctively know this:

“It don’t matter who gets to warm his butt in the White House chair,” says a West Virginia trucker. “The top dogs eat high on the hog and the little dogs eat the tails and ears. That’s what them bailouts is all about, and that’s the way it is no matter who’s president. So you might as well vote for the guy who looks like the most fun because you gonna be watching his ass on television for the next eight years.”

Yup. Rednecks do have a way of getting right down to the bone of the matter. For example, the news shows us Obama in an auto plant. We see Obama talking to the troops in Iraq. Obama ladling out grubs in a soup kitchen. That’s the stuff of urban liberal wet dreams. But a fellow over in the

mountains of Mineral County, West Virginia, a guy named Pinch who sells fence posts, poles and firewood out of his backyard, puts it like this:

“Nothing against Obama, mind you, but the last time I looked, the car plants was dead meat. Obama has never even come close to serving in the military, except for serving up that batch of hash in Baghdad. And there he was with his wife in a soup kitchen for god sake! Things has got so bad that we’ve got soup kitchens all over this country now. So, two millionaires in their armored limo drop by a soup kitchen, and this is supposed to make me feel good about my country?”

Feel good

To be sure, the Obama brand is a feel good brand. Like those Hallmark talking digital greeting cards we geezers send one another that say “You’re still sexy baby!” Or “How’s it hanging stud?” we know of course, the only things hanging are our beer bellies and the fat on our upper arms. But it makes us feel good anyway. For about ten seconds.

What makes us feel good in the long term is getting back to the true meaning of being an American – buying stuff and racking up debt. Still, who’d have ever thought we’d see the president of the United States on television telling us, “There’s never been a better time to refinance our homes”, or

buy a car?, which is exactly what he did last month.

Hawking home refits seems a bit un-presidential, to some of us. But then, too, this is America, where, by orders of President Bush, we struck back hard at the 911 terrorists by going shopping. In any case, a local mortgage lender here in Winchester, Virginia is running ads with pictures of Obama and quoting him on the virtue of debt. That lender is one cast iron Obama hating Republican. So maybe Obama is truly a uniter after all.

Debt serfdom

As to America’s working class debt serfdom, some of us were resigned to that a long time ago. My former neighbor, Fat Larry (whose real name is Myron, and is thus happy enough to be called Fat Larry) says: “Hey, look, I don’t care if Obama is putting us in debt. I was already in hock for the rest of my life before they started hollering about a ‘debt crisis’”. Nor is he opposed to accepting a handout: “Obama can let a smidgen of them trillions land in my poke anytime. Right now I got no problems fifty thousand bucks wouldn’t fix.”

Not to worry Larry! According to our media, the cavalry is on the way to our rescue. Arrival time is estimated to be in two years. That’s when employment is supposed to start coming back, after another year or so of continued job losses.

Meanwhile, Obama is humping the

pump in an effort to re-inflate an economy that looks more every day like a balloon with a 55 caliber bullet hole in it. He’s even tried to get some of the escaped air back into the balloon by making corporations return a few billion dollars of the trillions in bailout money that disappeared the minute it crossed their paws. “Seems to me,” says Fat Larry, “he should’a give the money back to me. It was mine to start with.”

Personally, I really cannot bitch too much about Obama’s giveaways. At the end of this month he’s sending me a \$250 check – stimulus money being handed out to us retirees – which is about the only good thing I have encountered so far about getting old. Indeed, it’s cause for celebration. So I’m gonna call ole Larry and we’re going out to get so damned stimulated we can’t walk home.

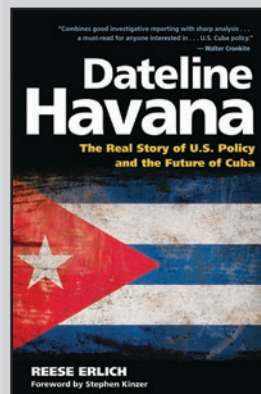
Postscript: Aw hell! The front page of today’s newspaper tells me the \$250 stimulus payment is only a loan from the government, and that I will have to pay it back next April. In this new America, we are all issued debt, whether we ask for it or not (sigh). **CT**

Joe Bageant is the author of the best selling Deer Hunting With Jesus: Dispatches from America’s class war (Random House). This column originally appeared on the web site of the Australian Broadcasting Company. His columns are available at www.coldtype.net/joe.html

I’m gonna call ole Larry and we’re going out to get so damned stimulated we can’t walk home

“Dateline Havana combines good investigative reporting with sharp analysis. Erlich takes us inside the cultures of Cubans and Cuban-Americans. . . Dateline Havana is a must-read for anyone interested in understanding the problems and seeing change in U.S. Cuba policy.”

—Walter Cronkite, former anchor of CBS Evening News



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Torture, what torture? We need more . . .

Gary Corseri thinks torture might just be a great idea, and there's considerable room for expansion

**As for them
“doctors” that do
abortions – hell’s
too good for ‘em. I
say we put ‘em in a
little crawl space,
get these giant
forceps—and we
crush their skulls.
Do unto others,
and all that**

==“What they regard as Tao is not Tao, and what they consider as right is often wrong. [They] do not really understand Tao, but understand some of it. ... They are able to worst others by argument, but do not convince people in their hearts, because they are just playing around with words. ... [They get] lost in the bypaths.”—Chuang Tse

What’s all this nonsense about torture? Now, I ain’t no Einstein, but it seems to me, if it makes us safer, it’s a no-brainer! In fact, maybe what we gotta do is torture a whole lot more.

I’m not talkin’ about droppin’ bombs on people from Predator drones. That’s a kind of torture if you get your limbs blown off or a beam thru your skull. But, it ain’t personal enuf. It’s what you call “collateral damage.” What we gotta do is intentional damage – up close and personal.

And let’s not stop with the so-called “terr’ists.” Let’s not pussy-foot.

I think everyone can agree that child-molesters should be tortured, right? If they do that kind of stuff once, they’re probably gonna do it again. Just like the terr’ists! And it’s gotta be tortured outa them. We gotta be intentional. That also means we gotta figure out their intentions! So, if we water-board ‘em a coupla hundred times, maybe they’re gonna get the point, confess their

sins – and tell us what they’re thinking, what they’re planning! We gotta clean out that hornet’s nest in their brains. Cut ‘em off at the pass. (Or before the pass, if you know what I mean.) Now if somebody’s contemplatin’ that kind of stuff, it’s too bad. I don’t care a rat’s ass if their daddy was mean to ‘em or their mama didn’t give them enuf cuddlin’. What’s right is right!

Then there’s the stem-cell research guys. (I’ll get to the abortion “doctors,” in a minute.) These research types (yeah, women, too!) don’t even give the little embryo a chance to grow, a chance to feel the warmth of mama’s womb. Suppose somebody had done that to them? Well, turnabout’s fair play I’m sayin’. I say we get into their bone marrow and do some jiggering. Inject them with something chemical that’s gonna make ‘em feel like jello on a hot griddle.

As for them “doctors” that do abortions – hell’s too good for ‘em. I say we put ‘em in a little crawl space, get these giant forceps—and we crush their skulls. Do unto others, and all that.

N’other thing: crime’s gotten outa hand since 9/11. There was some break while the criminals was layin’ low, bein’ cowards and all, but they been comin’ back full force. So, let’s not shut down Guantanamo! Let’s build a whole shebang more all over the world, carve out niches of land in commie regimes like Castroland, send these mis-

fit criminal types there and let the locals at'em. Send'em to central Asia. They know how to boil people in oil over there. They been doin' it since Jesus was in Bethlehem.

"What else?" you ask. ...You got all this garbage on TV now. You got "cartoons" with foul-mouthed characters. Whaddaya gonna do? You can't whup Homer Simpson. You can't get to'em cause they ain't real, but you can get to the "creators" – if you know what I mean. You got this show called "American Idol," too. They got this guy wearing black nail polish! What kinda message is that sendin' to the kids? Well, I say we extract his fingernails one by one – just like the Nazis used to do! I say we learn'em good. And that Simon Cowell judge-guy is an arrogant S.O.B. We oughta put him on the rack, see how much "stretchin" his ego can take!

Let's not forget our Congress, either. You got Barney Frank and Nancy Pelosi. I hear there's some stuff they do with electricity in sensitive parts (!) that oughta shut those traitors up. And as for that white-black, smiley guy who stole the election – I'd put him through some "changes" I would. If you know what I mean!

All those guys that sold this country down the drain – yeah, bankers and CEO's. What are we bailin' them out for? We oughta be bailin' them in. Right in the sewer! Ain't they done enuf already? Ain't they hurt the people good enuf? I say we strapado them! Put'em in the Iron Maiden!

We gotta quit this pussy-footin'. We gotta make examples of these vermin. Give'em gladius and sword and trident and net and let'em fight to death in the football stadiums and on the baseball diamonds. And the ones that win – we'll make them fight again until old age or disease or mortal wounds finish'em off. Then we'll hang their

corpses from the nearest bridge. We'll pike their heads! And we'll show the world: we mean business! We'll show them how tough democracy can be!

I ain't sayin' it's pleasant for the torturer, but there's some people who don't mind it so much. Good, salt-of-the-earth folks like Lindsay England, for example – gonna smile for the camera while they tie up the scumbags and put out their cigarettes in the scumbags' flesh.

And good, honest patriots like Mr. Cheney and Rush Limbaugh. They ain't gonna flinch. They're gonna do what they gotta do. (And if we gotta rape the bastards, humiliate them before their Muffis and Allah – there's plenty of cops who know where to put their billy clubs!)

We gotta get less "sensitive" about these things if we're gonna win this War on Terror! We can't let these Mueslis win or we're gonna be back in the Dark Ages! War is hell as General Sherman said – and he oughta know! We gotta get some kick-ass backbone if we're gonna save our country from all the garbage out there. Cause some things are worth savin' and doin' everything you gotta do to save'em. Some things ya just gotta do whether you like it or not. But there's some people don't mind it so much and we oughta use their talents!

CT

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The final week of my parents' life

Robert Meeropol, son of executed US spies Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, looks back to their last days in June, 1953

Fifty-six years ago today, on Monday, June 15, 1953, the Supreme Court denied my parents' request for a stay of execution by a 5-4 vote. This was the eighth time my parents had asked the Supreme Court to review their case, and the Court had refused them all

Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were members of the Communist Party who were convicted of espionage for allegedly stealing atomic secrets. On June 19, 1953, they were executed – the most prominent victims of the McCarthyite campaign to crush political and social dissent. Robert Meeropol, one of the Rosenbergs' two sons, has dedicated himself to helping provide for the children of activists who have been persecuted for their political beliefs, founding the Rosenberg Fund for Children. This year, in the days leading up to the anniversary of his parents' death on June 19, Robert wrote this diary, remembering what happened each day 56 years ago.

Monday, June 15

Have you ever wondered why anniversaries that are multiples of five or 10 are more significant milestones than those that are multiples of other numbers? I wonder if we had six fingers, instead of five, whether a 24th wedding anniversary might be a bigger deal than the 20th, and if we had seven fingers a 49th might be much more important than a 50th.

This week will mark 56 years since my parents' executions on June 19, 1953. I expect that unlike the 50th anniversary in 2003, the day will pass with very little public notice. But this week will resonate more powerfully for me because for the first time

in 11 years, the days of the week track the weekdays of 1953.

In other words, my parents' executions took place at sundown on Friday the 19th, and the 19th will also fall on a Friday this year.

To mark this echo, I'll recall in daily posts to this blog the events of the final five days of my parents' lives and my feelings at the time.

Fifty-six years ago today, on Monday, June 15, 1953, the Supreme Court denied my parents' request for a stay of execution by a 5-4 vote. This was the eighth time my parents had asked the Supreme Court to review their case, and the Court had refused them all.

With this denial, the Supreme Court adjourned for the summer. The Federal Bureau of Prisons scheduled the executions for that Thursday, June 18, on my parents' 14th wedding anniversary.

My brother Michael and I were living with acquaintances of my parents, Ben and Sonia Bach, in Toms River, N.J. I had just turned 6, and my brother was 10. The previous Friday had been the last day of school, so our summer vacation had just started. I have no specific recollection of the Supreme Court's denial that Monday, but I do remember attending a big demonstration to save my parents in Washington, D.C., the day before. Here's what I wrote in

my memoir about that event:

We went to New York or Philadelphia and got on a bus with many others going to Washington. I peered out the window as we drove south on Route 1, apparently racing a passenger train I believed was filled with people going to the same place; it was exciting to observe and imagine everyone rushing to a common destination. But once we got off the bus and became part of the commotion, it wasn't fun anymore.

Then I was a small person amid crowds of milling adult legs. I observed the process of getting to the demonstration so closely because I wanted so much to understand what was happening.

I could see how we got there with my own eyes, but no one told me why we were doing this or what was happening once we got there, and incomprehension left me anxious.

Tuesday, June 16

Early Tuesday morning, June 16, Ben Bach drove us to meet our parents' attorney, Manny Bloch, in Manhattan. From there, Manny took us to Sing Sing prison, 30 miles to the north, for what would become our last visit with our parents.

This was the only prison visit where we saw both our parents together at the same time. My brother wrote in *We Are Your Sons*, "[T]hey sat at opposite ends of the table. Robby and I wandered around the room, hugging them and listening" while they talked strategy with Manny.

I did not understand that with the executions scheduled for Thursday, it was probable that we would never see them again, but Michael did, and at the end of the visit, he started to wail, "One more day to live. One more day to live." They hurriedly said goodbye before we all broke down.

While we were all visiting at Sing Sing, unbeknownst to us, two attorneys who had not been involved in the case previously presented a petition to Justice Douglas as he left for vacation. The new lawyers claimed my parents had been tried under

the wrong law, and that under the correct law, the death sentence was illegal. Douglas decided to postpone his vacation one day to consider the request.

Wednesday, June 17

On Wednesday morning, June 17, Justice Douglas announced he was staying the executions and left for vacation. He did not rule on the merits of the new lawyers' claim, but rather said that the petition must be considered by the District Court and then the Court of Appeals. This would add months, if not years, to my parents' lives.

Michael recalled in *We Are Your Sons* that we were playing our usual game of Monopoly when Michael heard a commotion in the kitchen: "[Sonia Bach] burst in on us and starting hugging us. 'The Douglas stay! The Douglas stay!'...As the news sunk in, we became wildly happy, Robby included."

This was, without a doubt, the best news we'd had since my parents' arrest. Although I couldn't read newspaper articles, I saw reports on TV and heard them on the radio. My interpretation was that at the hearing on Monday, the Supreme Court's justices had asked Manny to give them 10 reasons why my parents should not be killed, and he had done this, so they stayed the executions.

But we didn't know that, according to FBI files forced into the open 20 years later by our Freedom of Information Act lawsuit, late on the previous evening, the Attorney General of the United States had met secretly with the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. They agreed that if Douglas issued a stay the following morning, the entire Court would be called into special session to vacate Douglas' action. They conspired to do this knowing neither the legal reasoning behind the request for the stay nor the contents of Douglas' ruling, which had not yet been written.

So our good news only survived about eight hours. By late afternoon, the Attorney General had asked that the Supreme Court be called into special session, and by

I did not understand that with the executions scheduled for Thursday, it was probable that we would never see them again, but Michael did, and at the end of the visit, he started to wail, "One more day to live. One more day to live"

LAST DAYS

I remember that Michael was distraught, but I doubt I fully comprehended that my parents had just been executed

evening the Chief Justice had scheduled a hearing on Douglas' stay for the following morning.

Thursday, June 18

Thursday, June 18, was my parents' 14th wedding anniversary, but I have no recollection of knowing that fact as a 6-year-old. In fact, I have no memory of this day whatsoever other than my belief that the Supreme Court was reconvened to ask Manny Bloch to provide an 11th reason why my parents should not be killed. I think I confused everything I heard about "eleventh hour appeals" with giving an "eleventh reason."

For Michael and me, this was a day of waiting. Manny Bloch and the two new lawyers, Fyke Farmer and Daniel Marshall, argued before the Supreme Court in the morning that Douglas' stay should be upheld.

The justices retired to their chambers after the argument and had not announced a decision by the end of the day.

Our parents were in limbo. For all they knew, the Supreme Court could overturn the stay at any moment, and their executions would go forward as planned at 11 p.m. that very day. They drew up their wills and wrote what would be their last letter to Manny Bloch. In what for my brother and me turned out to be a momentous decision, they insisted that Manny become our legal guardian if they were executed. But the Supreme Court remained silent that day, and so they lived to see the sun rise on Friday, June 19, 1953.

Friday, June 19

Friday, June 19, 1953, was a warm, sunny, slightly humid day.

In the morning, the Supreme Court denied the stay by a 6 to 3 vote, and the executions were set for 11 p.m. that evening. Manny Bloch and several other lawyers spent the day filing a variety of appeals to judges and the president, but it was all to no avail. When they pointed out that it would be improper to carry out executions

during the Jewish Sabbath, which started at sundown on Friday, the government obliged by moving the executions forward to 8 p.m. so they could be carried out just before sunset.

Michael and I tried to play outside, but the Bachs' front lawn was now swarming with reporters. To get away from the press, we were whisked to a friend's house in the next town. I don't remember leaving the Bachs', but I do recall playing ball with my friend Mark that evening, while my brother played with Mark's older brother Steve. Earlier, we'd been watching a baseball game on TV when the news flashed across the screen that plans for the executions were going forward. I do not recall Michael's reaction, but he remembers moaning, "That's it, goodbye, goodbye."

Michael's reaction, which was followed by the adults' deciding to send us outside, gave me the sense that something terrible was happening.

We came back in only when it got too dark to see the ball. I remember that Michael was distraught, but I doubt I fully comprehended that my parents had just been executed. However, I do remember thinking that Manny Bloch had failed to provide the "11th reason," and that's why my parents' were killed.

Throughout that evening, upwards of 10,000 people had gathered on 17th Street off Union Square in New York City. The rally was originally planned to celebrate Justice Douglas' stay, but it turned into a death watch.

Hundreds of thousands, perhaps more, demonstrated against the executions throughout the world that Friday. They promised never to forget, and even now, many communicate with me and describe what they did that day.

The 56th anniversary may not be a marker of great note, and a long chunk of my life has passed since then. But this year, the week that has led up to today has brought the matching days from 1953, and the memories they evoke, very close. **CT**

This diary originally appeared on the Rosenberg Fund for Children web site at www.rfc.org

Words and war

By Norman Solomon

It takes at least tacit faith in massive violence to believe that after three decades of horrendous violence in Afghanistan, upping the violence there will improve the situation.

Despite the pronouncements from high Washington places that the problems of Afghanistan can't be solved by military means, 90 percent of the spending for Afghanistan in the Obama administration's current supplemental bill is military.

Often it seems that lofty words about war hopes are boilerplate efforts to make us feel better about an endless warfare state. Oratory and punditry laud the Pentagon's fallen as noble victims of war, while enveloping its other victims in a haze of ambiguity or virtual nonexistence. When a recent Sunday edition of the *Washington Post* printed the routine headline "Iraq War Deaths," the newspaper meant American deaths -- to Washington's ultra-savvy, the deaths that really count. The only numbers and names under the headline were American.

Ask for whom the bell tolls. That's the implicit message -- from top journalists and politicians alike.

A few weeks ago, some prominent U.S. news stories did emerge about Pentagon air strikes that killed perhaps a hundred Afghan civilians. But much of the emphasis was that such deaths could undermine the U.S. war effort. The most powerful media lenses do not correct the myopia when Uncle Sam's vision is impaired by solipsism and narcissism.

Words focus our attention. The official words and the media words -- routinely, more or less the same words -- are ostensibly about war, but they convey little about actual war at the same time that they boost it. Words are one thing, and war is another.

Yet words have potential to impede the wheels of war machinery. "And henceforth," Albert Camus wrote, "the only honorable course will be to stake everything on a formidable gamble: that words are more powerful than munitions."

A very different type of gamble is routinely under-

way at the centers of political power, where words are propaganda munitions. In Washington, the default preference is to gamble with the lives of other people, far away.

More than 40 years ago, Country Joe McDonald wrote a song, "An Untitled Protest", about war fighters: who "pound their feet into the sand of shores they've never seen / Delegates from the western land to join the death machine." Now, tens of thousands more of such delegates are on the way to Afghanistan.

In pseudo-savvy Washington, "appearance is reality." Killing and maiming, fueled by appropriations and silence, are rendered as abstractions.

The deaths of people unaligned with the Pentagon are the most abstract of all. No wonder the *Washington Post* is still printing headlines like "Iraq War Deaths." Why should Iraqis qualify for inclusion in Iraq war deaths?

There's plenty more media invisibility and erasure ahead for Afghan people as the Pentagon ramps up its war effort in their country.

War thrives on abstractions that pass for reality.

There are facts about war in news media and in presidential speeches. For that matter, there are plenty of facts in the local phone book. How much do they tell you about the most important human realities?

Millions of words and factual data pour out of the Pentagon every day. Human truth is another matter.

My father, Morris Solomon, recently had his ninetieth birthday. He would be the first to tell you that his brain has lost a lot of capacity. He doesn't recall nearly as many facts as he used to. But a couple of days ago, he told me: "I know what war is. It's stupid. It's ruining humanity."

That's not appearance. It's reality.

CT

Norman Solomon's books include "War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death," which has been adapted into a documentary film. For more information, go to: www.normansolomon.com

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