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THE SHAME OF LEBANON:

**THE ANATOMY OF
A MASSACRE**

BY ROBERT FISK

CHAOS IN PALESTINE:

**WORSE THAN
APARTHEID**

BY CHRIS HEDGES



WHOSE COUP?

Quite what the CIA had spent millions on was left to the reader's imagination. Perhaps opposition politicians were funded. Perhaps propaganda messages were ruthlessly posted around Santiago. Who knows?

Pinochet's death.

Before we explore the links, let's consider what the press has had to say on US involvement in Chile.

A Guardian obituary read: "The coup, in which CIA destabilisation played a part..." (Malcolm Coad, 'Augusto Pinochet,' The Guardian, December 11, 2006; <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/story/0,,1968953,00.html>)

And that was that! Space is always a problem for the media. Presumably, there was not space for more detail in this 3,049-word piece.

A BBC online obituary was fractionally bolder: "It became known later that the CIA had spent millions to destabilise the Allende government." (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/americas/472707.stm>)

That, again, was that. Quite what the CIA had spent millions on was left to the reader's imagination. Perhaps opposition politicians were funded. Perhaps propaganda messages were ruthlessly posted around Santiago. Who knows?

On reading the above, a friend joked that it represented a reversal of Spike Milligan's book title: 'Adolf Hitler: My Part In His Downfall,' with the press desperate to downplay Western involvement in Allende's fall.

Rupert Cornwell in the Independent edged slightly closer to forbidden facts: "Yes, the turmoil in Chile before the coup of September 1973 was shamefully fomented by the United States. But there is no evidence that Washington directly ordered the coup." (Rupert Cornwell, 'The general willing to kill his people to win the battle against com-

munist,' The Independent, December 11, 2006; <http://news.independent.co.uk/world/americas/article2064694.ece>)

Again, vague hints sufficed. Note, also, the irrelevant apologetic for US actions – "there is no evidence that Washington directly ordered the coup". But there is evidence that Washington moved heaven and earth to make the coup happen. The hard facts and direct quotes making this all too clear – available to us and anyone else with an internet connection – were nowhere in sight.

Jonathan Kandell in the New York Times trotted safely with the media herd: "General Pinochet initially led a four-man junta in the 1973 military coup that brought him to power, with the support of the United States government..." (Kandell, 'Augusto Pinochet – Dictator Who Ruled by Terror in Chile, Dies at 91,' New York Times, December 11, 2006)

And that, also, was that in this 2,600-word piece. A theme is emerging, is it not?

The Daily Telegraph had many pieces saying little on the subject, referring in one 1,200-word report to "the CIA-backed military coup in 1973". (Neil Tweedie, 'Pinochet, the friend of Britain who ruled his country by fear,' Daily Telegraph, December 11, 2006)

The Telegraph's 2,300-word obituary had only this to say of US involvement: "Inevitably, such a government [Allende's] did not appeal to the Americans. Richard Helms, the director of the CIA, sought means to 'make the (Chilean) economy scream', while the

Nixon administration cut off all aid and credits. Such measures exacerbated inflation in Chile, and intensified class conflicts.” (Daily Telegraph, ‘Obituary of General Augusto Pinochet,’ December 11, 2006)

Economic strangulation was the more passive element of what was a highly pro-active US campaign to destroy democracy in Chile.

The Telegraph described Pinochet as: “not only an extraordinarily successful dictator; he was also one of the very few to surrender power at the behest of the electorate.” (Ibid)

The Daily Mail noted merely that the junta “had secret CIA backing”. (Patrick Marnham and Richard Pendlebury, ‘Death of a friendly dictator,’ Daily Mail, December 11, 2006)

The Mail asked of Pinochet: “So will history judge him as a brute or a pragmatic economic and political strongman, who rescued Chile from Marxist orchestrated disaster?”

This of a man who, as the same journalists wrote, “modelled himself on Stalin in the Thirties”.

Writing in the Daily Mirror, Christopher Hitchens managed one veiled reference to US involvement, noting that Henry Kissinger had been “anxious to protect the criminal he helped usurp power”. (Hitchens, ‘Thatcher’s tyrant,’ Mirror, December 11, 2006)

There was nothing more. A remarkable performance from the author of *The Trial Of Henry Kissinger*, which included many of the details of the US role in Chile. Hitchens only other article on the subject since Pinochet’s death appears to have been in Slate maga-

zine (‘Augusto Pinochet – 1915-2006,’ December 11, 2006; <http://www.slate.com/id/2155242/>). Hitchens made no mention at all of US involvement in the coup.

A Guardian news story noted: “When Pinochet seized power in 1973, he knew he would be enjoying the strong support of the United States. The secretary of state and national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, was an admirer.” (Jonathan Franklin, Rory Carroll and Duncan Campbell, ‘Glee and grief as man who “brought Spanish inquisition to Chile” dies at 91,’ The Guardian, December 11, 2006)

The Guardian omitted to mention that the CIA initially reported difficulty finding officers willing to participate in a coup thanks to what it described as “the apolitical, constitutional-oriented inertia of the Chilean military”. (Quoted, William Blum, *Killing Hope*, Common Courage Press, 1995, p.210 – the chapter on Allende’s overthrow from Blum’s book is also republished at <http://coldtype.net/archives.html>) The United States did not merely support Pinochet, they worked energetically to create him.

The Times wrote: “... the coup was launched on September 1, 1973, with the support of the US which had played an active role in supporting the anti-Allende opposition”. (‘General Augusto Pinochet, November 25, 1915 – December 10, 2006,’ The Times, December 11, 2006)

The theme, then? The US “backed”, “supported”, “fomented” and “assisted” the coup, and cut off aid. But the active, central role played by the United States

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WHOSE COUP?

After Allende had narrowly failed to win the 1958 elections, the United States worked hard to avert future risks. Prior to the 1964 elections, a vast CIA campaign was mounted to subvert Chilean democracy. Eduardo Frei's Christian Democratic Party was selected, with the CIA underwriting more than half the party's campaign costs

is simply not described.

We found a single article, in the Independent, that gave more than fleeting attention to US subversion of Chilean democracy. Hugh O'Shaughnessy wrote: "the Chilean right, Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger and US companies such as ITT [International Telephone and Telegraph] sought to prevent Allende's assuming the presidency to which he had been freely and fairly elected.

"A US military attaché was later to confess that he carried down from Washington a large sum in dollar banknotes to buy the assassination of General René Schneider... [who] was resisting calls from the Chilean right and the US for an immediate coup against Allende."

O'Shaughnessy added: "By then, within Chile and in the United States, the enemies of the President's unstable coalition of six parties of the left and centre-left had shown their continuing desire to topple the head of state." (Hugh O'Shaughnessy, 'General Augusto Pinochet,' The Independent, December 11, 2006)

But this also only hints at the true scale of US subversion. The vast political sabotage of Chilean democracy and the fierce US determination to destroy Allende's regime militarily were both buried out of sight by the Independent, as was the general trend in Latin America (and the Third World more generally) of which these horrors form one tiny part.

A media database search showed that the words 'Pinochet' and 'CIA' have been mentioned in seven articles in the

UK national press since Pinochet's death.

Not acceptable to the United States

Peter Kornbluh is director of the National Security Archive's Chile Documentation Project at George Washington University. In an October 1998 article, Kornbluh described how the CIA "laid the ground work for the coup d'état" in Chile. (Kornbluh, 'The Chile Coup – The U.S. Hand,' iF magazine, October 25, 1998; http://www.third-worldtraveler.com/Terrorism/Chile%20Coup_USHand.html)

After Allende had narrowly failed to win the 1958 elections, the United States worked hard to avert future risks. Prior to the 1964 elections, a vast CIA campaign was mounted to subvert Chilean democracy. Eduardo Frei's Christian Democratic Party was selected, with the CIA underwriting more than half the party's campaign costs. The agency's electoral operation cost \$20 million – far more per voter than was spent by Johnson and Goldwater combined in the same year in the US presidential elections. A senate committee later gave an insight into one small segment of the onslaught: "The propaganda campaign was enormous. During the first week of intensive propaganda activity, a CIA-funded propaganda group produced twenty radio spots per day in Santiago and on 44 provincial stations; twelve-minute news broadcasts five times daily on three Santiago stations and 24 provisional outlets, and much paid press advertising. By the end of June, the group produced 24 daily newscasts in

Santiago and the provinces, 26 weekly 'commentary' programs, and distributed 3,000 posters daily." (Quoted, William Blum, *Killing Hope*, Common Courage Press, 1995, p.207)

These efforts were supported by 'red scare' campaigns, funding of strikes, funding of right-wing organisations committing acts of violence, promotion of grassroots programmes, speaking tours and propaganda stories placed in Western media, and numerous other examples of flak and subversion.

Despite all of this, Allende won the September 4, 1970 election. The US response was clear. CIA director Richard Helms informed his senior covert action staff that "President Nixon had decided that an Allende regime in Chile was not acceptable to the United States." Helms added:

"The President asked the Agency to prevent Allende from coming to power or to unseat him."

Helms's handwritten notes of the meeting with Nixon reveal the mindset: "One in 10 chance perhaps, but save Chile!... not concerned with risks involved... \$10,000,000 available, more if necessary... make the economy scream..." (Quoted, *ibid*, p.209)

Helms reported two parallel strategies for destroying Allende. As discussed, the "soft line" was (in Nixon's words) to "make the economy scream." The "hardline" was to aim for a military coup.

Ambassador Korry was given the job of implementing the "soft line." He described his task: "not a nut or bolt will be allowed to reach Chile under Allende. Once Allende comes to power

we shall do all within our power to condemn Chile and the Chileans to utmost deprivation and poverty, a policy designed for a long time to come to accelerate the hard features of a Communist society in Chile". (Quoted, Chomsky, *Year 501 – The Conquest Continues*, South End Press, 1993, p.36)

Noam Chomsky comments: "Even if the hard line did not succeed in introducing fascist killers to exterminate the virus, the vision of 'utmost deprivation' would suffice to keep the rot from spreading, and ultimately demoralize the patient itself. And crucially, it would provide ample grist for the mill of the cultural managers, who can produce cries of anguish at 'the hard features of a Communist society,' pouring scorn on those 'apologists' who describe what is happening." (Footnote 15; <http://www.understandingpower.com/chap1.htm>)

On October 16, a secret cable from CIA headquarters to the CIA station chief in Santiago, read:

"It is firm and continuing policy that Allende be overthrown by a coup... prior to October 24. But efforts in this regard will continue vigorously beyond this date. We are to continue to generate maximum pressure toward this end utilizing every appropriate resource. It is imperative that these actions be implemented clandestinely and securely so that the USG [U.S. government] and American hand be well hidden." (Quoted, Kornbluh, *op. cit*)

Despite initial difficulties in recruiting officers within the Chilean army, supporters for the "hard line" were eventually found and an initial, botched coup attempt was made in October

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WHOSE COUP?

Hours later, Nixon called in CIA chief Richard Helms and, according to Helms's handwritten notes, ordered the CIA to prevent Allende's inauguration on November 3

1970. The attack began with the assassination of the commander-in-chief of the Chilean army, Rene Schneider, who had insisted that constitutional processes be followed. The assassination backfired, however, serving to consolidate traditional army support for constitutional solutions.

In a vanishingly rare mainstream article on the subject, the Observer's Greg Palast reported that the failed October 1970 plot, using CIA "sub-machine guns and ammo", was "the direct result of a plea for action a month earlier by Donald Kendall, chairman of PepsiCo, in two telephone calls to the company's former lawyer, President Richard Nixon". (Palast, 'Marxist threat to cola sales? Pepsi demands a US coup. Goodbye Allende. Hello Pinochet,' The Observer, November 8, 1998; <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Columnists/Column/0,,305870,00.html>)

Palast described how Kendall had arranged for the owner of PepsiCo's Chilean bottling operation to meet Kissinger on September 15. Hours later, Nixon called in CIA chief Richard Helms and, according to Helms's handwritten notes, ordered the CIA to prevent Allende's inauguration on November 3.

Meanwhile, an ITT board member, ex-CIA director John McCone, pledged Kissinger \$1 million in support of CIA action to prevent Allende from taking office. In addition, Anaconda Copper and other multinationals offered \$500,000 to buy influence with Chilean congressmen to reject confirmation of Allende's victory.

Having failed to prevent both Allende's election victory and his inauguration, the CIA continued pursuing both its "soft" and "hard" lines. As CIA director William Colby later put it, the campaign was a "prototype laboratory experiment to test the techniques of heavy financial investment in an effort to discredit and bring down a government". (Quoted, Mark Curtis, *The Ambiguities of Power*, Zed Books, 1995, p.129)

A 1970 ITT memorandum stated: "A more realistic hope among those who want to block Allende is that a swiftly-deteriorating economy will touch off a wave of violence leading to a military coup." (Quoted, Blum, *op. cit.*, p.211)

While almost all economic aid was cut off in its attempt to inflict "utmost deprivation" on the Chilean people, the United States increased its military assistance to Chile in 1972 and 1973, and trained Chilean military personnel in the US and Panama. The focus was on strengthening ties in pursuit of a "hard line" solution.

The rationale for overthrowing Allende was outlined in a CIA report dated November 12, 1970: "Dr. Salvador Allende became the first democratically-elected Marxist head of state in the history of Latin America – despite the opposition of the U.S. Government. As a result, U.S. prestige and interests are being affected materially at a time when the U.S. can ill afford problems in an area that has been traditionally accepted as the U.S. 'backyard'." (Quoted, Kornbluh, *op. cit.*)

The US was concerned, Kissinger's aides recall, because "Allende was a liv-

ing example of democratic social reform in Latin America.” (Quoted, Curtis, p.130) Kissinger stated that the “contagious example” of Chile would “infect” not only Latin America but also Southern Europe. (Ibid)

Chomsky comments on Allende: “He was basically a social democrat, very much of the European type. He was calling for minor redistribution of wealth, to help the poor. (Chile was a very inegalitarian society.) Allende was a doctor, and one of the things he did was to institute a free milk program for half a million very poor, malnourished children. He called for nationalization of major industries like copper mining, and for a policy of international independence – meaning that Chile wouldn’t simply subordinate itself to the US, but would take more of an independent path.” (‘Secrets, Lies and Democracy – Interview with Noam Chomsky,’ by David Barsamian; http://www.third-worldtraveler.com/Chomsky/SecretsLies_Chile_Chom.html)

A SECOND, failed coup attempt was made on June 29, 1973. This is the BBC’s version of events: “Political strife, rocketing inflation and general economic chaos resulted in an abortive military coup in June 1973.” (‘Obituary: Augusto Pinochet,’ December 10, 2006; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/472707.stm>)

As discussed above, the BBC noted merely that the CIA had made efforts “to destabilise the Allende government”.

Ultimately, the superpower’s economic sabotage, and political and mil-

itary subversion, was successful. On September 11, 1973, Chile’s military seized control of strategic sites throughout the country and cornered Allende in his presidential offices, where he apparently committed suicide.

The CIA’s Santiago station had earlier described the operational intelligence it had collected: “arrest lists, key civilian installations and personnel that need protection, key government installations which need to be taken over, and government contingency plans which would be used in case of a military uprising”. (Quoted, Blum, op. cit, p.213) US officials later denied that this information had been passed on to the junta, although the rapid arrests of key targets immediately after the coup suggest otherwise, William Blum notes.

Nixon officials were delighted by the turn of events. A situation report from the US military in Valparaiso declared: “Chile’s coup d’etat was close to perfect.” The report characterised it as Chile’s “day of destiny” and “Our D-Day.” (Kornbluh, op. cit)

In a telephone conversation taped shortly after the coup and made public after Nixon’s death, Kissinger is heard to laugh: “The press is bleeding because a pro-Communist government has been overthrown.” Nixon responded: “Our hand doesn’t show on this one, though.” (Washington Bullets: ‘Pinochet And Kissinger,’ http://www.tompaine.com/articles/2006/12/12/washington_bullets_pinochet_and_kissinger.php)

Kissinger immediately authorised the CIA to “assist the junta in gaining a more positive image, both at home and

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WHOSE COUP?

Only 19 days after Allende's death, a secret briefing paper prepared for Kissinger – entitled "Chilean Executions" – put the "total dead" from the coup at 1,500. The paper reported that the junta had summarily executed 320 individuals – three times more than publicly acknowledged. After three months, 11,000 people had been killed

abroad," according to subsequently released documents. (Kornbluh, op. cit)

As part of these efforts, the CIA helped the junta write a "white book" justifying the coup. Kornbluh writes: "The CIA financed advisors who helped the military prepare a new economic plan for the country. The CIA paid for military spokesmen to travel around the world to promote the new regime. And, the CIA used its own media assets to cast the junta in a positive light."

The Nixon administration also supported Pinochet by opening the floodgates on economic aid. Three weeks after the coup, the US government authorised \$24 million in commodity credits to buy wheat and \$24 million more for feed corn, and planned the transfer of two destroyers to the Chilean navy.

Ultimately, the coup plotters were rewarded with a 558 per cent increase in US economic aid and a 1,079 per cent increase in US and multinational credits. (Rai, Chomsky's Politics, Verso, 1995, p.67)

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deliberate use of torture, 'disappearances' and murder had at that time no parallel in the history of Chile or Latin America, a continent with a long experience of dictatorship and military brutality". (Quoted, Curtis, op. cit, p.130)

CIIR described how the Pinochet regime instigated a "policy of permanent terror." (Ibid, p.131)

When Kissinger was told of initial reports of massacres following the coup he responded: "I think we should understand our policy – that however unpleasant they act, the [military] government is better for us than Allende was." (Kornbluh, 'The Pinochet File,' <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB110/index.htm>)

This is the Guardian's version of these events: "Pinochet quickly became undisputed leader of the four-man junta – declaring himself president in 1974 – and set about the task of stamping out opposition. The ferocity and surgical precision of that repression repulsed the world and made Chile an international pariah for nearly two decades." ('Repression,' The Guardian, December 11, 2006)

On December 11, I wrote to the Guardian's Isabel Hilton regarding her article that day, 'A dictator dismantled.' (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/chile/story/0,,1969317,00.html>):

Dear Isabel

I was interested to read your article, 'A dictator dismantled,' on Comment Is Free. You write of Pinochet: "The dictatorship he installed was not the bloodiest in Latin America. It was shocking because it happened in a country

proud of its democratic traditions.”

Surely the real shock value lies in the fact that the United States organised the coup... [We cited Greg Palast's article]...

That's pretty shocking, isn't it? And there's much more besides, of course. But not a word in your article even hinted at it. Why not?

Best wishes
David Edwards

Hilton responded on December 16.

Dear David Edwards

There is never room to say everything in a rather short article and I have written about the US role many times. Is it surprising or shocking that the US played a central role? Hardly. The US had played that role in coups all over the sub continent for some time, (for me the worst was the one against Arbenz – worse for its long term effect) their role in Chile was not surprising for anyone who followed Latin American events, and the shock factor had long since worn off.

best
Isabel Hilton

I replied on December 17:

Dear Isabel

Many thanks for your reply. You write: “Is it surprising or shocking that the US played a central role? Hardly. The US had played that role in coups all over the sub continent for some time...”

Yes, you know that, but do your readers? In fact journalists generally

refer to the US role in Pinochet's coup in vague terms (as in current reporting) – the details and motives are rarely discussed. As for the wider US pattern of forcibly subordinating people to profit, this is essentially a taboo subject for the media.

A media database search shows that in the last ten years you have mentioned the words ‘Pinochet’ and the ‘CIA’ in three articles. Obviously this covers a period when you were writing about Pinochet's detention in Britain. You have made no mention at all of PepsiCo or ITT in connection with the 1973 coup. Unfortunately, your references to US involvement have been superficial and have buried the wider pattern discussed above.

Sincerely
David Edwards

Why does any of this matter?

Is the suppression of this evidence of the US role in Chile's bloodbath an irrelevant one-off? If the media normally do a fearlessly honest job, it would be absurd to make too much of these particular omissions, would it not? The media track record is visible enough, readers can find any number of comparable examples in these and many other earlier alerts:

- http://www.medialens.org/alerts/06/061113_hanging_saddam_hussein.php
- http://www.medialens.org/alerts/04/040610_Reagan_Visions_1.HTM
- http://www.medialens.org/alerts/04/040615_Reagan_Visions_2.HTM
- <http://www.medialens.org/alerts/04>

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WHOSE COUP?

This suppression of the historical pattern enables contemporary politicians like George Bush and Tony Blair to deceive the public when they claim to be pursuing 'democracy' in Iraq, 'freedom' in Iran, and a 'just settlement' in Palestine

/040706_Covering_Mr_President.HTM
http://www.medialens.org/alerts/02/020601_east_timor.html

A stunningly consistent pattern emerges. The elite corporate media always passes over Western responsibility for mass killing in the Third World. The standard motives at work – the subordination of human rights to corporate profit – are buried even deeper. Deepest of all lies the systematic pattern traced over decades right across the Third World revealing the utter ruthlessness of Western priorities.

But why is this so crucially important? The answer is because this suppression of the historical pattern enables contemporary politicians like George Bush and Tony Blair to deceive the public when they claim to be pursuing 'democracy' in Iraq, 'freedom' in Iran, and a 'just settlement' in Palestine. It means that we in the West are simply unable to understand what

Hugo Chavez represents for the people of Venezuela, what Evo Morales represents for the people of Bolivia – what it is these nations know they have to fear and what they are desperately trying to resist.

Forever presented a picture of Britain and America as civilised and humane, how can the public imagine that human beings are systematically subordinated to profit by their own governments? And how can anyone hope to prevent further atrocities until this basic truth is widely understood and acted upon? **CT**

David Edwards is co-editor, with David Cromwell, of the London-based media watchdog, Medialens. (www.medialens.org). The Media Lens book 'Guardians of Power: The Myth Of The Liberal Media' by David Edwards and David Cromwell (Pluto Books, London) was published last year.



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THE US GETS A NEW MONSTER

BY WILLIAM BLUM

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is a man seemingly custom-made for the White House in its endless quest for enemies with whom to scare Congress, the American people, and the world, in order to justify the unseemly behavior of the empire. The Iranian president has declared that he wants to “wipe Israel off the map”. He’s said that “the Holocaust is a myth”. He recently held a conference in Iran for “Holocaust deniers”. And his government passed a new law requiring Jews to wear a yellow insignia, à la the Nazis. On top of all that, he’s aiming to build nuclear bombs, one of which would surely be aimed at Israel. What right-thinking person would not be scared by such a man?

However, as with all such designer monsters made bigger than life during the Cold War and since by Washington, the truth about Ahmadinejad is a bit more complicated. According to people who know Farsi, the Iranian leader has never said anything about “wiping Israel off the map”. In his October 29,

2005 speech, when he reportedly first made the remark, the word “map” does not even appear. According to the translation of Juan Cole, American professor of Modern Middle East and South Asian History, Ahmadinejad said that “the regime occupying Jerusalem must vanish from the page of time.” His remark, said Cole, “does not imply military action or killing anyone at all,” which presumably is what would make the remark threatening.^[1] Readers are advised that the next time they come across such an Ahmadinejad citation to note whether a complete sentence is being quoted, and not just “wipe Israel off the map”.

At the conference in Teheran (“Review of the Holocaust: Global Vision”), the Iranian president said: “The Zionist regime will be wiped out soon, the same way the Soviet Union was, and humanity will achieve freedom.”^[2] Obviously, the man is not calling for any kind of violent attack upon Israel, for the dissolution of the Soviet Union did not occur through force or violence.

As for the Holocaust myth, I have

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yet to read or hear words from Ahmadinejad's mouth saying simply and clearly and unequivocally that he thinks that the Holocaust never happened. He has commented about the peculiarity of a Holocaust which took place in Europe resulting in a state for the Jews in the Middle East instead of in Europe. And he argues that Israel and the United States have exploited the memory of the Holocaust for their own imperialist purposes. He also wonders about the accuracy of the number of Jews – six million – killed in the Holocaust, as have many other people of all political stripes, including Holocaust survivors such as author Primo Levi. (The much publicized World War One atrocities which turned out to be false made the public very skeptical of the Holocaust claims for a long time.)

The conference gave a platform to various points of view, including six members of Jews United Against Zionism, at least two of whom were rabbis. One was Ahron Cohen, from London, who declared: "There is no doubt what so ever, that during World War II there developed a terrible and catastrophic policy and action of genocide perpetrated by Nazi Germany against the Jewish People." He also said that "the Zionists make a great issue of the Holocaust in order to further their illegitimate philosophy and aims," indicating as well that the figure of six million Jewish victims is debatable. The other rabbi was Moshe David Weiss, who told the delegates: "We don't want to deny the killing of Jews in World War II, but Zionists have given much higher figures for how many people were

killed. They have used the Holocaust as a device to justify their oppression." His group rejects the creation of Israel on the grounds that it violates Jewish religious law in that a Jewish state can't exist until the return of the Messiah.^[3]

Clearly, the conference – which the White House called "an affront to the entire civilized world"^[4] – was not set up to be simply a forum for people to deny that the Holocaust, to any significant degree, literally never took place at all. I think it's safe to say that very few of the attendees held this position, which is so untenable.

As to the yellow star story of this past May – that was a complete fabrication by a prominent Iranian-American neo-conservative, Amir Taheri. There are as well other egregious examples of Ahmadinejad's policies and words being twisted out of shape in the Western media, making him look like a danger to all that's holy and decent. Political science professor Virginia Tilley has written a good account of this. "Why is Mr. Ahmadinejad being so systematically misquoted and demonized?" Tilley asks. "Need we ask? If the world believes that Iran is preparing to attack Israel, then the US or Israel can claim justification in attacking Iran first. On that agenda, the disinformation campaign about Mr. Ahmadinejad's statements has been bonded at the hip to a second set of lies: promoting Iran's (nonexistent) nuclear weapon programme."^[5]

Ahmadinejad, however, is partly to blame for this "disinformation". I heard him in an interview while he was at the UN in September being asked directly

about “the map” and the reality of the Holocaust, and he refused to give explicit answers of “yes” or “no”, which I interpret as his prideful refusal to accede to the wishes of what he regarded as a hostile Western interviewer asking hostile questions. In an interview with the German news magazine, *Der Spiegel* (May 31 2006), Ahmadinejad states: “We don’t want to confirm or deny the Holocaust.” The Iranian president is also in the habit of prefacing certain remarks with “Even if the Holocaust happened ...”, a rhetorical device we all use in argument and discussion.

It may already be too late. The conventional wisdom about what Ahmadinejad has said and meant may already be set in marble. Ban I Moon, at a news conference on December 14, after being sworn in as the new secretary-general of the United Nations, was asked by an Israeli reporter whether the United Nations was going to address the issue of Holocaust deniers. Ban replied: “Denying historical facts, especially on such an important subject as the Holocaust is just not acceptable. Nor is it acceptable to call for the elimination of any state or people.”^[6] Let’s hope that this is not very indicative of the independence of mind that we can expect from the new secretary-general. Myths die so hard.

Time magazine has just foregone its usual selection of “Person of the Year” and instead chosen “You”, the Internet user. Managing editor Richard Stengel said that if it came down to one individual it probably would have been Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, but that “It just felt to me a little off selecting

him.”^[7] In previous years Time’s “Person of the Year” has included Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler.

No one ever thinks they’re guilty of anything. They’re all just good ol’ patriots

General Augusto Pinochet, who escaped earthly justice on December 10, was detained in London in 1999 awaiting a ruling by a British court on whether he would be extradited to Spain on a Spanish judge’s warrant to face charges of crimes against humanity committed during his rule in Chile from 1973 to 1990. “I tell you how I feel,” he told a London journalist at the time. “I would like to be remembered as a man who served his country, who served Chile throughout his entire life on this earth. And what he did was always done thinking about the welfare of Chile.”^[8]

P.W. Botha, former president of South Africa died November 1. He was a man who had vigorously defended the apartheid system, which led to the jailing of tens of thousands of people. He never repented or apologized for his actions, and resisted attempts to make him appear before the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. At one point he declared: “I am not going to repent. I am not going to ask for forgiveness. What I did, I did for my country.”^[9]

As Pol Pot lay on his death bed in 1997, he was interviewed by a journalist, who later wrote: “Asked whether he wants to apologize for the suffering he caused, he looks genuinely confused, has the interpreter repeat the question,

“Denying historical facts, especially on such an important subject as the Holocaust is just not acceptable. Nor is it acceptable to call for the elimination of any state or people”

When it comes to sentencing, let me tell you, people, and pardon my language, the United States is one hell of a tough mother fucker

and answers ‘No’. ... ‘I want you to know that everything I did, I did for my country.’^[10]

“In these three decades I have been actuated solely by love and loyalty to my people in all my thoughts, acts, and life.” Adolf Hitler, “Last Will and Testament”, written in his bunker in his final hours, April 29, 1945.

Fast Forward now to 2036 ... George W. Bush lies dying, Fox News Channel is in the room recording his last words ... “I know that people think the whole thing ... that thing in Iraq ... was a bad thing, and they hold it against me ... I appreciate their view ... I can understand how they feel ... But y’know, I did it for America, and the American people, and their freedom ... The more you love freedom, the more likely it is you’ll be attacked ... Saddam was a real threat ... I still think he had weapons of mass destruction ... and someday we’ll find ‘em ... someday we’ll say mission accomplished! ... that will really be a turning point! ... So I’m prepared to meet my maker and whatever he has in mind for me ... in fact I say Bring it on!”

William Shirer, in his monumental work “The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich”, comments that Hitler’s Last Will and Testament “confirm that the man who had ruled over Germany with an iron hand for more than twelve years, and over most of Europe for four, had learned nothing from his experience.”^[11]

Shirer tells us of another happening concerning Hitler’s bunker, on April 12. When news of the death of President Franklin Roosevelt reached Nazi Prop-

aganda Minister Joseph Goebbels, he phoned Hitler in the bunker. “My Fuehrer,” Goebbels said. “I congratulate you! Roosevelt is dead! ... It is the turning point.”^[12]

The United States of Punishment

2.2 million imprisoned ... “We’re Number One! USA! USA! USA!” ... 7 million – one in every 32 American adults – either behind bars, on probation, or on parole ... When it comes to sentencing, let me tell you, people, and pardon my language, the United States is one hell of a tough mother fucker ... beginning with mandatory minimum sentences ... there are tens of thousands of young men rotting their lives away in American prisons for simple possession of a drug, for their own use, for their own pleasure, to enjoy with a friend, no victims involved.

Do you think a person should be in prison if he hasn’t hurt anyone? Either physically, financially, or in some other real and serious manner?

Jose Antonio Lopez, a legal permanent resident with a family and business in South Dakota, was deported back to Mexico a while ago because of a cocaine charge – Sale? No. Use? No. Possession? No. ... He told someone where they could buy some.^[13]

Another man was sentenced to 55 years in prison for three marijuana deals because he was in possession of a gun each time, which he did not use or brandish. Possession of a firearm in a drug transaction requires a much stiffer prison sentence.

Four former attorneys-general and

145 former prosecutors and judges wrote in support of a lighter sentence for this man. The presiding judge himself called the sentence “unjust, cruel and irrational”, but said the law left him no choice.^[14]

On December 1, a court in the Netherlands convicted four Dutch Muslims of plotting terrorist attacks against political leaders and government buildings. The heaviest sentence for any of them was eight years.^[15] On December 13, a priest was convicted of taking part in Rwanda’s 1994 genocide by ordering militiamen to set fire to a church and then bulldoze it while 2,000 people seeking safety were huddled inside. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda sentenced him to 15 years in prison.^[16] Considerably lighter sentences than in the United States are generally a common phenomenon in much of the world. In the US, the mere mention of the word “terrorist” in a courtroom will likely bring down 30, 40, 50 years, life in prison, on the defendant’s head, even for only thinking and talking of an action, an Orwellian “thoughtcrime”, with nothing concrete done to further the plan.

Colombian drug traffickers, British Muslims, and others accused of “terrorist” offenses strenuously fight extradition to the United States for fear of Uncle Sam’s merciless fist. They’re the lucky ones amongst Washington’s foreign targets; they’re not kidnapped off the street and flown shackled and blindfolded to secret dungeons in shadowy corners of the world to be tortured.

For those who think that no punish-

ment is too severe, too cruel, in the War on Terrorism against the Bad Guys, it must be asked what they think of the case of the Cuban Five. These are five Cubans who were engaged in the United States in the 1990s trying to uncover information about anti-Castro terrorists based in Miami, some of whom shortly before had been carrying out a series of bombing attacks in Havana hotels and may have been plotting new attacks. The Five infiltrated Cuban-American organizations based in Miami to monitor their actions, and they informed the Cuban government of their findings. The Cuban government then passed on some of the information to the FBI. And what happened next? The FBI arrested the five Cubans.

The Cubans were held in solitary confinement for 17 months; eventually they were tried, and in 2001 convicted on a variety of charges thrown together by the government for the occasion, including murder (sic!) and conspiracy to commit espionage (probably the first case in American judicial history of alleged espionage without a single page from a single secret document). They were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 15 years to life. But the federal government’s lust for punishment was still not satisfied. They have made it extremely difficult for their Cuban prisoners to receive family visits. Two of them have not seen their wives and children since their arrest in 1998; the other three have had only scarcely better luck.^[17]

Yet another glorious chapter in the War on Terrorism.

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The day after the coup, a Pentagon source, while denying US involvement, declared: "We're kinda delighted ... All of a sudden our ships couldn't go to Fiji, and now all of a sudden they can"

The making of official history

It was just a passing remark in an Associated Press story about the recent overthrow of the Fiji government. "It was the nation's fourth coup in 19 years," the article noted, the first being the 1987 coup. "The takeover, like the previous three coups, has its roots in the ethnic divide between the descendants of ancient Melanesian warrior tribes and those of Indian laborers brought by former colonial power Britain to work in sugar plantations."^[18] That's how "official history" is created and passed on, all the more effective because it's unconscious, unknowing, voluntary, and done by "objective" journalists.

In 1987, Fiji Prime Minister Timoci Bavrada made Washington officials unhappy by identifying himself with the non-aligned movement (always a risk for a country during the Cold War), and even more so by taking office with a pledge to reinstate Fiji as a nuclear free zone, meaning that nuclear-powered or nuclear-weapons-carrying ships could not make port calls. When Bavrada's predecessor, R.S.K. Mara, instituted the same policy in 1982, he was put under intense American pressure to drop it. Said the US ambassador to Fiji that year, William Bodde, Jr., "a nuclear free zone would be unacceptable to the US, given our strategic needs ... the US must do everything possible to counter this movement." The following year, Mara dropped the policy.

Two weeks after Bavrada took office, American UN Ambassador Vernon Walters visited the island. The former Deputy Director of the CIA had a long

and infamous history of showing up shortly before, during, or shortly after CIA destabilization operations. Walters met with Bavrada, ostensibly to discuss UN matters. He also met with Lt. Col. Sitiveni Rabuka, third-in-command of the Army. Two weeks later, Rabuka led a military coup which ousted Bavrada.

The day after the coup, a Pentagon source, while denying US involvement, declared: "We're kinda delighted ... All of a sudden our ships couldn't go to Fiji, and now all of a sudden they can."

These happenings, and others concerning the 1987 Fiji coup which I recount elsewhere^[19], are of the type that the mainstream media typically ignore or, if obliged to deal with them, would have us believe are no more than coincidences.

The anonymous author of the Associated Press story can be forgiven for not knowing of the American fingerprints all over the Fiji coup. The story has probably not appeared in any media except those on the left; if by chance a mainstream editor came across such a story he would likely dismiss it as a "conspiracy theory". Well, you can call people like me "conspiracy theorists" if you call everyone else "coincidence theorists".

There are of course implausible conspiracy theories, but that is an altogether different matter.

Some things to look forward to in 2007

JANUARY: Insurgents in Iraq explode a nuclear bomb, totally destroying all of Iraq and everyone in it. Bush declares: "There will be no change in our policy

of bringing freedom and democracy to the people of Iraq. We will not cut and run.”

MARCH: To add to the ban of liquids and jells aboard aircraft, solids are now banned. But gasses are still allowed.

JUNE: Halliburton is awarded a 300 million dollar no-bid contract to investigate contractor fraud in Iraq.

SEPTEMBER: New York City policemen run down, then shoot, mace, stab, beat up, and hang a Muslim resident of Brooklyn after thinking that he might be a suspected terrorist who fit the Terrorist Profile, was alleged to be on the Master Terrorist Watch List, and appeared to be carrying what they imagined, or think they imagined, might be a concealed bomb, or something of that nature.

NOVEMBER: George W. announces that he will ask Congress to give embryos the vote.

DECEMBER: Gasses are now banned aboard aircraft. The only permitted forms of matter are now ionized atoms, electrons, neutrinos, quarks, and dark matter. (The last being what Dick Cheney is completely composed of, he is allowed aboard any airplane.) **CT**

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- [1] AlterNet, www.alternet.org/, May 5, 2006
- [2] Associated Press, December 12, 2006
- [3] nkusa.org/activities/Speeches/2006Iran-ACohen.cfm (Cohen's talk); Telegraph.co.uk, article by Alex Spillius, December 13, 2006; Associated Press, December 12, 2006

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- [5] counterpunch.org/tilley08282006.html
- [6] Washington Post, December 15, 2006, p.27
- [7] Associated Press, December 16, 2006
- [8] Sunday Telegraph (London), July 18, 1999
- [9] Democracy Now (Pacifica Network), November 1, 2006
- [10] Nate Thayer, in Far Eastern Economic Review (Hong Kong), October 30, 1997, pages 15 and 20
- [11] paperback edition, p.1459
- [12] Ibid., p.1441
- [13] Washington Post, December 6, 2006, p.3
- [14] Bulletin News Network, Inc., The White House Bulletin, December 4, 2006
- [15] Associated Press, December 1, 2006
- [16] Associated Press, December 13, 2006
- [17] For the details of the case see my essay, "Cuban political prisoners ... in the United States", members.aol.com/bblum6/polpris.htm
- [18] Associated Press, December 6, 2006
- [19] William Blum, *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower*, pages 199-200

CT

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 Anti-Empire Reports and excerpts from his books may be read at www.killinghope.org

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WHAT'S FOR DINNER? PET FOOD

BY JIMMY MOYANA

Not only is pet food popular among poor families, but pigskin and discarded fat from beef also sell well in the country's teeming working class suburbs

While Kenyans took offence at the offer of dog food for hungry children last year, Zimbabweans are queuing up at meat suppliers and abattoirs to buy pet food. They crave any kind of meat, and quality products are now far beyond the means of ordinary people.

Not only is pet food popular among poor families, but pigskin and discarded fat from beef also sell well in the country's teeming working class suburbs. Kenyan officials dismissed as "culturally insulting" the offer of powdered dog food to feed starving children made by the founder of a dog biscuit company in New Zealand.

The offer might have received a warmer welcome from poor Zimbabweans, who had been forced to adopt a vegetarian diet before they discovered packaged pet food.

Beef and pork now cost between 4,000 and 6,000 Zimbabwean dollars (16 to 24 US dollars) a kilogram in the supermarkets. A family of six which would have consumed 12 kilos of meat

a month in the days before Zimbabwe's economic implosion began would now need to spend 72,000 Zimbabwean dollars (288 US dollars).

Eighty per cent of the population is unemployed and the majority of people in work earn less than 20,000 Zimbabwean dollars a month. People buy pet food even though the packaging clearly states that it is not for human consumption. A 500-gram packet of branded pet food costs around 1,250 Zimbabwean dollars – five US dollars – and a kilo of "meat sawdust" which contains meat gristle and bone and is sold as dog meat by abattoirs costs 1,200 Zimbabwean dollars.

Those who cannot afford pet food have to be content with flavouring boiled rape leaves with animal fat cut from beef or pork.

Dignity is a luxury few can afford these days in a country which until seven years ago was the breadbasket of southern Africa. At Colcom Foods in Harare's Willowvale area, there are long queues at the department where pet food is sold.

I asked some of the people waiting what they were planning to buy. One woman from the densely populated Mbare suburb, one of the poorest residential areas in Harare, said softly, “Pet food. What else?”

Upon further probing, the woman, who asked not to be named as she felt ashamed, said the pet food was for her family. “Pet food is food and it is perfectly edible by human beings,” she said. “What can I do when I cannot afford to buy meat? Have you ever tasted it? It’s like minced meat and is very tasty. We boil it or fry it and mix it with vegetables. We go through a 500-gram packet of pet food in three to four days. We eat the whole packet all at once if we want to give ourselves a treat.”

This woman is a widow with three children, who sells bananas at Mbare Musika, the biggest vegetable market in Harare. On a lucky day she makes 600 Zimbabwean dollars, enough to buy two loaves of bread.

“I feel so humiliated. I never dreamt in all my life that I would queue up to buy dog meat. I feel worthless – and what is dignity in Zimbabwe? We have all been reduced to nothing, to worthless human beings,” she said. “At least when I cook the dog food or meat shavings, if I am lucky to get them at our nearby butchery, I can taste meat. It gives the vegetables a different flavour and I get the protein that has been lacking in my diet.”

She is not alone in her humiliation. Harare resident Patrick Kaseke told IWPR he felt it was important to provide a “balanced diet” to his family.

In what people now regard as the

golden past – just seven years ago but seemingly a lifetime away – most people, even the poor, ate well. Now the most important thing is to ensure that the family has something eat.

“Tell me what is better: eating boiled covo [a spinach-like leaf] or rape every single day, or eating meat shavings or dog meat on some days and covo or rape on other days?” asked Patrick. “At my house we call the pet food ‘minced meat’ because I don’t want my children growing up knowing that they had been reduced to the level of a dog. It kills their spirit. To us pet food is a relish we look forward to. It gives us the feeling of the old days when we had chicken and rice at Christmas.”

One worker at a slaughterhouse close to the city centre said there was now such a high demand for sawdust, pigskin and fat that they had to put some aside for their own families.

“It is meat,” he said. “Sawdust is the remnants when slicing meat. So there is really nothing wrong in eating it. They are cheap products but taste just like minced meat. You must try them.”

Both consumers and their government are paying little heed to the long-term implications of a poor diet – particularly among children.

As the government grapples with the huge economic challenges facing the country, nutrition is not on the agenda. **CT**

Jimmy Moyana is a pseudonym for a reporter for International War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) in Harare. This article originally appeared on the IWPR web site – www.iwpr.net

“To us pet food is a relish we look forward to. It gives us the feeling of the old days when we had chicken and rice at Christmas”

END TIMES FOR THE COALITION

BY BILL BERKOWITZ

In late November, however, Hunter stepped down as president-elect, saying that he had wanted the organization to focus on issues other than abortion and same-sex marriage (such as poverty and environmental protection), but Coalition leaders did not

On September 19, 2005, Jason Christy, the head of Christy Media and the publisher and editor-in-chief of The Church Report, a national news and business journal for pastors and Christian leaders, was named executive director of the Christian Coalition by the organization's president, Roberta Combs. "I am honored and humbled to be chosen by the Christian Coalition's Board of Directors for this key position," Christy said. "It is crucial at this time in our nation for people of faith to engage the culture, and to realize that at the grassroots level they can make a difference."

Less than a month later, Christy changed his mind, deciding not to take the position. According to Word News, Christy intimated that it would be difficult to work with the Christian Coalition and continue running his various businesses.

Less than a year later, the Coalition's board voted to name Joel Hunter president of the organization. Hunter was/is the senior pastor of the nonde-

nominal Longwood, Florida-based Northland Church, also known as Northland A Church Distributed, and a founder of both the Christian Citizen and the Alliance for the Distributed Church. In late November, however, Hunter stepped down as president-elect (he was to have assumed office on January 1), saying that he had wanted the organization to focus on issues other than abortion and same-sex marriage (such as poverty and environmental protection), but Coalition leaders did not. "I think the board just got scared," said Hunter, the author of "Right Wing, Wrong Bird: Why the Tactics of the Religious Right Won't Fly With Most Conservative Christians."

The withdrawal of the media-savvy Christy and the forward-looking Hunter — albeit for different reasons — is surely indicative of a once mighty organization going south. However, like Spain's Fascist dictator, Generalísimo Francisco Franco, who was kept alive so that his death would coincide with the anniversary of the death of another

well-known fascist leader 39 years earlier, the Christian Coalition's demise is taking a dreadfully long time to play itself out. While Reports of Franco's death made it into the popular culture – it became a recurring item during the satiric Weekend Update segment on the then-new “Saturday Night Live” program – the death of the Christian Coalition probably won't get the same comedic treatment.

IT SHOULD be noted that in its day, the Christian Coalition became the heir and-then-some to the Rev. Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority. Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition (CC) set the gold standard for Christian conservative grassroots organizing efforts, fundraising ability and lobbying efforts well into the 1990s.

At its peak, one of the organization's claims to fame was its highly partisan Voter Guides. In 2000, it distributed over 70 million voter guides in churches all across America, including over 5 million in Spanish (approximately 2 million of which were distributed in Florida alone). In the 2004 election cycle, the group claimed that it distributed around 30 million voter guides, but this time in targeted states and congressional districts, choosing instead to focus its efforts on areas that were more politically competitive.

“The once-mighty Christian Coalition founded 17 years ago by the Rev. Pat Robertson as the political fundraising and lobbying engine of the Christian right, is more than \$2 million in debt, beset by creditors' lawsuits and struggling to hold on to some of its

state chapters,” the Washington Post reported in April of this year. “In March, one of its most effective chapters, the Christian Coalition of Iowa, cut ties with the national organization and reincorporated itself as the Iowa Christian Alliance, saying it “found it impossible to continue to carry a name that in any way associated us with this national organization.”

Stephen L. Scheffler, president of the Iowa affiliate since 2000, said that “The credibility is just not there like it once was. The budget has shrunk from \$26 million to \$1 million. There's a trail of debt ... We believe, our board believes, any Christian organization has an obligation to pay its debts in a timely fashion.”

In reality, the organization hasn't been the same since Ralph Reed, the organization's baby-faced point man who garnered serious face time on television pushing the organization's agenda, and Robertson, the founder and chief operating officer left the Coalition.

“After the founders left, the Christian Coalition never fully recovered,” James L. Guth, an expert on politics and religion at Furman University in South Carolina, told the Washington Post's Alan Cooperman and Thomas B. Edsall in April 2006. “The dependence on Robertson and Reed was really disastrous.”

Reed resigned as the CC's executive director in 1997, leaving to head up his own political consulting firm (Century Strategies), become head of Georgia's Republican Party, and to set the stage for launching his own political career.

At its peak, one of the organization's claims to fame was its highly partisan Voter Guides. In 2000, it distributed over 70 million voter guides in churches all across America, including over 5 million in Spanish

CHRISTIAN COALITION

"My position is, unless we are caring as much for the vulnerable outside the womb as inside the womb, we're not carrying out the full message of Jesus"

Earlier this year, unable to slide out from under reports of his close connection to GOP uber-lobbyist, the now-imprisoned Jack Abramoff, Reed was defeated in his bid to become the GOP's candidate for lieutenant governor.

Robertson left in 2001 after a CNN interview in which he defended China's one-child policy, a position that horrified fellow Christian conservatives. Robertson's China comment, according to the Washington Post, "was among the most damaging in a series of remarks that have hurt Robertson's standing among evangelical Christians -- and may have hurt the Christian Coalition as well."

"The Christian Coalition was already on life support. Robertson's remarks probably mean its demise," said former Christian Coalition lobbyist Marshall Wittmann, who before he was recently hired to be the communications director and spokesman for Senator Joe Lieberman (I-CT), was a senior fellow at the Progressive Policy Institute, a think tank affiliated with the Democratic Leadership Council and partially funded by the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation.

ROBERTA COMBS, who coordinated Robertson's South Carolina campaign during his run to head the GOP presidential ticket in 1988, replaced him as head of the Christian Coalition five years ago. Claiming that the organization was in horrendous financial straits, Coombs cleaned house and made enemies.

"I had to let a lot of staff go, and they

all got upset with me because they were close to Ralph [Reed]. Of course they said bad things about me. But we got a lot of that [debt] paid down over time," Combs told the Washington Post.

While she may have succeeded in cleaning house and making enemies, one thing she didn't do was straighten out the organization's financials, according to the Washington Post: "IRS records show that the Christian Coalition's red ink has remounted. Its debts exceeded its assets by \$983,000 in 2001, \$1.3 million in 2002, \$2 million in 2003 and \$2.28 million at the end of 2004, the most recent year for which it has filed a nonprofit tax return."

"Lawsuits for unpaid bills have multiplied. The Christian Coalition's longtime law firm -- Huff, Poole & Mahoney PC of Virginia Beach -- says it is owed \$69,729. Global Direct, a fundraising firm in Oklahoma, is suing for \$87,000 in expenses. Reese & Sons Inc., a moving company in District Heights, is trying to recover \$1,890 for packing up furniture when the Christian Coalition closed its Washington office in 2002."

The resignation of Joel Hunter precludes any chance that the Christian Coalition might emerge as a new and forward-looking organization.

"My position is, unless we are caring as much for the vulnerable outside the womb as inside the womb, we're not carrying out the full message of Jesus," Hunter said in a late-November telephone interview with the Washington Post.

"They [Christian Coalition leaders] began to think this might threaten their

base or evaporate some of their support, and they said they just couldn't go there." Although concerned about the organization's precarious financials, his resignation did not stem from that factor: "I got a look at who they owed money to. It's sobering. But with the right leadership and the capability of rebuilding a grass-roots organization, it's not insurmountable. My church budget is \$15 million a year ... It's not too intimidating for me to think I could have raised that kind of money."

According to the newspaper, Roberta Combs, chairman of the coalition's four-member board, "said that Hunter "is still a good friend" but that they agreed during a November 21 conference call that "it would be best for everyone if he did not become president."

Combs pointed out that the organization has "been wanting to broaden our agenda for some time. But there's a way to do that. We wanted to survey our supporters first and make sure they're on board on new issues. Joel saw it differently – he just wanted to go

out and do it."

Interestingly enough, when Time magazine ran a cover story earlier this year headlined "The 25 Most Influential Evangelicals in America," not one Christian Coalition spokesperson was amongst them. With Dr. James Dobson's Focus on the Family, Tony Perkins' Family Research Council, and the Southern Baptist Convention having eclipsed the Coalition in lobbying effectiveness since even before Pat Robertson's leaving the organization, Hunter's ideas represented an opportunity for a new beginning.

With Hunter's resignation, it appears that Christian Coalition leaders have soundly rejected changing the way it has been doing business. The organization's long slide from its glory days to relative obscurity will no doubt continue. **CT**

Bill Berkowitz is a longtime observer of the conservative movement, documenting the strategies, players, institutions, victories and defeats of the American Right

With Hunter's resignation, it appears that Christian Coalition leaders have soundly rejected changing the way it has been doing business. The organization's long slide from its glory days to relative obscurity will no doubt continue

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DEMOCRACY TAKES A BEATING

BY DANNY SCHECHTER

They bemoan the fact that there was more spin and opinionizing than reporting along with less investigative reporting. And then they do it all over again

After every election, there are post-mortems and then, after that, come the studies to confirm the presence of many institutional and deep seated flaws in our ritualized electoral-democracy.

Annually, journalists acknowledge their own limits and mistakes. The honest ones admit a uniformity of outlook in which the horse race is over-covered and the issues undercovered.

They concede that there was a focus on polls without explaining their limits adequately or how polls in turn are affected by the volume and slant of media coverage. There are criticisms of how negative ads and entertainment values infiltrated election coverage, what Time magazine calls “electotainment.”

They bemoan the fact that there was more spin and opinionizing than reporting along with less investigative reporting.

And then they do it all over again.

It happened again this year, as if the media industry and the press corps never learns from its own mistakes and

is doomed to repeat them. Why? Phil Troustine former political editor of the San Jose Mercury News, told the magazine Nieman Reports, “too many reporters are cynics, not just skeptics. This leads to the sense that they are hard-bitten realists when they are simplistic and often biased.”

They also work for corporate media outlets who design the coverage and assign the journalists. Mostly, they are not free or independent agents.

A 2006 survey by the Committee of Concerned Journalists of their own members revealed that many journalists think the news media failed voters by not adequately covering this past year’s campaigns.

“Only 3% give the press an A grade, while another 27% give the news media a B. At the same time, 42% give the coverage a C and 27% say D or F.

“The poll surveyed 499 CCJ members between October 8 and October 15th. The Committee is a national consortium of journalists and journalism educators in various media.”

The Mediaocracy blog, inspired by a

book I wrote of the same name asks: “What are the particular concerns these journalists have? By large majorities they feel the news media has become sidetracked by trivial issues, has been too reactive and has focused too much on the inside baseball that doesn’t really matter to voters, according to the survey.

“In other words, most of the campaign reporting does not deliver what journalists think the public wants or needs. This is in line with other general surveys of reporters regarding the current state of their profession. A Pew Research Center report in 2000 showed that less than 40% of journalists surveyed said the media was fulfilling its public responsibilities.”

The latest study

The Project on Excellence in Journalism has just assessed this past year’s election after extensive on day research:

“On Nov. 7, a team of researchers from the Project for Excellence in Journalism monitored the coverage of 32 news outlets – 18 web sites, six blogs, four broadcast networks, three cable channels, and NPR as the results rolled in and Congress changed hands. This report, ‘Election Night 2006’: An Evening in the Life of the American Media,” breaks down that performance by media platform and contains an evaluation of each individual outlet.”

What did they find?

“1. The two most valuable things the news media offers on these fast-moving election nights now is a quick summary of key results for those wanting the headlines and deep veins of data

that users can mine on their own. That may explain why TV web sites fared well.

“2. In contrast, rich narrative story telling and snap punditry, the long suit of the morning newspaper and the TV telecast, may be less valuable – at least as the numbers are rolling in on the first night.

“3. Most news organizations are still finding their way in this new multimedia environment. Often they are trying to do too many things and lack the resources and flexibility to adjust to the speed of the news. They need to make clearer choices.

“4. The Exit Poll may be more important today, not less, since users are probing that information directly, functioning as their own editors – going state by state, looking for demographic information, late deciders, and more. This is not just the purview of experts and academicians anymore.”

“5. When the system works, voting occurs without widespread problems and the media establishment isn’t faltering-citizen sentinels, bloggers, and other observers, while potentially important watchdogs, have a more restricted role.”

Sorry to disagree. The system is NOT working well. On November 26, three weeks AFTER the election, the NY Times discovered that voting machines in Florida swallowed 18,000 votes and worried that without a verified paper trail, results would be compromised. Their editorial was titled “Déjà vu” in Florida.” The Times seemed shocked in concluding that electronic voting “could end up under-

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COULD?

Now I am the one who is shocked. How is it that so many of our mainstream media outlets IGNORED this problem, and did not demand that it be fixed BEFORE the election. For years now, an election integrity movement has been crusading on this issue but they have been brushed aside, and are rarely in the news. There is no shortage of information on the subject.

Burying the lead

Years ago, Jim Naureckas of FAIR wrote: "In journalism, it's called 'burying the lead.' A story starts off with what everyone already knows, while the real news – the most surprising, significant or never-been-told-before information – gets pushed down where people are less likely to see it ..."

Why? What accounts for media organizations looking away and covering elections the same way each year as if they are following routines?

Says Naureckas: "Many journalists are instinctively protective of the legitimacy of the institutions they cover." He then adds, "but the job of a journalist is not to promote but to question. The theory behind the First Amendment is that the system will be strengthened by an unflinching look at the system's flaws."

Too many journalists fail to separate the election outcomes from the self-interested financial interests that influence them or the way incumbents manipulate the system to their advantage.

Elections are often determined by

what's called the "Air War" – TV commercials, many negative attacks ads that do more misrepresenting than presenting, more selling than telling. The cost of these political ads on television, the third highest source of ad revenues for the industry, has more than quadrupled since 1982.

Today, commercial media has gone AWOL on this most obvious responsibility. "Pre-election news coverage of the candidates has in many cases all but disappeared," says Paul Taylor, chairman of the Alliance for Better Campaigns – a MediaChannel Affiliate that advocates free airtime for candidates. "What little candidate coverage that remains is devoted to incumbents, by a margin of nearly five to one, over challengers."

In a study of media coverage, Media Channel affiliate Norman Lear Center revealed that the amount of election-centered discourse provided by the typical local station during the height of the 2000 presidential primary season was just 39 seconds a night – far short of the five-minute standard advocated by a 1998 presidential advisory commission headed by then Vice President Al Gore.

Another MediaChannel affiliate, the Center for Media and Public Affairs, found that the total minutes of coverage of the 2002 midterm election on the national network news programs had declined by 78 percent over the coverage those networks devoted to the 1998 midterm election.

Political devolution

All of this got worse in 2006. The media

is failing us along with the political system it allegedly covers. There is a devolution underway, not reform and change.

Years ago in a book called “Hail to the Thief” on the outcome of the 2000 election, I wrote: “The media no longer, if it ever did, stand apart from politics as a neutral – much less objective – watchdog operating outside the political system to strengthen democracy. In an age of corporate mergers and unprecedented media concentration, the media have in effect, merged with politics and now function as a key component of a system that Norman Mailer sees, with a whiff of the Mafia theory of Organization, as a “family.”

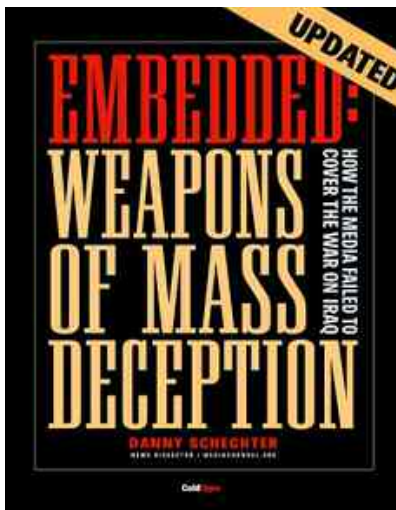
“The American political body has evolved,” he wrote in an essay in his

1998 anthology *The Time of Our Time*. “into a highly controlled and powerfully manipulated democracy overseen by a new species of aristocracy formed at the junction of four Royal Families – the ten thousand dollar suits of the mega-corporations, the titans of the media, the high ogres of Congress and the upper lords of the White House.”

In 2006, years after all the hand-wringing over the fiasco in Florida, and the debacle in Ohio, I see no reason to revise this judgment. **CT**

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