

May 28, 2003

DONALDRUMSFELD FESSES UP

Forget about Spring for now. I was giving in to a hopeful optimism yesterday when I told you about the reappearance of the sun. How premature of me! Today, the clouds are back, and so is the rain. We can forget about other things, too. Like economic recovery, as we watched a happy President sign a tax cut bill that only represented half of what he insisted was absolutely necessary to turn things around. The Financial Times of London, which knows more about the dismal science of economics than I do, dismissed the development and the assumption that tax cuts will bring prosperity as more evidence that the “lunatics are running the asylum.” Their words, not mine.

And speaking of lunatics, look at the reaction that Ariel Sharon’s admission that Israel is occupying Palestinian territory. Many of his own supporters are in shock at his use of the verboten “O” word, the word that Israel supporters denied for years. Even worse, he is being hailed all over the New York Times for finally being so frank, so candid, so honest, for simply telling the truth. How long has it taken? Try 35 years!

“THINGS AREN’T WORKING”

IN Iraq, another grenade was lobbed at US soldiers by civilians thought to be among those who would welcome their liberation with flowers and song. Nightline was up in arms about this festering problem last night: “Things aren’t working out exactly according to plan. Post-war Iraq is proving

to be a much tougher problem in many ways. It certainly appears that there is some sort of organized resistance starting to take shape. Are we going to see one or two American soldiers killed each day? How long will we allow that to go on?”

Good Questions all, but for answers ABC might turn to a source closer to home. I had to go to the South African Mail and Guardian to learn: “In the months before the Iraq war the Pentagon ignored repeated warnings that it would need a substantial military police force ready to deploy after the invasion to provide law and order in the postwar chaos, US government advisers and analysts said yesterday.”

TRANSLATING FROM “MAFIA-ESE”

“**FUHGEDDABOUTIT,**” Mafia characters once exclaimed in a movie I watched but have since forgotten the name of. “Forget about it” is the translation from “Mafia-ese.”

BBC World led its newscast this morning with a claim that US officials may wish they had forgotten those canards about Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction. Donald Rumsfeld was speaking at the Council on Foreign Relations, a story that our own New York Times played on page A 13. I didn’t see it on CNN, but it may have been there. And what was the Don saying with that permanent grin plastered on his otherwise stony face?

Here’s how the Times downplays it: “Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld suggested publicly

for the first time yesterday that Iraq might have destroyed chemical and biological weapons before the war there, a possibility that senior American officers in Iraq have raised in recent weeks.

Mr. Rumsfeld has repeatedly expressed optimism that it is just a matter of time, and of interviewing enough senior Iraqi scientists and former government officials, before military teams uncover the illicit arms that President Bush cited as a major reason for attacking Iraq and toppling Saddam Hussein's rule."

THEY HAD THE INTELLECTUAL CAPACITY

BUSH Administration officials are backing away now for yet new rationalizations. Here's an unbelievable one from Defense Tech:

"BUSH REGIME FINDS INTELLECTUAL CAPACITY OF MASS DESTRUCTION"

<http://64.207.156.228/>

"DEFENSE TECH – The Bush Administration is backtracking – hard – from their pre-war claims that Iraq had stockpiles of biological and chemical arms. It doesn't matter whether or not Iraq actually had any of the toxins in their possession, Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Affairs John Bolton said today. What counts is that Iraq had the "intellectual capacity" to build these unconventional weapons."

BBC QUESTIONS BLAIR

ON BBC, they were questioning the "intellectual capacity" of Tony Blair who made the big case that these weapons were there and had to be destroyed. So far, there is radio silence on this issue in London town. BBC correspondent David Loyn was hopping mad on this issue as if he had

just discovered that HMS government had been dastardly deceiving. Loyn was properly indignant in noting that there might now be hell to pay for the likes of Jack Straw and Tony B. (I was hopping mad earlier with earlier remarks by Loyn on Journalism. See My rejoinder on the UK-based OpenDemocracy.net)

Others in Europe are not just denouncing – they are filing lawsuits, which probably won't go anywhere. ABC in Australia reports: "A group of lawyers is planning to take the British Prime Minister Tony Blair to the new International Criminal Court on war crimes on charges arising out of the Iraq conflict. The Athens Bar Association says it feels an ethical and juristic responsibility to seek action from the court which was inaugurated in March. The bar association is citing Mr. Blair and his foreign secretary Jack Straw for crimes against humanity and war crimes, as well as violations of international law, human rights and a number of treaties. The Greek lawyers are considering making similar legal moves against the Spanish Prime Minister but are excluding the United States, which has challenged the court's jurisdiction over Americans."

POLICY PROMOTES PRIVATIZATION

WILLIAM BOWLES writes on Information Clearing House about what he considers "the real" reason for the invasion of Iraq. "At last, the truth is out. Bremer's 'state of the dis-union' address this past weekend spelled out the real reason for the invasion of Iraq; the protection of private ownership as the best guarantee of political freedom. This was on BBC Radio 4 news but when I came to find this quote in the Guardian, the Independent or even on the BBC website, no

luck, this critical quote was nowhere to be found. One has to ask the question why as it goes to the very heart of the issue of why the US invaded Iraq.

I continued to search other news sites including the New York Times and the closest I could get was the following:

“A free economy and a free people go hand in hand,” said Bremer, a former State Department anti-terrorism official who took over the civilian operation in Iraq on May 12.” (AP, May 26, 2003) But all trace of the interview I heard on BBC radio has strangely disappeared from our ‘information overloaded’ environment.

But interestingly, the search page on the NYT was sponsored by – guess who? – the L. Paul Bremer-run Marsh Crisis Consulting, which delivers “Crisis Readiness Solutions.”

BRAINWASHING, U.S. STYLE

AS for jurisdiction over Americans, the media impact of the war is just being felt and measured. It looks like the real victory for the Bush Administration will be here at home, which may have been the real target in the first place. Maureen Dowd reports in the New York Times that many who watched the war coverage were persuaded beyond the shadow of many doubts. She quotes Robin Toner who studied youth attitudes:

“A Harvard poll found that 75 percent of college kids trusted the military ‘to do the right thing’ either ‘all of the time’ or ‘most of the time.’ Two-thirds of the students supported the Iraqi war, with hawks beating doves 2 to 1. Mr. Bush runs a ‘trust us, we’re 100 percent right’ regime.”

So we’ve got a young generation that wants to take it on faith. And an administration that wants to be taken on faith.

The beginning of a beautiful friendship? Maybe. Unless the White House politicizes 9/11 so much it squanders all that belief. Karl Rove’s re-election strategy is designed to tug 9/11 heartstrings, and his ads will be heroic images of Top Gun chasing down the bad guys. The president and his posse diverted anger over 9/11 to Iraq, and now they are diverting it to Iran.”

BURYING THE FCC DEBATE

WHICH brings us back to our media system, which is usually my starting point. The FCC decision expected to give the media monopolists even more power is coming down June 2. So where does the New York Times play the story? On page C 6 in the business section where it notes that an ideologically broad coalition is opposing the plan. To them it is only about business, and not about how it will affect the rest of us. A news story about the hearings appears on the website, not the paper, and you have to search for it,. By the way, this story was written by the Associated Press, not the “newspaper of record.”

Writing in the Nation, John Nichols is all over the story that the Times is burying. “More than 100 members of Congress – ranging from Congressional Progressive Caucus stalwarts such as Vermont’s Bernie Sanders and Ohio’s Sherrod Brown to Congressional Black Caucus veterans such as Michigan’s John Conyers and New York’s Charles Rangel to Republican moderates such as Maine U.S. Senators Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins, as well as diehard conservatives such as U.S. Senators Trent Lott, R-Mississippi, and Wayne Allard, R-Colorado – have objected to the FCC’s rush to eliminate rules that protect against media monopoly and corporate consolidation.

WHO'S WHO OF THE OPPOSITION

LEADERS of the AFL-CIO, the Leadership Council on Civil Rights, the National Council of La Raza, the Consumer Federation of America, Consumers Union and dozens of other public interest groups have signed letters demanding that the FCC seek more public comment before making decisions that they argue “could have a sweeping impact on what news and information Americans see and hear in the future.” The Newspaper Guild, the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, the National Association of Broadcasting Employees and Technicians, the National Association of Black Journalists, the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, the Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers, the Caucus for Producers, Writers and Directors, the American Federation of Musicians and the Future of Music Coalition have all warned that making the changes could undermine American journalism and culture.

“Close to 300 leading academics have come forward to say that the FCC is moving too quickly and without legitimate scholarship on these crucial rulemaking decisions. Rockers Pearl Jam, Tom Petty, and Patti Smith have joined the chorus of concern, along with conservative columnist William Safire and the National Rifle Association, and the city councils of Chicago and Seattle, the Vermont House of Representatives. And public comments to the FCC have been running 20-1 against making changes that would allow the nation’s largest media companies to control virtually all television, radio and newspaper communications in American communities.”

REGULATORS TAKEN FOR A RIDE

HE also brings to our attention a story that Bill Moyers devoted a great deal of time to last Friday night – a report from the Center for Public Integrity, showing “how industry groups the FCC is supposed to be regulating have over the past eight years paid for more than 2,500 junkets taken by key FCC officials.”

PR Watch reports that an industry organization is joining this fight: “The leading PR trade association, the Public Relations Society of America, is calling on its 20,000 members to organize a “broad grassroots initiative to persuade the Federal Communications Commission to postpone its scheduled June 2 vote on the biennial review of regulations for broadcast ownership.” The group, which represents government, corporate, institutional and individual public relations practitioners, says it advocates postponement of the FCC vote “until the Commission proactively encourages full public participation in an open, robust debate and discussion of this critically important issue.”

WAS IT AN ACCIDENT

REMEMBER the journalists fired on at the Palestine Hotel in Iraq? Was it an accident, a mistake, an error committed during the fog of war? Not according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, which has just issued an investigative report on the subject. (See CPJ.org)

“The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) released an investigative report today about the April 8 shelling of the Palestine Hotel in Baghdad by U.S. forces, which killed two journalists and wounded three others. CPJ’s investigation, titled

“Permission to Fire,” provides new details suggesting that the attack on the journalists, while not deliberate, was avoidable. CPJ has learned that Pentagon officials, as well as commanders on the ground in Baghdad, knew that the Palestine Hotel was full of international journalists and that they were intent on not hitting it. However, these senior officers apparently failed to convey their concern to the tank commander who fired on the hotel.”

ON THE CASE OF THE OTHER BLAIR

AS the Jayson Blair affair continues to be investigated and debated, add this to the fallout. The New York Observer reports that many at the Times believe that Blair had been used by the paper because he was so young and too willing. Sridhar Pappu reports:

“As Al Siegal and his investigative committee continue to hash out exactly how the 152-year-old institution allowed 27-year-old reporter Jayson Blair to invent datelines and events and imaginary vistas, 13 of the newspaper’s bright young things have been hammering away at a memo to Mr. Siegal and other members of the committee calling for changes in how the paper treats its young.

“Among the early drafts of the memo being circulated, the group calls upon Times management to end favoritism in the newsroom, develop transparent procedures for filling open positions, and provide other amenities for young reporters eager for advancement.

“With the notable exception of race, perhaps no theory of Mr. Blair’s decline and fall has been as popular as his youth and relative inexperience when it came to big stories, such as the D.C. sniper saga of last autumn.”

BLAIR’S FRIEND CONDEMNS MEDIA HARRASSMENT

THE most moving comment I have read on the affair appears in Newsweek by the young woman who was Blair’s friend and harassed because of it. Zuza Glowacka writes beautifully:

“When Jayson was caught, it came as a big shock and betrayal to the world as well as to me. The media machine immediately started turning and I got stuck in its gears. Some newspapers wrote that because I often worked in the photography department of the Times and was a friend of Jayson’s, I might have conspired to help him obtain photographs that he then used to fabricate stories. Although that never happened – and the Times never investigated me – I nonetheless was put in danger of losing my credibility. Then, because my parents are social acquaintances of the Times’s executive editor, my family was brought into the mess. Soon reporters were camped out at my parents’ house, questioning them as well as their neighbors and waiting hopefully for me to come by so they could shout out questions, as if I was a celebrity.

“I’ve always been sensitive about my privacy. At first, I didn’t want to comment on the nature of my relationship with Jayson, or his sad downfall – I naively believed that I was an irrelevant and private part of the story. My initial decision to remain silent came at a cost. All sorts of questions were being asked about my behavior, and no one was answering them. I was being mischaracterized as well. The first time I saw my name printed in the paper in connection with this scandal, I was surprised to find myself labeled as a Polish émigré, considering the fact I had moved to America at the age of 4 and have lived in New York ever since.

I attended high school and college in America, and consider myself to be quite American. Maybe I'm too sensitive. Most émigrés are.”

For another far more political analysis, see Alexander Cockburn in the Nation this week.

MEDIA SHAKEUPS IN ARAB WORLD

“SHAKEUPS are being reported in media outlets in the Arab World. Arab News reports: “In a devastating blow to its reputation, Al-Jazeera said yesterday that its general director has been sacked after allegations were made that he worked with Saddam Hussein’s intelligence services. Mohammed Jassem al-Ali visited Iraq before the US-led war, meeting Saddam during an hour-long interview. Both Al-Jazeera and Ali were afterward accused by the Western media of collaborating with the former regime in Baghdad.

Reuters reports: “A spokesman for Al Jazeera, Jihad Ballout, said the chief executive, Mohammed Jassem al-Ali, would remain on the board of directors and insisted that the decision was not related to allegations that the Arab television network had been infiltrated by Iraqi intelligence.”

EDITOR FIRED IN SAUDIA ARABIA

THE New York Times reports: “In the first sign that it has already wearied of the public debate

over the possible roots of extremist thought in Saudi Arabia, the government ordered the removal today of the editor in chief of Al Watan, the daily newspaper which had been most outspoken on the subject.

“The editor, Jamal A. Khashoggi, one of the country’s leading experts on political Islam, declined to comment on his firing. There was also no government announcement, but an official at the Ministry of Information confirmed it without elaborating on the reasons.”

OPPOSE “FLORIDATION”

MARTIN LUTHER KING’S son, Marty III, is launching a petition campaign on the web against the dangers of the rigging of new computer voting machines. I am getting lots of appeals that read like this:

“Today, there is a new and real threat to voters, this time coming from touch-screen voting machines with no paper trails and the computerized purges of voter rolls.

“I just joined Civil Rights leader Martin Luther King III and investigative reporter Greg Palast in signing a petition protesting the ‘Floridation’ of the 2004 election. It only took me a few seconds to sign it and I’m hoping you’ll sign it, too. Click here to sign the petition:”

<http://www.workingforchange.com/activism/petition.cfm?itemid=14993>

