

# The duct tape magnate and other stories

**WOULDN'T** you know it? There's a duct tape magnate. His name is Jack Kahl. He lives in Avon, Ohio, and his company produces 46% of all the duct tape consumed in the United States. Which means they produce, more or less, 46% of all that extra duct tape stressed-out Americans dutifully bought last month after Bush Administration Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge told us to.

Jack's son John, heir to the duct tape fortune, recently reported sales increases of 100% to 200%, "particularly in certain metro markets and around the coasts and borders." Given that the company grossed \$300 million in 2001, such an increase represents, well, a lot of money. Suffice to say it's probably a lot more than the \$100,000 'ol Jack donated to the Republican Party in 2000.

What am I saying here? Do you think that I think the whole duct tape fiasco was just about generating a few dozen million dollars for a loyal Republican crony? That we all made fools of ourselves mobbing our local Home Depots just to line a few pockets and raise a few campaign dollars for the next election cycle? Not really. The notion is just too ridiculous – but then again these are ridiculous times. If you asked me a year ago if I would ever have thought Americans would run out en masse to buy duct tape, naively believing the otherwise handy basement stalwart would protect us from chemical, biological and nuclear attack, I'd think the question ridiculous. But alas, here we are – reliving shades of Duck and Cover, the 1950s era government education campaign that compared a nuclear attack to a bad sunburn and advised children us to hide under school desks when the big one hit.

The recent upgrade to code orange terror alert wasn't about protecting us – it was

## **THE DUCT TAPE MAGNATE AND OTHER STORIES / 2**

about terrorizing us. Duct [tape] and Cover is no different than Duck and Cover. With the exception of Jack and John Kahl, Duct Tape isn't going to really do much for anyone – except lead to a few random suffocation deaths. Maybe it was a joke – “Hey Jack, this week we'll tell them to all buy Duct Tape, tee hee hee. – Next week we'll tell them to stock up on Coca Cola.” More likely, it was all about raising the fear level, emphasizing code orange in the face of international peace protests. Don't fly, don't move, don't go to New York, and don't protest. It was the code orange “threat,” after all, according a federal judge, which provided the legal rationale for not granting a permit to New York's massive peace march. Of course, now that the Saint Patrick's Day parade is coming up, the threat level is being lowered to yellow – as in OK to march. Which brings up the question, what to do with all that extra duct tape? My suggestion: wrap your tee vee. Wrap it up good and tight.

### **What weapons of mass destruction?**

Talk about a tough defense – try this on for size. The Bush administration is center stage all over the world, contradicting just about every eyewitness, weapons inspector, and intelligence agency – including our own – droning on about how Iraq is stockpiling weapons of mass destruction. At the same time, pity the poor lawyer currently representing the US in the World Court, who has to argue the opposite case, playing down Iraq's weapons of mass destruction program. This is what lawyers must call bad timing. A 1992 suit leveled by Iran against the US for supplying chemical, biological and nuclear weapons to Iraq during that country's war with Iran is finally being heard. The US is being taken to task by the Iranians for its Reagan/Bush era alliance with Iraq, when it supplied Iraq with the very weapons the new Bush administration now insists they have. Duh.

The Iranians, for their part, insist on holding both the US and Iraq responsible for war crimes committed by Hussein's government while using US supplied weapons of mass destruction. Under US law, both Reagan and Bush Senior would be as guilty as Saddam, both being accomplices to a capital crime. That's, er, a very capital crime.

### **Enemy collaborators**

Of course Reagan and Bush Senior had accomplices. We now know that at least 24 major US corporations are accused of selling banned material to Saddam Hussein's government in order to help build his weapons of mass destruction program during the Iraq-Iran war. The list includes household names such as Honeywell, Unisys, Sperry, Rockwell, Hewlett-Packard, Dupont, Kodak, EZ Logic and Bechtel.

## **THE DUCT TAPE MAGNATE AND OTHER STORIES / 3**

While I'm not going to hold my breath waiting for any executives of these corporations to do the perp-walk any time soon, the question does arise, why the hell not? If the supposed rationale for Bush's planned war is to rid Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, which by all accounts are currently in check or gone, then isn't it logical that we should prosecute the very criminals who illegally and without any moral compunction supplied lethal weapons to a genocidal murderer with a track record for using them on innocent civilians? Hello?!? Doesn't any action other than arresting and prosecuting those supposedly sane business people who knowingly armed a supposed madman expose the hypocrisy behind this war?

The FBI, however, isn't investigating Iraq's corporate collaborators – they're too busy in rural Central New York interrogating pacifist Quakers and Peace activists who are under investigation for possibly donating money to charities feeding starving Iraqi children. According to John Ashcroft, such donations constitute a violation of the Treasury Department's "Trading With the Enemy" statutes. Giving the "enemy" weapons of mass destruction, on the other hand, doesn't seem to be a problem. And doubling your purchase of Iraqi crude oil, as a host of US companies have done during the past three months, also doesn't seem to violate the law.

But of course Kodak and company were just engaging in the time honored American tradition of making money, just as they were when Kodak, Ford, GM and a host of other corporations were supplying the Nazis. We didn't prosecute them then, and we're not going to prosecute them now. And if the war goes well, Exxon-Mobil and a host of other corporations with close ties to the Bush administration will continue this time honored tradition of making the best out of a bad situation, as they march over a sea of fresh corpses into Baghdad, hell-bent on exploiting the spoils of war.

### **Rummy and the Evil Pygmy Empire**

Then there's Donald Rumsfeld. He was at the center of the Reagan/Bush and Bush Senior efforts to arm Iraq. He went to Baghdad and met with Saddam Hussein at about the same time Hussein was gassing both Kurds and Iranians. It's no wonder he was recently ceremoniously disowned by his extended family in Germany. Rumsfeld seems to be amassing a reputation for strange relationships with what his boss calls, the "Axis of Evil." While Rumsfeld's former alliance with Saddam Hussein is old news, his relationship with North Korea's bizarre government is just beginning to surface.

In 1999 Rumsfeld was a director of the Swiss based nuclear power giant, ABB, when that company signed a \$200 million deal to sell two nuclear reactors to North Korea. Since then, relations between the US and North Korea have gone south, mostly because

of George W. Bush's frat boy rhetoric, calling the North Korean dictator a "pygmy" while labeling his government part of the "Axis of Evil." After putting them on edge, Bush really tweaked the North Koreans by declaring the evil pygmy empire worthy of a pre-emptive nuclear strike. Hence, they freaked out, started launching cruise-type missiles into the Sea of Japan, and are otherwise just acting badly. Suddenly Washington is concerned that Rumsfeld's nukes could be put to "evil" use, making "dirty bombs" and what not, in what is now becoming old hat for the insane clown posse in the White House.

### **The loyalty auction**

Regular readers know that, outside of the US it's just plain hard to find anyone who supports this war. Even here in the US, where information is increasingly controlled by a warmongering media, this is little support, with a host of major American cities passing anti-war resolution during the past month. In order to rally support on the UN Security Council, the Bush administration has arrogantly pushed ahead with an unprecedented campaign of arm-twisting and bribery. For our European allies, there's the bait of Iraq's "soon to be American" oil. You're either with us, or shut out of the new imperial American oil market. America's chicken-hawks, the Bush administration draft-dodgers and deserters, now keen on ordering hundreds of thousands of poor and working class Americans into battle, have threatened what they call "Old Europe" with economic devastation in a post-Iraq world. "Allies," those whores whose price has been met, on the other hand, will be awash in cheap oil.

But the auction for support is more complicated. The Turks, before allowing American troops to launch an invasion of Iraq from their territory, have asked for, not only \$30 billion in American aid, but a chunk of Iraq as well. Colin Powell said the US will only offer a "take it or leave it" deal of \$26 billion, but is open to negotiating what the London Times calls, "the finer details." The American media has so far only focused on the monetary demand, ignoring the finer detail of Turkey's request to occupy Kurdish Iraq. Of course, divvying up Iraq at this stage makes the war somewhat transparent, and of course there are the anti-Saddam forces in Iraq who have sworn to oppose Turkish occupation with the same relish they oppose Hussein's government. At last report, the Turkish Parliament, yielding to the 94% of the Turkish population that opposes the war, rejected the Bush administration's \$26 billion bribe.

The Bush administration is also shopping for votes for a UN resolution legalizing the US invasion of Iraq. So far they've offered Russia over \$10 billion, guaranteeing payment of an otherwise uncollectable Iraqi debt to Russia. Hungary will get an as of yet not publicly disclosed increase in US aid. Chile will get reduced tariffs on goods exported to the US.

## **THE DUCT TAPE MAGNATE AND OTHER STORIES / 5**

Bulgaria gets US support for their bid to enter the EU as well as military cooperation. Jordan gets a cool billion dollars and a bunch of planes and guns. Egypt gets a billion dollars as well. Angola gets US investment in its oil industry. Cameroon gets a few bucks, as does Guinea. Mexico gets relaxed immigration status.

These and other deals add up to about \$50 billion of our tax dollars going into this payola fund, to buy votes to support an unpopular war. But in reality, what Bush has bought with our stolen dollars, is not support for a war, but the undermining of world government – with the UN degenerating into an American model of “democracy,” where the top spenders usually win the elections. Of course, why would Bush pursue any other form of persuasion – this is the only form of government he and his cronies understand. And it’s the model of government by capital (not to be confused with capitalism) that they want to impose on the world. ●