

CONSPIRACY: **The Downing Street Memo**



DAVID EDWARDS

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WRITING WORTH READING FROM AROUND THE WORLD
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PART ONE

At the Nuremberg war crimes tribunal

in 1946, Nazi leaders like Goering, von Ribbentrop, Jodl and Streicher were sentenced to death by hanging for “Crimes against Peace: namely, planning, preparation, initiation or waging of a war of aggression, or a war in violation of international treaties, agreements or assurances, or participation in a Common Plan or Conspiracy for the accomplishment of any of the foregoing.” (Article 6, Charter of the International Military Tribunal, August 8, 1945, <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/nuremberg/NurembergIndictments.html>)

It is remarkable, but now indisputable, that the current leaders of Britain and the United States are responsible for just such a conspiracy.

Carne Ross, a key Foreign Office diplomat responsible for liaising with UN inspectors in Iraq, said British government claims about Iraq’s weapons programme had been “totally implausible”. Ross told the Guardian: “I’d read the intelligence on WMD for four and a half years, and there’s no way that it could sustain the case that the government was presenting. All of my colleagues knew that, too. There was a very good alternative to war that was never properly pursued, which was to close down Saddam’s sources of illegal revenue.” (Richard Norton-Taylor, ‘WMD claims were “totally implausible”’, The Guardian, June 20, 2005)

But an alternative to war was never an option for the Bush-Blair alliance. On May 1, the Sunday Times published a leaked Downing Street memo that hammered the final nails in the coffin of Tony Blair’s credibility. The document – minutes of a highly confidential meeting dated July 23, 2002 – was written eight months before the invasion began. John Scarlett, chairman of the joint intelligence committee (JIC), opened proceedings by summarising the intelligence and latest JIC assessment: “Saddam’s regime was tough and based on extreme fear. The only

way to overthrow it was likely to be by massive military action.” (Michael Smith, ‘Blair planned Iraq war from start,’ Sunday Times, May 1, 2005)

As Scarlett’s initial statement makes clear, it was understood by everyone present that the issue at hand was how best to overthrow Saddam Hussein, not how to neutralise the supposed threat from any weapons of mass destruction. Indeed little mention was made of WMD.

The memo then records the words of Sir Richard Dearlove, the head of the British intelligence service MI6, who commented on his recent visit to Washington where he had held talks with George Tenet, director of the CIA: “There was a perceptible shift in attitude. Military action was now seen as inevitable. Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD. But the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy. The NSC [US National Security Council] had no patience with the UN route, and no enthusiasm for publishing material on the Iraqi regime’s record. There was little discussion in Washington of the aftermath after military action.” (ibid)

This recognition of the inevitability of war is reiterated in comments made in the meeting by foreign secretary Jack Straw: “It seemed clear that Bush had made up his mind to take military action, even if the timing was not yet decided. But the case was thin. Saddam was not threatening his neighbours, and his WMD capability was less than that of Libya, North Korea or Iran.” (ibid)

But in the absence of a threat – even to Iraq’s neighbours, much less to the West – how could war possibly be justified? Straw explained: “We should work up a plan for an ultimatum to Saddam to allow back in the UN weapons inspectors. This would also help with the legal justification for the use of force.” (ibid)

A further leaked Cabinet Office briefing paper from the same day clarifies that since regime change was illegal under international law it was “necessary to create the conditions” that would help provide legitimacy for war.

Writing in the Sunday Times, Michael Smith notes that the briefing paper asserts the only way the allies could justify military action was “to place Saddam Hussein in a position where he ignored or rejected a United Nations ultimatum ordering him to co-operate with the weapons inspectors“. But the briefing paper warns this would be difficult.

“It is just possible that an ultimatum could be cast in terms which Saddam

would reject,” the document says. But if he accepted it and did not attack the allies, they would be “most unlikely” to obtain the legal justification they needed. (Smith, ‘Ministers were told of need for Gulf war “excuse“,’ Sunday Times, June 12, 2005)

Notice the point is not that it was “just possible” than an ultimatum could be cast in terms which Saddam would *accept* – an outcome that might have allowed a peaceful resolution to the crisis. The aspiration was to cast an ultimatum that Saddam would *reject*, so providing an excuse for war. The goal, clearly, was to lay a trap for a war of aggression and conquest, not to negotiate for peace and security through disarmament. After all, if disarmament had been the concern, an ultimatum would have been superfluous – Saddam was “not threatening his neighbours, and his WMD capability was less than that of Libya, North Korea or Iran”.

Smith accurately comments: “The suggestions that the allies use the UN to justify war contradicts claims by Blair and Bush, repeated during their Washington summit last week, that they turned to the UN in order to avoid having to go to war.” (ibid)

But this was merely Plan A of a two-part plan to make war possible. There was also Plan B.

As part of the “attempt to provoke Saddam Hussein into giving the allies an excuse for war,” Smith writes, Britain and America increased bombing raids on Iraq, dropping twice as many bombs in the second half of 2002 as they did during the whole of 2001. (Smith, ‘RAF bombing raids tried to goad Saddam into war,’ Sunday Times, May 29, 2005)

By October, with the UN vote still two weeks away, RAF aircraft were dropping 64% of bombs falling on the southern no-fly zone.

This aggressive targeting of Iraqi defences contradicted Foreign Office legal advice appended to the leaked July 23, 2002 briefing paper, which states that allied aircraft were only “entitled to use force in self-defence where such a use of force is a necessary and proportionate response to actual or imminent attack from Iraqi ground systems”. (ibid)

The attacks, in other words, were illegal acts of state terror. Last week, Smith summarised the two-part plan to generate an excuse for war in an article in the Los Angeles Times: “British officials hoped the ultimatum [for Iraq to readmit UN

weapons inspectors] could be framed in words that would be so unacceptable to Hussein that he would reject it outright. But they were far from certain this would work, so there was also a Plan B... Put simply, US aircraft patrolling the southern no-fly zone were dropping a lot more bombs in the hope of provoking a reaction that would give the allies an excuse to carry out a full-scale bombing campaign, an air war, the first stage of the conflict.” (Michael Smith, ‘The real news in the Downing Street memos,’ Los Angeles Times, June 23, 2005; <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-smith23jun23,0,1838831.story>)

Straw, Blair And The Big Lie

The staggering deceit and criminality of the current British leadership is apparent when we compare the above with their public statements. Despite clearly plotting to ensure a violent outcome at least as early as July 2002, Jack Straw told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme in January 2003: “What’s important for people to understand is that war is not inevitable.” (‘War with Iraq not inevitable – Straw,’ January 6, 2003, 12:19 GMT; http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/2630155.stm)

Responding to comments made by an unnamed government source suggesting that the prospect of conflict had receded from a 60:40 likelihood of conflict to a 60:40 likelihood of peace, Straw commented: “I think that’s a reasonably accurate description.” (ibid)

This was Jonathan Freedland’s take on Straw in the Guardian: “To dump Straw would look especially perverse after Sunday’s leaked memo revealed not only that Downing Street had set its heart on regime change back in 2002 – as opponents of the war always charged – but also that Straw played a Colin Powell role in those internal deliberations, warning that the case against Iraq was ‘thin’. To make him the fall guy would look unfair...” (Freedland, ‘Campaign 05: It won’t be the names that matter,’ The Guardian, May 3, 2005)

In his May 1 article, Smith had rightly rejected exactly this benign interpretation: “Despite voicing concerns, Straw was *not* standing in the way of war. It was he who suggested a solution: they should force Saddam into a corner where he would give them a clear reason for war.” (Smith, Sunday Times, May 1, op. cit, our emphasis)

That was obvious to Smith; it is obvious to us. How curious that it was not also

obvious to Freedland. Straw was in fact proposing a conspiracy to lure Saddam into actions that would help 'legitimise' a US-UK war of aggression.

In the July 23, 2002 memo, the attorney general, Lord Goldsmith, warned that the desire for regime change was not a legal base for military action. Tony Blair responded that "it would make a big difference politically and legally if Saddam refused to allow in the UN inspectors".

Blair's comment was made in the context of Straw's points about the lack of a threat and the need for an ultimatum, and of the briefing paper arguing it was "just possible" that "an ultimatum could be cast in terms which Saddam would reject". Blair, then, was also willing to use UN inspectors, not to disarm Iraq, but to provoke Saddam's refusal to cooperate, so providing an excuse for war.

Blair's criminality in launching a war of aggression, and in lying to Parliament and to the British people, is therefore not in doubt. On November 8, 2002, Blair said: "Iraq now has a 'final opportunity' to comply with its international and legal obligations by giving up once and for all its weapons of mass destruction... If it does not, then the consequences are clear." (Cited, Panorama, Iraq – Tony & the Truth, BBC 1, 10.15PM, March 20, 2005; <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article8579.htm>)

The "final opportunity" was a fraud, an endgame in a plot to provide an excuse for war. The consequences, completely regardless of Saddam's response, were already clear.

In February 2003, Blair said: "If we go to war it will not be because we want to, but because we have to in order to disarm Saddam." (David Cracknell and Sarah Baxter, 'Allies set date for Iraq war,' Sunday Times, February 23, 2003)

As late as February 15, 2003 – just one month before the war began on March 20 – Blair told the Labour Party's spring conference in Glasgow: "I hope, even now, Iraq can be disarmed peacefully, with or without Saddam." ('Blair speech – key quotes,' February 15, 2003, 12:38 GMT; http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/2765763.stm)

But Blair had been plotting to secure a violent outcome since at least July 2002. With these words, Blair was deliberately deceiving the British public.

The evidence of a conspiracy to lure and goad Saddam into providing an excuse for war is amply corroborated by other sources. Sir Christopher Meyer, the British ambassador to the United States, wrote in a March 18, 2002 memo: "We backed

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regime change, but the plan had to be clever and failure was not an option. It would be a tough sell for us domestically.” (Cited, Panorama, op. cit)

John Ware reported on the BBC’s Panorama programme in March that this “clever” plan involved getting the UN Security Council to pass a tough new disarmament resolution. Was it intended to achieve peace or provide a trigger for war? Meyer could not be clearer: “The US could go it alone if it wanted. But if it wanted to act with partners there had to be strategy for building support for military action. I then went through the need to wrong foot Saddam on the inspectors.” (ibid)

As we have seen, the ‘wrong footing’ involved Saddam being provoked into rejecting the ultimatum – a desired outcome that was considered “just possible”.

Richard Haass, director of policy planning, State Department 2001-2003, also confirms that war had long been the intended outcome: “... the first time I came away persuaded that a war was ninety nine percent likely was in early July of 2002 during one of my regular sessions with Condoleezza Rice, then the national security advisor... I was uneasy about it, thought that it raised questions to me at least whether it was worth it... and when I began to raise these concerns, Condi’s reaction was essentially, save your breath, hold your fire ‘This decision’s pretty much been made, this is where the President is.’” (Cited, Panorama, ibid)

PART TWO

We have to admit that our attention was elsewhere

when Michael Smith published his Sunday Times article on the Downing Street memo on May 1. We at media lens were busy focusing on our own pre-election Media Alerts and then immediately moved on to the task of completing the first Media Lens book: *Guardians Of Power – The Myth of The Liberal Media* (forthcoming, Pluto Press, January 2006).

Our understanding of the story was based solely on what we had gleaned from a few newspaper and TV reports. According to the media accounts we saw, the main revelation appeared to centre around comments made by Sir Richard Dearlove, then head of MI6: “Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD” and that “the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy”.

This did not strike us as particularly interesting. We knew from former US treasury secretary Paul O’Neill’s evidence that Bush had been intent on deposing Saddam Hussein from the very first days of taking power: “It was all about finding a way to do it. The president saying ‘Go find me a way to do this’... From the very beginning, there was a conviction that Saddam Hussein was a bad person and that he needed to go.” (O’Neill, cited, Julian Borger, ‘Bush decided to remove Saddam “on day one”’, *The Guardian*, January 12, 2004)

And it was obvious from the testimony of any number of intelligence experts, and from exposures relating to the “dodgy dossiers”, that intelligence and facts had been distorted to fit policy.

Imagine our surprise, then, when we finally got round to reading Smith’s original May 1 article, including the memo itself, and found that the real story was the revelation that Straw and Blair had conspired to use inspections to lure Saddam

into obstructing the UN, so providing an excuse for war. By implication, the leaks clearly reveal that Blair and Straw had been consistently lying in 2002 and 2003 about their hopes for a peaceful resolution to the crisis.

In an article for the Los Angeles Times entitled, 'The real news in the Downing Street memos', Michael Smith appears to agree with us about the real story: "Although Blair and Bush still insist the decision to go to the UN was about averting war, one memo states that it was, in fact, about 'wrong-footing' Hussein into giving them a legal justification for war.

"British officials hoped the ultimatum could be framed in words that would be so unacceptable to Hussein that he would reject it outright. But they were far from certain this would work, so there was also a Plan B... Put simply, US aircraft patrolling the southern no-fly zone were dropping a lot more bombs in the hope of provoking a reaction that would give the allies an excuse to carry out a full-scale bombing campaign, an air war, the first stage of the conflict." (Michael Smith, 'The real news in the Downing Street memos,' Los Angeles Times, June 23, 2005; <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-smith23jun23,0,1838831.story>)

Smith's conclusion: "The way in which the intelligence was 'fixed' to justify war is old news.

"The real news is the shady April 2002 deal to go to war, the cynical use of the UN to provide an excuse, and the secret, illegal air war without the backing of Congress." (Smith, *ibid*)

We could not agree more. In considering what follows, readers might like to keep Smith's comments in mind as we see how close the corporate media have come to communicating the "real news" of the leaked documents.

Managing To Miss The Point – The Media And The Memo

Writing in the Guardian, Sidney Blumenthal focused on the "old news", making no mention of the "real news" at all: "Every revelation of how 'the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy' for war, as in the Downing Street memo, shatters even Republicans' previously implacable faith." (Blumenthal, 'Blinded by the light at the end of the tunnel,' The Guardian, June 23, 2005)

Not a word about the Plan A/Plan B conspiracy to provoke a war that is

blindingly obvious in the leaked documents published by the Sunday Times.

Rupert Cornwell wrote in the Independent that the July 2002 memo indicated “the Bush administration had already made up its mind to invade Iraq, and that intelligence was being ‘fixed’ to fit that policy”. (Cornwell, ‘Bush policies blocked as US mood on Iraq sours,’ The Independent, June 17, 2005)

Again, not a word about the “real news” of Plan A/Plan B.

In the same paper one week earlier, Andrew Gumbel had described the memo as being “about an early decision having been taken to go to war and of the need for justification to be found for the Iraq invasion”. (Gumbel, ‘Americans turn against Bush and a war on Iraq that is getting nowhere,’ The Independent, June 9, 2005)

A justification is always needed for war – the point about Smith’s revelations is that they show that an *excuse* was being sought, not merely a justification. It was a conspiracy to *ensure* a war of aggression and conquest would be fought.

The Evening Standard wrote that the memo “showed the PM backed regime change in Iraq as early as July 2002”. (‘In the air,’ Evening Standard, May 4, 2005)

This was a tiny fraction of what the memo showed, and was not the “real news”, but it was all the Standard had to say.

According to the Express, the memo “revealed Mr Blair had already privately committed Britain to help America topple Saddam Hussein and was anxious to find ways of selling the war to the public and Parliament”. (‘PM hid truth on ousting Saddam,’ Express, May 2, 2005)

Again, the “old news”, this time combined with a distortion – the conspiracy was to provoke war, not just to sell it to the British people. The same paper added for ‘balance’: “But yesterday Mr Blair told BBC1’s Breakfast With Frost the decision had not been taken to attack Saddam Hussein by July 2002. He added: ‘The point is that after that meeting we decided to go back to the UN and give him a last chance.’” (ibid)

The Express journalists failed to mention the evidence staring them in the face: namely, that the memo itself reveals that Blair’s “last chance” was a fraud designed to “wrong foot” Saddam into rejecting the ultimatum and so trigger war.

The Financial Times wrote that the memo “revealed that eight months before the conflict, he [Blair] had discussed with colleagues possible invasion scenarios and how to justify military action”. (Christopher Adams and Ben Hall, ‘Labour

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targets key marginals,' Financial Times, May 2, 2005)

This is a staggering, lobotomised version from two journalists who, to be kind, had presumably not read the memo published the previous day in the Times.

In a separate article, one of the same authors wrote that the memo “suggested that he [Blair] was looking at ways to justify an invasion eight months before the conflict”. (Christopher Adams, ‘Blair defends decision for war with Iraq,’ Financial Times, May 2, 2005)

In the real world, Blair was looking at ways to provoke, not merely justify, an illegal war of aggression.

Remarkably, the FT article added that the memo “showed Mr Blair giving serious thought to strategy”: “‘If the political context were right, people would support regime change,’ the memo said. ‘The two key issues were whether the military plan worked and whether we had the political strategy to give the military plan the space to work.’” (ibid)

One could not possibly guess from this that Blair was in fact giving serious thought to manipulating inspections as part of a campaign of public deception in pursuit of war.

The Guardian wrote the day after Smith’s May 1 article that the memo showed “that, almost a year before the Iraq invasion, Tony Blair was privately preparing to commit Britain to war and topple Saddam Hussein, despite warnings from his closest advisers that it was unjustified”.

This was the old news. The article continued: “The documents show how Mr Blair was told how Britain and the US could ‘create the conditions’ for an invasion, partly, in the words of Jack Straw to ‘work up’ an ultimatum to Saddam even though in the foreign secretary’s own words, ‘the case was thin’.” (Richard Norton-Taylor and Patrick Wintour, ‘Election 2005: Papers reveal commitment to war,’ The Guardian, May 2, 2005)

The obfuscation, here, is intensified to the point of incomprehension. The authors could instead have explained that the ultimatum was intended to ensure rejection so that war could be launched with a figleaf of international support and legitimacy. They could have mentioned that Bush and Blair endlessly lied to the public that peace was the desired outcome when they were doing everything in their power to trigger war.

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Raymond Whitaker of the Independent on Sunday wrote that the contents of the memo “demonstrate that the Prime Minister had signed up for ‘regime change’ even earlier, when he met President George Bush at his Texas ranch the preceding April. Having promised British backing for war, the Government then set about seeking legal justification”. (Whitaker, ‘05.05.05 Election Special: Evidence reveals Blair’s true intention for war,’ Independent on Sunday, May 1, 2005)

What could be more innocent than that the government should “set about seeking legal justification” for war? In a sentence that surely had Orwell rolling in his grave, Whitaker wrote of the conspiracy to lure Iraq to war: “Mr Straw’s suggestion of an ultimatum on weapons inspections seemed to be the most promising way to allow Britain to join the US in its move towards war.”

This is truth stripped of all meaning so that the appalling revelations in the memo are completely obscured from view. Whitaker quoted from the memo: “‘The Prime Minister said that it would make a big difference politically and legally if Saddam refused to allow in the UN inspectors,’ the minutes recorded. ‘Regime change and WMD were linked in the sense that it was the regime that was producing the WMD ... If the political context were right, people would support regime change.’

“This marked the beginning of the Government’s campaign to find a legal basis for the war in the alleged threat from Iraq’s illegal weapons, marked by the notorious WMD dossier published two months later.” (ibid)

Again, not a word about “the cynical use of the UN to provide an excuse” for war described by Michael Smith.

According to the Sunday Telegraph, the memo “revealed that Mr Blair explicitly raised the possibility of ‘regime change’ as early as July 2002 – eight months before military action began – and discussed with senior ministers how to ‘create’ the conditions necessary to provide the legal justification for war”. (Melissa Kite and Sean Rayment, ‘If the political context is right, people will support “regime change”, said Blair,’ Sunday Telegraph, May 1, 2005)

Again, the real issue is buried out of sight.

Jonathan Freedland wrote in the Guardian at the end of June: “One [memo] shows that Britain and the US heavily increased bombing raids on Iraq in the summer of 2002 – when London and Washington were still insisting that war was

a last resort – even though the Foreign Office’s own lawyers had advised that such action was illegal. These ‘spikes of activity’ were aimed at provoking Saddam into action that might justify war.” (Freedland, ‘Yes, they did lie to us,’ The Guardian, June 22, 2005)

Freeeland here at least mentioned that increased bombing was intended to goad Saddam into providing an excuse for war. But he failed to mention that the bombing was merely Plan B alongside Plan A that involved provoking Saddam to reject inspectors, so also providing a trigger for war. Once again, the real issue somehow just managed to escape his focus.

Conclusion

Anyone who wonders how Bush and Blair, clearly major war criminals, are able to remain in power, need look no further than the mendacious record of corporate media performance above, which is all but uniform right across the media ‘spectrum’. Only Smith, writing in the Sunday Times, has managed to state honestly the significance of the documents leaked to him. Notice that this bizarre media response – we have coined the term Feigned Media Psychosis to describe the phenomenon – occurred despite the ready availability of the key documents under discussion in the Sunday Times and on the internet. Brazenly, in broad daylight, as it were, the media has stolen the truth out from under the public’s noses.

Critics might object that this is an anomaly, a freak of timing, that a generally honest media system felt the public had simply had enough of Iraq. Thus, the Guardian’s Jonathan Freedland acknowledges that the memo has been all but ignored but comments: “Journalists decided that voters were Iraq-ed out and so gave the memo much less coverage than it deserved.” (Freedland, ‘Yes, they did lie to us,’ The Guardian, June 22, 2005)

But it was not merely that journalists decided that the public were “Iraq-ed out”. In fact the corporate media have consistently distorted the truth in exactly this way for many years. Ahead of the 2003 war, journalists suppressed the truth of the genocidal impact of Western sanctions on Iraq. They suppressed the truth about the near-total disarming of Iraq by UN inspectors between 1991-98, and about the limited shelf lives of any retained WMD that would long since have become

“useless sludge”, according to UN inspectors.

Since March 2003, the same media have suppressed the truth of Blair’s mendacious “moral case for war” by hyping Saddam’s crimes over the last decade and by suppressing the true costs of the invasion for the people of Iraq – notably, by ignoring or dismissing the October 2004 Lancet report indicating that almost 100,000 Iraqi civilians had died since the invasion. They suppressed the truth about the alleged June 2004 “transfer of sovereignty” in Iraq, about the January 2005 “democratic elections”, about the alleged US “exit strategy”, and about the true importance of oil and strategic power in US designs for Iraq. Consistently, right across the board, corporate media reporting has reflected corporate and other establishment interests at the expense of the Iraqi people.

It is tempting to psychoanalyse mainstream journalists, to try and understand how highly educated professionals can behave as intellectual herd animals in this way. How can apparently civilised Western journalists so consistently subordinate the misery and despair of innocent Iraqis to the needs of power and profit? In his book, *The Corporation*, Canadian law professor Joel Bakan explains the bottom-line for corporate executives: “The law forbids any motivation for their actions, whether to assist workers, improve the environment, or help consumers save money. They can do these things with their own money, as private citizen. As corporate officials, however, stewards of other people’s money, they have no legal authority to pursue such goals as ends in themselves – only as means to serve the corporations own interests, which generally means to maximise the wealth of its shareholders.

Corporate social responsibility is thus illegal – at least when its genuine.” (Bakan, *The Corporation*, Constable, 2004, p.37)

Thus the hidden, enforced moral corruption of corporate employment: “The people who run corporations are, for the most part, good people, moral people. They are mothers and fathers, lovers and friends, and upstanding citizens in their communities, and they often have good and sometimes even idealistic intentions... [But] they must always put their corporation’s best interests first and not act out of concern for anyone or anything else (unless the expression of such concern can somehow be justified as advancing the corporation’s own interests).” (ibid, p.50)

In the corporate media, putting the corporation first means not alienating centres

of political and economic power that hold the keys to survival and success.

And so consider the words of Physician Mahammad J. Haded, director of an Iraqi refugee centre, who was in the besieged and bombarded Iraqi city of Fallujah during the US onslaught of November 2004. In February, Dr Haded spoke to the German magazine *Junge Welt*: “The city is today totally ruined. Falluja is our Dresden in Iraq... The population is full of rage. People hate the Americans – Americans generally, not only US soldiers. They are occupiers, killers and terrorists. Almost every family in Falluja has to mourn a victim; how you can expect any other reaction there?” (Rüdiger Göbel, ‘Falluja was “wiped out”’, *Junge Welt*, February 26, 2005)

Putting the corporation first means that this horror, and the criminality behind it, just cannot become real for the media. Instead, the BBC’s Middle East correspondent, Paul Wood, is able to say on the main TV news: “After everything that’s happened in Fallujah, the Americans aren’t going to find an *unambiguous* welcome. But Fallujah is more peaceful than it’s been in a long time. Its people like that.” (Wood, BBC 1, 18:00 News, June 22, 2005)

Eyebrows would perhaps have been raised if Wood had said the same of Kuwait and the Iraqi army in 1990. Or if he had said it of the Warsaw ghetto and the German army in 1943. Two days after these extraordinary words were spoken, six US marines were killed by a roadside bomb in Fallujah.

Ultimately, the crucial point is that, in the age of the ‘blogosphere’, there is simply no longer any need to indulge the mainstream media’s high-paid servility to power. Though they scoff at the notion, corporate journalists really *do* have the blood of hundreds of thousands of innocents on their hands. People who care about rational thought, who feel compassion for human suffering, will withdraw their support from the corporate media system. Readers will stop supporting it with their subscriptions, writers will stop supporting it with their words – and they will instead set about the vital work of building and supporting not-for-profit, internet-based media offering our only serious hope for compassionate change.

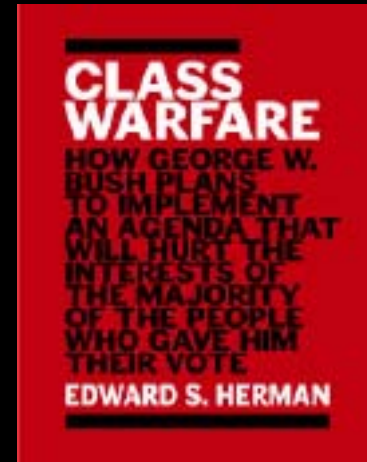
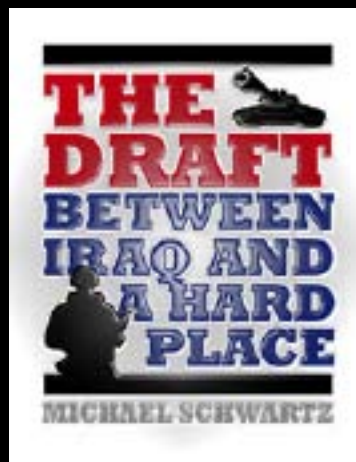
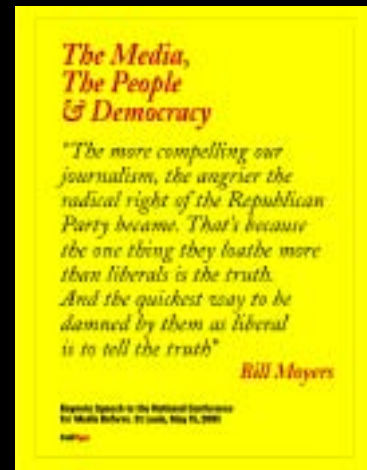
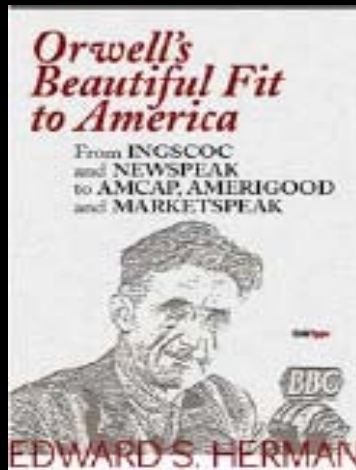
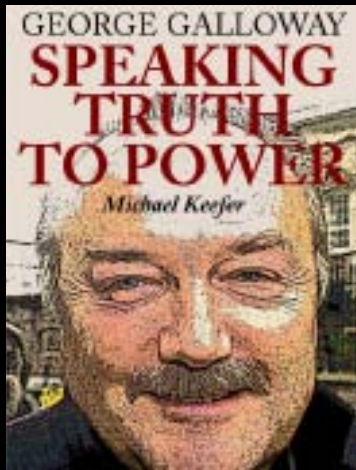
Why is it wrong for even well-meaning people to participate in fundamentally corrupt systems? Tolstoy explained: “It is harmful because enlightened, good and honest people, by entering the ranks of the government, give it a moral authority which but for them it would not possess. If the government were made up entirely

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of that coarse element – the violators, self-seekers, and flatterers – who form its core, it could not continue to exist. The fact that honest and enlightened people are found who participate in the affairs of the government gives it whatever it possesses of moral prestige.” (Tolstoy, ‘Letters to the liberals,’ Writings On Civil Disobedience and Non-Violence, New Society, 1987, p.192)

The same is true of the blood-soaked “moral prestige” of today’s corporate media.

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