

INSIDE: DOWNHILL FROM HERE ● SECRECY, LIES,
POWER & THE PENTAGON PAPERS ● THE LYING
GAME ● HISTORY OF A CAMPAIGN THAT FAILED

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THE WAR ON DISSIDENT

PATRICK ROBBINS, SHAMUS COOKE, DAVID SWANSON

The ^{ColdType} READER



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Cover: Detail of anti-G20 Pittsburgh poster (see Page 7): www.resistg20.org

Green action. Red tape. Black helmets

Patrick Robbins tells how environmental groups were harassed by the police and city at Pittsburgh's G20 summit

Months before any of the delegates from the G20 nations set foot in Pittsburgh for the global summit in the final week of September, a media campaign was launched in the Pittsburgh press to equate dissent with terrorism. The White House announced late last May that the summit, which brings together leaders from twenty nations to discuss global economic issues, would be held this year in Pittsburgh PA. Immediately after the announcement was made many local media outlets started stoking public fear, suggesting that Pittsburgh could become “another Seattle” (whether you greet that idea with fear or delight is, perhaps, a matter of personal disposition). The *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review* ran an article after speculative article about protester violence, featuring glossy color photos of fires set by activists at the last G20 summit in London, and implied that the protests would inevitably lead to violent riots.

This fear was used to justify a massive boost of security forces. Thousands of extra police were imported from around the nation, and military forces could be seen driving all over the city in camouflage convoys during the days of the summit. As these security forces began harassing various groups involved in planning protests, it became hard to conceive of the buildup

of forces and the subsequent harassment campaign as anything but a campaign designed to have a chilling effect on public dissent. The police were not alone in this campaign, for the city government itself threw hurdle after hurdle at groups trying to obtain permits for marches and other nonviolent actions in the months leading up to the G20.

A curious trend emerges from accounts of this intimidation campaign: the groups that bore the brunt of the harassment were either environmental activists or their supporters. When I told Pittsburgh ACLU lawyer Vic Walzcek I was working on an article about the targeting of environmental protesters, his immediate response was: “What environmental protesters? I didn’t see any!” He clarified: “There was a systematic effort by the city to intimidate and suppress any environmental voices at the G20, and ultimately that effort was very successful. It was a remarkable thing. Thanks to the city’s efforts, I hardly saw one environmental activist at the G20 protests. I grew up in Soviet Poland and what I saw in Pittsburgh was just as bad as anything I saw growing up.”

Permits denied

The first attack on environmentalists’ civil liberties was the denial of permits. Pittsburgh has a troubled history in this re-

“I grew up in Soviet Poland and what I saw in Pittsburgh was just as bad as anything I saw growing up”

on the morning of Sept 22, 3RCC organizers awoke to discover that their tents and educational materials had been taken. This was not the work of looters

spect, and the ACLU had already won a case against the city in 2003 for a city code law that violated the first amendment by giving local officials too much discretion in bestowing or denying permits. Legally, this meant the city of Pittsburgh was forbidden from making “content-based” judgments with respect to permits – if the city disagrees with your message, it’s still not allowed to deny you a permit on that basis.

The months leading up to the G20 saw a mad scramble to get permits. 3 River Climate Convergence (3RCC) was one of six groups that had been trying to get permits to use Point State Park during the G20.

According to Nadine Brnilovich, the Pittsburgh Police Department’s Coordinator for Special Events, the secret service hadn’t given the city clear parameters for the location of the summit, and the city could not reasonably issue permits without this information (the secret service issued a press release containing its plans for the summit on September 8, and in the subsequent court deposition it was revealed that the secret service never needed the park at all).

Then the police claimed that they would be using the park during that time for an annual gathering, but in mid-August, they decided they would only be using half of the park, so groups seeking to use the remaining area immediately sent in permit requests. Senator Jim Ferlo and the Steelworkers’ Union were given permission to use the park for an event on Wednesday and for “set-up time” on Tuesday, but when they heard that 3RCC, Code Pink and other groups were also seeking to use Point State Park from 7pm Sunday, Sept 20 to 7pm Tuesday, Sept 22, they agreed to share the space with the protesters. However, the city stonewalled their requests, so the six organizations couldn’t finalise their plans, which had a chilling effect. As 3RCC organizer David Meiran explained, “it’s difficult to ask a person or group to come across the country for a workshop or for a march if you can’t tell them what’s going on, if you

can’t even tell them where they’ll be staying.” Many big-name activists 3RCC had asked to join them were not able to attend as a result.

Finally the six organizations filed a lawsuit against the city on Sept 11. During the trial, city officials said the permits were denied because time was needed to prepare for Pittsburgh’s Great Race, which was scheduled for the Sunday. This, of course, made very little sense in light of the city’s grant of a permit to Ferlo and the Steelworkers for Wednesday, Sept 23. Then the city claimed the permit would interfere with breakdown time for the Junior Great Race, scheduled to end at 1 pm on the preceding Sunday. This claim was also shown to be false.

No overnight stay

After the permit case was settled in the favor of the plaintiffs, it was agreed that 3RCC would be allowed space to set up a sustainability camp (an educational camp showcasing environmentally friendly ways of living), but would not be allowed to stay in the camp overnight. When they tried to find out how this would work – would they have to break down their camp every night and set up again every morning? – the judge told them to work it out with the city. Director Mike Radley of the Parks Department sent the group an email telling them that their camp and materials could remain in place overnight, so long as no one was physically staying there after 11 pm.

The issue seemed to be settled: section 473.04 of Pittsburgh’s city code gives the Parks Department Director full authority to grant camping rights in the city parks. However, on the morning of Sept 22, 3RCC organizers awoke to discover that their tents and educational materials had been taken. This was not the work of looters: valuable and non-valuable material alike had been taken. While no one in the city government has claimed responsibility, a reliable source indicated that this was the doing of the Public Works department. As

of this writing, David Meiran is still working to retrieve the group's materials.

This theft followed an incident on Monday, Sept 21, when a bus that 3RCC had brought to the city to educate people about permaculture was prevented from joining the rest of the convergence. The block where the bus had been parked was surrounded by police and helicopters, and the owners of the bus were intimidated from leaving the block. So, by Tuesday, 3RCC had effectively had their bus, tents and materials all stolen or rendered useless.

The organizers tried to continue with their planned activities for the week, many of which were scheduled for Schenley Meadows, for which they had a legal permit from the city to use for workshops and discussions. On Sept 24, however, access to the Meadows was blocked off, and neither pedestrians nor organizers could gain access to their legally permitted organizing space (I explored the perimeter shortly before noon that day and could find no break whatsoever in the blockades). 3RCC had no choice but to cancel activities planned for the space.

Astonishing harassment

This was the second attack on environmentalists' civil liberties: a sustained campaign by the police to prevent activities from happening. But it wasn't just 3RCC that faced this kind of harassment. Their main logistical supporter was an organization called the Seeds of Peace Collective, a non-profit group that provides water and free food for activists and protesters. Seeds of Peace had coordinated with 3RCC beforehand to supply provisions during the G20, but when the Seeds of Peace bus came to town a few days before the march, the police began a harassment campaign so thorough, so constant and so astonishing that it is best conveyed in a timeline:

Friday morning, Sept 18: Seeds of Peace activists return to find two police officers inside the bus. Officers demand to see the

owner of the vehicle, which proves difficult, as Seeds of Peace is collectively run and the bus belongs to the organization as a whole.

Friday afternoon: Police say the bus is parked too far from the curb. Police tow the vehicle. The ACLU calls the department and are told that paying a \$220 fine will get the bus returned.

Friday evening: Seeds of Peace has been given permission to stay at a Sassafras Street property leased by local artist Bob Johnson and his friend John. Seeds shares the space with the Everybody's Kitchen bus, a similar organization that works with homeless populations.

Saturday: Three vans of riot police show up outside the property and attempt to discourage Johnson from allowing groups to stay. Police presence continues unabated over the weekend.

Sunday night: Bob Johnson returns home to find riot police 15 feet onto his property. The police demand to search his house for weapons. Johnson agrees to let them search the house, but not the buses, as they are not his property. His house is searched for an hour. Nothing is found.

2:00 am Monday: Seeds of Peace briefly leave compound. They are pulled over by the police and told they are suspected of loitering. They are detained for an hour.

Early Monday: The building inspector shows up on Johnson's property and says that without an occupancy permit he is going to fine Johnson \$1,000 a day to let Seeds of Peace stay. Johnson refuses to force them to leave. The owner of the property is then similarly threatened and tells Bob and John that either Seeds of Peace and Everybody's Kitchen leave or he'll revoke their lease. Johnson asks both groups to leave.

6:00 pm Monday: Seeds of Peace and Everybody's Kitchen load their buses and leave the Sassafras property. They have been told there is a school in Lancaster where they will be allowed to stay. Teams of ACLU legal observers are sent to accompany them. Within minutes the buses are

When the Seeds of Peace bus came to town a few days before the march, the police began a harassment campaign so thorough, so constant and so astonishing that it is best conveyed in a timeline

When it pulls over to let traffic pass, an officer tells the driver he is going to be ticketed for a parking violation. The driver points out that he isn't parking; the engine is still running. The officer orders the driver to turn off the engine. The bus is ticketed for a parking violation(!). More than 100 police officers are present

being followed by a large police van. The Everybody's Kitchen bus is allowed to pull onto the school property. When the Seeds of Peace bus attempts to do the same, police block the entrance and order the bus to park on the street. When it pulls over to let traffic pass, an officer tells the driver he is going to be ticketed for a parking violation. The driver points out that he isn't parking; the engine is still running. The officer orders the driver to turn off the engine. The bus is ticketed for a parking violation(!). More than 100 police officers are present.

Monday night: Police claim the Seeds of Peace bus is illegally transporting goods. They bring in a commercial inspection unit and go through the huge codebook, looking for something with which to charge them. Finally they give Seeds of Peace a ticket for driving a commercial vehicle without a passenger endorsement on the driver's license, although the bus is not a commercial vehicle. The police tell Seeds of Peace that they have to have a driver with an endorsement to pull the bus into the school by daybreak or they will impound the bus. A local bus driver is found with a passenger endorsement on his license, and he drives the bus onto the school property.

2:00 am Tuesday: The owner of the school tells Seeds the police harassment is too much for him to deal with, and that asks them to leave. Seeds of Peace negotiates to stay until noon.

10:00 am Tuesday: The ACLU files an injunction to make the police stop harassing Seeds of Peace.

Tuesday morning: Seeds drives their bus to a local church in Lancaster. The police tell them that this is private property, but the church pastor tells them the bus has his permission to stay on church property. The police attempt to convince him that Seeds of Peace are dangerous and that he shouldn't let them stay there. When this doesn't work, the police tell him that they are going to claim Eminent Domain to make him get rid of the protesters. The pastor laughs. Finally the police go away.

1:00 pm Tuesday: The ACLU injunction is denied by U.S. District Judge Gary Lancaster, the same judge who ruled against allowing 3RCC to camp overnight in the park. He claims that he "doesn't want to tie the hands of the police during the G20."

Centralized campaign

There is much that is troubling about the case of 3RCC and the Seeds of Peace Collective. For one thing, the number of different city agencies that were at the very least complicit in this attack on environmental protesters – police department, parks department, bureau of building inspection – makes it likely that this campaign came from a centralized power higher than any of these individual departments (the Pittsburgh Mayor's office could not be reached for comment). For another, while this attack on environmentalists and on civil liberties was appalling by itself, it also seems completely disproportionate. What's so threatening about a bunch of peaceful environmentalists who are trying to alert people to the threat that our current energy framework poses to the health and well-being of the earth?

"In a word, coal." 3RCC organizer Lisa Stolarski and I were seated on the lawn outside the climate camp, watching student activists trickle over from campus. It was noon on Sept 24. Lisa had been scrambling all morning to adapt 3RCC's plans to ever-changing conditions, but still found an hour to talk with me. She told me no one in the city's political establishment wants to hear that coal is a problem. Pittsburgh's links to the coal industry in Appalachia are deep, intricate, and very old. Most of the city's eight Fortune 500 companies for 2009, including US Steel, PNC Financial Services, Allegheny Technologies and Consol Energy, are directly tied to or invested in Appalachian coal, and the electricity grid in Pittsburgh is overwhelmingly dependent on coal-fired power plants. One of the biggest donors to Mayor Luke Ravenstahl's election fund was Chicago De-



Out of the mouths of babes and their mothers: A poster from the Pittsburgh protests. (www.resistg20.org)

veloper Steven Beemsterboer, who runs a slag and metallurgical coal company. And if you need any more concrete proof of the coal industry's influence in Pittsburgh, check out the stadium next time you're at a Penguins game: the Pittsburgh Penguins' shiny new Hockey arena, named the *Consol Energy Center*, is set to open its doors next year.

Destroying mountains

These same coal interests are destroying Appalachia. I do not mean that metaphorically — 470 mountains in West Virginia have already been blown up to accommodate mining interests. The practices of mountaintop removal mining and longwall mining leave horrifyingly unsafe amounts of pollution in surrounding communities, displace native species and create billions of

dollars worth of damages to local towns.

Both 3RCC and Seeds of Peace have been extremely active in the struggle against this destruction, so perhaps it shouldn't be surprising that these were the organizations that faced the worst harassment during the G20.

I'm not suggesting that there was a conspiracy to silence environmentalists. The truth is both less interesting and much scarier: when everyone's political and economic interests are the same, a conspiracy is unnecessary. Individual interests accomplish the silencing of dissent far more effectively than any conspiracy could hope. **CT**

Patrick Robbins is a journalist, researcher and jack-of-all trades with an interest in politics and the environment. He lives and works in New York City.

The practices of mountaintop removal mining and longwall mining leave horrifyingly unsafe amounts of pollution in surrounding communities, displace native species and create billions of dollars worth of damages to local towns

Moving closer to a police state

Shamus Cooke explains how overzealous state action and the use of the Patriot Act are killing freedom of speech in the United States

The G-20 police presence is not a terrible surprise to anyone who has attended a legitimate, community-organized protest over the years. Non-provoked usage of brutal weaponry is becoming commonplace

When word first arrived that the G-20 would be meeting in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, activists started to gear up to organize protest demonstrations. Events like this are what freedom of speech is made for. What better occasion to protest than a meeting of the world's 20 top leaders where they will be imposing policy on billions of people worldwide?

The majority of protesters consisted of labor and community groups; they encountered an army of police ... literally. The *New York Times* paints an intimidating picture:

"...the police were out in force, patrolling on bicycles, foot and horseback, by river and by air ... protesters trying to march toward the convention center ... encountered roaming squads of police officers carrying plastic shields and batons. The police fired a sound cannon (a new weapon) that emitted shrill beeps ... then threw tear gas canisters that released clouds of white smoke and stun grenades that exploded with sharp flashes of light." Rubber bullets were used in a separate incident.

And:

"Riot fences lined the sidewalks. Police helicopters, gunboats and Humvees darted to and fro. City officials announced they had up to 1,000 jail cells ready after county officials freed up additional space last week

by releasing 300 people who had been arrested on minor probation violations." (September 25, 2009).

What threat required such a military-like response? None was given. The *New York Times* article and many like it imply that the mere existence of marching protesters warrants a colossal reaction. Of course the presence of "anarchists" is used to further scare readers into accepting such foolishness, as if this breed of protester is especially lethal (the vast majority of anarchists are like all protesters – they do not attack the police or anybody else, though some protesters respond aggressively when being confronted with the above mentioned police weapons).

The G-20 police presence is not a terrible surprise to anyone who has attended a legitimate, community-organized protest over the years. Non-provoked usage of brutal weaponry is becoming commonplace; the police-enforced use of "free speech zones" at protests – small areas surrounded by fences in some cases – is nothing new.

Raised stakes

But the staggering police presence at the G-20 confirms that the stakes have been raised. Two turning points that deserve special attention – since the mainstream media continues to ignore them – are last year's Democratic and Republican Nation-

al Conventions. In both cases incredible abuses of police powers were witnessed, with the Republican Convention (RNC) showcasing the most extreme cases of state repression.

At the RNC the unlawful tactic of mass arrests were used when, in separate incidents, a public park and bridge were surrounded by police, trapping everyone in the dragnet. The documentary, “Terrorizing Dissent”, has excellent footage of both episodes; Police brutality was also a regular occurrence at the RNC – including much unnecessary usage of pepper spray and tasers – while occurring alongside an even more troubling episode.

The group now referred to as the RNC 8 consists of eight community organizers potentially facing years in jail for helping organize protests at the RNC. The original charge was the Orwellian Conspiracy to Riot in the second degree in Furtherance of Terrorism (other terrorism-related charges were later added). These terrorism charges were the first ever usage of the Patriot Act toward political activists. And although the terrorism provisions of the charges have since been dropped, due to public pressure, the attempt to equate terrorism with activism has incredible, non-accidental implications for the future.

When the Patriot Act was first enacted, there was no shortage of writers and activists warning about the potential of misuse. These predictions have been fully confirmed. Both the Military Commissions Act and the Patriot Act have created what many believe to be the framework for a full-fledge police state, with the initial flurry of abuses creating a series of dangerous precedents.

One famous precedent is the so-called Telecom scandal, where tele-communication corporations colluded with the Bush-controlled National Security Agency to illegally spy on an unknown number of innocent people. No one has gone to jail for this. Indeed, as a Senator, Obama was one of many Democrats who supported Bush’s

telecom immunity bill, which excuses those who broke the law while creating new powers to make spying on Americans legal.

Equally outrageous is the Military Commissions Act, created under Bush to destroy a fundamental democratic right: habeas corpus, or due process. This right says that the government cannot jail a person unless there is proof of crimes committed, while also giving that person a chance to challenge these charges in a legal court with a jury.

Bush created a separate category of person called an “enemy combatant,” which he claimed was too dangerous to be treated constitutionally. An “enemy combatant” can be tried in a military court with secret or no evidence; or they can be jailed forever without even the symbolic military trial. Of course, it is only a hop and a skip away for political activists charged with terrorist crimes to be considered “enemy combatants” or “domestic terrorists.”

Obama continues policy

Obama continues to uphold Bush’s destruction of due process. Obama has said publicly that many so-called enemy combatants held at Guantanamo Bay will be held “indefinitely” without being tried for their alleged crimes. Supposedly, they are “the worst of the worst.” If this is true then evidence should be produced to prove it, since anyone can accuse anybody of the most heinous crimes. Without evidence, however, such accusations correctly fall on deaf ears. But no more. Now, accusations of “terrorist activities” warrant life sentences. No crime need be committed, only a vague intention – even if such intentions were formed by the suggestions of an FBI informant and are impossible to implement. The media blares these absurd “terrorist plots” as facts, and the rationale behind the destruction of civil liberties is re-enforced.

It must not be forgotten that many of the “crimes” Guantanamo Bay inmates are being accused of are merely acts of resistance to the military occupations of Iraq

When the Patriot Act was first enacted, there was no shortage of writers and activists warning about the potential of misuse. These predictions have been fully confirmed

US corporate executives also understood that China became a police state out of necessity, so that its dollar-a-day workers could be brought into line. The trend of US workers' wages leads logically to similar conclusions

and Afghanistan, something they have every right to do.

The grossly illegal Guantanamo Bay is not being closed down like Obama promised, but moved. The equally illegal Bagram air base in Afghanistan is getting an upgrade, this according to London's *Independent* newspaper: "The air base is about to undergo a \$60million (£42m) expansion that will double its size, meaning it can house five times as many prisoners as remain at Guantanamo." (February 22, 2009).

Not only will Bagram continue to be an institution of terror, but also some analysts estimate that there remain 18,000 people held worldwide in foreign US facilities – so-called black sites – with no legal rights. The absence of even Red Cross observation at these prisons insures that "harsh interrogations" (torture) will remain a regular habit.

The above abuses of the Patriot Act have trickled down from high-profile terrorism cases (some who have made confessions under torture), to regular usage against al-

leged gang members, drug dealers and immigrants.

For example, one section of the Patriot Act gives police the power to search people's home secretly without notifying the homeowner – called "sneak and peeks," a blatant violation of the Fourth Amendment. The logic again was that "special powers" were needed to track down "terrorists." The *Huffington Post* reported, "Only three of the 763 "sneak-and-peek" requests in fiscal year 2008 involved terrorism cases... Sixty-five percent were drug cases." (September 23, 2009).

The illegal entry and searching of immigrant's homes – or anyone suspected of being an immigrant – is widely known by the Latino community and continues to include the terror-inducing tactics of pre-dawn raids with guns drawn.

Once anti-constitutional behavior is applied to alleged terrorists, and extended to immigrants and people suspected of being gang members or drug dealers, such police behavior becomes normalized, and can then be easily expanded to all people accused of

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being “criminals.” Police are widely known to consider political activists, protesters, and striking workers as criminal types, beliefs encouraged by the mainstream media.

Which brings us to why? Why does the destruction of democratic rights that accelerated under Bush continue with Obama? With every political “why” question one must first answer: who benefits?

Corporate benefit

In this case the benefiting parties are the giant corporations that dominate politics in the US. The people steering these companies had good foresight: they saw that the global capitalist economy necessitated a race to the bottom for workers’ living standards.

As US corporations faced stiffer competition abroad for international markets, wages and benefits for US workers would have to shrink, especially when US corporations were investing heavily in emerging economies – China, India, etc. – for their slave wages. US corporate executives also understood that China became a police state out of necessity, so that its dollar-a-day workers could be brought into line (US corporate investment rose sharply after the Tiananmen Square massacre). The trend of US workers’ wages leads logically to similar conclusions.

The creation of NAFTA to extend the dominance of US corporations to Mexico and Canada would also have predictably negative effects on workers’ living standards. Now, with two unpopular wars tak-

ing place and a third on the way (Pakistan) to further extend the profit margins of US corporations, a breaking point is nearing.

Public money is being used to bail out banks and wage foreign wars while the recession continues to destroy jobs and drive down wages. This unpopular policy is viewed as a necessity for US corporations, and Obama has no intention of reversing course. The police-state foundation created by Bush and continued under Obama is a stern warning to the US working class to accept our fate or face dire consequences. It is already a fact that many people are too afraid of police repression to attend a protest, just as some workers are too afraid to be on a picket line during a strike.

Ultimately, a real democracy cannot function where there exists tremendous inequalities in wealth, where large sections of the population are in poverty. This is why democracies are not viable in poor countries: the super-rich use their power over the state – including dictatorships and mass repression – to crush social movements that challenge the status quo, as we are witnessing today in Honduras. The same dynamic is being created in the United States, where the vast majority of people are clamoring for real change, while those in the two-party system are using all means available to keep their rotten system in place.

CT

Shamus Cooke is a social service worker, trade unionist, and writer for Workers Action (www.workerscompass.org).

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Arrested for speaking

David Swanson is detained outside the White House. His crime? Exercising freedom of speech in a group of more than 25 people

there was an incredibly noisy truck behind us that had chosen this moment to clean Pennsylvania Avenue with pressurized hoses

U.S. Park Policeman (USPP) who shall remain nameless on Monday, October 5, 2009: Next!

Me: Is that me?

USPP: Whoever. I'm flexible. I'm agreeable. I'm just here to please.

Me: Except for the whole arresting us part, huh? [climbing out of a cramped metal van where I'd been stuck with a dozen other men, our hands cuffed behind our backs so tightly they left marks and my friend's hands went numb]

USPP: What? I thought that was the whole point. You wanted to get arrested.

Me: No, we didn't want to get arrested. We wanted to engage in free speech.

USPP: Oh, I'm not going to get into that. Step over here. [He asks me my name and address.] Charlottesville? It's beautiful down there. Why would you want to come here and do this? [cutting himself off quickly] I mean I know why, you don't need to tell me.

But of course I did need to tell him. He just didn't want to know.

Earlier that day in front of the White House:

Another police officer (APO): You all will have to move off the sidewalk into the street.

Me: Are you sure the First Amendment says that?

APO: Oh you want to play that game? We can shut the whole area down if you want to play that game.

Me: I didn't say anything about a game.

The president was holding a press conference inside the White House fence with a bunch of doctors who oppose serious healthcare reform. Donna Smith, star of Michael Moore's "Sicko", was standing next to me and telling me that every patient who had appeared in that movie had determined that the healthcare bills now under consideration in Washington would not have done anything to help them and won't now.

Hundreds of peace activists made their way to the White House sidewalk. We joined with some doctors and nurses who were not permitted to take part in the events inside because they support single-payer healthcare. We shouted "Healthcare Not Warfare." We shouted "Troops Home Now. End Warfare." We shouted "Single Payer Now. End Warfare." We made a lot of noise, but we were in the street rather than on the forbidden sidewalk. And there was an incredibly noisy truck behind us that had chosen this moment to clean Pennsylvania Avenue with pressurized hoses.

We moved down the street and the truck came too. But we made a lot more noise. Prisoners in orange from Witness

Against Torture chained themselves to the White House fence. So did Cindy Sheehan whose son died in Iraq. Veterans for Peace displayed US, Afghan, and Iraqi coffins and read the names of the dead and shouted: "Mourn the dead! Heal the wounded! End the wars!"

The National Campaign for Nonviolent Resistance, the World Can't Wait, and lots of other groups joined in. Many of us donned black shirts, white placards with the names of dead troops or civilians, and white masks: the March of the Dead. We marched on the sidewalk in front of the White House in silence.

Then the police horses came at us. The police tried to drive us into the street with their horses, but we lay down on the sidewalk, and they didn't trample us. Instead they put police tape around a huge area, moved everyone else out of it, gave three warnings, and began arresting people. We lay on the sidewalk for approximately two hours, rode with lights and sirens blaring in an escorted caravan of vans and buses to the jail, and were out within an hour with tickets to pay \$100 fines or challenge in court.

The crime? Exercising free speech in a group of more than 25 people. Seriously. We're charged with failing to obey a lawful order. And the order was to move far-

ther away from the White House because with more than 25 people you have to have a special permit in order to exercise free speech. At least 50 of us, maybe closer to 100, went to jail, while many more chose to comply with the lawful (if unconstitutional) order.

And what did the Park Police SWAT team do? Nothing but follow orders. They followed orders to the exclusion of all thought. They asked us not to encourage them to think. They didn't want to think about freedom of speech. They didn't want to think about arresting nonviolent people for peacefully demanding peace. They didn't want to think about whether protesting illegal wars actually constitutes something closer to law enforcement than what they themselves were engaged in. And they certainly didn't want to think about the men and women and children in Iraq and Afghanistan and Pakistan who will die because the US Park Police arrested peaceful people assembling and speaking, rather than arresting war criminals like Richard Cheney who confess to felonies on television and lives right across the river. **CT**

David Swanson is the author of the new book "Daybreak: Undoing the Imperial Presidency and Forming a More Perfect Union" by Seven Stories Press.

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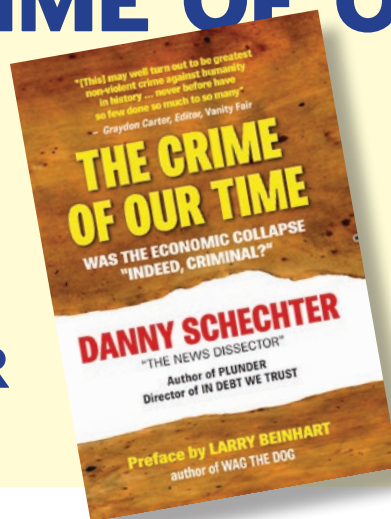
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Downhill from here

Ian Jack looks back at the 1970s and recalls a different time than does the author of a new book he's been reading

In 1970 it would have been hard to look back and stick a persuasive label on Britain in the 1930s, though adjectives such as 'hungry' and 'anxious' made excursions in book titles

The fashion is relatively recent for slicing up history into ten-year periods, each of them crudely flavoured and differently coloured, like a tube of wine gums. Growing up in Britain in the 1950s I never heard the past, however recent, specified by decade. There was 'the war' and 'before the war', and sometimes, when my parents were burrowing into their childhoods, 'before the first war'. The 20th century lay stacked in broad layers of time: dark moorland where glistened an occasional white milestone marked with a year and an event. Sometimes the events were large and public. The General Strike happened in 1926 and Germany invaded Poland in 1939. But often they were small and private. In my own family, 1944 wasn't remembered for D-Day but as 'the summer we went along the Roman Wall on the tandem'.

When did 'decade-ism' – history as wine gums – start? The first decades that took a retrospective grip on the popular imagination were the 1890s and the 1920s. It may not be a coincidence that both have been characterised as fun-loving eras that chucked out staid manners and stale customs, whose social revolutionaries were libertines (Mae West) and gangsters (James Cagney). Perhaps more than any other agency, it was Hollywood that defined those decades for people too young to

WHEN THE LIGHTS WENT OUT: BRITAIN IN THE SEVENTIES

Andy Beckett

Faber & Faber £20

know them. The American experience became the way the 1920s were remembered, even though only a tiny proportion of the world's population in 1925 drank hard liquor out of teapots in speakeasies; or danced – danced, danced, danced! – often in a cloche hat and with a long cigarette-holder pointed riskily at their partner's crotch. It took thirty years for the 1890s to become established as 'naughty' or 'gay' – Mae West's Belle of the Nineties came out in 1934 – but the 1920s were quicker off the mark. The Roaring Twenties, with James Cagney as its star, branded the decade only nine years after it ended. The Wall Street Crash and the ending of Prohibition, by utterly changing American life, had quickly sealed off the 1920s as history.

Subsequent decades didn't easily offer themselves for styling. In 1970 it would have been hard to look back and stick a persuasive label on Britain in the 1930s, though adjectives such as 'hungry' and 'anxious' made excursions in book titles. The 1940s were entirely blotted out by 'the war', while the 1950s had still to become the caricature of pipe-smoking dads and

orderly (or repressed) family life that now brings the shout, 'Oh, just like the 1950s!' from visitors to such English seaside resorts as Southwold and Frinton. A few years later, however, we could look into the rear-view mirror and see the 1960s, the Swinging Sixties, unquestionably the most famous ten-year stretch of world history. Yet the 1960s didn't happen everywhere at the same time or to every generation: I'd never come across a recreational drug, for example, before I left Glasgow for London in 1970, and I'm sure my dear parents never came across any at all. But, all in all, the notion is hard to contest that the 1960s was a transformative decade for most people in the Western world who lived through it. This made it majestic in retrospect and set loose a popular, attractive way of looking at the recent past. If the 1960s had a definable character, why couldn't the 1970s, the 1980s and the 1990s? These were paler and weaker wine gums to be sure, but television producers in early middle age did their best with shows in which minor celebrities recalled with well-briefed spontaneity their favourite moments on Top of the Pops or the first time they ate in an Angus Steak House and enjoyed a slice of Black Forest Gâteau.

Austere picture

Of these recent decades, the 1970s is the most reviled. I once had a colleague who'd been a little girl in the 1970s, and not a particularly poor one, yet she would shudder and say: 'Oh, it was like Eastern Europe then, all stews and root vegetables and wet holidays in caravans.' Her austere picture didn't fit with my own memories, which are of myself becoming richer, but it remains a popular view: Britain before the fun got going. As Andy Beckett writes in his introduction, the statement 'Above all, we don't want to go back to the 1970s' has been a relentless theme in British political life almost since the day the decade ended. They are the bogeyman years, regularly invoked by politicians of all parties as the na-

dir of postwar Britain. Conservative party leader David Cameron (though it could just as easily have been Gordon Brown) read out the charge sheet at a Demos meeting in 2006: 'economic decline . . . inflation, stagnation and rising unemployment . . . deteriorating industrial relations'. Nearly 30 million working days were lost to strikes in 1979, mainly during the Winter of Discontent – more than in any other year. We know what happens next in the script. The country rejects the worn-out panaceas of the Labour administration and elects Margaret Thatcher, and she, with what Cameron calls 'huge courage and perseverance', sets Britain on a dynamic new course towards its now tremulous destiny as financial capitalism's leading counting house.

Thatcher is the phoenix; the 1970s, the ashes. Beckett's method is to rake through these ashes, usually by revisiting – quite literally, as in 'travelling to see them' – the people and places that affected the course of the decade. The author turned ten in 1979. Some of what he discovers will come as no surprise to readers who lived through those years as half-awake adults: that, for example, environmentalism, feminism, gay rights and Rock Against Racism were for many people more important as politics than the parties led by Wilson and Callaghan, Heath and Thatcher. Sometimes he tells us just a little too much about the journey, how cloudy it was or how sunny, which mode of transport he used, what magazines he bought in W.H. Smith. But the point is well made when he writes:

"British politics in the 1970s, for all the Gothic prose it usually prompts, was about moments of possibility as well as periods of entropy; about stretches of calm as well as sudden calamity. Politics was rawer and more honest – in the sense that conflicts between interests and ideologies were out in the open – than perhaps we are used to nowadays. It was also more obviously connected to everyday life – not just through the much higher turnouts at general elections, but through the disruptions wrought

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ANOTHER COUNTRY

Even during what Beckett calls 'sudden calamity' – the gravest economic crisis since the Second World War – the country by recent swine-flu standards stayed remarkably calm

by strikes and other shocks, by voters' living-room lights suddenly going out."

I back him particularly on the 'stretches of calm'. Up against coal shortages and surging oil prices, caused respectively by a miners' overtime ban and the Yom Kippur war, [Prime Minister] Ted Heath announced 'emergency measures' in a special broadcast to the nation on 13 December 1973. The result during the first two months of 1974 was a three-day working week and an organised programme of power cuts, from which Beckett takes his title. I worked on a newspaper then, but my memory of the three-day week has been reduced to two scenes. I remember sitting in my car and seeing London's Tottenham Court Road suddenly plunge into darkness. I remember going with a photographer to find somebody – anybody – who was working in picturesque candlelight. Compared with my copious recollection of other and much less significant moments – the blazing summer of 1976, say – this is poor stuff, and not easily explained until you take into account the social atmosphere of the time.

Even during what Beckett calls 'sudden calamity' – the gravest economic crisis since the Second World War – the country, by recent swine-flu standards, stayed remarkably calm. There were some alarms and amusing excursions: Patrick Jenkin, the energy minister, advised people to save electricity by cleaning their teeth in the dark (and then newspapers printed pictures of Jenkin's own house ablaze with light). But the winter was mild and people coped. Output per labour hour actually increased. Workers worked harder over shorter weeks and then went home to trim the wicks of antique oil lamps and pay more attention to their children and gardens. The three television channels closed down early at 10.30 p.m., streetlights were dimmed, offices cooled their heating to 65°F; but the world did not collapse. Trade at fishing-tackle shops and golf courses boomed. The emergency, in Beckett's words, became 'a

sort of extended national holiday'. In 1974, after all, most people over forty could remember the blackout and much greater sacrifices made in 'the national interest' – a public memory which fed into Heath's calculations when he decided to face down the miners with his Churchillian appeal on television. Reading the speech now, I can see Heath's uncomfortable frame – Beckett tells us that an underactive thyroid made him plump and sluggish – filling the television screen: 'We must close our ranks so that we can deal together with the difficulties which come to us, whether from within [miners] or from beyond our own shores [sheikhs]. That has been our way in the past, and it is a good way.'

Battling communism

Heath, Beckett says, was convinced he was battling with the NUM's Communist wing, but 'difficulties' was the nearest he came to his successor's 'enemy within'. And of course he lost. The miners escalated their overtime ban to an all-out strike, Heath called an election that posed the question 'Who governs Britain?', and the electorate by a very small majority decided that the answer wasn't Heath. The miners, meanwhile, got most of the 31 per cent pay rise they wanted through the intervention of one of those benign 'conciliation and arbitration' bodies, in this case the Pay Board, which were then such a feature of industrial life. Another strike two years earlier had ended when another intervention (this time by the specially summoned Wilberforce Inquiry) awarded the miners 20 per cent. That strike had featured the famous 'Battle of Saltley Gate', when pickets fought a long struggle with police to prevent lorries collecting coke from the Saltley depot in the West Midlands. The police had neither riot shields nor truncheons ('We'd have been bloody bollocked if we'd used truncheons,' a retired policeman tells Beckett) and relied for crowd control on pushing and shoving. Sheer weight of numbers eventually beat

them; pickets, including Arthur Scargill, had travelled long distances. Heath's government was humiliated and inside the Tory Party the scar lasted for years. Beckett quotes Thatcher from her memoirs: 'For me what happened at Saltley took on no less significance than it did for the left.'

So there she was like Mrs Tam O'Shanter, nursing her wrath to keep it warm, while trade unions went on increasing their membership, and organised labour (what a historic phrase that now seems, like the 'Poor Law') grew from strength to strength. In 1968, 43 per cent of the British workforce belonged to a union. In 1978, the figure was 54 per cent (halved to 27.4 per cent by 2008). It made sense to join one. Power within unions had migrated down the hierarchy to the shop floor – the number of shop stewards quadrupled – and the simple mechanism of industrial action not only brought material rewards, but also a kind of spiritual uplift. Raphael Samuel, quoted by Beckett, thought that 'strikes, for those who took part in them, took on something of the character of [religious] Revivals . . . an occasion for mass conversion, a time when all things are made anew.' Little of Samuel's appealing notion applied to my own industry, newspapers, where workers in the press room would walk out for an increased bonus and walk back in again when they got it, which they usually did; bonuses cost less than the revenue lost when an edition failed to make the streets. Nobody imagined this was 'responsible' or 'reasonable' trade unionism – adjectives that all politicians stressed – any more than most of us understood the fear that partly explained the miners' militancy: that their time was running out (in 1971 oil replaced coal as Britain's chief energy source).

Trade unions became an immovable fact of everyday life; they were, as Beckett writes, at their zenith. From friends on unsympathetic newspapers I learned the term of art for the front-page formula that ran a big headline next to a mugshot ('The man who is stopping your trains to-

night!'). They called it the 'crucifixion lay-out'. It implied that strikes were caused by some ranting Messiah leading 'reasonable' workers astray, rather than (as was usually the case) the same reasonable workers taking a self-interested decision to maximise their wages. It became obvious, however, that governments needed the assent of trade unions to succeed. Together with capital and government, they made up the wobbly three-legged throne on which Heath sat. Later, three legs became two when Harold Wilson and the trade unions' grandest grandee, Jack Jones, reached the agreement known as the Social Contract, whereby workers agreed to moderate their wage demands so that the two-figure inflation rates could be beaten. Opinion polls decided Jones was the most powerful man in Britain. 'Vote Jack Jones, cut out the middle man,' the election graffiti said. Conflicts resolved over 'beer and sandwiches' at Downing Street became one of the clichés of the era, though Jones is said to have preferred gougons of sole. The right depicted the arrangement as trade unionists 'holding the country to ransom', while some on the left attacked it as a sell-out. In the view of the NUM leader, Joe Gormley: 'Our role in society is to look after our members, not run the country.'

Kowtowing to workers

It seems inconceivable now that British governments would kowtow to, or at least try to persuade and seduce, organisations of workers rather than bankers and financiers ('Vote Barclays, cut out the middle man'). But the economy was different then. Most of the heavy industry and infrastructure were publicly owned. British power stations and steel plants burned British coal. British-owned factories still made ships, cars and lorries, railway locomotives and textiles. We smoked British brands of cigarettes, drank our own Watneys, ate our own sweets. Not all of these products were flawless and often the quantities they were made in were diminishing, but they

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ANOTHER COUNTRY

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moored Britain to ways of thinking and living that were all its own. On the day Britain joined the EEC in 1973, the Daily Mirror published a survey into British attitudes towards the social changes that membership might bring. Only 18 per cent of those polled favoured all-day pub opening, only 23 per cent regular wine with meals, only 13 per cent continental breakfasts over bacon and eggs, only 5 per cent Sunday shopping. This might suggest a reasonably happy – if high-fat – contentment with the way things were. In fact, a low-energy fatalism had overcome large parts of an elite that once believed change, particularly economic change, to be both essential and possible. As Beckett notes, the idea of 'declinism' had nagged away in political conversation ever since anyone could remember; economic decline had been a fear even when Britain was at its most imperial. Between 1950 and 1970, when Britain's share of the world's manufactured exports shrank from about a quarter to about a tenth, it turned from a worrying prospect into an apparently unstoppable reality. Failing manufacturing industries were kept alive by state subsidy. Sterling crises were never far away. There was inflation on the one hand and unemployment on the other, see-sawing problems that were difficult to tackle together (if one went down, the other went up). The problem was, the people didn't understand. Beckett quotes a conversation, recorded in a diary, between two senior civil servants in 1975. The first asks the second how he is, and the second replies: 'Like everyone else, waiting for the collapse.' James Callaghan, then foreign secretary, wrote in his memoirs: 'Our place in the world is shrinking; our economic comparisons grow worse . . . Sometimes when I go to bed at night I think that if I were a young man I would emigrate.'

It was around that time that pessimism became a general condition, though the middle classes felt it most keenly. Inflation ate into savings, share dividends dwindled, a three-year slump in property prices, from

1974 to 1976, devalued homes. During the mid-1970s, according to Beckett, declinism truly began to pervade the national consciousness. It filled doomy books . . . It became a melodramatic staple for newspapers, magazines and television programmes. It darkened the work of artists, novelists, dramatists, film-makers and pop musicians. It soured foreign commentary on Britain . . . And it shifted in tone; from the anxious to the apocalyptic.

Drink got him through the day

In John Fowles's novel *Daniel Martin*, published in 1977, the expatriate narrator says of his homeland: 'England is already a thing in a museum, a dying animal in a zoo.' Beckett pulls many other examples (Lessing, Drabble, Spark) from what he calls the 'crisis fiction' of the time, but crisis seems too noisy a word. What I remember is the kind of hush that comes down in a fog. We ambled onwards. Politicians became blurred silhouettes in the distance. Returned to office in 1974, Harold Wilson was one of the weariest prime ministers in history, his 'clever eyes' fixed from the start on early retirement rather than any vision of national salvation. In conversations with Wilson's former colleagues, Beckett finds near universal contempt. Denis Healey says: 'He was a terrible prime minister, actually.' Gavyn Davies, then a Downing Street adviser, remembers him as bored and 'slightly an absentee prime minister'. Drink got him through the day: 'Brandy from midday till late evening, when he is slow and very slurred,' according to the diary of Bernard Donoghue, one of his kitchen cabinet. Like Heath, Wilson was ill – 'run-down', as people used to say. Persistent colds, stomach pains, a racing heart, moments of forgetfulness and bewilderment: all of these attended cabinet meetings along with the scent of Courvoisier and cigars, and may well have been early warnings for the Alzheimer's and bowel cancer that were diagnosed a few years after he quit.

One of Beckett's best discoveries is Dr

Richard Stone, whose father, Joe Stone, had been Wilson's GP since the 1940s – a job that the junior Stone took over for the last 12 years of Wilson's life. 'Harold had been the master of the detail, and then he didn't have the detail,' Richard Stone told Beckett. 'Heavy drinking cuts off one layer of your thinking. You lose sharpness, facts, precision. And it's the sign of someone who's burning out. In the 1970s, Harold knew it was downhill from here.' Joe Stone became one of Wilson's closest friends, and the prime minister would often be driven in his official car to Stone's house in North London. The two men would talk for an hour or two. Stone was a good listener, a loyal keeper of confidences – he committed few details of Wilson's ill-health to paper – and had no political axe to grind. 'Part of an afternoon or an evening would slip by, the Finchley Road a distant, lulling drone,' Beckett writes. 'The prime minister's driver would wait outside in the car. Britain's many mid-1970s problems would await Wilson's attention.' The vignette, so suggestive of a scene from *Smiley's People*, lacks the topics of their conversation. Beckett doesn't speculate, but it would be odd if they didn't include Smiley's People themselves. Wilson firmly believed that he had enemies inside the intelligence agencies and that they wanted to bring him down. At first his colleagues thought, like Shirley Williams, that he was 'off his trolley' when he pointed out bumps in the ceiling and said they held listening devices. Williams remembers a conversation in the cabinet chamber:

'That's a bug. They're bugging me.'

'Really, Harold?'

'Absolutely. They're listening to everything I say. And they're determined to get me out.'

The obvious explanation, that these were the paranoid delusions of a crumbling mind, needs to be revised in the light of later disclosures that sections of MI5 and the CIA had determined that Wilson was a long-serving Soviet puppet, if not actually a

spy. Williams now believes that there was 'a real attempt to try to undo him of a non-constitutional kind'. But really there was no need to supplement the exhaustion, alcohol and poor health that were already undoing him. When another sterling crisis hit Britain in 1976, Wilson's biggest worry was that dealing with it might affect his plans for retirement.

Wear and tear

One thing about decades it may be important to understand is that the actors and a lot of the scenery date from previous ones. They don't arrive at the studio flat-packed and in mint condition, the common fault of historical feature films in which, say, a 1920s romance will have a 1920s house with a 1920s cocktail cabinet and a 1920s car in the drive, none of them with a speck of dust or a scratch of wear and tear. In 1976, Wilson was 60 and his successor that year as prime minister, Jim Callaghan, four years older. Even in a decade when it was still possible – in a newsroom, say – to think nothing of working next to a man who had fought in the war, the memories of both men had a noticeably sepia tone. In his last volume of memoirs, *Final Term*, Wilson recalled that he'd told the party in 1974 that he saw his role as being like 'a deep-lying centre-half – I instanced Roberts of the prewar Arsenal team – concentrating on defence . . . moving upfield only for set-piece occasions (witness, as I had done, Roberts's famous winning goal in the sixth round of the FA Cup against Huddersfield in 1927)'. Callaghan, just as nostalgic and even more socially conservative, told Bernard Donoghue that he'd been unaware of homosexuality 'until well into adult life'. From the podium of the 1978 party conference he sang one of his favourite Victorian music-hall songs, 'Waiting at the Church', to suggest, like a winking uncle, that he wouldn't be calling an autumn election. Most of his audience was baffled, though there were still men and women alive who knew he'd mis-attributed the song to Marie Lloyd when in

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ANOTHER COUNTRY

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fact it was Vesta Victoria's.

The conventional wisdom now is that he should have called that election. Labour was roughly level with the Tories in the polls and the electorate in 1978 much preferred Callaghan's personality to Thatcher's. If she'd won, as she wrote in her memoirs, the pay revolt by public-sector workers that winter might have broken her government instead of ending Callaghan's. Even as it was, with the unburied dead and 'Crisis, what crisis?' and so forth, Labour increased its vote in the general election the following May by 75,000 compared with October 1974. The Tories' majority of 43 seats was owed mainly to defections from the Liberals, the Scottish and Welsh nationalists and the National Front. Within two years Britain had fallen into its biggest recession since the 1930s and opinion polls registered Margaret Thatcher as the most unpopular prime minister since polling began. 'General elections, like the beginnings and ends of decades,' Beckett writes, 'are rarely as decisive as they seem.'

Lasting prosperity

Yes indeed. The truth is that the 1970s, like most decades, was a wine gum of many colours. The two years between the IMF bail-out and the collapse of the Social Contract, roughly from the autumn of 1976 to the autumn of 1978, were far sunnier than those for some time before or after. Oil from the North Sea had begun to come ashore and with it the promise of lasting prosperity. Disposable incomes and house prices rose – the latter by 50 per cent in the five years to 1980 – while unemploy-

ment and inflation fell. In a book entitled *Britain: A Future That Works*, the *Washington Post's* London correspondent, Bernard Nossiter, was by early 1978 able to wonder if the mid-1970s 'crisis' had not been 'a case of hypochondria'. Nossiter felt London to be 'the last inhabitable great city', full of relaxed citizens who had discovered what would now be called a happy work-life balance, as opposed to what Nossiter described as the 'nervous intensity' of the crowds in Paris and New York. Britons, he suggested, might be 'the first citizens of the post-industrial age . . . choosing leisure over goods'. As Beckett points out, Nossiter was known to have soppy Anglophile tendencies; still, there was something to what he wrote. If greater equality nourishes happiness and the public good, as many have come to believe, then it should never be forgotten that in the late 1970s Britain became a more equal country than it had probably ever been and certainly than it has been since.

Beckett's book is not all out revisionism; the facts of industrial turmoil can't be revised away. But that one fact of greater equality suggests that the received wisdom of the 1970s as Britain's nightmare decade is little more than a politically convenient libel which suits a narrative of redemption. We must never go back to the 1970s? Perhaps we should be lucky. There are worse places, as we may shortly see. **CT**

Ian Jack used to edit the British literary magazine Granta and now writes a column for the Guardian. This essay originally appeared in the London Review of Books

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Killing America's kids

Banning photographs of dead and injured soldiers from publication in the media means that more kids will die, says **Fred Reed**

The internet was covered in stink last month because of a reporter for the Associated Press, Julie Jacobson, who photographed the death of Joshua Bernard, a 21-year old Marine lance corporal whose legs had just been blown off. When the photo appeared, Robert Gates, the Secretary of Defense [sic] furiously tried to get AP to quash the photo. It didn't, to its everlasting credit. To quote one of many accounts on the web:

"Gates followed up with a scathing letter to Curley [of AP] yesterday afternoon. The letter says Gates cannot imagine the pain Bernard's family is feeling right now, and that Curley's 'lack of compassion and common sense in choosing to put out this image of their maimed and stricken child on the front page of multiple newspapers is appalling. The issue here is not law, policy or constitutional right – but judgment and common decency.' "

I thought a long time before writing about this matter, and was not pleasant to be around. The photo resonated with me, as we say. You see, long ago, in another pointless war, promoted by another conscienceless Secretary, I too was a Marine Lance Corporal of twenty-one years. I too got shot, though not nearly as badly as this kid, and spent a year at Bethesda Naval Hospital. At this point I am legally blind following my (I think) thirteenth trip to eye

surgery as a result of an identical foreign policy.

Big fucking deal. Shit happens. At this point I'm comfortable and doing fine. Don't cry for me, Argentina. The other kid is dead.

But that bothers me. And all of this perhaps gives me a certain insight into the matter that not all reporters have, nor all editors. It also makes me poisonously, bottle-throwing angry to think about another chilly professional bureaucrat, the Second Coming of McNamara, with less combat experience than Tinkerbell, sending kids to croak in weird places having nothing to do with the US.

But Gates. The words "decency" and "unconscionable" coming from him are fetid with hypocrisy. Gates was director of the CIA. "Intelligence" agencies are moral dirt, hated the world over for torture, murder, and destabilization of countries leading to hundreds of thousands of deaths. The KGB, Mossad, CIA, STASI, SAVAK – they're all the same. A man who presides over torture and murder should not speak of decency. He has none.

Nor is it easy to believe that Gates feels the slightest sympathy for the dead kid or for his family. If you don't want kids to die in Afghanistan, don't send them there. He does. How sorry can he be?

Why then is he so angry at having the

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WAR'S FACE

Ever see brain tissue from gunshot? I have. It makes a pink spew across the ground. Like strawberry chiffon

war photographed? Easy: Spin control. Spin is so very important in war these days. While America is only barely a democracy, if the public, the great sleeping acquiescent ignorant beast, ever gets really upset, the war ends. The Pentagon is acutely aware of this. It remembers its disaster in Asia. The generals of today learned nothing military from Vietnam – they are fighting the same kind of war as stupidly as before – but they learned something more important: Their most dangerous enemy is the America public. You. Me. Defeating the Taliban isn't particularly important, or even desirable. (No war means fewer promotions and fewer contracts). But while the Taliban cannot possibly defeat the Pentagon, the American public can.

Death to war

Photographs are death to a war, boys and girls. They can asphyxiate a war faster than the planters of roadside bombs can even dream. Gates does not want the sprawling somnolent inattentive beast, the public, to see what his wars really are.

In wars, there are many enlightening things to see. For example, the Marine with a third of his face and half a lung, going kuk-kuk-kuk as red gunch rolls out of his mouth and he drowns in his blood. Ruined or dying teenagers whimpering the trinity of the badly wounded, Mother, wife, and water. The brain-shot guy jerking like an epileptic as he tries not to die. Ever see brain tissue from gunshot? I have. It makes a pink spew across the ground. Like strawberry chiffon.

Gates does not want you to see this. You would puke, buy a bottle of bourbon, and take to the streets. He knows it. CBS could end these wars in a week if it aired what really happens. Gates cannot afford to let the dam break. PR is all. Thus Bush forbade the photographing of coffins coming home, and the CIA ferociously resists the publication of photographs of torture. Professional sadists do things to people that would make you gag.

Then there are the enlisted men. In

these hobbyist wars, and to an extent even in peacetime, it is crucial to keep the enlisteds from thinking. In some three decades of covering the military, I saw this constantly. If I went to Afghanistan today as a correspondent, I could argue in private about the war with the colonel. If I suggested to the troops that they were being suckered, the colonel would go crazy. Next to keeping the public quiescent, keeping the troops (and potential recruits) bamboozled is vital. If a high-school kid saw what awaited, if he saw the cartilage glistening in wrecked joints, he wouldn't sign.

Do I think that the press should publish such photos? Not just yes, but HELL, YES, on afterburner. Every time an editor covers for the Pentagon, every time papers refuse to show the charred bodies still...slowly...moving, the dead children, the...never mind. The effect is to ensure that more kids will die the same way. And the press almost always does exactly this. We are a trade of whores and shills. Except that whores give value for money. The press kills our children.

Julie Jacobson sounds like that modern-day rarity, a reporter, as distinguished from a volunteer flack. Bless her. I used to wonder whether women could hack it as combat correspondents. I no longer do. I used to refer to smarmy over-groomed bloodthirsty office warts as pussies, saying that they lacked balls. The anatomical reference no longer works. I note that Jacobson has more combat time than the aggregate for Bush II, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rice, Obama, Biden, Gonzalez, Clinton, Perleman, Abrams, Kristol, Feith, Podhoretz, Krauthammer, George Will, Dershwitz, and Gates. These men, if the word is appropriate, killed that kid. Jacobson just caught them in the act. **CT**

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

Celebrating slaughter

Chris Hedges reflects on war and collective amnesia

War memorials and museums are temples to the god of war. The hushed voices, the well-tended grass, the flapping of the flags allow us to ignore how and why our young died. They hide the futility and waste of war. They sanitize the savage instruments of death that turn young soldiers and Marines into killers, and small villages in Vietnam or Afghanistan or Iraq into hellish bonfires. There are no images in these memorials of men or women with their guts hanging out of their bellies, screaming pathetically for their mothers. We do not see mangled corpses being shoved in body bags. There are no sights of children burned beyond recognition or moaning in horrible pain. There are no blind and deformed wrecks of human beings limping through life. War, by the time it is collectively remembered, is glorified and heavily censored.

I blame our war memorials and museums, our popular war films and books, for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as much as George W. Bush. They provide the mental images and historical references to justify new conflicts. We equate Saddam Hussein with Adolf Hitler. We see al-Qaida as a representation of Nazi evil. We view ourselves as eternal liberators. These plastic representations of war reconfigure the past in light of the present. War memorials and

romantic depictions of war are the social and moral props used to create the psychological conditions to wage new wars.

War memorials are quiet, still, reverential and tasteful. And, like church, such sanctuaries are important, but they allow us to forget that these men and women were used and often betrayed by those who led the nation into war. The memorials do not tell us that some always grow rich from large-scale human suffering. They do not explain that politicians play the great games of world power and stoke fear for their own advancement. They forget that young men and women in uniform are pawns in the hands of cynics, something Pat Tillman's family sadly discovered. They do not expose the ignorance, raw ambition and greed that are the engine of war.

There is a burning need, one seen in the collective memory that has grown up around World War II and the Holocaust, to turn the horror of mass murder into a tribute to the triumph of the human spirit. The reality is too unpalatable. The human need to make sense of slaughter, to give it a grandeur it does not possess, permits the guilty to go free. The war makers – those who make the war but never pay the price of war – live among us. They pen thick memoirs that give sage advice. They are our elder statesmen, our war criminals. Henry Kissinger. Robert McNamara. Dick Cheney.

The memorials do not tell us that some always grow rich from large-scale human suffering

WAR'S MEMORY

A war memorial that attempted to depict the reality of war would be too subversive. It would condemn us and our capacity for evil

Chris Hedges, a Pulitzer prize-winning reporter, is a Senior Fellow at the Nation Institute. His new book is *Empire of Illusion* (Knopf)

George W. Bush. Any honest war memorial would have these statesmen hanging in effigy. Any honest democracy would place them behind bars.

Primo Levi, who survived Auschwitz, fought against the mendacity of collective memory until he took his own life. He railed against the human need to mask the truth of the Holocaust and war by giving it a false, moral narrative. He wrote that the contemporary history of the Third Reich could be “reread as a war against memory, an Orwellian falsification of memory, falsification of reality, negation of reality.” He wondered if “we who have returned” have “been able to understand and make others understand our experience.”

He wrote of the Jewish collaborator Chaim Rumkowski, who ran the Lodz ghetto on behalf of the Nazis, that “we are all mirrored in Rumkowski, his ambiguity is ours, it is our second nature, we hybrids molded from clay and spirit. His fever is ours, the fever of Western civilization that ‘descends into hell with trumpets and drums.’ ” We, like Rumkowski, “come to terms with power, forgetting that we are all in the ghetto, that the ghetto is walled in, that outside the ghetto reign the lords of death, and that close by the train is waiting.” We are, Levi understood, perpetually imprisoned within the madness of self-destruction. The rage of Cindy Sheehan, who lost her son Casey in Iraq, is a rage Levi felt. But it is a rage most of us do not understand.

Reality of war

A war memorial that attempted to depict the reality of war would be too subversive. It would condemn us and our capacity for evil. It would show that the line between the victim and the victimizer is razor-thin, that human beings, when the restraints are cut, are intoxicated by mass killing, and that war, rather than being noble, heroic and glorious, obliterates all that is tender, decent and kind. It would tell us that the celebration of national greatness is the cel-

ebration of our technological capacity to kill. It would warn us that war is always morally depraved, that even in “good” wars such as World War II all can become war criminals. We dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Nazis ran the death camps. But this narrative of war is unsettling. It does not create a collective memory that serves the interests of those who wage war and permit us to wallow in self-exaltation.

There are times – World War II and the Serb assault on Bosnia would be examples – when a population is pushed into a war. There are times when a nation must ingest the poison of violence to survive. But this violence always deforms and maims those who use it. My uncle, who drank himself to death in a trailer in Maine, fought for four years in the South Pacific during World War II. He and the soldiers in his unit never bothered taking Japanese prisoners.

The detritus of war, the old cannons and artillery pieces rolled out to stand near memorials, were curious and alluring objects in my childhood. But these displays angered my father, a Presbyterian minister who was in North Africa as an Army sergeant during World War II. The lifeless, clean and neat displays of weapons and puppets in uniforms were being used, he said, to purge the reality of war. These memorials sanctified violence. They turned the instruments of violence – the tanks, machine guns, rifles and airplanes – into an aesthetic of death.

These memorials, while they pay homage to those who made “the ultimate sacrifice,” dignify slaughter. They perpetuate the old lie of honor and glory. They set the ground for the next inferno. The myth of war manufactures a collective memory that ennoble the next war. The intimate, personal experience of violence turns those who return from war into internal exiles. They cannot compete against the power of the myth.

This collective memory saturates the culture, but it is “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” **CT**

Men with guns, in Kabul and Washington

Norman Solomon reminds us of the innocent victims of the West's 8-year war on one of the poorest nations on earth

For those who believe in making war, Kabul is a notable work product. After 30 years, the results are in: a devastated city. A stale witticism calls Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai "the mayor of Kabul." Now, not even. On block after block in the Afghan capital, AK-47s are conspicuous in the hands of men on guard against a near future. Widely seen as corrupt, inept and – with massive election fraud – now illegitimate, Karzai's government is losing its grip along with its credibility.

Meanwhile, a war-stoking mindset is replicating itself at the highest reaches of official Washington – even while polls tell us that the pro-war spin has been losing ground. For the US public, dwindling support for the war in Afghanistan has reached a tipping point. But, as you've probably heard, the war must go on.

Kabul's streets are blowing with harsh dust, a brutal harvest of chronic war that has destroyed trees and irrigation on mountains around the city.

Visiting Kabul in late August, I met a lot of wonderful people, doing their best in the midst of grim and lethal realities. The city seemed thick with pessimism.

In comparison, the mainline political discourse about Afghanistan in the United States is blithe. A familiar duet has the news media and the White House asking

the perennial question: "Can the war be won?"

The administration insists that the answer is yes. The press is mixed. But they're both asking the wrong question.

More relevant, by far, would be to ask: Should the US government keep destroying Afghanistan in order to "save" it?

All over Kabul, men are tensely holding AK-47s; some are pointing machine guns from flatbed trucks. But the really big guns, of course, are being wielded from Washington, where administrative war-making thrives on abstraction. Day to day, it can be easy to order the destruction of what and who remain unseen.

Truly, the worst enemy in Afghanistan is poverty. But the US government keeps waving a white flag.

World's worst poverty

Does anyone in the upper reaches of the Obama administration actually grasp what it means that Afghanistan's poverty is very close to the worst in the world?

The current version of the best and the brightest should ponder the kind of data that can be found in the CIA World Factbook, such as Afghanistan's infant mortality rate – defined as "the number of deaths of infants under one year old in a given year per 1,000 live births in the same year." The current number is 154.

All over Kabul, men are tensely holding AK-47s; some are pointing machine guns from flatbed trucks. But the really big guns, of course, are being wielded from Washington

END THIS WAR

I hate to think of the kind of future that the US war escalation foreshadows for the very thin children I saw in Kabul, flying ragged little kites or playing with toys like an empty plastic soda bottle with a rope tied around its neck

Last year, while the US government was spending nearly \$100 million a day on military efforts in Afghanistan, an Oxfam report put the total amount of humanitarian aid to the country from all sources at just \$7 million per day. Not much has changed since then. The supplemental funding measure that the White House pushed through Congress a few months ago devotes 90 percent of the US spending in Afghanistan to military expenditures.

Dimes to nurture life. Dollars to destroy it.

I hate to think of the kind of future that the US war escalation foreshadows for the very thin children I saw in Kabul, flying ragged little kites or playing with toys like an empty plastic soda bottle with a rope tied around its neck.

Echoing now is a speech from Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1967. If we replace the word "Vietnam" with "Afghanistan," the gist of his message is with us in the autumn of 2009:

"Somehow this madness must cease. We must stop now. I speak as a child of God and brother to the suffering poor of Afghanistan. I speak for those whose land is being laid waste, whose homes are being destroyed, whose culture is being subverted. I speak for the poor of America who are paying the double price of smashed hopes at home, and death and corruption in Afghanistan. I speak as a citizen of the world, for the world as it stands aghast at the path we have taken. I speak as one who loves America, to the leaders of our own nation: The great initiative in this war is ours; the initiative to stop it must be ours." **CT**

Norman Solomon is executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy. He is the author of many books including "War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death," which has been adapted into a documentary film. For information, go to: www.normansolomon.com

A Bomb in Every Issue

How the Short, Unruly Life of Ramparts Magazine Changed America

by **PETER RICHARDSON**

The rollicking story of Ramparts – the magazine that captured the zeitgeist of the '60s, repeatedly scooped the New York Times, brought the new left into American living rooms, and made an indelible imprint on American journalism

"Richardson has done a brilliant job bringing to life the incredible story of Ramparts, a

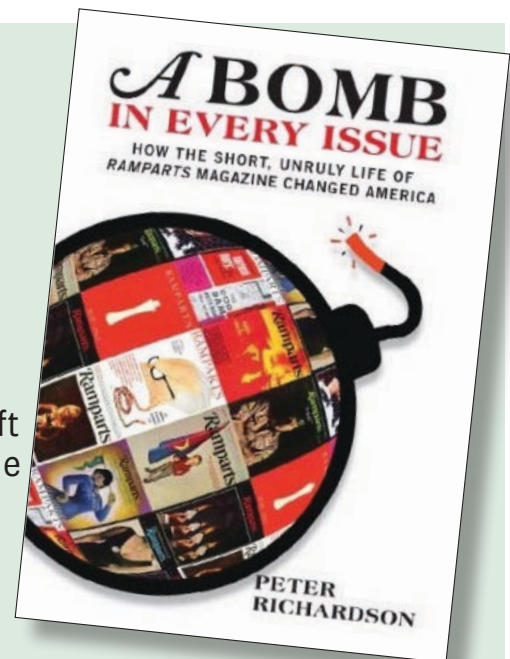


THE NEW PRESS

publication that changed journalism and the world it reported on."

– *Lowell Bergman, Professor of Journalism, UC Berkeley, and a correspondent for PBS's Frontline*

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Secrecy, lies, power and the Pentagon Papers

Bill Berkowitz talks to film maker Rick Goldsmith about his new movie on Daniel Ellsberg's brave actions 38 years ago

A little over 38 years ago, when Daniel Ellsberg released the “Pentagon Papers” to the *New York Times* and other newspapers, it set off one of the 20th century's most important battles over government secrecy and freedom of the press.

The nation was stunned by the revelations, and he became one of the most reviled and admired figures in the United States. The Richard Nixon administration was apoplectic; it targeted him through warrantless eavesdropping and ransacked his psychoanalyst's office to gain access to his medical records.

An exhausted anti-war movement was buoyed by his courage and audacity. And yet, despite the uproar, the Vietnam War lasted several more years.

Ellsberg was arrested and tried for espionage and conspiracy, and faced life imprisonment. The charges were later dropped due to the Nixon administration's misconduct.

The saga began in 1969 when Ellsberg, a former Marine Corps officer, was given access to classified documents regarding the conduct of the Vietnam War, in his capacity as a US military analyst employed by the RAND Corporation, a government-sanctioned corporate think tank.

As reported by Stanford Unger in his 1972 book *The Papers & The Papers, An Ac-*

count of the Legal and Political Battle Over the Pentagon Papers, Ellsberg and his former RAND Corporation colleague Anthony Russo secretly photocopied 7,000 pages of what was to become known as the “Pentagon Papers,” officially titled “United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945–1967: A Study Prepared by the Department of Defense.”

The Papers were a top-secret history of the US's political and military involvement in Vietnam during that period, commissioned in 1967 by then Defence Secretary Robert S. McNamara.

After failing to convince several anti-war senators to release the papers on the Senate floor, Ellsberg leaked the documents to *New York Times* correspondent Neil Sheehan.

In mid-June of 1971, after initially publishing the first of nine excerpts and commentaries, the *Times* ceased publication after the Nixon administration got a court order. Ellsberg then leaked the documents to the *Washington Post* and 17 other newspapers.

By the end of the month, a landmark Supreme Court decision – *New York Times Co. v. United States* – permitted the paper to resume publication. Realising that the FBI might assume that he was responsible for the leak, Ellsberg went underground for 16 days. He then turned himself in on June 28, 1971.

After failing to convince several anti-war senators to release the papers on the Senate floor, Ellsberg leaked the documents to *New York Times* correspondent Neil Sheehan

TRUTH TELLERS

All the key players believed that as a democracy, this country functions best if the Congress, the courts, the press, and the public are outspoken and involved in the decisions of our government

Last month, a new documentary film which tells the story of those extraordinary times, “The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers”, co-produced and co-directed by Rick Goldsmith and Judith Ehrlich, premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival to rave reviews.

The film will be shown in New York City at the Film Forum, in Los Angeles, and at the Vancouver International Film Festival and Mill Valley (California) Film Festival this month.

Before the film’s Toronto debut, I spoke to Goldsmith, who also produced and directed the Academy-Award nominated documentary feature “Tell the Truth and Run: George Seldes and the American Press”.

Excerpts from the interview follow.

Bill Berkowitz: Why did you and Ehrlich decide to do a film about Daniel Ellsberg now?

Rick Goldsmith: We came to it independently. I had interviewed Ellsberg for my film on George Seldes. In 2002, I wrote Ellsberg about the possibility of doing a film about him and the “Pentagon Papers.” I sent him a short outline which even then was titled “The Most Dangerous Man in America”. He didn’t reply and I didn’t follow up. A few years later, Ehrlich approached me and suggested doing a film on Dan Ellsberg. We took it from there.

We both had done films about people of conscience who stood up for their beliefs and dared challenge the status quo. By 2004, we were in the middle of an immoral and disastrous war in Iraq started by a president who lied us into the war, and we had a Congress and a public who seemed either uninterested or powerless to stop it.

Ellsberg’s story had parallels that were all too apparent; we both felt it might have something to say to audiences today, especially anyone under 50, who wouldn’t have personally remembered or even known about the “Pentagon Papers”.

BB: Where does the title “The Most Dangerous Man in America” come from?

RG: Henry Kissinger, President Nixon’s national security advisor, was widely quoted as saying – shortly after Ellsberg was identified as having leaked the Pentagon Papers to the *New York Times*, and was thought to have copies of Nixon’s Vietnam war plans – “Daniel Ellsberg is the most dangerous man in America and he has to be stopped at all costs.”

BB: The release of the “Pentagon Papers” was an example of great personal courage, a test of the media’s right to publish, and a battle over the public’s right to know. How does this relate to today’s political climate; secret CIA hit squads, Blackwater (now named Xe – pronounced zee); assassination teams?

RG: After Ellsberg’s released the “Pentagon Papers”, he was tried under the Espionage Act and faced 115 years in prison. The publication of the Papers by the *New York Times* and other newspapers could have subjected them and their reporters and editors to criminal prosecution as well.

So you might say that June of 1971 was a high point in “civil courage” – a phrase Ellsberg likes to use. All the key players believed that as a democracy, this country functions best if the Congress, the courts, the press, and the public are outspoken and involved in the decisions of our government.

While presidents will try to shut those voices down in times of crisis, they have to struggle to get the truth out. But since 1971, there has been a slow and steady erosion, not only in Congressional, press, and citizen involvement, but in the notion that we have a right, a responsibility, to challenge the president and his administration.

During the first Gulf War, in 1991, CNN foreign correspondent Peter Arnett (who has a cameo in our film) was branded “unpatriotic” and even a “traitor” because he tried to put a human face on Iraqis. The notion that because we’re at war, it is treason

to report on the effects of war or to criticise the president is absurd.

Congress and the news media have become more timid, so stories about torture, assassination, and using mercenary enterprises like Blackwater to fight our wars with no accountability are rarely reported and when they are, horrendous abuses are pushed under the rug.

The [George W.] Bush administration said “no pictures of body bags” and the news media complied. Reporters were embedded with the troops, which made it near impossible to report independently and without censorship.

When the “Pentagon Papers” were published, the central issue was “national security vs. the public’s right to know.” Today, the present administration – and this is no less true with [President Barack] Obama and Afghanistan than it was with Bush and Iraq – the public has an extremely difficult task even getting the facts, the true story.

BB: The story of the Pentagon Papers has been told a number of times. What new things will viewers learn?

RG: If you’re young, you’ll be entertained by a gripping story about American government, secrecy, lies and power that you couldn’t have imagined in your wildest dreams. If you’re older, you’ll discover that what you thought you remembered about the “Pentagon Papers” and Watergate is not the whole story.

You’ll get the inside dope from most of the principals of the time – Ellsberg and his “co-conspirator” Tony Russo, Ellsberg’s family, journalists, anti-war activists, government insiders, Nixon White House officials, and, through the Nixon White House secret tapes, President Nixon and Henry Kissinger as you’ve never heard them before.

BB: Over the course of your filmmaking

career, you’ve interviewed some very impressive individuals, including the iconic journalist George Seldes. What have you learned about the struggle for truth, peace and social justice?

RG: George Seldes and Dan Ellsberg were men of conscience, who took risks to address the biggest social injustices of their day. In both of the films – Seldes in one and Ellsberg in this film – reflects on a personal revelation, a turning point, where he comes to the conclusion that war, which he has participated in and championed up until this moment, is in actuality murder and a crime that has to be stopped. Their lives are changed forever – they never again “go along to get along”. What unfolds in each film is a story in which the viewer comes to see that stopping war, stopping injustice, may take an incredible about-face to your belief system, an enormous personal commitment to doing something, and the realization that it is a lifelong struggle.

BB: What do you hope the film accomplishes?

RG: I hope that audiences might begin to examine the world around them in a different way; to question authority, to consider that their president, their boss, their parents, whoever, doesn’t have all the answers. That taking risks for important issues can be liberating, uplifting, and can make a difference in the world around them.

I think we all face periods of discouragement, maybe even live “lives of quiet desperation” and that it is a common experience to ask the question “why bother?” Maybe this film can help answer that question.

CT

Bill Berkowitz is a freelance writer covering right-wing groups and movements

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Toxic assets

The Trafigura scandal is just one of thousands of cases of the rich world's fly-tipping, writes **George Monbiot**

It is one of the world's worst cases of chemical exposure since the gas leak at the Union Carbide factory in Bhopal. But in all other respects the Trafigura case is unremarkable. It's just another instance of the rich world's global fly-tipping

It was revolting, monstrous, inhumane – and scarcely different from what happens in Africa almost every day. The oil trading company Trafigura has just agreed to pay compensation to 31,000 people in Cote d'Ivoire, after the *Guardian* and the BBC's *Newsnight* obtained emails sent by its traders(1). They reveal that Trafigura knew that the oil slops it sent there in 2006 were contaminated with toxic waste(2). But the Ivorian contractor it employed to pump out the hold of its tanker dumped them around inhabited areas in the capital city and the countryside. Tens of thousands of people fell ill and 15 died(3). It is one of the world's worst cases of chemical exposure since the gas leak at the Union Carbide factory in Bhopal. But in all other respects the Trafigura case is unremarkable. It's just another instance of the rich world's global fly-tipping.

On the day that the *Guardian* published the company's emails, it also carried a story about a shipwreck discovered in 480 metres of water off the Italian coast(4). Detectives found the ship after a tip-off from a mafioso. It appears to have been carrying drums of nuclear waste when the mafia used explosives to scuttle it. The informant, Francesco Fonti, said that his clan had been paid £100,000 to get rid of it. What makes this story interesting is that the waste appears to be Norwegian. Norway is famous

for its tough environmental laws, but a shipload of nuclear waste doesn't go missing without someone high up looking the other way.

Italian prosecutors are investigating the scuttling of a further 41 ships. But most of them weren't sunk, like Fonti's vessel, off the coast of Italy; they were lost off the coast of Somalia. When the great tsunami of 2004 struck the Somali coast, it dumped and smashed open thousands of barrels on the beaches and in villages up to 10km inland(5). According to the United Nations, they contained clinical waste from western hospitals, heavy metals, other chemical junk and nuclear waste. People started suffering from unusual skin infections, bleeding at the mouth, acute respiratory infections and abdominal haemorrhages(5a). The barrels had been dumped in the sea, a UN spokesman said, for one obvious reason: it cost European companies around \$2.50 a tonne to dispose of the waste this way, while dealing with them properly would have cost "something like \$1000 a tonne."(6) On the seabed off Somalia lies Europe's picture of Dorian Grey: the skeleton in the closet of the languid new world we have made.

Pirate patrols

The only people who have sought physically to stop this dumping are Somali pi-

rates. Most of them take to the seas only for blood and booty; but some have formed coastal patrols to stop over-fishing and illegal dumping by foreign fleets(7,8,9). Some of the vessels being protected from pirates by Combined Task Force 151 – the rich world’s policing operation in the Gulf of Aden – have come to fish illegally or dump toxic waste. The warships make no attempt to stop them.

The law couldn’t be clearer: the Basel convention, supported by European directives, forbids EU or OECD nations from dumping hazardous wastes in poorer countries(10,11,12). But without enforcement the law is useless. So, for example, while all our dead electronic equipment is supposed to be recycled by licensed companies at home, according to Consumers International around 6.6 million tonnes of it leaves the European Union illegally every year(13).

Much of it lands in West Africa. An investigation by the *Mail on Sunday* found computers which once belonged to the National Health Service being broken up and burnt by children on Ghanaian rubbish dumps(14). They were trying to extract copper and aluminium by burning off the plastics, with the result that they were inhaling lead, cadmium, dioxins, furans and brominated flame retardants(15). Tests in another of the world’s great flytits – Guiyu in China – show that 80% of the children of that city have dangerous levels of lead in their blood(16).

In February, working with Sky News and the *Independent*, Greenpeace placed a satellite tracking device in a dead television and left it at a recycling centre in Basingstoke run by Hampshire County Council(17,18). It passed through the hands of the council’s recycling company, then found its way first to Tilbury docks then to Lagos, where the journalists bought it back from a street market. Under EU law, used electronic equipment can be exported only if it’s still working, but Greenpeace had made sure the TV was unusable. A black market run by criminal gangs is dumping our

electronic waste on the poor, but since the European directive banning this practice was incorporated into British law in January 2007, the Environment Agency hasn’t made a single prosecution(19). Dump your telly over a hedge and you can expect big trouble. Dump 10,000 in Nigeria and you can expect to get away with it.

If the mafia were to establish itself as an effective force in this country, it would do so by way of the waste disposal industry. All over the world the *cosa nostra*, *yakuza*, *triads*, *bratva* and the rest make much of their fortune by disposing of our uncomfortable truths. It suits all the rich nations – even, it seems, the government of Norway – not to ask too many questions, as long as the waste goes to faraway countries of which we know little. Only when the mobs make the mistake of dumping it off their own coasts does the state start to get huffy.

Dumping the risk

The *Trafigura* story is a metaphor for corporate capitalism. The effort of all enterprises is to keep the profits and dump the costs on someone else. Price risks are dumped on farmers, health and safety risks are dumped on sub-contractors, insolvency risks are dumped on creditors, social and economic risks are dumped on the state, toxic waste is dumped on the poor, greenhouse gases are dumped on everyone.

Another story that broke on the same day was the shifting, by Barclays, of £7bn of residential mortgage assets and collateralised debt obligations to a fund in the Cayman Islands(20). These were universally described by the media as toxic assets. Some traders also call them toxic waste. Everyone understands the metaphor even if they haven’t thought it through: the banks seek to dump their liabilities while clinging onto their assets. Perhaps it comes as no surprise to find that *Trafigura* also runs a hedge fund, or that Lord Strathclyde, leader of the Conservatives in the House of Lords, is a director(21).

That party, like New Labour, advo-

It suits all the rich nations – even, it seems, the government of Norway – not to ask too many questions, as long as the waste goes to faraway countries of which we know little

DUMPING GROUNDS

The Trafigura case, like the financial crisis, suggests that in business there are people ruthless enough to shut their eyes to almost anything if they think they can make money

cates the continuing deregulation of business. The Trafigura case, like the financial crisis, suggests that in business there are people ruthless enough to shut their eyes to almost anything if they think they can make money. Business without regulation is scarcely distinguishable from organised crime. Regulation without strict enforcement is an open invitation to mess with people's lives. Tedious directives, state power and bureaucratic snooping – the interference that everyone professes to hate – are all that stand between civilisation and corporate hell. **CT**

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

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Dr Pepper's wet dream

Yasha Levine tells a story of water, government subsidies and transfer of wealth in the middle of an American desert

On a sun-baked afternoon in October 2008, a group of soft-drink executives and city officials gathered for a ground-breaking ceremony at an old Air Force base on the outskirts of the Californian city of Victorville, 100 miles east of Los Angeles.

They were standing on the edge of the Mojave Desert, one of the driest, most inhospitable terrains in America. Yet there they were, posing for photographs, gold-plated shovels in hand, to mark the construction of a massive new bottling plant and distribution hub for the Dr Pepper Snapple Group, a facility that will suck up hundreds of millions of gallons of water a year from this water-scarce area to supply soft drinks to 20 percent of its domestic market.

A bottling plant in the middle of the desert? It sounds too absurd to be real. But in the warped “pro-growth, pro-business” logic of a city on the frontier of Southern California’s urban sprawl, the plan made perfect economic sense.

If the scheme is pulled off without a hitch, Dr Pepper will fire up one of its biggest production nodes in America sometime near the end of 2010.

The \$120 million plant will occupy 57 acres, with 200 low-skilled workers manning almost a million square feet of warehouse space. Using 250 million gallons of

water a year, six production lines will crank out 350,000 gallons worth of liquid refreshments a day, shipping perennial soft-drink favorites like Dr Pepper, Snapple, 7UP, A&W, Hawaiian Punch and 50 other brands all across the West Coast and Southwest.

The Victorville plant was a steal for the beverage manufacturer, receiving tens of millions of dollars in subsidies from the city. Local officials have painted it as a win-win situation, talking up the jobs and tax revenue it will bring to a community hard-hit by the recession and housing market collapse. Yet, no one has seriously addressed the big wet elephant in the room: water. Where will it come from, and at what cost to the local population?

Water calamity

California is on the verge of a water-related calamity. For the past three years, the state has been in the grips of a devastating drought. Up and down the Golden State, water deliveries have been cut by more than half of the normal allotment.

In the fertile Central Valley, the bosom of America’s agricultural powerhouse, fields stand fallow because of water rationing. Farmers are losing their jobs, lines for emergency food rations are become a common sight, and some agricultural communities are going bust for lack of water.

The scenes are eerily reminiscent of the

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WATER CRAZY

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Dust Bowl. The situation has become dire enough for the Obama administration to say “California’s ongoing water crisis is a major national priority, akin to restoring the Chesapeake Bay or Florida’s Everglades.”

But as far as Victorville is concerned, this drought might as well be happening on Mars.

“This is a great day for High Desert residents,” City Councilman Terry Caldwell said at the plant’s ground-breaking ceremony. “When a company like Dr Pepper Snapple chooses Victorville for its new West Coast facility, it means we have arrived, and others will follow. This means hundreds of new jobs for our local residents.”

Victorville, a sprawling commuter exurb of Los Angeles, is a pro-growth, pro-business city. Its free-market free-for-all approach to governance and abundance of cheap unexploited land made it the second-fastest-growing city in 2007.

Fueled by securitized subprime mortgages, its population doubled to 100,000 in less than a decade, and the city swelled with some of the cheapest tract-home developments in California.

Most of the growth was built on empty promises. Victorville was supposed to become the industrial and manufacturing capital of Southern California. Now completely bankrupt, the city has some of the highest unemployment and foreclosure rates in California, with home prices shrinking to 1989 levels.

To Victorville officials, the advantages of job growth, no matter how minuscule, far outweigh any concerns over the increased water use. But some locals are not convinced that the plant is such a good idea. Because no matter how you slice it, corporate interests and political ambitions come out as the only real winners.

Victorville is the biggest and most powerful of the half-dozen closely packed cities and towns and smaller unincorporated desert communities that make up Victor Valley. The 350,000 people who call this place home are a varied bunch – ex-mili-

tary types, retirees, lower-income subprime mortgage fodder – but they are all linked by a common and very limited resource.

“How does what happens in Victorville affect the rest of us? The water that we have in this valley is a shared resource that is supposed to be controlled by a California Supreme Court ruling,” says Paul Bosecki, a council member for the city Hesperia, Victorville’s neighbor. “Victorville has made more than a few bad choices lately. The full-speed ahead, pedal-to-the-metal attitude has consequences when it fails to deliver. It comes down to public interest versus private interest, with the public interests such as water for the residents of this valley coming after Victorville’s business ambitions.”

Where’s the water?

Standing on the sandy turf where the future bottling plant will stand and looking around at the Joshua trees and tumbleweeds stretching out as far as the eye can see, it’s easy to see why people like Bosecki are worried.

Victorville receives 5 to 6 inches of rainfall a year. For comparison: Death Valley gets 2 inches, semi-arid Los Angeles gets 15 and New York City gets 28. Not surprisingly, a recent poll conducted by the Mojave Water Agency found that 90 percent of the local population was concerned about the availability of water.

Out here in the desert, water will soon become more precious than oil. Underground water reserves have been shrinking for decades. In fact, local aquifers here have been in overdraft – with more water being pumped out than is replaced naturally – since the 1950s.

To recharge its underground sources, the Mojave Water Agency has been purchasing water from the State Water Project via the California Aqueduct, which pumps water hundreds of miles via concrete rivers, all the way from the Sacramento Delta. But the recent subprime-fueled population explosion, combined with a total lack of

water regulation and California's persistent drought conditions have put the overdraft process into overdrive.

Victor Valley residents use an average of 200 to 250 gallons per day, more than twice the national average. Not surprisingly, the aquifer is being drained at record levels. Victorville old-timers say that at the turn of the century, groundwater was so abundant in some parts of the city and so close to the surface that springs would pop up overnight and wash away pavement and roads. Now, wells that tapped fresh water at a 1,000 feet two decades ago have gone dry.

The more rustic parts of Victor Valley seem to be more mindful of water usage, with gravel-filled and desert-landscaped yards a common sight. Victorville proper is not as keen on conservation. The city is not trying to sell the desert lifestyle, but attempts to re-create the suburban ideal of green lawns, lush trees and golf courses.

But as water rates continue to climb, conservation efforts are starting to kick in. Victorville is promoting the "Cash for Grass" program, which offers 50 cents per square foot to replace lawn with low-water-use landscaping. Some communities are striving for a 20 percent reduction in water consumption.

A decade a day

Yet these efforts are dwarfed by the enormity of the Dr Pepper Snapple plant's water usage. In a single day, the facility would use a decade's worth of per capita water consumption. The 250 million gallons of fresh water it uses over the course of one year would be enough to supply 1 percent of Victor Valley's population.

"While the rest of the high desert is faced with ever-increasing water bills and told to conserve in every way possible, Victorville keeps creating huge water-guzzler projects that only benefit private interests," Bosacki said. "You got this juxtaposing of people getting fined for watering their lawns, while you have this plant using 1 million gallons a day for private profit. There is a different standard here, which should encourage some outrage."

Victorville's city officials say that the plant will not lead to higher water rates, nor the need for increased conservation. Without consulting neighboring cities, the city council voted against commissioning a "lengthy and costly" environmental impact study. Instead, it cited a flimsy five-page report prepared by a city engineer that did not even address the issue of water consumption, instead focusing on burrowing owls, desert tortoises and what to do if Native American artifacts would be discovered during the construction process.

To allay fears and quiet critics, Victorville politicians have been talking up a \$40 million water-reclamation facility in the works, which they say will conserve 70 percent of the plant's water usage – nearly 700,000 gallons a day – by using it to water the city's golf course and to cool the reactors of a nearby privately owned power plant. (Called the High Desert Power Project, the plant has been using 3.5 million gallons of fresh water a day for nearly two decades and has been criticized for its wasteful water usage.)

The treatment facility was somewhat of a coup for Dr Pepper Snapple Group. To make Victorville more attractive for the

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WATER CRAZY

The plan is nothing less than a transfer of wealth,

company, the city agreed to bankroll the whole thing, and it even threw in a several million dollars worth of roads and assorted infrastructure for the bottling plant. (It was a noble gesture considering Standard & Poor's Rating Services downgraded Victorville's credit worthiness to "junk status," forcing the city to float five-year municipal bonds at a subprime rate of 12 percent to finance the wastewater reclamation plant, while at the same time cutting most city services by almost 50 percent.)

But the Dr Pepper Snapple plant is being subsidized with public funds on an even bigger and more sinister level.

There is no doubt that the bottling plant's oversized water consumption will have a real effect on the future cost of water in the area. So, not only is the city making

locals pay for the construction of the plant, but will actually end up funding Dr Pepper Snapple's corporate profits with future water-rate hikes, giving the company access to cheap water now by making it more expensive for everyone later.

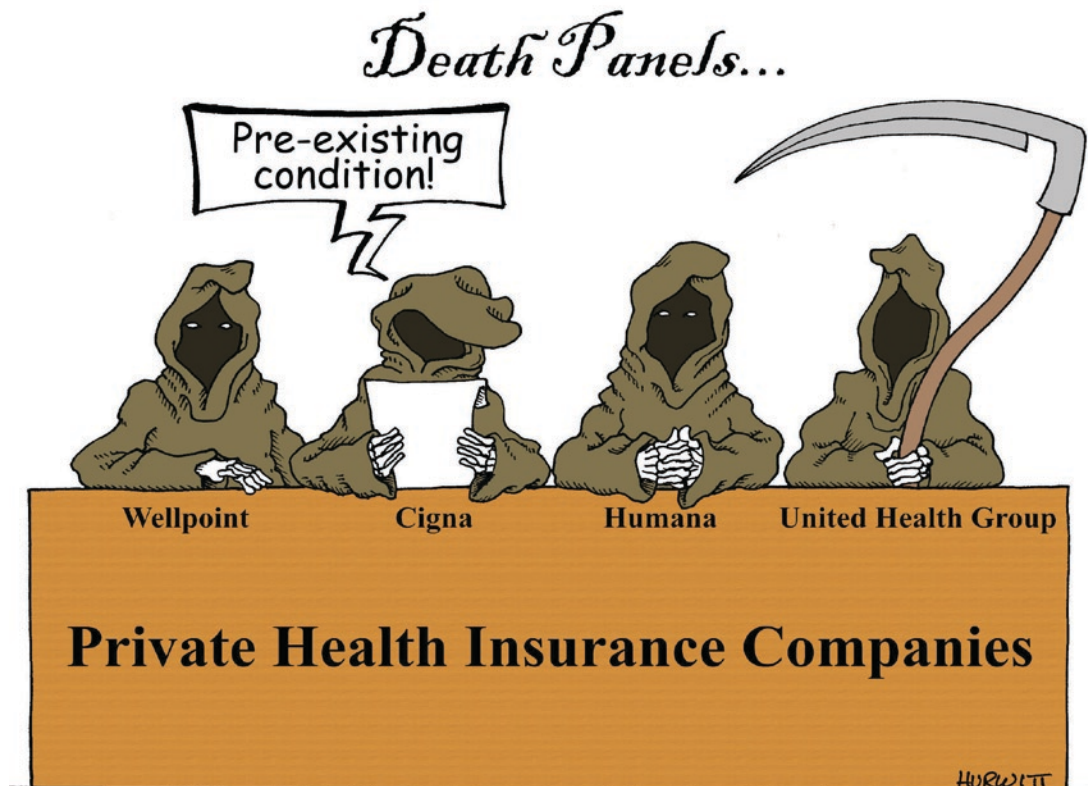
"They are shifting and deferring the cost to the public in order to bring them to Victorville," Bosacki said.

Put simply, the plan is nothing less than a transfer of wealth, a slow privatization of a scarce public resource and further plundering of taxpayer wealth by the shareholder class. **CT**

Yasha Levine writes for the web site The Exiled, where this essay was first published. Read more of his work at www.exiledonline.com.

HURWITT'S EYE

Mark Hurwitz



A weak and fearful nation

When are Americans going to rise up against their government and the criminal cartel that owns it? Never, says **Joe Bageant**

Dear Joe:

TODAY, a friend forwarded to me a news article with this headline: “Fines proposed for going without health insurance.” Here are some things I don’t get:

1) If folks can’t afford to reroof the Old Manse or buy groceries or put retreads on the Jimmy, how (and why) are they going to get insurance, and

2) If they can’t afford insurance, how are they going to afford the alleged fine, and

3) Who is the Insurance Police, who’s going to rat me out, and

4) Why did The Bastards wait until the whole country is unemployed to pull this shit, and

5) Who elected these boobs – wait, I have a long-standing soft spot for boobs; make that “idiots” – anyway, and supposedly to act in our interests? Not me.

My elected representatives so far stand mute on these salient and vexing points.

I tell ya, I’m glad I’m old and won’t have to watch much more of this nonsense go by. Although, my Ma’s 85 and going strong, still tearing up trees and throwing rocks, I seriously don’t think I can take it. I’ll blow the beans out of my pressure cooker one of these days.

And you? Well?

Jim

Dear Jim:

It’s like this ole buddy. Mandatory insurance can be made to sound worse than it is. Especially given that the word mandatory scares the hell out of Americans, even though we already have mandatory drivers’ licenses and drivers’ insurance, income tax, building permits, school attendance, vehicle registration, home insurance for mortgages, personal identification, security scanning at airports, income tax filing, dog licensing, sales taxes, etc. (Looking at this short partial list, I can hear the libertarians locking and loading as we speak).

For example, Spain, which is now considered to have the best overall health system in the world, has mandatory health insurance. So do many other countries, though they do not think of it in those terms, and though they are often technically purchasing it from the government at very low costs, which they perceive (and rightfully so) as a tax. This helps offset the government cost of insuring retired, poor, unemployed and others who cannot afford insurance. The government covers these people anyway, but must recover the cost. What a novel idea for running a government! Knowing how you are going to pay for things.

A US “public option” (we are not even allowed to utter the term socialized health-

What a novel idea for running a government! Knowing how you are going to pay for things

DEAR JOE

Our government is now a corporate criminal enterprise extorting the wealth productivity of the people. The people are so used to it and so conditioned they no longer know how to ask questions or extrapolate outcomes

care, or even universal healthcare, because anything universal, which is to say fair to all, is a goddamned commie plot – the cold war lives on in our capitalist state indoctrination) could cover everyone unable to afford insurance by providing it at such extremely low cost. So low that even people below the poverty level, and thus qualify for supplemental income tax rebates, would have insurance. It would simply be deducted from their \$500 tax rebates or whatever. So they would never even see it being paid for.

The insurance companies love the mandatory part, which would deliver millions of new customers into their hands and let them set the price. But they hate any so-called public option, which would give those poor customers an alternative. So they've done a pretty good job of torpedoing the public option. Good enough to scare Obama off it for a while, even though any such public measure of his would always have been a half measure and still depended upon the insurance corporations to exist. Now it's back, but who knows what it looks like now, or will look like when the fight is over.

And insurance companies especially fear the possibility of a national health card, which inevitably comes with any sort of government sponsored public healthcare. It's just too damned efficient. For instance, in France, doctors have no files, just a card reader and an Internet connection that links to the patient's permanent files and scan images. But it also tracks costs, fees and billings. And in France (or Germany, I forget) if the doctor is not paid within 72 hours, the insurance company is fined. Health insurance companies in Germany are totally non-profit, but sell other insurance – auto and home – for profit. They see providing efficient health coverage as a good leader item and a chance to show off their performance to customers. A public option is the first step toward such a system, or something similar. But I suspect we will never see a national health card. These

thugs in America would never stand for it. They like to count their money unseen.

Elected officials, the strong liberal ones at least, are mute on this because to say anything resembling the above is political death. The brownshirts who worked them over at town hall meetings at the behest of the healthcare industry would not be so easy on them next time, given what's at stake for the capitalist overclass. Which is to say the healthcare industry's corporate criminal cartel.

And besides, they own the joint. Our government is now a corporate criminal enterprise extorting the wealth productivity of the people. The people are so used to it and so conditioned they no longer know how to ask questions or extrapolate outcomes. They just react in fear of any new public proposal that would change the status quo.

As for the mandatory part and the fines, that is a red herring if ever there was one. People who have a hard time paying for healthcare (and who doesn't?) get scared out of their britches by such threats. That's why the Republicans put it in there. To scare people away. First you take a good and reasonable thing like universal healthcare, and turn it into a scary authoritarian mandatory thing with grave punishments. Put some stink all over it, something obvious and odious. Make it a burden AND a threat.

That is one of the poison pills for the bill. There will be others to come. After the death panel thing, and the way the people swallowed it, we already know the outcome. Hell, one of the anti-healthcare lies being circulated around here right now is that Obama wants to have mandatory abortions of anyone born with low IQ or is otherwise substandard. Which is OK with me because it would spell the end of the Republican Party.

But whatever they do, there will be no rounding up and fining of the underemployed, unemployed or broke. That's 50 million people these days. Any effort would

be mostly a paperwork exercise, at this point. And besides, they do not want your body. They want your money. Thugs work the neighborhoods where the money is, not where it ain't. We live in an extortion based criminal enterprise masquerading as a government, so one shudders to think of the paperwork liens that could be placed on homes, etc. They are paperwork too, but have the strength of law behind them. The commissariat judges who provide the legal muscle for the cartels.

All of which is moot as long as medical and pharma costs in this country are astronomical and still rising, making doctors, executives and major shareholders in the crime syndicate richer than ever. And as long as drone missiles, 400 military bases and two ongoing wars keep draining an already looted public treasury that is forced to run international indebtedness anyway.

Scaring people

Whenever we see something like the mandatory health insurance covered in the media, it is there for effect, not to inform us. It is there to cloud the issue and scare the piss out of people toward the ends of the corporate state. To make them fearfully ask the wrong questions and miss the real issue. The real question is this: When are we going to rise up against our government and the criminal cartel that owns it?

And with each passing day I am more convinced that the answer is – never. That takes true inner convictions and ideals, not to mention courage. The real thing, not political rhetoric and ideology. Convictions are measured by actions. And true convictions are arrived at through the clear-eyed self-examination and deep questioning and personal sacrifice of individuals. And defining one's self as something necessarily other than the state. We failed to do so too long ago. We are now state property. A mass of people rallying and surging back and forth in response to state manufactured pseudo events and faux choices. If I still loved this country I would weep for it.

But I've watched us too willingly acquiesce to this fate for too long. I don't think we have the reservoir of cultural, moral, spiritual and political strength to turn things around. Or even conceive of what can be, other than what we've seen. Instead, we are issued empty terms as convictions, such as democracy and diversity.

Surely though, the noisy pseudo drama of pseudo choices will go on in a pseudo democracy. If I were a younger man, it might possibly be instructive, in a chilling way. But a guy gets tired of learning the same old lesson year after year, decade after decade. The lesson being that Americans have become weak and fearful things. Ignorant of any sort of real self agency in shaping their country's government. They embrace the notion of "working within the system." Then too, the consequences for doing otherwise are dire. Our corpo-government crime syndicate makes that very clear. In a mob neighborhood, everyone is afraid.

In closing let me say, by all means go ahead and blow the beans out of your pressure cooker. I did. And I found that it left me with a clearer head (or maybe a less cluttered delusion of my own, who is to say? But either way, now the decor inside the old cranium allows me to sleep better at nights). People will call you nuts, say you've gone over the brink. But I find that there is plenty of fine company down here at the bottom of the cliff.

In art and labor,

Joe

CT

PS: I hear on the BBC this morning that the US is still number two (behind Switzerland) in economic output. The difference between the quality and security of our lives and that of the Swiss can be seen as a measure of what is siphoned off by the cartel. Evidently there is quite a bit of wealth being produced by the people left to steal, leaving public amenities and the people to run on pure debt. Thus, don't expect our criminal overlords to let up on us any time soon.

We are now state property. A mass of people rallying and surging back and forth in response to state manufactured pseudo events and faux choices. If I still loved this country I would weep for it

Joe Bageant is the author of the best selling *Deer Hunting With Jesus: Dispatches from America's Class War* (Random House, 2007)

The history of a campaign that failed

The story of Sarah Palin, former Governor of a Really Big state, told by **Clay Reynolds** (*with apologies to Mark Twain*)

Anyways, Obama grew up and went to Harvard, which is a big college somewhere near Maine or Connecticut or one of those teeny-tiny states that nobody can remember on a geography quiz – or at least nobody in my class could remember the capital of except, of course, Anne Marie Smith

Once upon a time there was a little boy named Barack Hussein Obama who was born in Hawaii, which is near Kenya – or maybe part of Kenya – who can tell? At any rate he was born in Hawaii, maybe, on an island named Oahu, which rhymes with “Wahoo,” which is the yell that came from my daughter’s bedroom so many times when she and her boyfriend were watching the Christian Broadcasting Network’s review of Gospel Favorites – they were such fans! – and his father was from Kenya, which made the little boy half an African American – a real African American, not one of the fake kinds from Georgia or someplace – or at least half an African American, since his mother wasn’t from Kenya or Hawaii, but was from Kansas, which is part of Chicago. I think. At least, there are some nice stores there and a really tall buildings and a lake a Canadian named Gordon Lightfoot, who is a Canadian or something, named Gitchigoomie that nobody can swim in because it’s so polluted and is bigger than the Bering Straits that you can’t really see across whether the Russians are there are not and can’t swim in because it’s so cold.

This little boy worked hard all his life to earn money so he could go to school, and he made good grades, although he probably didn’t deserve them but only got them because he was in Kansas and everyone

knew he was from Hawaii or Kenya, which made him special because nobody can remember where Hawaii is, except my sometimes bestest friend, Anne Marie Smith, who thought she was so smart because she made all As on her report cards and went to a real college and finished her degree and was so prissy that she didn’t even have to wear glasses so everyone could see her when she winked.

Anyways, Obama grew up and went to Harvard, which is a big college somewhere near Maine or Connecticut or one of those teeny-tiny states that nobody can remember on a geography quiz – or at least nobody in my class could remember the capital of except, of course, Anne Marie Smith, who was so snotty just because her daddy was a big deal in town, which is why I wanted to be a PRESIDENT or SENATOR or GOVERNOR of the State of Alaska like Arnold Schwartzberger, who is my hero, even though he was born in Armenia or Alsatia or one of those A places, or Ronnie Reagan, whose picture should appear on Mount Rushmore in Wyoming or Montana or somewhere, and who looked so cool in his cowboy hat with Nancy who always said NO, which I wish my daughter had listened to her about, or own my own nail salon or be something important when I grew up, right after I beat the socks off of her in all the beauty contests we could find

to enter – and I did, too! Any-who, he went to Harvard or somewhere like that and became a lawyer or something like that and came back to Kansas and worked hard to make things all better in the neighborhoods of Chicago, which everybody knows is full of Mafia goon squads and such things who are always shooting at each other and not even from airplanes, and finally was elected to the US SENATE from the State of Illinois or Idaho or another one of those I States or someplace that has lots of corn and wheat and pigs and stuff, and lots of African Americans, too – the fake fake kind who aren't even from Georgia or someplace.

While he was in Chicago or Kansas but before he left for the SENATE, he joined this church that is run by Black Pantherites, who hate America and say “G.D. America” and talk about h-e-double two-sticks all the time, not as a place that Muslims go to burn forever because they don't believe in Jesus Christ as their PERSONAL SAVIOR and even though they think there are a bunch of virgins there waiting for them in ETERNAL D – NATION, but as a description of the same communities Obama was working hard to organize, and he became a Muslim and a Nazi and a Socialist. His work as an organizer was because of him being a Socialist, who are also organizers, mostly. He became a Muslim because his daddy was a Kenyan and an African American – the real kind – and because he hates America because his grandmother lived in Hawaii and he didn't get to go visit her very much, which is why he hates old people, too. He became a Nazi because he heard that the Nazis rounded up all the old people and killed nearly six million of them somewhere in Europe – Australia, I think – during one of those World Wars we had that nobody could keep straight except Anne Marie Smith, who always thought she was so important because her mother could make stew from fresh-killed moosemeat, something that I soon learned to do better than she did and got my stew on National Television to boot, and not just because it

was a slow news day, either, although I had to make the network pay to have the house cleaned up because it was such a mess from my kiddos tracking in moose guts and fish scales and stuff because they know that because we eat we hunt since the supermarket doesn't sell moosemeat. So he kept it a secret that he was a secret Kenyan and Muslim and Socialist and Nazi from Chicago, Iowa, which is near Kansas or Hawaii.

He was in the US SENATE just long enough to get his chair warm and to vote for a bunch of stuff only Socialists believe in – like abortions and not praying and letting homosexuals act like regular people – and then he ran for the PRESIDENT of the UNITED STATES, and he won, even though he was half an African American, the real kind, and even though he had Hillary Clinton as a running-mate opponent and she was a woman and everything and had been married to Bill who was the cause of all the problems in the REPUBLICAN National Convention, especially the bazillion-dollar deficiency, because he had an affair with a chubby young woman named Monica and then lied about it on national television and got a peach for doing it, although Hillary wasn't nearly as pretty as Monica or as me or even Anne Marie Smith! And I ran for Vice President, I think, but they made me hang around with this really old guy named John McCain who was kind of crippled up and really old and was a prisoner of warfare when he was shot down over China or someplace, even though he'd divorced his wife, who was faithful to him while he was away fighting COMMUNISM and the Domino Theories and staying in the Hilton in Hanoi, or somewhere, but who didn't look good standing next to me because he's so short and who didn't know how to match his tie with my dress, and who kept wincing and making faces at me whenever I tried to tell him how the cow ate the cabbage, which, by golly, I know! Even though we don't have a lot of cows in the Wonderful State of Alaska, because we keep thinking they're caribous or rein-

He became a Muslim because his daddy was a Kenyan and an African American – the real kind – and because he hates America because his grandmother lived in Hawaii and he didn't get to go visit her very much, which is why he hates old people, too

SATIRE

I never could remember them the way that nasty Anne Marie Smith would have, just because she thinks she's so perfect because she married a guy with a real job and stuff and who takes a bath once in a while and shaves and looks good in a real suit, but who really isn't very good in bed, and, by golly... well, never mind that, tick-a-lock

deers and shooting them. And so we lost to Obama even though we don't have any African Americans – not any kind – in the Great State of Alaska, which wasn't fair, because they made fun of all my earmarkers, which everybody knows are part of what people want when they want bridges and pipe lines and stuff, and they questioned my ethicals, like when I fired my no-good rotten ex-brother-in-law because he was such a dirty bird, and they made me answer all these really hard questions about Africa and other countries I'd never heard of on television and in other places, and even though they gave me the answers ahead of time and wanted to put this gizmo, which I would not wear because it did not match my earrings, in my ear so they could even tell me what they were, I never could remember them the way that nasty Anne Marie Smith would have, just because she thinks she's so perfect because she married a guy with a real job and stuff and who takes a bath once in a while and shaves and looks good in a real suit, but who really isn't very good in bed, and, by golly ... well, never mind that, tick-a-lock.

And the first thing Obama when he and his perfect wife and perfect kids, who are even more obnoxious than Anne Marie Smith and her kids and are nothing like my kiddos who are almost perfect and know how to use all kinds of firearms and fishing equipment and can skin a grizzly bear with a bottle opener, did when he got to the WHITE HOUSE, where no African American – even the fake kind – had never spent so much as one night, was run the economy into the ground and make people lose their jobs and go broke, especially on Wall Street, and the second thing he did was raise taxes on babies and crippled people, and the third thing he did was make us keep fighting this war in Iraq, or maybe Iran, which we didn't even start, because they had all these massive destructibles, which he never could find even though we had already killed Sadaam Hussein, who was this really bad guy who lived in a hole

and never shaved and had fleas and lice and stuff and who I think Obama is related to because they have the same name and who captured a bunch of airplanes and ran them into the Empire State Buildings in Boston or Philadelphia or someplace like that when he could just as easily have run them into some building in Chicago, like the Sears Twin Towers, or somewhere, and the fourth thing he did was keep us invading Afghanistan and try to find Ossama ben Laden, who is another really bad man who ran the Talibans, which I think is a kind of religious department store for Muslim women in India or Peru, or someplace in the Apex of Evil, where they sell these really ugly dresses and head scarves, which are no good in the cold of my Home State of Alaska, and who makes lots of video tapes even though nobody has a VCR anymore and only play DVDs, and who won't speak English, even though he can, and who doesn't even know how to hold an AK-47 right, even though Obama tortured every man, woman, and old person in the country by making them ride surf boards in the water and also made them wear these really ugly orange jumpsuits and shower shoes and live in Gitmo, Cuba, which is near Florida or Texas, where there's no new cars at all, but he never could, and the fifth thing he did was give all the money in Washington D.C. to the car makers because everybody, including Anne Marie Smith, who thinks she's so important just because her daughter has a husband and stuff, wants economical cars made in Pakistan and other parts of Africa, especially Honduras, which is why we are going to war with Pakistan next, because of all the boarder problems they're having with the warlords, who are, I think, men who are witches, and because they hate Indians, which we have a lot of in the Great State of Alaska, although we call them Eskimos, even though they like to be called Inuits, which is another one of those I words nobody can pronounce except Anne Marie Smith, who is such a snob because she wants them to be able to hunt

and make beads and blankets and stuff in their igloos where they don't even kiss but rub noses which is why they're overpopulated, like everybody knows, and the sixth thing he did was give all the other money he borrowed from the RED Chinese, who are near North Korea and look just like them and who make Obama look like a chipmunk in a polar bear cage at feeding time, even though the Chinese should probably save all their money to pay for the winter Olympias they had there, even though it was so terribly pollinated that nobody could breathe and didn't snow the way it does in my Beautiful State of Alaska, so they had to do all kinds of other stuff that made no sense, like beach volleyball, which may be illegal to watch in Alaska, which is where they should have the Olympias, even though that snooty Anne Marie Smith would probably enter the swimsuit competition again and beat me out, since I had all my children naturally and not by Caesar Section the way she did, to the other forty-eight states even though those that were REPUBLICAN just said NO and turned it down, like I did, and the Red Chinese stole water from all the regular Chinese farmers so they could have their river races in these skinny little boats that wouldn't last two seconds in the Bering Straits, even if the Russians weren't there, and the seventh thing he did was to find this Mexican woman and make her a Supreme, even though she wasn't even a fake African American and probably can't even sing or dance because she was a racist and a Mexican and too short, besides, and has no fashion sense whatsoever – just like Anne Marie Smith! – and who probably doesn't even speak English and who I think snuck into the country before we could put up a wall to stop that kind of thing, and the eighth thing he did try to make CONGRESS, which is where the US SENATE, which I was going to run like a clock, by golly, as soon as I got to be Vice President, or something, and which I think is in NEW YORK CITY, which does not have small town values and is an evil

place full of illegal aliens from Port Rico and Russia and places like that and muggers and millions and millions of fake, fake African Americans and fake other kinds of minorities, like gays and Catholics, who are from all over the place and all talk dirty, or so Anne Marie Smith said when she was being so stuck up about having a bunch of clothes from fancy stores there, which is something I made John McCain buy for me and my husband and my kiddos the very second I became a mate on his running ticket but before he fooled around and lost the election because he hung around with this homeless guy named Joe Plumber who wasn't really a plumber and who never wears a tie and was even dumber than Anne Marie Smith, try to pass a health care bill which would mean that we would have to give FREE HEALTH CARE to people who had NO MONEY AT ALL, if you can believe that!, is. I mean how are drug pushers and chiropractors and insurance pharmacy companies supposed to get ahead if that happens? And what about Medicare? What about that? Then he wanted to kill all the babies, including my own little girl's baby, I'm sure, and just because her boyfriend turned out to be such a jerk – which was a total surprise to everyone, and I don't care what Anne Marie Smith says!

And part of his stupid, ridiculous health care thingie was to make sure all the old people were rounded up by DEATH PANEL SQUADS and put into gasoline chambers where they would be burned alive before being strangled by poison glasses, the same way the Nazis did – and I've seen the pictures of those, by golly, so don't try to tell me! – which proves that he's a Nazi, just like giving all that Chinese money away to all the banks and car companies proves that he was a Socialist, and the fact that he bowed down on his knees before some Muslim shriek in Arabia, which is near Turkey or Egypt or Israeli, or someplace in the Middle of Asia, and then he refused to prove that he was ever actually born anywhere, and then he wanted to tell all the

I became a mate on his running ticket but before he fooled around and lost the election because he hung around with this homeless guy named Joe Plumber who wasn't really a plumber and who never wears a tie and was even dumber than Anne Marie Smith

SATIRE

Steve Colbert is really a Secret Pal or maybe boyfriend of Anne Marie Smith's or maybe of one of her daughters, and who I know for a fact went to Iraq so he could spy for the El Kadas, who are, I think, all Kenyans or maybe Kurdistanis or one of those K words – like Kansas!

kids to stay in school so they'd all turn out like Anne Marie Smith, probably, and be so stuck-up, just like that sneaky Katie Couric – who thinks she's so smart and who actually looks like Anne Marie Smith, only she's shorter and a little hippy – which I am not!, I don't care what Anne Marie Smith says – and who I happen to know dyes her hair and wears contact lenses when she reads all her stupid magazines and stuff, or that mean old Jon Stewart, who I think is a Jew and who is shorter than John McCain and not even as cute as Joe Plumber, or that stupid David Letterman, who is not funny and has a gap between his teeth that he's too cheap to get fixed and was mean to my little girl and her little baby and made nasty jokes about both of them and about me and my husband and all that I hold dear in my Beloved State of Alaska on National Television, or that real Nazi Steve Colbert, who I think is really a Secret Pal or maybe boyfriend of Anne Marie Smith's or maybe of one of her daughters, and who I know for a fact went to Iraq so he could spy for the El Kadas, who are, I think, all Kenyans or maybe Kurdistanis or one of those K words – like Kansas! – and so they could remember something they read, or maybe so they could actually read, which is a waste of time in The Glorious Sate of Alaska, since there's lots of wild animals to shoot and hockey to play and snowmobiles

to race around, and stuff like that to do when we're not counting the fish floating down the stream or watching the Russians off our back porches!

Which is why I resigned as Governor of the Really Big State of Alaska, so I could put on my lipstick and spread my story far and wide about how I only lost my election to Vice Presidentship because the Media and Anne Marie Smith were running around making stuff up about me and my family, who are off-limits! So that's why Obama is an evil person and unAmerican and probably wishes he was born in one of the original thirteen colonials, like I was, and that he was more than half an African American – the real kind – which, of course, he isn't even that, really, since even Anne Marie Smith knows that there are no Africans in Hawaii!

The End.

CT

Native Texan novelist, scholar, and critic Clay Reynolds is the author of 13 books and more than 700 other publications ranging from critical studies to short fiction and poems. He is presently professor of arts and humanities at the University of Texas at Dallas and for five years served as the school's associate dean for undergraduate studies.

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Media failure adds to financial failure

The press is still ignoring the story of fraud and the economic decline still to come, writes **Danny Schechter**

We know that Wall Street has not learned much from the crash it helped instigate. We know that our government, whatever its stated desire to clean up the markets and reform the financial behemoths, lacks the willingness and perhaps the clout to rein in the real power centers. We are not sure if they have been “captured” by them, or just lack the guts to take on institutions and individuals that helped fund their rise to power.

But do we know that, even now, much of our media, despite the sheer volume of coverage may be missing the real story? Do we know that if we want to find missing facts and the real context we have to turn away from the failed media system that never really investigated the failed financial system

The Project on Excellence on Journalism, a think tank that examines media trends, released a study charging “that the gravest economic crisis since the Great Depression has been covered in the media largely from the top down, told primarily from the perspective of the Obama administration and big business, with coverage reflecting the concerns of institutions more than the lives of everyday Americans.”

Why is this? I asked several journalists in making a film and writing a book about the financial crisis as a crime story. A number

agreed that the media itself is “embedded” in the culture and narratives of Wall Street, like reporters embedded in Iraq. They lack the ability to be critical of the sources they rely on. They bring little perspective and context to their work.

Max Wolff, who works in the financial industry, and also teaches about it, shared his view as we stood outside the New York Stock Exchange:

“I think the media mostly did unpaid press releases for various businesses looking to sale financial products and while that made sense given the advertising driven the media, they became cheerleaders instead of critics and that took of the table out of the discussion a critical voice that would have help people realize what was going on, stop it before it got too big and deal with the crisis in a way that was relatively transparent, democratic and broadly beneficial as opposed to quite and partial and very muddy and unclear.”

I pressed him to reflect on why. He said, “It seems like there is still a tendency to amplify rumors on one hand, and then try to reassure that everything is ok while at the same time tell us that the world is about to end...”

“Well we get a wild volatility, with a blind set of stories, everything is fine, nothing to see here, remain calm or if you don’t do x, y and z or tomorrow life as we know

“The gravest economic crisis since the Great Depression has been covered in the media largely from the top down, told primarily from the perspective of the Obama administration and big business, with coverage reflecting the concerns of institutions more than the lives of everyday Americans”

SILENT REPORTING

“You know everybody that comes on television is working for government or working for Wall Street. They all have invested interest. They are all trapped inside the bubble and so from their advantage point they don’t know they are in a bubble...”

will come to a stretching hold, water won’t come out of your fosse, electricity won’t come on, and you will live the rest of your life regretting that you just didn’t listen to me when I told you what I wanted. And that is a bad way conduct a social discussion. And it makes the public more scared and quite reasonably less confident in leadership whether that is corporative leadership, politicians or the media itself.”

The tendency on the left is to bash the frenzy of free market hype on the Fox News Channel but not look to carefully at other channels and mainstream media outlets.

Often, even when they run good stories, they don’t probe deeply enough. The Naked Capitalism blog offered up one recent example in the *New York Times*:

“The *New York Times* features a generally very good piece, “Buyout Firms Profited as a Company’s Debt Soared,” by Julie Creswell that falls short in one important respect: it fails to call a prevalent and destructive practice of private equity firms by its proper name....”

“George Akerlof and Paul Romer called that activity looting in a famous 1993 paper and depicted it as criminal: ‘Bankruptcy for profit will occur if poor accounting, lax regulation, or low penalties for abuse give owners an incentive to pay themselves more than their firms are worth and then default on their debt obligations....”

Conservatives like Peter Schiff who was literally laughed off Fox News when he warned of the coming meltdown in 2006 – the year I did the film *In Debt We Trust* - says media institutions have centrist biases that genuflect to the status quo. A lot of the media I appeared on were kind of captured by the industries,” he told me. “You know everybody that comes on television is working for government or working for Wall Street. They all have invested interest. They are all trapped inside the bubble and so from their advantage point they don’t know they are in a bubble...”

Right now, many media outlets are reinforcing the idea that a recovery is under-

way pointing to a rise in the stock market and some signs of improvement, even as joblessness continues to climb along with bankruptcies and foreclosures.

The dissents of informed analysts like Paul Krugman, Nouriel Roubini and George Soros are heard but marginalized. The signs of another collapse tied to an insolvent banking sector are discussed in the financial blogs but not yet on TV.

And the crime angle that I investigate is still seen as minor, except in all the stories about Bernie Madoff or the corporate lawyer Marc Dreier just profiled by 60 Minutes which wanted to get him to be more “emotional” (ie cry for the camera).

These “poster boys” for corporate crime get the visibility while reports on pervasive “epic” fraud in our financial institutions are buried in trade outlets like Information Week which notes “Seventy percent of financial institutions in the past 12 months have had cases of insider fraud, new survey says.”

“Kelly Jackson Higgins reported, “A former Wachovia Bank executive who had handled insider fraud incidents says banks are in denial about just how massive the insider threat problem is within their institutions. Meanwhile, the economic crisis appears to be exacerbating the risk, with 70 percent of financial institutions saying they have experienced a case of data theft by one of their employees in the past 12 months, according to new survey data.

“Shirley Insoe, who spent 21 years at Wachovia handling insider fraud investigations and fraud prevention, says banks don’t want to talk about the insider fraud, and many aren’t aware that it’s an “epic problem.”

Epic problems are often buried problems. No wonder most of us don’t know about them and are not as outraged as we deserve to be. **CT**

News Dissector Danny Schechter has made a film and written a book on the “Crime Of Our Time.” (NewsDissector.com/plunder.)

If the Russians did this to us, we'd kill 'em!

A very real enemy has invaded the United States and stripped it bare, writes **David Michael Green**

What if the Russians invaded? It's not so far-fetched an idea, you know. We spent half a century and trillions of dollars to make sure that it would never happen, so it's really not such a strange notion.

So what if the Russians invaded?

What if they came and stole all of our money?

What if the Russians invaded and enslaved our children as cheap worker bee drones locked in dismal dead-end jobs?

What if the Russians invaded and excavated all of our natural resources, leaving only mountains of toxic debris in their wake?

What if the Russians invaded and they ruined our infrastructure, thrashed our educational institutions, and stuck us with a grossly inadequate healthcare system?

What if the Russians invaded and incarcerated a huge percentage of our people in for-profit jails? What if they ruined our military by sending it off on big-money colonial expeditions? What if they cut the legs out from under the middle class?

What if the Russians invaded and turned us against each other, tricking this tribe of Americans into hating that tribe, in order to keep any of us from realizing that they were looting our country?

If the Russians did any of these things,

we'd kill 'em. Dead.

If the Russians invaded, we'd send our army to crush them in defense of our country (or, at least, we hire somebody to do it).

If the Russians invaded, we'd be furious and raging and hateful and destructive – for good reason, too – and we would bring to them the full measure of American organized violence in order to take back our country from their plundering rampages.

Of course, the Russians haven't invaded. But what's astonishing about the moment we live in is that America has in fact been subjected to all these travails. We have essentially been invaded by those who wish us ill, and our national and private resources are being stripped bare. This country is being looted, and everything in it that isn't nailed down is being carted away and sold off.

Enormous financial burdens

Our children are being saddled with enormous financial burdens. Our educational and healthcare systems, sucked dry as mere revenues sources, are falling to pieces. Our infrastructure is approaching ruin.

Our jobs, our industries and our community resources have been bundled up and exported to where the work can be done far cheaper, and the workers are compliant. Increasingly we are scrambling just

We have essentially been invaded by those who wish us ill, and our national and private resources are being stripped bare. This country is being looted, and everything in it that isn't nailed down is being carted away and sold off

ROBBING A NATION

Under the terms of this new/old arrangement, the unregulated wealthy grab absolutely everything they can get their hands on, the middle class scrambles for whatever bare existence it can maintain, and the rest of America, the working class and the poor, fall deeper and deeper into third world-style poverty

to survive. Admittedly, our government remains absolutely dedicated to making sure that some of us do extremely well. It's just that that 'some' doesn't include anyone you know.

What is absolutely astonishing about the moment that we live in is that we have been essentially invaded, we have been absolutely looted, and yet we don't seem to be the slightest bit angry about that.

If the Russians had done it, we would be absolutely furious. But in fact, it was our own overclass that did it, and not only are we not furious at them, we don't even notice the crime. Or, if we do notice, we're furious at some ridiculously inappropriate target, like a 'liberal' president who isn't even remotely liberal.

America has always been a country with its full and fair share of flaws, but for quite some time during the middle part of the twentieth century, we got one thing reasonably right. There was a bargain then, between elites and the government and the public. According to the terms of the deal, the aristocracy would still be fantastically rich, but there would be limitations on their wealth, because some of that wealth, some substantial amount, needed to be shared with the working people and the middle class, and it was the role of government to make sure that happened. Many among the well-to-do even shared that consensus.

Since Ronald Reagan rode into town, however, that deal is off the table, replaced by what is essentially a new New Deal – or, more accurately, simply the Bad Old Deal. Under the terms of this new/old arrangement, the unregulated wealthy grab absolutely everything they can get their hands on, the middle class scrambles for whatever bare existence it can maintain, and the rest of America, the working class and the poor, fall deeper and deeper into third world-style poverty. Under the terms of this new system, the role of the government is no longer to provide for the welfare of the people, nor to ensure that there are limitations on what the plutocracy can lib-

erate from them. Under the terms of this new arrangement, the function of the government is simply to serve as a tool, assisting that plutocracy in depriving America's own people of everything that can be taken from them.

That means that in the last thirty years we've entirely restructured the economy so that the super-wealthy have become obscenely-super-wealthy, and the middle class are lucky to have stood still, and haven't really even managed that. If one examines the destination of the considerable GDP growth that America has sustained over the last three decades, it's gone entirely to the richest of Americans. The middle class has actually lost ground. That's an astonishing fact, but think about it: Despite robust economic growth, workers today actually make less than they did back in the 1970s.

Jobs exported, tax policy changed

Even more amazing, it wasn't that hard to pull off. All you had to do was to fool the people and divert their attention to other circuses to go along with the remaining crumbs of bread. Meanwhile, unions were decimated by changes in government policy. Jobs were exported – first to the south, then to Mexico, then to China, now to Thailand or Vietnam, and probably soon to Africa – in a never-ending search for the cheapest possible way to wring value out of the working people of the world, leaving Americans without any sort of remaining industry or economic base. Tax policy was also deployed, channeling money from current working Americans, and especially from their children, and diverted it to the already wealthy. The upshot of all these policy changes was that the richest Americans became absolutely, astonishingly, fabulously rich, and the rest of us are barely holding on, if that.

If the Russians had come here and done this – if they had come and stolen our resources, if they come and enslaved our children into inescapable soul-numbing

jobs, if they had left us with environmental degradation and a wrecked economy and destroyed education system and a crumbling infrastructure and a sieve-like health-care regime – if the Russians had come and done any or all of this, we would've risen up in anger and hostility and patriotism and nationalism, and we'd have loaded up our weapons and killed every last one of them.

But it wasn't the Russians that did it, it was our own overclass. And worse still, it was our own government acting as though they were protecting us from the evil bogeyman du jour, while in fact they were assisting the wealthy in bleeding us dry, until our anemia left us fit only for our profit-seeking hospitals.

Think about how idiotic you have to be to allow yourself to be looted and not even realize the money's been taken out of your pocket. Think about how politically immature you have to be to allow a thief to walk right up to you, take your money, and not even recognize who that thief is. Think about how stupid you have to be to blame it on somebody else – like gays, or Iraqis, or black helicopters – and not pay attention to the real rip-off artist who's stealing your money.

I would tip my hat in admiration to these plutocrats for the cleverness of their scheme – even if a scam this ugly requires the predators to have the moral sensibility of an empty parking lot – but in fact what they've done isn't really all that clever. The successes of their crimes have lots more to do with the fatuousness of their victims than with the acumen of the criminals.

Worse yet, as if the American public hasn't already been stupid enough, here we are thirty years down the road from the advent of Reaganism, and we still don't get it. Here we are after three decades of being looted, still unable to figure out who's ripping us off. Here we are, even after the implausibly complete failures and disasters and depredations of the Bush administration, and most Americans are still unable

to point to the criminals and their ideology, and identify the source of the crime.

Which makes the future looked even more shaky. Now we have a president who most Americans are coming to believe is some sort of far-left Stalinist, while in fact he is every bit the full-measured facilitator of corporate parasitism that either George W. Bush or Bill Clinton were.

And yet, because he is being made out to be some sort of outrageously decadent liberal, and because Americans are too dim to figure out the ruse, this president – who is failing to address the concerns of ordinary Americans, most especially because he's not working for them in the least – is bound to fail, and is looking increasingly like the proud owner of a one-term presidency. And what we can expect in reaction to that failure – ironically and disastrously and jaw-droppingly idiotically – is a sharp turn to the right. When Obama fails, it will be framed, as it already is being, as some sort of grand failure of liberalism. In fact, of course, just the opposite is true. It's a grand success of the overclass's looting of America.

Little change

In this respect, Obama offers precious little "change", even from the crimes of George W. Bush. Look at his healthcare initiative, for example. I don't know about you, but I'd say it's a pretty safe bet that anything that the big pharmacological and big health insurance industries are in favor of is pretty much guaranteed to be a disaster for the rest of us – you know, we the people of the United States. This bill no more represents an initiative for the purpose of bringing healthcare to Americans than George Bush's prescription drug bill was an initiative to improve the life of seniors. In both cases, whatever vicarious and accidental improvements that exist are simply diversionary window-dressing on what is really another example of legalized corporate colonialism.

In the case of Obama's healthcare legis-

Think about how stupid you have to be to blame it on somebody else – like gays, or Iraqis, or black helicopters – and not pay attention to the real rip-off artist who's stealing your money

ROBBING A NATION

The upshot is that today American voters have two choices. They can have the party that represents the maximal plundering of America, at the maximal speed. Or they can have the party that represents nearly the same crime at almost the same velocity

lation, what's happening is that enormous quantities of new customers are being forced to buy expensive health coverage from insurance industry predators who will be vastly enriched by means of this new legislation, which is precisely why they would favor something that ordinarily we would expect them to oppose, and that we certainly would expect them to oppose if Obama was any kind of progressive whatsoever, even if only in his personal fantasies.

Public looting

The bank bailouts were absolutely no different. What an amazing episode, what an amazing looting of the American public, what an amazing chapter in the destruction of an empire – and all brought to us by a supposedly liberal president. In fact, Obama was simply extending the tradition of the Bush administration, and the Reagan ideology prior to that, which calls for pillaging the federal treasury in order to divert the maximal amount of money to economic elites, and then leaving the bill for the American taxpayer. One could go on and on from here. Obama continues to deploy more mercenaries in Iraq and Afghanistan than there are uniformed American soldiers. He continues to support privatization of everything from American prisons to schools. He asks for the most tepid possible re-institution of regulations on the financial industry, and when the thieves on Wall Street growl back at him, he abandons even those most limited of obstacles to their worst impulses.

The upshot is that today American vot-

ers have two choices. They can have the party that represents the maximal plundering of America, at the maximal speed. Or they can have the party that represents nearly the same crime at almost the same velocity. Either way, the United States has ceased in any meaningful way to be owned by citizens. Its voters vote, but their representatives in Congress and in the administration are beholden to economic elites, and act entirely accordingly.

The country's institutions, infrastructure, and social relations are all being dismantled piece by piece and either relocated elsewhere or sold off in order to wring yet another drop of wealth out of the hides of working Americans, so that those who are already wealthy beyond belief can be even further enriched.

If some other country did this to us – if the Russians invaded and took all our resources, and enslaved us and our children to work in dismal jobs when we could find any work at all sufficient to maintaining a rapidly sinking middle class livelihood – if those things happened and the perpetrator was a foreign power, we'd rise up and go to war and we'd kill every last one of 'em.

But we're not doing any of that, even though a very real enemy has invaded this country and stripped it bare. In fact, this society is pretty busy making sure that we don't even notice who that enemy is. **CT**

David Michael Green is a professor of political science at Hofstra University in New York. More of his work can be found at his website, www.regressiveantidote.net

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The lying game

John Pilger compares the current drum-beating for war against Iran with the manufacture of a sense of false crisis that led to invasion of Iraq and the deaths of 1.3 million people

In 2001, the *Observer* in London published a series of reports that claimed an “Iraqi connection” to al-Qaeda, even describing the base in Iraq where the training of terrorists took place and a facility where anthrax was being manufactured as a weapon of mass destruction. It was all false. Supplied by US intelligence and Iraqi exiles, planted stories in the British and US media helped George Bush and Tony Blair to launch an illegal invasion which caused, according to the most recent study, 1.3 million deaths.

Something similar is happening over Iran: the same syncopation of government and media “revelations”, the same manufacture of a sense of crisis. “Showdown looms with Iran over secret nuclear plant”, declared the *Guardian* on 26 September. “Showdown” is the theme. High noon. The clock ticking. Good versus evil. Add a smooth new US president who has “put paid to the Bush years”. An immediate echo is the notorious *Guardian* front page of 22 May 2007: “Iran’s secret plan for summer offensive to force US out of Iraq”. Based on unsubstantiated claims by the Pentagon, the writer Simon Tisdall presented as fact an Iranian “plan” to wage war on, and defeat, US forces in Iraq by September of that year – a demonstrable falsehood for which there has been no retraction.

The official jargon for this kind of pro-

paganda is “psy-ops”, the military term for psychological operations. In the Pentagon and Whitehall, it has become a critical component of a diplomatic and military campaign to blockade, isolate and weaken Iran by hyping its “nuclear threat”: a phrase now used incessantly by Barack Obama and Gordon Brown, and parroted by the BBC and other broadcasters as objective news. And it is fake.

On 16 September, *Newsweek* disclosed that the major US intelligence agencies had reported to the White House that Iran’s “nuclear status” had not changed since the National Intelligence Estimate of November 2007, which stated with “high confidence” that Iran had halted in 2003 the programme it was alleged to have developed. The International Atomic Energy Agency has backed this, time and again.

The current propaganda-as-news derives from Obama’s announcement that the US is scrapping missiles stationed on Russia’s border. This serves to cover the fact that the number of US missile sites is actually expanding in Europe and the “redundant” missiles are being redeployed on ships. The game is to mollify Russia into joining, or not obstructing, the US campaign against Iran. “President Bush was right,” said Obama, “that Iran’s ballistic missile programme poses a significant threat [to Europe and the US].” That Iran would contemplate a

This serves to cover the fact that the number of US missile sites is actually expanding in Europe and the “redundant” missiles are being redeployed on ships

TARGET IRAN

Iran's crime is its independence. Having thrown out America's favourite tyrant, Shah Reza Pahlavi, Iran remains the only resource-rich Muslim state beyond US control

suicidal attack on the US is preposterous. The threat, as ever, is one-way, with the world's superpower virtually ensconced on Iran's borders.

Iran's crime is its independence. Having thrown out America's favourite tyrant, Shah Reza Pahlavi, Iran remains the only resource-rich Muslim state beyond US control. As only Israel has a "right to exist" in the Middle East, the US goal is to cripple the Islamic Republic. This will allow Israel to divide and dominate the region on Washington's behalf, undeterred by a confident neighbour. If any country in the world has been handed urgent cause to develop a nuclear "deterrence", it is Iran.

As one of the original signatories of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Iran has been a consistent advocate of a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East. In contrast, Israel has never agreed to an IAEA inspection, and its nuclear weapons plant at Dimona remains an open secret. Armed with as many as 200 active nuclear warheads, Israel "deplores" UN resolutions calling on it to sign the NPT, just as it deplored the recent UN report charging it with crimes against humanity in Gaza, just as it maintains a world record for violations of international law. It gets away with this because great power grants it immunity.

Obama's "showdown" with Iran has another agenda. On both sides of the Atlantic the media have been tasked with preparing the public for endless war. The US/Nato commander General Stanley McChrystal says 500,000 troops will be required in Afghanistan over five years, according to America's NBC. The goal is control of the "strategic prize" of the gas and oilfields of

the Caspian Sea, central Asia, the Gulf and Iran – in other words, Eurasia. But the war is opposed by 69 per cent of the British public, 57 per cent of the US public and almost every other human being. Convincing "us" that Iran is the new demon will not be easy. McChrystal's spurious claim that Iran "is reportedly training fighters for certain Taliban groups" is as desperate as Brown's pathetic echo of "a line in the sand".

During the Bush years, according to the great whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg, a military coup took place in the US, and the Pentagon is now ascendant in every area of American foreign policy. A measure of its control is the number of wars of aggression being waged simultaneously and the adoption of a "first-strike" doctrine that has lowered the threshold on nuclear weapons, together with the blurring of the distinction between nuclear and conventional weapons.

All this mocks Obama's media rhetoric about "a world without nuclear weapons". In fact, he is the Pentagon's most important acquisition. His acquiescence with its demand that he keep on Bush's secretary of "defence" and arch war-maker, Robert Gates, is unique in US history. He has proved his worth with escalated wars from south Asia to the Horn of Africa. Like Bush's America, Obama's America is run by some very dangerous people. We have a right to be warned. When will those paid to keep the record straight do their job? **CT**

John Pilger will receive the Sydney Peace Prize on 5 November. His latest book, "Freedom Next Time," is now available in paperback

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Sodomised for freedom

Why all the attention to waterboarding when the media talks about US torture?, asks **Allan Uthman**. There are other, equally repellant techniques to discuss – anal rape, for example

“Yasser tearfully described that when he reached the top of the steps ‘the party began. ... They started to put the [muzzle] of the rifle [and] the wood from the broom into [my anus]. They entered my privates from behind.’ ... Yasser estimated that he was penetrated five or six times during this initial sodomy incident and saw blood ‘all over my feet’ through a small hole in the hood covering his eyes.” – by Physicians for Human Rights’ “Broken Laws, Broken Lives,” a report containing firsthand accounts of men who endured torture by US personnel in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantánamo Bay.

Waterboarding. It’s all we seem to discuss when comes to American torture. Whenever you see people discussing “enhanced interrogation” on your TV, chances are they’ll be throwing around the same tired arguments, all revolving around waterboarding.

Why, of all the things we’ve done to our suspected (and not-so-suspected) terrorist detainees, is waterboarding the issue? Why confine the rapidly dwindling debate to that single technique? We’ve engaged in a lot of other practices that qualify universally as torture. Are sleep deprivation or “Palestinian hanging” not controversial enough? Is solitary confinement too mundane?

How about sodomy? Is that something

we consider unremarkable?

That’s right; sodomy. Forcible anal penetration. The documentation of this and other forms of sexual humiliation is too extensive to be denied or pawned off on a couple of redneck privates. And we know now that sexual humiliation techniques were among those discussed and approved by the National Security Principals Committee, a White House group including Dick Cheney, Condoleezza Rice, Donald Rumsfeld, Colin Powell, George Tenet and John “History will not judge this kindly” Ashcroft.

I don’t want to come off as minimizing the horror of controlled drowning. It’s just that there’s something about anal rape that brings the torture issue into sharp focus.

Justifying anal rape

Just once, I’d like to hear one of these American Enterprise Institute psychos, the ones that always trot out to defend the neo-cons’ freakish obsessions, have to defend shoving a flashlight up a guy’s ass. I want to hear Frank Gaffney or Jonah Goldberg tell me why I shouldn’t be fucking mortified that raping prisoners was considered within tolerable interrogation practices by my country. I want Glenn Beck to justify butt-raping a suspect.

The next time I hear some idiot refer to Jack Bauer in defense of torture, I want to

I don’t want to come off as minimizing the horror of controlled drowning. It’s just that there’s something about anal rape that brings the torture issue into sharp focus

DEFEND THIS

Raise the specter of White House-authorized sexual abuse, and anyone who doesn't shrink away from defending it will be doomed to be remembered as the guy who defended ass-rape and forced urine-drinking

ask him what he thinks of Jack Bauer rogering terrorists with a broomstick. You've never seen that in the hours of not-so-subtle pro-torture TV drama we've seen since 2001, have you? Never saw Andy Sipowicz cornhole a skull on NYPD Blue? Or Michael Chiklis on The Shield making a suspect drink his pee? Me neither. Something tells me that might have hurt their ratings.

The key to winning the debate on torture is to eradicate any illusions about just what this was, which is sick, twisted and freakish beyond any usefulness in gathering information. And it becomes very clear in the light of a rectally inserted lightstick.

Raise the specter of White House-authorized sexual abuse, and anyone who doesn't shrink away from defending it will be doomed to be remembered as the guy who defended ass-rape and forced urine-drinking, which is the very least an American should suffer for trying to justify brutally raping prisoners.

Limited debate

But no one will pull the trigger. Even as more proof is revealed, nobody seems to mention the sodomy. The torture debate is limited to waterboarding alone. Why?

Forget the 48 photos President Barack Obama has flipped on releasing (like the putz he's turned out to be). There are known photos – you can see them at Salon.com – of a female prisoner being raped, and a male. Not to mention the kinky, naked slave-stacking and forced masturbation – and the prisoner with a banana up his ass.

We blared Metallica at them 24 hours a day while they shat themselves, chained to the floor. We kept them in coffin-sized boxes for hours on end. We hung them from the ceiling. We made them jack each other off. We beat some of them to death. Many have lost their minds. Some of these people were guilty of nothing but being in Afghanistan or Iraq and being swept up as part of an intelligence “mosaic.”

The inevitable dunderhead response, “they beheaded our people,” is a sickness unto itself. From Abu Ghraib to Gitmo, we've suffered countless such humiliating comparisons, judging ourselves by the lowest standards current events can offer.

Sorry, but it is not enough to say we aren't as bad as Saddam Hussein or the scumbags that killed Daniel Pearl. The very idea that we should measure our own conduct by theirs is a total failure of self-respect. Only the worst kind of scumbag can excuse himself by saying, “I'm incrementally better than the Taliban.”

What's so sick about it is that the sexual nature of the torture seems so unnecessary. I mean, even if we were going to torture them, we could have stuck to waterboarding, pulling some fingernails or just beating the shit out of them. But menstrual blood smeared on their faces? Rape? What kind of people do that? What possible purpose does that serve that outweighs becoming known as the country that ass-rapes people? We couldn't get enough answers, or false confessions, or whatever we were looking for, from regular brutality? We had to go all BDSM on these people?

The upshot is this: America is the country that rapes its prisoners. We're sex criminals. That's our thing now. And Obama's refusal to “look back,” i.e. prosecute these incredibly serious crimes, ensures that it's our permanent legacy. No national reputation can survive this simply by shrugging it off.

We used to be seen as a bastion of freedom and decency around the world. That shit is over, folks. Now we're like the Soviet Union, with better movies. When we talk about human rights, we are an international joke. And when we talk about torture, we stick to waterboarding, because nobody, not even the “liberals,” are willing to face what we've done. **CT**

Allan Uthman is executive editor for the Buffalo Beast – www.buffalobeast.com

Gaza's tunnel economy

Eric Ruder looks at the lengths to which desperate Gazans – starved and deprived by Israel's punishing blockade – are going to in order to attain food and other necessities

Israel launched a pre-dawn wave of air strikes against a tunnel on August 10 that it said was being used by Palestinian militants to smuggle explosives into Gaza. Israel claimed that its offensive was a reaction to the firing of rockets at the Eretz border crossing that connects Gaza and Israel.

The attack produced a ripple of headlines in newspapers around the world, but the attention was notable precisely because though such strikes were once routine, they have been rare in the months since Israel carried out its December/January massacre that claimed the lives of some 1,400 Palestinians and severely damaged Gaza's already fragile infrastructure.

The real story, generally ignored by mainstream reports that failed to penetrate beyond Israel's own assertions about its motives, is the ongoing siege of Gaza, the tunnel economy that the people of Gaza now must depend on, and the daily and deadly toll of the humanitarian crisis unleashed by Israel's siege.

In the two years since Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip, Israel has imposed a suffocating blockade of a dizzying array of goods essential to subsistence. In the month of January 2007, more than 14,000 truckloads of goods entered Gaza, but in June 2007, that number fell to about 5,000. Since then, the monthly number of

truckloads entering Gaza has hovered just above 2,000, which is less than a quarter of what Gaza needs to function normally.

"I lived through the 1967 war, but I've never seen days like this before," said Souad Abrado, whose home was destroyed by Israeli bulldozers this past winter. She and her husband now sleep on foam mattresses under a tarp next to the rubble that was once their home because they are unable to find an apartment.

The choking shortage of food, fuel, construction and medical supplies has spawned a network of hundreds of tunnels connecting the Rafah refugee camp in southern Gaza with the Egyptian border town of Rafah. Even before Israel's December/January offensive, some 90 percent of goods entering Gaza were smuggled through the tunnels, which are controlled by businessmen who pay the Hamas government a one-time digging fee of about \$2,500 for each tunnel they build.

The cost of constructing and maintaining Gaza's economy of tunnels is substantial, both in terms of money and lives. The tunnels vary dramatically in size, cost between \$25,000 and \$100,000 to build, and take several weeks to complete the digging and rudimentary buttressing to keep the tunnel from collapsing on itself.

Some are no more than a yard across and barely tall enough for a grown man

The choking shortage of food, fuel, construction and medical supplies has spawned a network of hundreds of tunnels connecting the Rafah refugee camp in southern Gaza with the Egyptian border town of Rafah

DIGGING FOR LIFE

The unpredictability of life and death in the tunnels is more than matched by the arbitrariness of Israel's policy that bars some goods on some days and other goods on other day

to crawl through. Others are wide and tall enough to walk through upright and to even accommodate the passage of livestock such as cows and goats or large automobile parts. Most have an electric winch or some other means to raise and lower goods down the tunnel shaft, which varies in depth from 50 to 80 feet. Some even have a winch at either end of the tunnel, which may run 1,500 to 2,500 feet underground, to pull the goods from Egypt into Gaza and the transport containers back from Gaza into Egypt. The tunnels provide a lifeline connecting Gaza to the outside world, but they are also deadly and dangerous for the more than 5,000 Palestinians who toil underground or operate the machinery that keep the goods flowing.

In one week spanning late July and early August, 12 Palestinians died in tunnel accidents. In one particularly gruesome episode, seven tunnel workers died when a spark ignited gasoline that had leaked from a pipe used to move the fuel through the tunnel. It took days for five of the charred bodies to be excavated from the rubble, and two other men who suffered moderate burns had to be hospitalized.

In all, more than 150 Palestinians have been killed in tunnel accidents since the June 2007 tightening of the siege. But in a land characterized by the collapse of industry, soaring unemployment and desperate poverty, thousands of Palestinians choose the prospect of steady employment over the daily risk of being crushed, burned or bombed on the job.

Life and death in the tunnels

The unpredictability of life and death in the tunnels is more than matched by the arbitrariness of Israel's policy that bars some goods on some days and other goods on other days. The seemingly random decisions by Israeli officials about what gets through and when has confounded aid agencies, businesses and transport companies.

"We've asked them, 'Please, supply us with lists, so we know upfront,'" says

William Corcoran, president of American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA). ANERA had been allowed to deliver medical supplies and food aid with few obstacles for most of the last eight years it has operated in Gaza – until last November. "[Now, it's] a very cumbersome system, more complicated than it's ever been before," explained Corcoran.

ANERA and several other aid groups, including Save the Children, World Vision, and Mercy Corps, have repeatedly requested that Israeli officials clarify their policy but to little effect.

In March, during the closing days of the administration of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, the Israeli cabinet announced that it would allow the "unfettered" transport of food into Gaza. But according to Sari Bashi, the executive director of Gisha, the Legal Center for the Freedom of Movement, based in Tel Aviv, this official policy is intentionally frustrated by a maze of bureaucratic obstacles that reimpose the fetters that Israel supposedly lifted. "Even if they say all food is allowed, Israel has created an extremely onerous bureaucratic process that has made it nearly impossible to get many basic foodstuffs into Gaza," said Bashi.

According to a May 13 report in the *Christian Science Monitor*:

"The process includes complicated manifests of food being sent in by various aid organizations, which can be rejected at any point in the process and not always for clear reasons. Trucks are checked, unloaded, and reloaded several times over the course of days, raising shipping costs.

"In recent months, all of the following items have been rejected at one point, and later allowed in only after it became an embarrassing international issue: pasta; lentils; strawberry jam; chocolate; and halvah, a Middle Eastern sweet made of sesame. A shipment of "reinforced nutritional bars" were turned back because low-level military officials misunderstood the manifest and thought they were steel bars, which – like other building materials – are not allowed into Gaza."

Even tin cans are not allowed because they could be melted down for other purposes, making it difficult for farmers in Gaza to turn vegetables into canned food that will last longer.

As a consequence, trucks full of food and aid sit, sometimes for weeks, while their cargo spoils. In June, Egyptian authorities burned a shipment of peanuts, agricultural pesticides and medicines that had expired before Israel allowed the goods into Gaza.

Such policies have left some 80 percent of Gaza's 1.5 million residents dependent on aid agencies for food and medicine.

"I used to buy two cartons of eggs a week, but after the war the price of one carton jumped and I stopped buying it," said Amal Sharif, a resident of the Shati refugee camp and a mother of 10. There are many things that we stopped buying completely: meat, fish, chicken. Even the price of fruit is higher." Sharif has also resorted to making just two meals a day instead of three: "We eat breakfast at 11 a.m. and lunch at 5 or 6 p.m., so no one needs to eat dinner after that."

Weapons smuggling

The centrality of the tunnels to Gaza's near-dead economy undermines Israel's chief justification for maintaining its right to use air strikes along the Rafah border at will. Israel asserts that the tunnels are used for weapons smuggling, without acknowledging that without the tunnels, Gaza would face mass starvation.

In truth, Israel recognizes that the tunnels must remain open – precisely to keep Israeli officials from having to face international criticisms that it was literally starving the people of Gaza to death. Thus Israel – along with Egypt's collaboration – engages in a complicated dance around the tunnels, turning a blind eye at times while bombing the tunnels at other times, in order to carry out the slow but steady (rather than fast and obvious) strangulation of Palestinian life in Gaza. And while Israel uses the world's most sophisticated jet fighters and ordnance to deny food and aid to the people of Gaza

and arms to Hamas, the US supplies Israel with jet fighters and explosives – all while the international community looks on.

In this context, it is understandable why the Hamas government does use some tunnels to import arms. How else can it defend itself from Israel, which – thanks to help from US taxpayers – possesses one of the world's 10 most powerful militaries? Certainly Hamas would end its weapons smuggling – in exchange for an agreement from the US to end its massive military supplies to Israel.

Despite all the rhetoric about how Israel must bravely confront "Palestinian terrorists," Israel has killed far more civilians through its military offensives and siege than Palestinian rocket attacks or bombings. The truth is that the civilian toll has been five to 10 times higher on the Palestinian side for every year since 2000. And that only counts the number of Palestinian civilians directly killed in Israeli military strikes. Since June 2007 alone, at least 344 Palestinians who required life-saving medical treatment that Gaza's compromised health care system couldn't provide them have died because of the Israeli siege.

Palestinians seeking health care outside Gaza are regularly denied travel permits by Israel – or are granted permits but then still denied passage. It's impossible to know how many lives were unnecessarily shortened by Israel's callous disregard for such patients.

Israel also bars the importation of construction materials, such as cement and steel, under the Orwellian policy of restricting the flow of so-called "dual-use equipment" – that is, goods essential to the functioning of Gaza's civilian infrastructure that may also have a military application.

Cement and steel, for example, could be used to build bunkers and other structures to defend military targets and are not allowed to be imported, even though they are desperately needed to rebuild more than 14,000 homes, 68 government buildings, and 31 offices of nongovernmental organizations damaged or destroyed by Israel earlier this

Palestinians seeking health care outside Gaza are regularly denied travel permits by Israel – or are granted permits but then still denied passage

DIGGING FOR LIFE

By means of both military and economic attacks, Israel has sought to devastate Gaza's entire economy and civilian infrastructure in order to force either total surrender on the Palestinian people or the slow but relentless strangulation of all social life

year, according to the UN Development Program.

It should be mentioned that the US used this same logic in imposing deadly sanctions against Iraq for the 12 years between its 1991 and 2003 invasions. These sanctions killed 1 million Iraqis, half of them children under 5, according to the United Nations. In addition to the doublespeak of barring dual-use supplies, Israel also uses the capricious designation of "luxury items" to bar all manner of goods on any given day. The reason? According to Israeli Defense Ministry spokesperson Maj. Guy Inbar, "gourmet items" are turned away because they won't be consumed by average Palestinians, but "by the rich and corrupt leaders of Hamas."

But rhetorical concern for the plight of Gaza's poverty-stricken residents does not conceal the fact that Israel, not Hamas, is responsible for the crushing siege that has plunged so many Palestinians into desperate poverty – and created the shortages of everyday items that make for lucrative opportunities for wealthy Palestinians who own and operate the tunnels. A bag of smuggled cement, for example, costs 10 times what a bag of cement used to.

That explains why the huge price tag associated with building a tunnel is embarked upon – by employing cheap Palestinian labor to take advantage of the artificial shortages created by Israel's blockade, the initial investment can be made back in a hurry. By means of both military and economic attacks, Israel has sought to devastate Gaza's entire economy and civilian infrastructure in order to force either total surrender on the Palestinian people or the slow but relentless strangulation of all social life.

But the people of Gaza still refuse to capitulate. Some have begun rebuilding their houses with bricks made of mud and clay, building materials that were abandoned 50 years ago in favor of steel, brick and concrete. Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, drawing on the example of the Black South African struggle against apartheid, have

launched a boycott, divestment and sanctions movement against Israel.

And activists from around the world have responded – building divestment campaigns as well as convoys of aid and people designed to defy the Israeli siege (as well as challenge Egypt's shameful collaboration in the project).

But the pressure in Gaza is mounting every day. In January 2008, two-thirds of the border wall between Gaza and Egypt was toppled by Palestinian resistance fighters. In what can only be described as the world's largest prison break, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians – perhaps as many as 800,000 – flooded into northern Egypt to stock up on supplies.

For days the border remained open, and Egyptian authorities only succeeded in sealing it after deploying riot police armed with electric batons, water cannons and live ammunition, along with hastily constructed barbed wire and chain-link fences to hold back the sea of people.

Could there be a replay of these events in the future? Some observers believe that discussions about how to pursue such a move are already beginning in Gaza. In addition to the internal pressures driving Palestinian leaders toward this strategy, there are also some signs that the world beyond Gaza may look on such a development sympathetically.

In his June 4 speech in Cairo, Barack Obama acknowledged that Gaza was in throes of a "humanitarian crisis" and just a month later the G8—the group of eight of the world's most-powerful countries—issued a statement calling on Israel to allow for a "sustained reopening" of Gaza's border crossings in order to facilitate the regular flow of people, food and aid.

But talk is cheap—and without more and sustained pressure from activists, students and workers around the world, Israel, the US and Egypt will continue their criminal policy of collective punishment against the people of Gaza.

Don't let them get away with it. **CT**

Eric Ruder writes for Socialist Worker, where this essay originally appeared. www.socialistworker.org

Relieving the sickness of pacifism

William Blum tells how NATO pressurised Germany and Japan to drop their resistance to fighting in the war on Afghanistan

Picture the scene: Afghanistan, two hijacked tankers filled with highly inflammable fuel, surrounded by a crowd of Afghans eager to syphon off some for free ... What's the last thing you want to do? Right – drop bombs on the tankers. That's what a German military commander signaled an American drone airplane to do September 4. Kaboom!! At least 100 human beings incinerated. This incident has led to a lot of controversy in Germany, for Article 26 of Germany's post-war Grundgesetz (Basic Law/Constitution) states: "Acts tending to and undertaken with intent to disturb the peaceful relations between nations, especially to prepare for a war of aggression, shall be unconstitutional. They shall be made a criminal offense."

But NATO (aka the United States) can take satisfaction in the fact that the Germans have put their silly pacifism aside and acted like real men, trained military killers; although prior to this incident the Germans had engaged in some aerial and ground combat, there hadn't been such a dramatic and publicized taking of civilian lives. Deutschland now has more than 4,000 soldiers in Afghanistan, the third largest contingent in the country after the US and Britain, and at home they've just finished building a monument to fallen members of the Bundeswehr (Federal Armed Forces), founded in 1955; 38 mem-

bers (so far) have surrendered their young lives in Afghanistan.

In January 2007 I wrote about how the US was pushing Germany in this direction; that circumstances at that time indicated that Washington might be losing patience with the pace of Germany's submission to the empire's needs. Germany declined to send troops to Iraq and sent only non-combat forces to Afghanistan, not quite good enough for the Pentagon warriors and their NATO allies. Germany's leading news magazine, *Der Spiegel*, reported the following:

"At a meeting in Washington, Bush administration officials, speaking in the context of Afghanistan, berated Karsten Voigt, German government representative for German-American relations: "You concentrate on rebuilding and peacekeeping, but the unpleasant things you leave to us." ... "The Germans have to learn to kill."

A German officer at NATO headquarters was told by a British officer: "Every weekend we send home two metal coffins, while you Germans distribute crayons and woolen blankets." Bruce George, the head of the British Defence Committee, said "some drink tea and beer and others risk their lives."

A NATO colleague from Canada remarked that it was about time that "the Germans left their sleeping quarters and

NATO (aka the United States) can take satisfaction in the fact that the Germans have put their silly pacifism aside and acted like real men, trained military killers

ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

The United States has also engaged in a decades-long effort to wean Japan away from its post-WW2 pacifist constitution and foreign policy and set it back on the righteous path of again being a military power, only this time acting in coordination with US foreign policy need

learned how to kill the Taliban.”

And in Quebec, a Canadian official told a German official: “We have the dead, you drink beer.”

Ironically, in many other contexts since the end of World War II the Germans have been unable to disassociate themselves from the image of Nazi murderers and monsters.

Will there come the day when the Taliban and Iraqi insurgents will be mocked by “the Free World” for living in peace?

The United States has also engaged in a decades-long effort to wean Japan away from its post-WW2 pacifist constitution and foreign policy and set it back on the righteous path of again being a military power, only this time acting in coordination with US foreign policy needs.

“Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.

“In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.” – Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, 1947, words long cherished by a large majority of the Japanese people.

In the triumphalism of the end of the Second World War, the American occupation of Japan, in the person of General Douglas MacArthur, played a major role in the creation of this constitution. But after the communists came to power in China in 1949, the United States opted for a strong Japan safely ensconced in the anti-communist camp. It’s been all downhill since then. Step by step ... MacArthur himself ordered the creation of a “national police reserve”, which became the embryo of the future Japanese military ... Visiting Tokyo in 1956, US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles told Japanese officials: “In the past, Japan had demonstrated her superiority over the

Russians and over China. It was time for Japan to think again of being and acting like a Great Power.” ... various US-Japanese security and defense cooperation treaties, which, for example, called on Japan to integrate its military technology with that of the US and NATO ... the US supplying new sophisticated military aircraft and destroyers ... all manner of Japanese logistical assistance to the US in its frequent military operations in Asia ... repeated US pressure on Japan to increase its military budget and the size of its armed forces ... more than a hundred US military bases in Japan, protected by Japanese armed forces ... US-Japanese joint military exercises and joint research on a missile defense system ... the US Ambassador to Japan, 2001: “I think the reality of circumstances in the world is going to suggest to the Japanese that they reinterpret or redefine Article 9.” ... under pressure from Washington, Japan sent several naval vessels to the Indian Ocean to refuel US and British warships as part of the Afghanistan campaign in 2002, then sent non-combat forces to Iraq to assist the American war as well as to East Timor, another made-in-America war scenario ... Secretary of State Colin Powell, 2004: “If Japan is going to play a full role on the world stage and become a full active participating member of the Security Council, and have the kind of obligations that it would pick up as a member of the Security Council, Article Nine would have to be examined in that light.”

One outcome or symptom of all this can perhaps be seen in the 2005 case of Kimiko Nezu, a 54-year-old Japanese teacher, who was punished by being transferred from school to school, by suspensions, salary cuts, and threats of dismissal because of her refusal to stand during the playing of the national anthem, a World War II song chosen as the anthem in 1999. She opposed the song because it was the same one sung as the Imperial Army set forth from Japan calling for an “eternal reign” of the emperor. At graduation ceremonies in

2004, 198 teachers refused to stand for the song. After a series of fines and disciplinary actions, Nezu and nine other teachers were the only protesters the following year. Nezu was then allowed to teach only when another teacher was present.

Which brings us to Italy, the remaining member of the World War Two Tripartite, or Axis. Article 11 of the 1948 Italian Constitution says in part: "Italy rejects war as a means for settling international controversies and as an instrument of aggression against the freedoms of others peoples."

But Washington laid claim early to Italy's post-war soul. In 1948 the United States all but took over the Italian election campaign to insure the Christian Democrats (CD) defeat of the Communist-Socialist candidate. (And the US remained an electoral force in Italy for the next three decades maintaining the CD in power. The Christian Democrats, in turn, were loyal Cold-War partners.) In 1949, the US saw to it that Italy became a founding member of NATO. This was not seen as a threat to Article 11 because NATO has always painted itself as a "defensive" organization, even in 1999 when it carried out a 78-day bombing of Yugoslavia as both Italy and Germany supplied military aircraft and a NATO air base at Aviano, Italy served as the main hub for the daily bombing runs. For decades, Italy has been the home of US military bases and airfields used by Washington in one military adventure after another from Europe to Asia.

There are now some 3,000 Italian soldiers in Afghanistan performing a variety of services which enables the United States and NATO to engage in their bloody warfare. And 15 Italian soldiers have also lost their lives in that woeful land. The pressure on Italy, as on Germany, to become full-fledged combatants in Afghanistan and elsewhere is unrelenting from their NATO comrades.

The Berlin Wall – Another Cold War Myth

Within a few weeks many of the Western

media can be expected to turn on their propaganda machines to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the tearing down of the Berlin Wall, November 9, 1989. All the Cold War clichés about The Free World vs. Communist Tyranny will be trotted out and the simple tale of how the wall came to be will be repeated: In 1961, the East Berlin communists built a wall to keep their oppressed citizens from escaping to West Berlin and freedom. Why? Because commies don't like people to be free, to learn the "truth". What other reason could there have been?

First of all, before the wall went up thousands of East Germans had been commuting to the West for jobs each day and then returned to the East in the evening. So they were clearly not being held in the East against their will. The wall was built primarily for two reasons:

The West was bedeviling the East with a vigorous campaign of recruiting East German professionals and skilled workers, who had been educated at the expense of the Communist government. This eventually led to a serious labor and production crisis in the East. As one indication of this, the New York Times reported in 1963: "West Berlin suffered economically from the wall by the loss of about 60,000 skilled workmen who had commuted daily from their homes in East Berlin to their places of work in West Berlin."

During the 1950s, American coldwarriors in West Germany instituted a crude campaign of sabotage and subversion against East Germany designed to throw that country's economic and administrative machinery out of gear. The CIA and other US intelligence and military services recruited, equipped, trained and financed German activist groups and individuals, of West and East, to carry out actions which ran the spectrum from terrorism to juvenile delinquency; anything to make life difficult for the East German people and weaken their support of the government; anything to make the commies look bad.

Before the wall went up thousands of East Germans had been commuting to the West for jobs each day and then returned to the East in the evening. So they were clearly not being held in the East against their will

ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

Eastern Europe became communist because Hitler, with the approval of the West, used it as a highway to reach the Soviet Union and wipe out Bolshevism forever. After the war, the Soviets were determined to close down the highway

It was a remarkable undertaking. The United States and its agents used explosives, arson, short circuiting, and other methods to damage power stations, shipyards, canals, docks, public buildings, gas stations, public transportation, bridges, etc; they derailed freight trains, seriously injuring workers; burned 12 cars of a freight train and destroyed air pressure hoses of others; used acids to damage vital factory machinery; put sand in the turbine of a factory, bringing it to a standstill; set fire to a tile-producing factory; promoted work slowdowns in factories; killed 7,000 cows of a co-operative dairy through poisoning; added soap to powdered milk destined for East German schools; were in possession, when arrested, of a large quantity of the poison cantharidin with which it was planned to produce poisoned cigarettes to kill leading East Germans; set off stink bombs to disrupt political meetings; attempted to disrupt the World Youth Festival in East Berlin by sending out forged invitations, false promises of free bed and board, false notices of cancellations, etc.; carried out attacks on participants with explosives, firebombs, and tire-puncturing equipment; forged and distributed large quantities of food ration cards to cause confusion, shortages and resentment; sent out forged tax notices and other government directives and documents to foster disorganization and inefficiency within industry and unions ... all this and much more.

Throughout the 1950s, the East Germans and the Soviet Union repeatedly lodged complaints with the Soviets' erstwhile allies in the West and with the United Nations about specific sabotage and espionage activities and called for the closure of the offices in West Germany they claimed were responsible, and for which they provided names and addresses. Their complaints fell on deaf ears. Inevitably, the East Germans began to tighten up entry into the country from the West.

Let's not forget that Eastern Europe became communist because Hitler, with the

approval of the West, used it as a highway to reach the Soviet Union and wipe out Bolshevism forever. After the war, the Soviets were determined to close down the highway.

In 1999, *USA Today* reported: "When the Berlin Wall crumbled, East Germans imagined a life of freedom where consumer goods were abundant and hardships would fade. Ten years later, a remarkable 51% say they were happier with communism."

About the same time a new Russian proverb was born: "Everything the Communists said about Communism was a lie, but everything they said about capitalism turned out to be the truth."

Health care: ignoring the huge red elephant in the room

In the frenzied search of recent months for a better way of delivering health care to the American people, the American media has often discussed health-care systems in other countries, particularly Europe. Usually, little, if anything, is mentioned about Cuba's system, where everyone is covered, for everything, where pre-existing conditions do not matter, and no patient pays for anything; i.e., nothing at all. The reason the Cuban system is seldom mentioned in the mass media is probably that it's kind of embarrassing that this otherwise poor country, laboring under the awful yoke of (choke, gasp) socialism, can deliver health care that most Americans can only dream of.

Now we have a new book by T.R. Reid, former correspondent for the *Washington Post* and commentator for National Public Radio. It's called *The Healing of America: A Global Quest for Better, Cheaper, and Fairer Health Care*" Reid does not avoid giving some credit to the Cuban system, but he makes sure that the reader knows that he's not taken in by any commie propaganda. He refers to the Cuban government as "a totalitarian Communist fiefdom", and adds: "In every country (except, perhaps, a police state like Cuba) there is one group

of citizens who are not bound by the unified health care system: the rich.” Thus, the fact that Cuba has an egalitarian health care system is made to seem like something negative, something one could expect to find only in a police state.

In discussing the World Health Organization’s giving Cuba high marks for fairness in its system, Reid points out: “Of course, fairness and equal treatment extend only so far; when Fidel Castro himself fell ill in 2007, medical experts were flown in from Europe to treat him.” Aha! I knew it! Americans, and not just the right-wing crazies, would never accept a medical system where everyone got completely free care for all ailments if the president ever got any kind of special treatment. Would they? We could at least ask them.

Speaking of the right-wing crazies, there was a report in the *New York Times* which said: “Tomorrow night, getting right into the thick of the battle,” the president will “carry his message to the people in a nationwide television and radio speech” fighting for enactment of his health reform bill, which opponents tagged as “socialized medicine” and “an entering wedge for the takeover of private medicine by the federal government.” The president was John F. Kennedy, the program was Medicare, the *Times* story was published on May 20, 1962. Despite the speech, the effort failed until passage in 1964.

And speaking of the totalitarian communist socialist fascist Cuban police-state dictatorship, Mr. Reid and others might be interested in an article I wrote at <http://killinghope.org/bblum6/democ.htm> — which demonstrates that during the period of its revolution, Cuba has enjoyed one of the very best human-rights records in all of Latin America.

But how to get past a lifetime of conditioning and reach the American mind with that message? At the recent convention of the AFL-CIO, the country’s leading labor

organization, there was a very progressive resolution put forth calling for the right of all Americans to travel to Cuba and for an end to the US embargo against the island nation. But at the end of the resolution the authors reminded us that they’re Americans, calling upon Cuba “to release all political prisoners”.

To appreciate what’s wrong with that resolution one must understand the following: The United States is to the Cuban government like al Qaeda is to Washington, only much more powerful and much closer. Since the Cuban revolution, the United States and anti-Castro Cuban exiles in the US have inflicted upon Cuba greater damage and greater loss of life than what happened in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001.

Cuban dissidents typically have had very close, indeed intimate, political and financial connections to American government officials, particularly in Havana through the United States Interests Section. Would the US government ignore a group of Americans receiving funds from al Qaeda and/or engaging in repeated meetings with known leaders of that organization?

In the past few years, the American government has arrested a great many people in the US and abroad solely on the basis of alleged ties to al Qaeda, with a lot less evidence to go by than Cuba has had with its dissidents’ ties to the United States, evidence gathered by Cuban double agents. Virtually all of Cuba’s “political prisoners” are such dissidents. **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*. Portions of the books can be read, and signed copies purchased, at www.killinghope.org

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