

**INSIDE:** HEROES FOR THE MASSES ● LET'S ATTACK IRAN! ● THE FREE MARKET EXPLAINED ● TALE OF TWO BOOBS ● WIKILEAKS: SMEAR & DENIAL

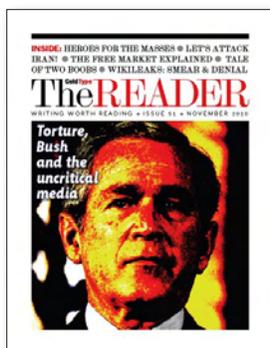
**The** ColdType **READER**

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**Torture,  
Bush  
and the  
uncritical  
media**



# The <sup>ColdType</sup> READER



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# Heroes for the masses

**Chris Hedges** meets a couple who have spent their lives fighting for the rights of workers and prisoners

**S**taughton Lynd could have built an enviable career as an academic but for his conscience. His conscience led him as a young undergraduate disgusted by the elitism around him to drop out of Harvard, and tortured him when he returned to finish his degree. It plagued him after he received his doctorate from Columbia and saw him head to the segregated South to join his friend Howard Zinn in teaching history at the historically black Spelman College. It propelled him to become the director of Freedom Schools in the Mississippi Summer Project of 1964. It prodded him a year later to chair the first march against the Vietnam War in Washington, D.C., and join Tom Hayden and Herbert Aptheker on a trip to Hanoi.

The administration at Yale University, where Staughton taught after leaving Spelman because of conflicts with the college president over his and Zinn's activism, was not amused. Yale dismissed him as a professor. Five other universities, which had offered Staughton teaching positions, abruptly rescinded their offers. He had become a pariah. No university would hire him, although his book "Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism" had become a minor classic. Staughton, like all incorrigible rebels, found a new route to defy authority. He put himself, with his wife's help, through law school, graduated in 1976

and moved to Youngstown, Ohio, to fight the departing steel companies and defend workers tossed out of jobs.

Staughton faults the labor movement and 1960s civil rights organizers, including Saul Alinsky, for whom he worked in Chicago, for failing to see that moving temporarily into a community, organizing and then departing left the organized vulnerable to reprisal. It eroded the credibility and moral authority of radical activists. The Lynds embrace the idea of "accompaniment," proposed by the assassinated Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero. Accompaniment calls on professionally trained people, whether lawyers, doctors or teachers, to move into poor areas and remain there. This led the Lynds to move, once Staughton got his law degree, to Youngstown, where they have remained for 34 years.

Power, for the Lynds, must be fought in all its forms. While working for a law firm that represented unions, Staughton was asked to prepare a Supreme Court brief for a union that had failed to file a meritorious grievance for a member.

"I'd drop dead first," Staughton snapped at the head of the firm.

He then published a book called "Labor Law for the Rank and Filer," and the firm's patience with their new hire ended. He was fired. It was another lesson, for all who seek the moral life, that the world does not re-

**I was alive during World War II when there was torture galore; then it was considered a grave offense. The Nuremberg Tribunals tried and convicted Germany's leaders for torture and other war crimes**

## HELPING HANDS

**Bush's confidence – or arrogance – can be traced, in part, to the power and tenacity of his acolytes, especially the neocons who remain very influential in Washington**

ward virtue. Failure, at least as it is defined by the powerful, is the price to pay for moral autonomy and courage. Staughton had become a lawyer to help workers. If union bosses would not further workers' rights, he would fight the unions too.

"The paradigmatic experience of my father, who as a student at Union Theological Seminary had taken a summer preaching assignment, which apparently was the practice between the first and second years, saw him end up at a Rockefeller oil camp in Elk Basin, Wyo.," Staughton said. "When my father arrived in Elk Basin in the early 1920s by stagecoach, he became aware on the very first evening at the table that the men who were working six days a week for Mr. Rockefeller were not thrilled to have this handsome young man from the East spending the week talking to their wives. So he got a job as a pick-and-shovel laborer, and preached in the schoolhouse Sunday evenings. It is the single thing about him of which I am most proud. I have made a way of life out of what my father experienced for a summer, to find a way to have a continuing relationship with the poor and the oppressed, with a working-class community quite different from the academic livelihood that both my parents ended up in.

"Throughout my life with one or two exceptions, my closest friends have been persons who, like Howard Zinn, could be described as working-class intellectuals," he said. "What it means for Marxist analysis and how we change the world, I guess I am still trying to figure out. Nowadays, Youngstown having closed all its steel mills and become a prison town, Alice and I have some of our closest relationships with people behind bars."

I met Staughton and Alice, also a lawyer, a few days ago in Youngstown. The Lynds, now in their 80s, have soldiered on as the walls have collapsed around them. They practice what they call "prophetic litigation," meaning that they often know they are likely to lose but believe that constantly battling issues of injustice and abuse, and

keeping these issues before the public, is worth the likelihood of defeat.

Youngstown, like many postindustrial pockets in America, is a deserted wreck plagued by crime and the attendant psychological and criminal problems that come when communities physically break down. The city's great steel mills have been leveled and replaced by America's new growth industry—prisons, including a so-called supermax facility.

The Lynds worked for many years for Legal Services in Youngstown, specializing in employment law. Staughton, when the steel mills were shut down in the late 1970s, served as lead counsel to the Ecumenical Coalition of the Mahoning Valley, which sought to reopen the mills under worker-community ownership. The legal impediments, however, conspired to make the worker-community ownership impossible, a stark reminder that law in this country is usually designed to protect privilege.

"The hollowing out of the American economy, the absence of manufacturing jobs, is critical," he said. "It means that this is not an ordinary recession. We are not going to bounce back the way we did in past recessions. Alice and I have had some contact with a school in inner-city Youngstown where they send kids who are thrown out of public school to give them one last chance before they put them behind bars. We have a pretty intense feeling for what it is like to grow up as an African-American in a place like Youngstown. Even if you make it through high school, where do you find a job? I don't mean to say the problem is wholly economic. There is often a lack of love in the home that these kids experience. But if there were decent jobs which a hard-working young person could go on to, we would have a different world. Instead, some of these kids volunteer for the military and take their hatred and trauma overseas."

As the collapse has taken its toll on the residents in and around Youngstown, the Lynds have focused on the plight of inmates, especially those who were involved

in a prison uprising in Lucasville, Ohio, in April 1993. Five of the leaders of the uprising were sentenced to death for their part. They remain on death row.

Three of the five are black and two are white. The two whites were members of the Aryan Brotherhood. The blacks are Muslims. The men have refused to testify against each other. The Lynds, when they read the testimony of Ohio Highway Patrol Sgt. Howard Hudson in the trial of one of the white inmates, George Skatzes, were inspired by the inmates' ability to overcome racial and religious divisions.

Once the prisoners surrendered and the Highway Patrol entered L block, which the prisoners had occupied, the officers found graffiti covering the walls. In the trial, Hudson, the state's principal investigator, identified a photograph taken in the L block corridor.

**Question:** On the wall on the right there appears to be something written?

**Answer:** Says "Black and White Together."

**Q:** Did you find that or similar slogans in many places in L block?

**A:** Yes, we did, throughout the corridor, in the L block.

The transcript goes on.

**Q:** [What is the photograph] 260?

**A:** 260, the words, "Convict Unity," written on the walls of L corridor.

**Q:** Did you find the message of unity throughout L block?

**A:** Yes. ...

**Q:** Next photo?

**A:** 261 is another photograph in L corridor that depicts the words, "Convict race."

" 'Convict race,' is my favorite," Staughton said. "Evidently the cultural creation of racial identity can work in more than one way. Among the Lucasville rebels, the process didn't separate the races, but overcame racism. Not since the early 1960s in the South have I experienced as much interracial solidarity as I have among convicted

prisoners which the state of Ohio considers 'the worst of the worst.'

"The same solidarity took place among soldiers in Vietnam who protested the war," he said. "This is instructive. People draw on their cultural resources, on their music, traditions and symbols in radical or revolutionary conflicts. It is natural that blacks and whites would initially organize separately. But in Vietnam, or a supermax prison, troops and inmates face a common danger and a common enemy. It is easier to overcome cultural barriers. The danger in the wider society is less defined. It is more diffuse. This is the reason it is harder to bring groups together. But this is what must happen. Too many movements are directed from the top down. They are not rooted in local communities. It is we who should be building local movements to tell those in power what to do, not the other way around.

"My favorite book is Ignazio Silone's novel 'Bread and Wine,' particularly the first edition before he started rewriting all his books," he said. "The religious element in my childhood was very recessive, more in the background than upfront. We never went to church, although it has always been there for me. My parents sent me to schools run by the Ethical Cultural Society. It is a kind of reform, Reformed Judaism institution. What Pietro Spina, the protagonist of 'Bread and Wine,' struggles with is how to bring together the Christianity of his childhood and adolescence with his later Marxism. That has been my effort as well."

The Lynds have requested that their ashes be buried along with those of indigent death row inmates at a cemetery run by the Jubilee Partners community in Georgia.

"We knew at once that this is where we belonged," Staughton said. **CT**

*Chris Hedges' new book, The Death of the Liberal Class (Nation Books) has recently been published. Download and read an excerpt in this month's ColdType at [www.coldtype.net](http://www.coldtype.net)*

**Watch how the media gives George W. Bush a stay-out-of-jail pass as he starts to peddle his lie-infested memoir on TV and in bookstores**

# Wikileaks: The smear and the denial

**David Edwards** examines media treatment of Julian Assange, the man behind the Wikileaks exposés, to illustrate the chasm that now exists between mainstream journalists and their readers

**Someone willing to make an enemy of the world's leading rogue state in order to expose the truth about the horrors it has inflicted on Afghanistan and Iraq is frightening to the compromised, semi-autonomous employees of corporate power**

Journalists don't like WikiLeaks", Hugo Rifkind notes in the *Times*, but "the people who comment online under articles do... Maybe you've noticed, and been wondering why. I certainly have." (Hugo Rifkind Notebook, 'Remind me. It's the red one I mustn't press, right?,' the *Times*, October 26, 2010)

Rifkind is right. The internet has revealed a chasm separating the corporate media from readers and viewers. Previously, the divide was hidden by the simple fact that Rifkind's journalists – described accurately by Peter Wilby as the "unskilled middle class" ([www.guardian.co.uk/media/2007/dec/10/comment.pressandpublishing](http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2007/dec/10/comment.pressandpublishing)) – monopolised the means of mass communication. Dissent was restricted to a few lonely lines on the letter's page, if that. Readers were free to vote with their notes and coins, of course. But in reality, when it comes to the mainstream media, the public has always been free to choose any colour it likes, so long as it's corporate 'black'. The internet is beginning to offer some brighter colours.

If Rifkind is confused, answers can be found between the lines of his own analysis:

"With WikiLeaks, with the internet at large, power is democratised, but responsibility remains the preserve of professionals."

This echoes Lord Castlereagh's insistence

that "persons exercising the power of the press" should be "men of some respectability and property". (Quoted, James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility – The Press And Broadcasting in Britain*, Routledge, 1991, p.13)

And it is with exactly this version of "responsibility" that non-corporate commentators are utterly fed up. We are, for example, tired of the way even the most courageous individuals challenging even the most appalling crimes of state are smeared as "irresponsible".

## **Frighteningly amoral?**

Thus, Rifkind describes WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange as "a frighteningly amoral figure". In truth, journalists find Assange a frighteningly *moral* figure. Someone willing to make an enemy of the world's leading rogue state in order to expose the truth about the horrors it has inflicted on Afghanistan and Iraq is frightening to the compromised, semi-autonomous employees of corporate power. Assange's courage is the antidote to their poison.

A separate *Times* editorial comments:

"Nowhere in WikiLeaks's self-serving self publicity is there a judgment of what the organisation is achieving for the Iraqi nation, and what it hopes to achieve... Its personnel are partisans intervening in the security affairs of Western democracies and their al-

lies, with a culpable heedlessness of human life.” (Leader, ‘Exercise in Sanctimony; The release of military files by WikiLeaks is partisan and irresponsible,’ the *Times*, October 25, 2010)

Again, the truth is reversed – it is the *Times*, together with virtually the entire mass media, that is notable for its “heedlessness of human life”, for its endorsement of the West’s perennial policy: attack, bomb, invade, torture, kill based on any crass pretext that can be got past the public. As WikiLeaks spokesperson Kristinn Hrafnsson politely told the WSWS website:

“The media is getting much too close to the military industry. They are not following the changing moods of the general public who are increasingly opposed to the wars.” (<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2010/nov2010/wiki-no2.shtml>)

In the *Daily Mail*, Edward Heathcoat-Amory’s article raised the important question:

“Paranoid, anarchic. Is WikiLeaks boss a force for good or chaos?”

After all, “The Wikileaks supremo lives a bizarre peripatetic life, with no house and few belongings...” He also has “disciples” whom “he ruthlessly manipulates”. (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1297917/Is-Wikileaks-boss-Julian-Assange-force-good-chaos.html>)

As for Assange’s motivation: “His critics says he’s motivated by a desire for personal publicity.”

Like Rifkind, Heathcoat-Amory is appalled by Assange’s lack of “ethical judgments”, his “cult of secrecy, with no accountability to anyone”. Lack of accountability can indeed be a problem. Heathcoat-Amory, it should be mentioned, is of the Heathcoat-Amory Baronetcy, whose humble “family seat” was at Knightshayes Court in Tiverton, Devon: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knightshayes\\_Court](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knightshayes_Court)

In the *Times*, passionately pro-Iraq war commentator David Aaronovitch recalls the main theme of his questions to Assange: “from where did WikiLeaks derive its au-

thority and to whom was it accountable”. And from where exactly does the *Times* derive its authority? To whom is it responsible? Its advertisers? Rupert Murdoch? Aaronovitch continued:

“And this is where something strange happened. Questioners wanted to know from Assange just how he and his team decided which documents to publish, which to redact, which to leave unpublished... Not only would Assange not answer these questions, it was almost as though he regarded them as illegitimate... I could tell that the overwhelming reaction was surprise at Assange’s refusal to engage in any discussion about himself as anything other than an uncaped crusader.” (Aaronovitch, ‘Enigmatic WikiLeaks chief keeps his guard up,’ the *Times*, October 2, 2010)

Strange indeed, because in fact Assange has addressed these questions numerous times (See here for a recent example: [http://www.democracynow.org/2010/10/26/wikileaks\\_founder\\_julian\\_assange\\_on\\_iraq](http://www.democracynow.org/2010/10/26/wikileaks_founder_julian_assange_on_iraq)). Aaronovitch focused on Assange’s jacket, his shirt, his shoes – “incredibly long and pointy black winkle pickers”. The very fact of the focus suggested something was not quite right. The unsubtle implication: Assange was unsavoury, strange, sinister.

#### Somewhat bizarre-looking?

A *Daily Mail* reporter described Assange as “somewhat bizarre-looking”.

(<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1323433/Murder-rape-final-proof-Britain-fought-shaming-war.html>)

An *Independent* news report referred to the “sometimes erratic behaviour of Wikileaks’ founder”. (<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/online/secret-war-at-the-heart-of-wikileaks-2115637.html>)

In an interview with ABC News (Australia), the *Independent*’s Robert Fisk derided Assange as “some strange code-breaker from Australia”. (<http://is.gd/gzdKc>)

Dan Jones wrote in the *Evening Standard*: “Assange is slippery. He is a master of the moral non sequitur... Do we really want the

**“The media is getting much too close to the military industry. They are not following the changing moods of the general public who are increasingly opposed to the wars”**

## MEDIA POWER

**Assange “moves like a hunted man” around “London’s rundown Paddington district”, John Burns writes feverishly in the *New York Times*, having apparently not tried to rent or buy in Paddington recently**

definition of what constitutes the public interest resting in the hands of a highly politicised neo-anarchist like Assange?” (Jones, ‘There are limits to the freedom of the internet,’ *Evening Standard*, August 2, 2010)

Again, the level of self-awareness hovered around zero.

The *Daily Telegraph* observed: “the publication of classified documents risks endangering the lives of both soldiers and those who collaborate with them.” (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/8084891/Wikileaks-A-very-leaky-argument.html>)

Failure to publish the documents risks the lives of the inevitable next target of the US-UK killing machine in Iran, or Yemen, or Syria, or Venezuela. At this point, the only people capable of stopping the “coalition” is the public they are supposed to represent.

### **The New York Times’ hit piece**

In the United States, the same and worse has been pouring out of the media. Assange “moves like a hunted man” around “London’s rundown Paddington district”, John Burns writes feverishly in the *New York Times*, having apparently not tried to rent or buy in Paddington recently. He notes of Assange:

“He demands that his dwindling number of loyalists use expensive encrypted cell-phones...”. He has made “a remarkable journey to notoriety” and has recently made “his most brazen disclosure yet”. “Now it is not just governments that denounce him: some of his own comrades are abandoning him for what they see as erratic and imperious behavior, and a nearly delusional grandeur unmatched by an awareness that the digital secrets he reveals can have a price in flesh and blood.” Assange has “come a long way from an unsettled childhood in Australia as a self-acknowledged social misfit”. He now “pursues his fugitive’s life, his leadership is enforced over the Internet. Even remotely, his style is imperious...” (John F. Burns and Ravi Somaiya, ‘WikiLeaks Chief on Run, Trailed by His Notoriety,’ *New York*

*Times*, October 23, 2010; [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/24/world/24assange.html?\\_r=1&hp](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/24/world/24assange.html?_r=1&hp))

The *New York Times* afforded the same treatment to Bradley Manning, the 22-year-old army private suspected of supplying the classified documents to WikiLeaks. The newspaper described how “classmates made fun of him for being a geek”. Later, “classmates made fun of him for being gay”. Manning’s partner was “a self-described drag queen”. People who knew Manning offered insights into his early life and “how he came to be so troubled”.

At school, Manning “was clearly different from most of his peers” – former students remembered him “being teased for all sort of reasons”. In case readers had lost focus wading through this appalling smear, the *Times* told them again that Manning’s partner had described himself as a “drag queen”. ([http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/09/us/09manning.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/09/us/09manning.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1))

### **Delusions of grandeur**

What could Manning’s motivation possibly have been for leaking evidence of thousands of unreported civilian deaths and many hundreds of examples of torture? Some of Manning’s friends “say they wonder whether his desperation for acceptance – or delusions of grandeur – may have led him to disclose the largest trove of government secrets since the Pentagon Papers”.

This reads like a parody of Soviet-era propaganda in the days when dissidents were carted off to mental hospitals. As Assange has said, the article “removed all higher-level political motivations from him and psychoanalyzed him down to problems in his childhood and a demand for attention”. ([http://news.yahoo.com/s/yblog\\_upshot/20101026/cm\\_yblog\\_upshot/ny-times-reporter-defends-profile-of-wikileaks-assange](http://news.yahoo.com/s/yblog_upshot/20101026/cm_yblog_upshot/ny-times-reporter-defends-profile-of-wikileaks-assange))

Writing for the *Salon* website, media analyst Glenn Greenwald describes Burns’ piece on Assange as “one of the sleaziest, most vi-

icious hit pieces seen in the *New York Times* in quite some time.”

([http://www.salon.com/news/opinion/glenn\\_greenwald/2010/10/27/burns/index.html](http://www.salon.com/news/opinion/glenn_greenwald/2010/10/27/burns/index.html))

Greenwald adds a crucial point:

“This kind of character smear (‘he’s not in his right mind,’ pronounced a 25-year-old who sort of knows him) is reserved for people who don’t matter in the world of establishment journalists – i.e., people without power or standing in Washington and, especially, those whom American Government authorities scorn. In official Washington, Assange is a contemptible loser – the Pentagon hates him and wants him destroyed, and therefore the ‘reporters’ who rely on, admire and identify with Pentagon officials immediately adopt that perspective – and that’s why he was the target of this type of attack.”

Burns has defended his article on Assange as “an absolutely standard journalistic endeavor that we would use with any story of similar importance in the United States...” ([http://news.yahoo.com/s/yblog\\_upshot/20101026/cm\\_yblog\\_upshot/ny-times-reporter-defends-profile-of-wikileaks-assange](http://news.yahoo.com/s/yblog_upshot/20101026/cm_yblog_upshot/ny-times-reporter-defends-profile-of-wikileaks-assange)) Not quite, says Greenwald:

“If anyone doubts that, please show me any article that paper has published which trashed the mental health, psyche and personality of a high-ranking American political or military official – a Senator or a General or a President or a cabinet secretary or even a prominent lobbyist – based on quotes from disgruntled associates of theirs. That is not done, and it never would be.”

Greenwald quoted from Burns’s earlier coverage of the departure of Nato Afghan war leader General Stanley McChrystal, describing the “grave misfortune it is, considering what is lost to America in a commander as smart, resolute and as fit for purpose as General McChrystal...” With his heart on his sleeve, Burns added:

“Reporters, of course, do best when they keep their views to themselves, to retain

their impartiality. But it’s safe to say that many of the men and women who have covered General McChrystal as commander if [sic] Afghanistan, or in his previous role as the top United States special forces commander, admired him, and felt at least some unease about the elements in the Rolling Stone article that ended his career.” (<http://atwar.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/06/24/john-burns-and-dexter-filkins-answer-questions-on-mcchrystals-dismissal/>)

Media analyst Norman Solomon has noted:

“I was in Baghdad before the invasion and spoke with Burns, and he was seriously eager to have this invasion take place. And throughout the war, he constantly denounced the behavior of Iraqi insurgents without ever applying the same human rights standards to the American forces in Iraq.” ([http://www.salon.com/news/opinion/glenn\\_greenwald/2010/10/27/burns/index.html](http://www.salon.com/news/opinion/glenn_greenwald/2010/10/27/burns/index.html))

### **Serving the interests of the powerful**

How to explain the media’s propaganda performance? Greenwald comments with rare insight and honesty:

“They receive most of their benefits - their access, their scoops, their sense of belonging, their money, their esteem - from dutifully serving that role... ‘neutrality’ means: ‘serving the interests of American political and military leaders and amplifying their perspective.’”

Readers – the same irresponsible commenters derided by Rifkind – reacted furiously to the smearing of Assange. Burns says that in his 35 years at the *New York Times* he cannot “recall ever having been the subject of such absolutely, relentless vituperation”. His email inbox and the comments section under his article have been flooded with criticism from readers, including a number of academics at Harvard, Yale and MIT. Some, he said, used “language that I don’t think they would use at their own dinner table”.

([http://news.yahoo.com/s/yblog\\_](http://news.yahoo.com/s/yblog_)

**Burns says that in his 35 years at the *New York Times* he cannot “recall ever having been the subject of such absolutely, relentless vituperation”**

## MEDIA POWER

**The Burnses, Baronets and Rifkinds are going to be challenged, tested and thwarted at every turn by ordinary readers who do not accept that truth and human life should be subordinated to privilege and power**

upshot/20101026/cm\_yblog\_upshot/ny-times-reporter-defends-profile-of-wikileaks-assange)

Ironically, last June, Burns wrote about reader reaction to his reporting of McChrystal's resignation:

"Not for the first time, I'm struck, reading the comments and questions, by the comprehensive grasp so many of our readers... have of the issues... In an otherwise deeply dispiriting moment, that is something to celebrate: With all else that has gone wrong for America in recent years, in the wars and the economy at home, it has the enormous advantage, indispensable to the republic's health, of a well-informed and active citizenry." (<http://atwar.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/06/24/john-burns-and-dexter-filkins-answer-questions-on-mcchrystals-dismissal/>)

**Indeed so - well said!**

The rising level of dissent really is wonderful news. It is a sign that a public empowered by the internet is beginning to seriously challenge the propaganda, lies and smears of the "responsible" media that make mass killing possible. Life will never be the same again. – the Burnses, Baronets and Rifkinds are going to be challenged, tested and thwarted at every turn by ordinary readers who do not accept that truth and human life should be subordinated to privilege and power. **CT**

*David Edwards is co-editor of Media Lens, the British media watchdog at whose website - [www.medialens.org](http://www.medialens.org) – this article first appeared. His latest book, written with Media Lens co-editor David Cromwell, is *Newspeak In The 21st Century**

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# Now what?

The mid-term election is over, the Republicans have won, but how will they wield their new-found power, asks **James Howard Kunstler**

**N**ow the Republican Party and its Tea Party chump-proxies have re-conquered the sin-drenched bizarro universe of the US congress, they'll have to re-assume ownership of the stickiest web of frauds and swindles ever run in human history – and chances are the victory will blow up in their supernaturally suntanned, Botox-smoothed faces.

But don't cry for John Boehner, Barack Obama.

The President and his Democrats may have inherited this clusterfuck from the feckless George Bush but they flubbed every chance to mitigate any part of it, ranging from their failure to restore the rule of law in banking (by prosecuting the executives of major banks who oversaw the systematic swindle), to mis-directing our dwindling resources toward ends (such as “shovel-ready” new super-highways) that won't promote a credible future for this society, to misleading the public in the fantasy that alt-energy will offset the disruptions of peak oil (and allow us to keep running suburbia, the US Military, and WalMart by other means).

It's really too late for both parties. They're unreformable. They've squandered their legitimacy just as the US enters the fat heart of the long emergency. Neither of them have a plan, or even a single idea that isn't a dodge or a grift. Both parties tout a “recovery” that is just a cover story for ac-

counting chicanery and statistical lies aimed at concealing the criminally-engineered national bankruptcy that they presided over in split shifts. Both parties are overwhelmingly made up of bagmen for the companies that looted America.

Alas, the damage is now so pervasive in money matters that the federal government could be toast as a viable enterprise, even if a new party or two spontaneously rose up out of the ruins of a plundered democracy. Anyway, one of them will not be the Tea Party, with its incoherent agenda and moron cadres who seek to put Jesus back in the US constitution, where he never was in the first place – though they don't know that.

Nor is there any party on the left or even in the center with a clue or a moral compass. It's just one of those tragic moments in history – like 1850s America, when a strange vacuum of thought occupied the heart of political life, and the scene was cluttered up with mere place-holders like Millard Fillmore, Franklin Pierce, and James Buchanan. (Can you state a single idea or position, these political ciphers advanced?)

Where we stand now is on the cusp of another giant step into the abyss, since the latest storm of Foreclosure-Gate suggests pretty strongly that mega-tons of mortgage-backed securities are assured of blowing up, as well as the sundry derivatives of these things (CDOs, CDOs-squared, plus the mas-

**It's really too late for both parties. They're unreformable. They've squandered their legitimacy just as the US enters the fat heart of the long emergency**

**The proud winners of seats in congress and the senate might as well put on clown suits and little pointed hats and drive around the Washington monument in toy cars**

sive fetid matter infesting the alternative cosmos of credit default swaps). If you follow the media-of-record like the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, you would have to conclude that there is no extant plausible notion among financial leaders as to how the fiasco of botched mortgage-and-title documentation can be resolved. After three weeks of emerging events around this debacle, the consensus among the power brokers is to pretend that there's no problem, that the issue of missing, forged, post-dated, trashed, or non-existent paper related to claims on property can just be put aside, brushed under the rug, glossed over, ignored.

Let me tell you something: this problem is not going away. At the very least it is going to paralyze the real estate industry for as far ahead as anyone can see. For another thing, it could force the disclosure of what the banks are holding in their vaults in the way of worthless paper and expose their insolvency.

For still another thing, it could lead to rafts of lawsuits that would additionally shove the banks toward collapse, demolish the claims that underlie our currency, call into question the meaning of property ownership per se that is the basis of Anglo-American law, and tie up the court system until kingdom come. In any case, every pension fund, state government, and insurance operation would be crippled. I could go on but you get the picture.... This might all sound extreme, but I repeat: nobody with any authority in this land has proposed a

plausible way out.

By the way, I haven't even touched on the totally insane but now accepted practices of the Federal Reserve attempting to stage manage the velocity of money by so-called quantitative easing – a.k.a. the US writing checks to itself – because even that nonsense assumes that everything else remains more or less stable.

This is what the two major parties can look forward to as we swing around into the Yuletide season and then into 2011. The proud winners of seats in congress and the senate might as well put on clown suits and little pointed hats and drive around the Washington monument in toy cars. There will be a desperate need for a new politics in this country, for people unafraid to tell the truth and act in the genuine public interest. If we can't generate it from the saner quarters of this country where people think thoughts that comport with reality, I'm afraid we could see some generals step into the picture.

I write literally over the middle of the Pacific Ocean, en route from Australia where I spent the past week – not on vacation. It's a reminder that there are a lot of other players in the wide world – not all of them nations on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

**CT**

*Janes Howard Kunstler* blogs at *clusterfuck Nation* ([www.kunstler.com/blog](http://www.kunstler.com/blog)). His latest book, *The Witch of Hebron*, the sequel to his 2008 novel of post-oil America, *World Made By Hand*, is available at all booksellers now.

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# Of irony and implosion

The US is imploding, so what can we expect those tea party freaks will do to improve the state of their country? Not a lot, says **David Michael Green**

I guess if you're gonna go down, you might as well do it with style.

And I guess if you can't do it with style, you might as well do it with irony.

Even if it is of the comedic sort. And even if the joke's on you.

The US is imploding. It has been for thirty years, if not fifty. What happened in this month's mid-term elections was egregious in every respect, but at the end of the day represents little more than just another data point on a secular trend line. Putting the tea party freaks in control of the world's only superpower is hardly distinguishable, really, from giving those same governmental car keys to Ronald Reagan, Newt Gingrich, or George W. Bush. For that matter, it bears all too uncomfortable resemblance to having Lyndon Johnson or Bill Clinton or Barack Obama president (though at least in those latter cases, we mostly didn't know beforehand what they'd turn out to be).

I want to say, before wallowing too much deeper into the despairing swamps of comedic irony, that there is some hope out there, at least in the longer term. Put bluntly, this country's main problem is old white guys. If we can find a way to neutralize their destructive impact, there is a new generation of un-crazy people waiting to take control of the country, stop it from digging deeper down in the hole its in, and begin the repair

process. The next generation is liberal, and will become even more liberal when it realizes the degree to which the state is necessary to solve problems and protect citizens from predatory actors (most of which are far more likely to be dressed in shiny business suits than Taliban get-ups). It is a generation that finds prejudice based on race, sex and sexual orientation not only stupid and repugnant, but something far better – just plain dismissively irrelevant. It is a generation willing to take the outrageous step of protecting the only planet we happen to have (what a concept!). It's a generation that is largely unmoved by the institutionalized societal idiocy of organized religion. It is a generation that will be a lot more diverse than the regressive good ol' white boy dinosaurs from the 1930s and 1940s still lumbering about the country, waiting for “Father Knows Best” to stage a resurgence.

So, in the long term, we may be okay. Nature and demographics are pulling for the home team here. If we can last long enough, it's just possible that the suicidal empire will find a way to rescue itself from its self-imposed death spiral of inanity we've locked into these last decades.

But it's the getting there that will be tricky. And it's the question of what will be left of the country when we arrive that is crucial.

In the meantime, we are a country that

**If we can last long enough, it's just possible that the suicidal empire will find a way to rescue itself from its self-imposed death spiral of inanity we've locked into these last decades**

**Are we locked in some sort of perennial James Dean movie, where our jacket sleeve keeps getting caught on the door handle as the Chevy hurtles toward the cliff**

continues to manifest remarkable levels of foolishness in our politics, for which the mid-terms represents merely an italicized exclamation point on a very long sentence. Some days I wonder if I missed something along the way. Did somebody challenge the US to a Stupidity Smackdown contest thirty years ago, and we in our vanity, arrogance and pride accepted the dare? Did we agree to enter our country into an international demolition derby, and then marshal all our prodigious resources toward winning? Are we locked in some sort of perennial James Dean movie, where our jacket sleeve keeps getting caught on the door handle as the Chevy hurtles toward the cliff?

I dunno. But what I do know is that the ironies of Election 2010 are enough to knock me to the floor.

Start with the fact that this is by far the richest country in the world. That doesn't mean, of course, that we shouldn't identify our problems and try to solve them. We definitely should. But I can't help being struck at the sheer whininess of it all. I mean, here we sit, in our opulence and abundance and decadent materialism, and we're just absolutely beside ourselves. We are the richest people ever to exist on the planet, and we five percent swim in our thick lumpy gravy while 25 percent of humanity – close to two billion people – live in conditions of extreme poverty. Rather ironic, I have to say.

So is the fact that, amongst us, the angriest folks are the very most privileged. They are the white, male seniors who came out in droves for the freak show calling itself the tea party. We know empirically from polling data that these folks are the very definition of demographic privilege. They're wealthier than the rest of us. They're in the majority and dominant race. They are the dominant, catered to and most privileged sex. They have been benefitting from all the goodies that liberalism has provided them for all their lives, most especially now as they bask in their Social Security and Medicare payouts. Oh, and one other thing. They're furious. Furious at the injustices of the world,

furious at the idea of sharing the fat bonanza they lucked into in the lottery of life, furious at a society that might have the audacity of compassion for this or that group that it has spent centuries, if not millennia, pummeling. That fury. The ironic fury of the hurl-inducing über-selfish.

#### **What would an alien say?**

And what they do with that fury is equally ironic. Imagine how puzzled a visiting alien would be if you were forced to explain the election of 2010 to him. See in your mind's eye his antennae twisting themselves into slimy little pretzels as he attempts to apply logic – alien, Martian, human, twisted, any kind – to your explanation of what happened. “You see, little green dude, we were extremely unhappy with the state of our country, so what we did was to grab as many of the people as we could find who had just put us in that condition, and we put them back in power. Get it?” “No”, he's thinking, “I don't”. “But you're about to, as we vaporize your pathetic planet into a gazillion subatomic particles. Oh, and don't think the Universe will care, either, Mr. Supremely Illogical Humanoid Life Form. Everyone knows that you biped wankers are the least developed, most arrogant, and most buffoonish species in the entire Quadrant. You barely-down-from-the-trees hominids make the dwarf methane sloths of the Ursa Major Cluster seem like Galactic Wisdom Prize laureates by comparison!”

I mean, really. Is this supposed to be some sort of joke? Not even two years after they crashed the country economically, diplomatically, environmentally, fiscally, politically and morally, we've now turned to an even crazier lot of Republicans and put those monsters in charge? People (allegedly, anyhow) who think that unmarried women who are sexually active should not be allowed to teach in public schools? People who think that we should have weaker anti-pedophilia laws so that we don't impinge on business profitability? People who think it's okay to put “Whites Only” signs

back in the windows of restaurants and hotels? People who think that 12-year-old girls impregnated by their uncles should have to bring the fetus to term? People who want to close down all public schools? People who dress up as Nazi SS officers? People who think George W. Bush was a pretty great president, after all, and got a raw deal from the American public? Those are the folks to whom we've handed the keys to the government now? I don't think the word irony is sufficient to touch that one.

But while we're at it, let's add in the fact that these same people who brought us disaster in every form have also pledged to bring us once again precisely the same policies that created that outcome. Without question what the country needs right now is more tax cuts for the wealthy, more deregulation of Wall Street and other corporate predators like BP, more use of fossil fuels to wreck the environment, more troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, more religion in government, more Constitution-slashing destruction of the Bill of Rights, more intrusion into people's personal and sexual lives, more gay and Hispanic and Muslim bashing, and more destruction of the meager social safety net that we have, just at the time it is needed most. Right? How's that for ironic?

#### **Prescription for gridlock**

Here's another one for you. What the public really wants right now are solutions to the problems that beset them. And rightly so. The goons of the right (you know, the ones always talking about 'personal responsibility' – OMG, the ironies are starting to reproduce!) have made a right proper hash of things. They've wrecked just about everything, and the rest they just didn't get to yet. But what the American public just voted for was something very different indeed from rule by the GOP. We just voted for divided government. We just created the precise prescription for gridlock. We just picked the very people who – even apart from the fact that their entire platform consists of undoing existing policies – will make sure that

the government fails to act in response to any of the crises facing us. Brilliant.

And just as brilliant as throwing in the bad folks was the throwing out of the good. Admittedly, there are damn few of the latter, which offers a silver lining of sorts by mitigating the potential damage. But I will say that losing the likes of Alan Grayson and, especially, Russ Feingold really hurts, and it really hurts the people who are the most furious, even if they're far too stupid and fearful (which are more or less the same thing these days) to realize it. I was really pained in particular to see Feingold go down, especially because it was for no remotely sensible reason, and especially because he lost to a creep like Ron Johnson. In a city just brimming over with whores, Feingold was one of the true stand-up characters still remaining. Whatever one might say about his politics, which were generally liberal but ultimately quite iconoclastic, he was a senator with that rarest of attributes: integrity. Shame on Wisconsin and shame on America for rejecting him in favor of an army of corporate corporals. Shame on us, especially, for taking out the cleanest clean government guy in the whole city, in the name of attacking waste in Washington. The size of the drunken bacchanal they're throwing on K Street to celebrate Feingold's political demise is precisely the measure of his lonely public interest spirit. But since we're talking ironies here, maybe we'll get lucky and there'll be one other. Maybe Feingold will stand for president in 2012, running unabashedly against the plutocratic prostitution of both Obama and the Republicans. That's a message that could actually win for once.

Another astonishing irony of this election was the sight of Democrats running against themselves. I guess we finally have an answer to the question of what happens when you take cowardly fecklessness to its absolute logical extreme. I know of no Democrats who were running in this cycle on what appear on the surface to have been substantial, even monumental, legislative

**Let's add in the fact that these same people who brought us disaster in every form have also pledged to bring us once again precisely the same policies that created that outcome**

**We knew after the experience of 1929 that Wall Street had to be regulated, and so we did. And it worked, until we decided to try the old way again, with the same consequences**

achievements. Many even ran against those, foolishly thinking that voters might separate them from their party identification on the ballot. And several even ran explicitly against their own leadership, trashing Obama and Pelosi like any tea bag lunatics might have. Unreal. These days you sometimes have to lean your head over sideways and shake it a few times to check for any loose parts rattling around. That's how absurdly unimaginable it is that one of the two actually electable parties in the world's sole superpower might have come to the conclusion that running against their own record could be a winning strategy.

But, of course, Democrats will top themselves yet again by going with the exact same leadership for another round. How about those inspirational leaders, Barack Obama, Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid, eh? Don't they just deserve plaudits for how they led their party successfully into battle? Shouldn't we reward them with more terms at the party helm over the next two, four and six years? That would be a real masterstroke. Not.

Speaking of whom, my personal nominee for the most outrageous performance in the category of American irony has to go to Barack Obama for the jaw-dropping performance he gave at his post-"shellacking" press conference this week. I recently compared this president to Ricky Ray Rector, the mentally impaired condemned man who asked to have his pecan pie saved for "later" as he was about to be executed by the State of Arkansas. Before that I described the president as the pass-around rag doll for the fellas of Cell Block D. I can now see that in both cases I was far too generous.

After two years of the rabid right saying anything imaginable about him – down to questioning his citizenship and religion – and after a series of Republican leaders publicly announcing that they would not be compromising with the president and that their goal was to remove him from office – after all this, there was Mr. Happy Face once more talking about how he was hopeful that the two sides could come together in

the spirit of public service and reach agreements with each other in the name of the public's demand for bipartisan efforts to solve pressing problems. They are running scorched earth white phosphorous bombing raids on this guy, and he continues to respond with "Thank you sir, may I have another?"

This behavior started out as mystifying, became anger-inducing, transcended into the pathological, and now has become truly, eye-avertingly, embarrassing and sad. I don't think we can avoid saying this anymore: Our president is mentally unwell. In the same way that we don't let our children walk the streets on their own until they know that moving cars are a threat to their safety when crossing the road, this man who cannot properly identify a vicious enemy of his (and ours), even when it announces itself on national television, should not be anywhere near government, let alone in the Oval Office. It may be safe for him to go back to being a law professor, but he should no more be allowed to deal with Republicans and CEOs than drunken frat boys should be permitted to drive a Caterpillar earthmover through a suburban neighborhood at two o'clock in the morning.

### **Forgotten lessons of recent history**

Undoubtedly the greatest irony of the lot, however, is that this country's problems are of its own making, and that the solutions to these threats are so transparent – chiefly because they used to be public policy. We had most of this stuff figured out once, but then we got greedy and stupid and pissed it all away. We knew after the experience of 1929 that Wall Street had to be regulated, and so we did. And it worked, until we decided to try the old way again, with the same consequences. We learned after Vietnam not to follow lying presidents into destructive wars that suited their personal ambitions. And it worked, until we forgot the lesson and were doomed to repeat the consequences. We learned from Reagan that tax cuts unmatched by spending cuts would drive a

Mack truck through the budget, but then Cheney said “Reagan proved deficits don’t matter”, so we did it again, and now we’re doing it a third time.

And so on, and so on. I tell ya, I’d feel a lot better about our predicament if someone else was the cause of it. Some evil, external, bad guy. But surely, Shirley, the dumbest people on Earth are the ones who shoot themselves in the foot. Dumbest, that is, except for the ones who reload and do it again to the other foot.

Things may get better in this country, but not before they get worse, I can tell you that. And possibly not before they get really worse. The next two years are going to bring loads more nightmare our way. The scary moment comes when the doubling-down on regressivism produces the predictable outcome of more national disaster.

Think of the present moment, cranked out on irradiated steroids. Just as has been the case lately, many will argue that we need to double down on these malignant ideas, and that anyone saying otherwise is a threat to society who should be treated accordingly. That’s called fascism.

And that’s the beauty of conservatism. Each time it fails, there are plenty among us for whom that failure represents a reason to do even more of the same.

If you’re not depressed enough this week already, consider this: Next time around we might just quadruple-down on stupidity.

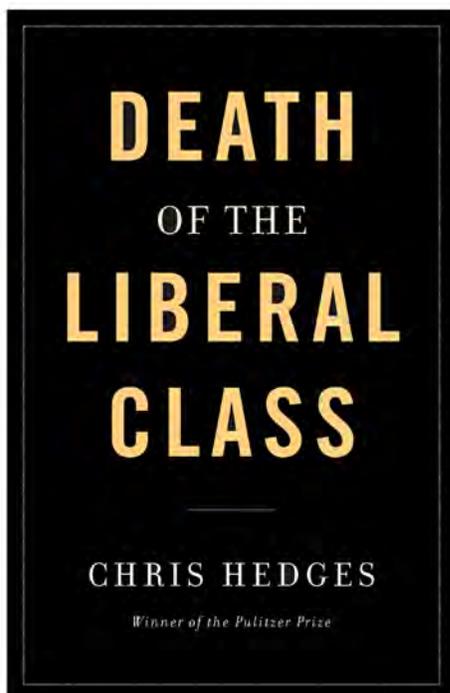
Oh boy.

**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](http://www.regressiveantidote.net).*

**Each time it fails, there are plenty among us for whom that failure represents a reason to do even more of the same**

## The new work from **Chris Hedges**, bestselling author of *Empire of Illusion*



“Liberals conceded too much to the power elite. The tragedy of the liberal class and the institution it controls is that it succumbed to opportunism and finally to fear. It abrogated its moral role. It did not defy corporate abuse when it had the chance. It exiled those within its ranks who did. And the defanging of the liberal class not only removed all barriers to neofeudalism and corporate abuse but also ensured that the liberal class will, in its turn, be swept aside.”



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# The lax tax pact

**George Monbiot** shows how Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs surrendered to Britain's tax evaders

**It's arguable that the UK government does not have a spending crisis; it has a tax avoidance crisis**

**D**id Vodafone avoid £6bn of tax? As protesters gathered outside the telecom company's shops at the beginning of this month, both the company and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs dismissed the claim as an urban myth. That, for the media, was the end of the story. But in accepting this account, journalists made an unsafe assumption: that Vodafone and HMRC are on opposing sides in the tax battle. Over the past few years, the government tax office appears to have been mutating into a subsidiary of the corporate avoidance industry.

It's arguable that the UK government does not have a spending crisis; it has a tax avoidance crisis. Official accounts suggest that the tax gap amounts to £42bn. Richard Murphy of Tax Research has demonstrated that this figure cannot be correct, as it contradicts other government statistics. He estimates that avoidance now amounts to £25bn a year, evasion to £70bn, and outstanding debts to the tax service to £28bn: a total of more than £120bn.

That's roughly three-quarters of the budget deficit. It's equivalent to 80% of the UK's revenue from income tax. By comparison, benefit fraud, which both the government and the rightwing press emphasised in order to justify the cuts, amounts to £1.1bn a year. No one would claim that all this missing money could be recovered. But even if

only 20% were clawed back, the most damaging cuts could be reversed.

So the government is frantically seeking to close the tax gap? You're joking, of course. The comprehensive spending review will cut the revenue service by 15%. It had already been hacked to bits by New Labour. In 2005 Gordon Brown merged the Inland Revenue with Customs and Excise to create HMRC. Between them they had 99,000 staff. Since the merger this has fallen to 68,000. Some of the staff cuts were the result of sensible efficiencies. Others attacked the service's core functions. The money it spends on fighting tax avoidance, for example, has fallen from £3.6bn in 2006 to £1.9bn today.

Many of the crises HMRC has suffered since then – such as the recent pay-as-you-earn fiasco – are the result of Labour's cuts. A parliamentary report found that people working for the revenue had the lowest morale of any civil servants. HMRC is hopelessly outclassed by corporate ruses: the Lib-Dem Treasury spokesman Lord Oakeshott compares it to “a fat policeman chasing a speeding Ferrari.” Now its staff will be cut again: to 56,000 by 2015. The government announced that an extra £900m would be spent on tackling tax avoidance. It turned out that this was magic money: nothing but a reallocation of funds HMRC already possessed.

This cut, in the midst of an economic cri-

sis, looks like madness. It's like cutting your household bills by deciding to stop commuting to work. While the government's new strategy for reducing benefit fraud, according to the Association of Revenue and Customs, is likely to harvest £3 for every £1 it spends; money invested in HMRC to deal with tax avoidance and evasion brings in £60 for every £1 spent.

Seen as a means of reducing the deficit, the government's policy makes no sense. It becomes explicable only when you understand that this is a response to political opportunity, another application of the shock doctrine. The Conservatives have seized the chance afforded by the economic crisis to free corporations and the very rich from their obligations to society.

It's not as if they were oppressed in the first place. The last Conservative government cut corporation tax from 52% to 33%. In 1999 Gordon Brown cut it again, to 30%. This, he boasted, was "now the lowest rate in the history of British corporation tax, the lowest rate of any major country in Europe and the lowest rate of any major industrialised country anywhere". Labour then cut it again, to 28%. George Osborne has promised to reduce the rate to 24%.

Richard Murphy points out that, thanks to tax avoidance, the effective rate of corporation tax (the amount they actually pay) is now 21%. If current trends continue, it will be 17% by 2014. This means that big business will soon pay tax at a lower rate than small companies (which can't afford sophisticated avoidance strategies) and at a lower rate than basic income tax. The richest companies in the UK will surrender less of their income than the poorest workers.

Some companies pay less than others. A recent edition of the BBC's *File on 4*, for example, found that the chemist chain Boots, after relocating to a post office box in Switzerland, has legally cut its tax bill from over £100m a year to around £14m. That's roughly 3% of its profits.

If you expected HMRC to come out fighting, you'll be disappointed. In August,

the service's permanent secretary, Dave Hartnett, told the *Financial Times* "we are sometimes too black-and-white about the law." From now on, the paper reported, the tax service "will adopt a less combative approach to resolving tax disputes with businesses". This would be "welcomed by businesses critical of the revenue's uncompromising approach to litigation and also chime with the coalition's 'open for business' message."

Workers at the revenue – lions led by donkeys – tell me that some offices have been instructed not to chase business debts to HMRC of under £20,000; but are still expected to send threatening letters to people who have accidentally been given an extra £200 in tax credits. "The whole system is falling apart. It's predicated on allowing big business to get away with billions, while pursuing the poorest."

So did Vodafone wriggle out of a paying up to £6bn in tax? We'll never know. But we do know that even the company appears to have been surprised at how little it got away with: it set aside £2.2bn to settle its case with the revenue, but had to pay only £1.25bn. *Private Eye* makes a strong case for another £5bn, which, it says, the company legally avoided by channelling around Euro 18bn through a subsidiary in Luxembourg, where the money was taxed at less than 1%. HMRC agreed that the arrangement could continue without further challenge, raising the alleged shortfall to the UK to £6bn.

HMRC's inability or unwillingness to pursue big tax avoiders means that taxation shifts from the rich to the poor. As corporate payments fall, either the poor must pay more or services must be hit even harder. Regardless of the exact amount Vodafone avoided, the protesters are right to picket its shops (and they might have a go at Boots while they're at it). We are living in a country where the poor bail out the banks, while the rich keep their billions intact. **CT**

[www.monbiot.comferences:](http://www.monbiot.comferences:)

**Regardless of the exact amount Vodafone avoided, the protesters are right to picket its shops (and they might have a go at Boots while they're at it)**

# As Western civilisation lies dying ...

Worried that your kids will be stuck with the bill for the financial meltdown? Don't be. It won't happen, writes **John Kozy**

**Wanting to be strong, "like the Russians," and to "scare" marijuana users, Nixon ordered his administration to come down hard on users and to target them as enemies in his "war on drugs"**

A man suffering from severe chest pains collapses. His wife calls 911. An ambulance arrives, the EMTs treat the patient, place him in the ambulance's bed, and start off to the hospital. Along the way, the engine stalls. The ambulance's staff begins arguing about how to get the motor restarted. One says more gasoline is needed, another says there's water in the tank, a third says the fuel filter is clogged. While they argue, the patient lies dying.

This situation is analogous to what's happening in America and parts of Europe. While economists and politicians argue, their nations are in the throes of death. These people are looking for the devil in the details, but he is not there. It's the system itself that's diabolical.

The Western commercial system is extractive. It exists to extract more from consumers than it supplies in products and services. Its goal is profit, and profit literally means to make more (*pro-ficere*). Its goal has never been to improve the human condition but to exploit it. It works like this:

Consider two water tanks, initially each partially full, one above the other. One gallon of water is dumped from the upper tank into the lower one for each two gallons extracted from the lower tank and pumped into the upper tank. Over time, the lower tank ends up empty and the upper tank ends up full.

The circulation of water between the tanks ends.

Essentially, this scenario describes all commercial systems based on profit. It is why the top 20 percent of Americans has 93 percent of the nation's financial wealth and the bottom 80 percent has a mere seven percent. It is why the bottom 40 percent of all income earners in the United States now collectively own less than one percent of the nation's wealth. It is why the nation's poverty rate is now 14.3 percent, about 43.6 million people or one in seven. It is also why the *Wall Street Journal* has reported that 70 percent of people in North America live paycheck to paycheck. It is also why, despite numerous pledges over decades, no progress has been made in reducing world-wide poverty. The system is a thief.

## **Pockets have been picked**

The economy has collapsed not because of misfeasance, deregulation, or political bungling (although all may have been proximate causes), it has collapsed because the pockets of the vast majority of Americans have been picked. The housing bubble didn't burst because home prices had risen, it burst because the pockets of consumers had been picked so clean they could no longer service their mortgages.

What the wealthiest 20 percent of Americans don't realize is that some in this group

will begin to target the others in order to keep the extractive process working. In fact, it's already happening. "The brute force of the recession earlier this year turned back the clock on Americans' personal wealth to 2004 and wiped out a staggering \$1.3 trillion as home values shrank and investments withered." Little of this loss from investments was suffered by the lower 80 percent of Americans. There is, after all, no goodwill within greed, and the market can be and often is manipulated.

The "system" has impoverished the people, the circulation between the two tanks has been reduced to a trickle, and our economists have convinced the government that the only way to get things flowing again is to pour more water into the upper tank, hoping that the spillover will settle in the lower tank. Better to pray for rain!

This impoverishment has mathematical certain implications; two major ones follow.

First, the system can't be fixed by tinkering with the details. At best, tinkering with the details can merely slow down the depletion of consumer wealth. As long as the system is based on profit, more must be taken than is given. The rate of depletion can be changed, but the depletion cannot be stopped. This conclusion is as mathematically certain as subtraction. Why the geniuses in the American economics community, all who whom taut economics for its use of mathematical models, cannot understand this is a conundrum. They can tinker as much as they like. Some tinkering will produce apparent benefits, some won't. But one thing is certain – the system, unless it is fundamentally and essentially changed – will break down over and over again just as it has at fairly regularly intervals in the past. As long as maintaining the system is more important than the welfare of people, the people have no escape. They are eventually impoverished – both when the system works and when it doesn't! Two thousand years of history has produced not a single counterexample to this conclusion. Prosperity never results from exploitation.

Another implication that few seem to recognize concerns the national debt.

We are told that the burden of paying off the debt will be borne by our progeny, our children, and their children. But unless the Western commercial system undergoes fundamental changes, the children and grand children of most Americans will never have to bear this burden. Why? Not even governments can pick empty pockets. So if the debt is to be paid by raising taxes, the children and grandchildren of that 20 percent of Americans who hold 93 percent of the nation's financial wealth will have to pay them. Most, if not all, of these people are also investors. Given the acrimonious debate about letting the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy expire, the chances of that ever happening are slim to none.

Will the debt then be paid by devaluing the dollar, by printing money? Many believe that the government will eventually take this alternative. Let's say it does. Then all the dollars held by anyone anywhere will be devalued equally, including the dollars held by that same 20 percent of Americans. Again the wealthy 20 percent of Americans, having the most, lose the most. The devalued dollars they collect on their investments are merely added to their other devalued dollars, and the more the dollar must be devalued to repay the debt, the more the wealthy lose.

### **Default is the best option**

And finally, will the government default? Most seem to believe this to be unlikely. Perhaps, but isn't it the best alternative? Investors will simply not be paid, but the rest of their money will retain its value unless other economic consequences reduce it. Even Morgan Stanley recognizes that "the sovereign debt crisis won't end till deeply indebted rich country governments give holders of their bonds a good soaking."

So relax, Americans, your children will never bear the burden of paying off the national debt. Just sit back and enjoy watching the wealthy squirm.

Some say that if the nation defaults, the

**Everything I have learned during almost 50 years in the justice system compels a conclusion that the criminalisation of marijuana was a fraud on the American people from the very inception of the war on drugs**

## DIABOLICAL SYSTEM

**If Mexico were not next to the world's most ravenous drug market, it would be a corrupt, but functioning and reasonably successful upper Third-World country**

government will be unable to borrow. But other governments have defaulted without losing their ability to borrow. Russia, Argentina, and Zimbabwe are but recent examples. Of course, there are severe economic consequences to defaulting, but there are severe consequences to each of these alternatives too. How much harder can life be for the 80 percent of Americans holding a mere seven percent of the nation's wealth? There are, after all, no degrees of broke; no broke, broker, and brokest.

Will investors refuse to lend? Doubtful. A wealthy person can do four things with money: give it away, spend it, stuff it under the mattress, or invest it. Those are the only alternatives, and it is unlikely that much of it can be spent or that many will have the inclination to give it away or save it. So the wealthy really lack a great deal of choice.

### **Good economic practice?**

Finally, a hidden principle underlies this extractive system – It is okay for some to enrich themselves by making others poor. Even though this is exactly what thieves do, no one, to my knowledge, has ever pointed out that this principle is immoral. It appears to be accepted universally as economically acceptable. But consider these two similar principles: (1) It is okay for some to improve their health by making others unhealthy, and (2) It is okay for some to avoid the consequences of their criminal acts by making others bear them. No one would consider the last of these right, yet all three are logically and materially identical.

Some may claim that without profit, no commercial system can function effectively. If true, the implications for humanity are horrific. It implies that mankind was made in Satan's image, that the Commandments, especially the tenth, are fraudulent, that all the philosophy and literature that defines Western Civilization are nugatory, that no essential distinction exists between so-called civilized and barbaric nations, that all governments are illegitimate, that words like justice and fairness are meaningless,

that the law is lawless, that society disintegrates into nociety, and that nothing really matters. The economy is Bedlam, the Earth is the Universe's Insane Asylum, and the craziest are in charge. What kind of human mind would ever attempt to defend this abomination?

This Western commercial system exists merely to enrich vendors by exploiting consumers. When governments institutionalize this system, they place their nations on suicidal paths. Astute observers of history have long recognized what Thomas Jefferson made explicit "Merchants have no country." Oh, yes! These merchants will object vehemently. Pay no attention. Just watch what they do.

They expect favorable treatment and services from governments but do everything possible to keep from paying for them in taxes and exhibit no concern whenever their native lands face bankruptcy. When their native lands face stress, as in times of war, the people are called upon to sacrifice while the merchants are allowed to profiteer. When John F. Kennedy said, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but ask what you can do for your country," he was not speaking to corporate America. Does any reader really believe that the makers of Humvees, drones, and F16s would ever consider supplying them to our military at cost? Yet how great is the cost of the sacrifice parents are asked to make by sending their children off to fight hideous wars?

A merchant unwilling to sacrifice for his country has no country, he will support no country, defend no country, and if such people are given control of a nation, they will suck its blood dry and sell off the body parts to the highest bidder. Not even a corpse will remain. It is not terrorism that threatens the security of the Western World, it is the Western World's commercial system. **CT**

*John Kozy is a retired professor of philosophy and logic who writes on social, political, and economic issues. His on-line pieces can be found on [www.jkozy.com](http://www.jkozy.com)*

# Torture, Bush and the uncritical media

**Andy Worthington** bemoans the media's failure to challenge George W. Bush's claims about the legality and efficiency of torture

**B**ritain's mainstream media likes to claim that it has high journalistic standards, but when the opportunity for a sensational headline turns up, those principles are often abandoned. A recent example of this was the hysterical response to the supposed swine flu epidemic last year, and a new example is currently sweeping the UK.

Led by the *Times*, whose headline on November 9 was, "George W. Bush: waterboarding saved London from attacks," newspapers and broadcasters have uncritically parroted the former US President's claims, failing to mention that waterboarding is torture, and that torture is a crime, for which Bush can and should be prosecuted, and also failing to mention the lack of evidence for his claim that the use of waterboarding saved London from any planned terrorist attacks.

All of these problems are highlighted in the *Times*' front-page article. Reporter Ben Macintyre, observing the protocol that, since 9/11, has led to the mainstream media refusing to recognize waterboarding as an ancient torture technique, whose use – in the Vietnam War, for example – led to the prosecution of the US military officer involved, described how Bush "offered a vigorous defence of the coercive interrogation technique," to which three supposed "high-value detainees" – Khalid Sheikh Moham-

med, Abu Zubaydah and Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri – were subjected, and "denied that waterboarding, which simulates drowning, amounted to torture."

"Coercive interrogation technique" is, of course, Bush-speak for "torture," and is all part of the pretence that a technique known to the honest torturers of the Spanish Inquisition as "*tortura del agua*" can be repackaged, with the advice of corrupt lawyers in the Justice Department, as an "enhanced interrogation technique" that is legally permissible. In addition, waterboarding is not, as the *Times* claimed, a process that "simulates drowning," but is actually a form of controlled drowning, which is rather a different matter.

## Escaped accountability

In the US, the former President has so far managed to escape accountability for his actions, after an internal Justice Department report – examining the behaviour of the lawyers who twisted the law out of shape in a clumsy and disgraceful attempt to redefine torture so that it could be used by CIA operatives under Bush's command – was whitewashed in February this year.

Although the original report concluded that the lawyers in question – John Yoo and Jay S. Bybee – were guilty of "professional misconduct," a senior DOJ fixer, David Margolis, was allowed to override those conclu-

**In the US, the former President has so far managed to escape accountability for his actions**

## COVER STORY

**Critics believe, with considerable justification, that these “plots,” had involved nothing more than some casual browsing on the Internet**

sions, claiming that Yoo and Bybee had only exercised “poor judgment.”

Critics of these conclusions include President Obama and the US Attorney General Eric Holder, who have both stated that waterboarding is torture, and Lt. Gen. Michael D. Maples, the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, who told the Senate Armed Services Committee in February 2008, after CIA director Gen. Mike Hayden first admitted that three prisoners had been waterboarded, that he believes waterboarding violates Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, the baseline protection for all prisoners in wartime (which the Bush administration chose to ignore from February 2002 until June 2006, when the US Supreme Court compelled them to reinstate it).

Common Article 3 prevents “cruel treatment and torture” and “outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment.”

This is the exchange between Sen. Carl Levin and Lt. Gen. Maples:

**SEN. LEVIN:** General, do you believe that waterboarding is consistent with Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions?

**LTG MAPLES:** No, sir, I don't.

**SEN. LEVIN:** Do you believe it's humane?

**LTG MAPLES:** No, sir. I think it would go beyond that bound.

In addition, Bent Sørensen, a former member of the United Nations Committee Against Torture, and now a Senior Medical Consultant to the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims, stated unequivocally in February 2008:

“It's a clear-cut case: Waterboarding can without any reservation be labeled as torture. It fulfills all of the four central criteria that according to the United Nations Convention Against Torture (UNCAT) defines an act of torture. First, when water is forced into your lungs in this fashion, in addition to the pain you are likely to experience an immediate and extreme fear of death. You

may even suffer a heart attack from the stress or damage to the lungs and brain from inhalation of water and oxygen deprivation. In other words there is no doubt that waterboarding causes severe physical and/or mental suffering – one central element in the UNCAT's definition of torture. In addition the CIA's waterboarding clearly fulfills the three additional definition criteria stated in the Convention for a deed to be labeled torture, since it is 1) done intentionally, 2) for a specific purpose and 3) by a representative of a state – in this case the US.”

### **No evidence for Bush claims**

As well as failing to mention any of these criticisms – by people whose knowledge of the law was considerably deeper than that of George W. Bush – the *Times* also uncritically reported the former President's claim that the interrogations of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, Abu Zubaydah and Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri “helped break up plots to attack American diplomatic facilities abroad, Heathrow airport and Canary Wharf in London, and multiple targets in the United States,” even though no evidence has ever been presented to back up these claims.

Critics believe, with considerable justification, that these “plots,” like the “dirty bomb plot” to attack New York – in which British resident Binyam Mohamed and US citizen Jose Padilla were implicated (by Abu Zubaydah), and which had involved nothing more than some casual browsing on the Internet – were similarly spectral, and, as I explained in an article earlier this month, “No appetite for prosecution: In his memoir, Bush admits he authorised the use of torture, but no one cares,” – <http://www.cage-prisoners.com/our-work/opinion-editorial/item/789-no-appetite-for-prosecution-in-memoir-bush-admits-he-authorized-the-use-of-torture-but-no-one-cares> – which cast a critical eye on Bush's culpability for torture and his dubious claims regarding intelligence, four days before the tsunami of uncritical reporting in the British media, the

British journalist David Rose explained in an article for *Vanity Fair* in December 2008 that, “according to a former senior CIA official, who read all the interrogation reports on KSM, ‘90 percent of it was total f\*cking bullsh\*t,’” and a former Pentagon analyst added, “KSM produced no actionable intelligence. He was trying to tell us how stupid we were.”

The story of Abu Zubaydah, meanwhile, is even more illuminating, as he was not, as alleged, a high-ranking al-Qaeda member, but was, instead, the mentally troubled gatekeeper of the Khaldan training camp in Afghanistan that was closed down by the Taliban because its emir, Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi, refused to cooperate with Osama bin Laden.

As I have explained previously, Dan Coleman, the FBI’s senior expert on al-Qaeda, has told how he and others at the FBI concluded not only that Zubaydah had severe mental problems – particularly because of a head injury he had suffered in 1992 – but also that this led to him being regarded with particular suspicion by the al-Qaeda leadership. “They all knew he was crazy, and they knew he was always on the damn phone,” Coleman said. “You think they’re going to tell him anything?”

Moreover, Coleman’s analysis was, essentially, reinforced by a Justice Department official who told the *Washington Post* in 2009:

[Abu Zubaydah] “was not even an official member of al-Qaeda,” and was, instead, “a ‘kind of travel agent’ for would-be jihadists. A former Justice Department official, who knows his case, explained, “He was the above-ground support. He was the guy keeping the safe house, and that’s not someone who gets to know the details of the plans.

To make him the mastermind of anything is ridiculous.” What happened, it transpired, was that “because his name often turned up in intelligence traffic linked to al-Qaeda transactions,” some within the intelligence community presumed that he

was a significant figure, whereas the truth was that, although committed to the idea of jihad, he did not share Osama bin Laden’s aims, and “regarded the United States as an enemy principally because of its support of Israel.” The officials explained that he “had strained and limited relations with bin Laden and only vague knowledge before the Sept. 11 attacks that something was brewing.”

A more honest appraisal of the result of Abu Zubaydah’s torture would note that it began before George W. Bush received the Justice Department’s legally twisted approval for it, and that, as Ron Suskind explained in his 2006 book, *The One Percent Doctrine*, so misplaced was the CIA’s belief in Zubaydah’s importance that when they subjected him to waterboarding and other forms of torture, he “confessed” to all manner of supposed plots – against shopping malls, banks, supermarkets, water systems, nuclear plants, apartment buildings, the Brooklyn Bridge, and the Statue of Liberty – and, as a result, “thousands of uniformed men and women raced in a panic to each target ... The United States would torture a mentally disturbed man and then leap, screaming, at every word he uttered.”

#### **False confessions**

Even more disturbingly, a far clearer example of how torture works in practice – to produce false confessions – is to be found in the story of Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi, conveniently ignored by George W. Bush and his courtiers in the mainstream media.

Seized in December 2001, al-Libi was sent to Egypt by the CIA where, under torture – including, it seems, waterboarding – he falsely confessed that Saddam Hussein was advising al-Qaeda members on the use of chemical weapons.

This claim made its way into Colin Powell’s presentation to the United Nations before the Iraq invasion in March 2003, and, as well as demonstrating how torture is only reliable for producing false intelligence, it also highlights something else that George

**A far clearer example of how torture works in practice – to produce false confessions – is to be found in the story of Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi**

## COVER STORY

**The former President is a war criminal, and not some kind of flawed hero returning from the wilderness to salvage his legacy**

W. Bush would like to have ignored while he brags about how, “Had I not authorized waterboarding on senior al-Qaeda leaders, I would have had to accept a greater risk that the country would be attacked.”

As Powell’s former Chief of Staff, Col. Lawrence Wilkerson, explained to me last year, the truth is that, far from fearing another terrorist attack, the Bush administration had actually decided by December 2001 to shift its focus to Iraq, and was therefore using torture to try to justify the invasion of Iraq.

Bush may not have been driving this policy, which, as he indicates in his book, was in the hands of Dick Cheney, but as Commander-in-Chief he bears the ultimate responsibility not only for authorizing torture, but also for what seems to be to be the treasonous policy of torturing “terror suspects”

to justify the illegal invasion of a sovereign country, while lying to his countrymen that he was doing it to keep them safe.

As a result, all those media outlets queuing up to join the *Times* in sitting at Bush’s feet and uncritically reporting his lies, evasions and self-deceptions about torture ought to be ashamed.

The former President is a war criminal, and not some kind of flawed hero returning from the wilderness to salvage his legacy.**CT**

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# FRAMING INNOCENCE

A Mother’s Photographs, a Prosecutor’s Zeal, and a Small Town’s Response

**LYNN POWELL**

The story of how innocent photographs taken by a mother of her child became the heart of a wrenching legal battle

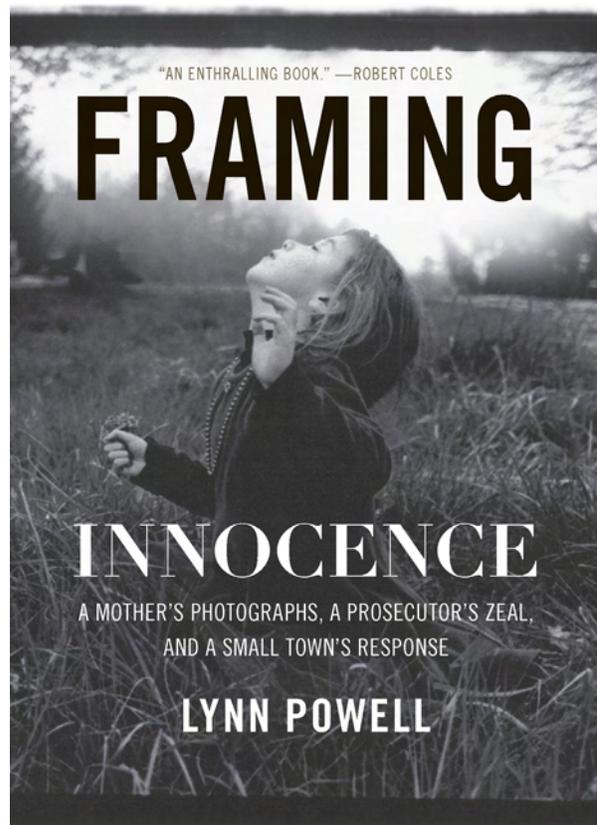
“A fascinating cautionary tale. . . . Powell is a facile writer, and her closeness to the material adds a subjective element to the story that makes it more immediate and compelling.” —

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# Let's attack Iran!

**Fred Reed** is convinced that American politicians and military leaders are as brain deficient as tapeworms. Who can argue?

**O**h good. I see that Senator Lindsey Graham wants to attack Iran. The US, he says, should “sink their navy, destroy their air force and deliver a decisive blow to the Revolutionary Guard.”

Senator Graham has the brains of a tapeworm, making him eminently qualified for the senate. Tapeworms, I note, do not have brains. It is characteristic of warlike innocents, including those at the Pentagon, to believe that if you destroy navies and air forces, you win wars. This worked well in Vietnam, you will recall, and as soon as we destroy the Taliban's navy, Afghanistan will be a cakewalk.

Now, I understand that practicality and realism are alien concepts in American politics, to be approached with trepidation, but maybe, just once, we should think before sticking our private parts into a wood-chipper. Just once. I do not propose consistent rationality, forethought, or intelligent behavior. I profoundly respect my country's traditions.

However, folk wisdom from West Virginia: Before you say, “I can whip any man in the bar!” it is well to scout the bar.

Note that the United States cannot defeat Iran militarily, short of using nuclear weapons. It is easy to start a war. Finishing one is harder. I could punch out Mike Tyson. Things thereafter might not go as well

as hoped.

Some will find the thought of American martial incapacity outrageous. Can't beat Iran? Buncha towel monkeys? Among grrr-bowwow-woof patriots, there exists a heady delusion of American potency, that the US has “the greatest military power the world has ever seen.” Ah. And when did it last win a war? In Afghanistan, for ten years the gloriousest military ever known, the expensivist, and whoosh-bangiestic, hasn't managed to defeat a bunch of pissed-off illiterates with AKs and RPGs.

At this point Lindsey of Persia will doubtless allude to the wonders of air power, of “precision-guided weapons,” of smart bombs that presumably read Kant on the way down. Those pitiable Iranians would have no hope of stopping our mighty bombers. True.

Implicit in this Thomistic fantasy (Clancy, I mean, not Aquinas) is that Iran wouldn't, couldn't dare fight back without a navy, etc. Lindsey had better be very sure that Iran couldn't block the Strait of Hormuz in retaliation. Enough of the world's petroleum comes from the Gulf that the price would rise drastically if the Straits were blocked. Some economies would simply stop.

How many supertankers going up in flames would be tolerated before operators of tankers refused to risk it?

Iran recently began serial production of

**Lindsey of Persia will doubtless allude to the wonders of air power, of “precision-guided weapons,” of smart bombs that presumably read Kant on the way down**

## THE CRAZIES ARE LOOSE

The distance from “Israel did it” to “The Jews did it,” though logically great, is emotionally short. People think in collective terms

the Nasr 1, an anti-ship cruise missile. Tankers are thin-skinned and highly flammable. The Nasr 1 can be fired from the back of a truck. Trucks by their nature are mobile. They are easy to hide.

The Air Force, to include Naval Air, may be confident that it can destroy all of Iran’s missiles. The Air Force always believes that air power can do anything and everything – make coffee, win at marbles, everything. After all, don’t its airplanes say “Vrooom!” and “Swoosh!”? Don’t cockpits have lots of portentous buttons and spiffy little screens? Unfortunately the Air Force is regularly wrong.

In fact the entire military is regularly wrong about the ease and duration of its adventures. For example, it had no idea that Viet Nam would turn into an endless war ending in defeat. Iraq notoriously was going to be a walk in the park. That the war on Afghanistan would last ten years with a distinct possibility of defeat...this never occurred to the soldiers.

It is barely conceivable that the Five-Sided Wind Box could do what Field Marshal Graham thinks it could do. The unexpected is always a possibility. But, the stakes being what they would be in Hormuz, hoo-boy....

Another possibility is that Israel will attack Iran, as it has threatened. I would like to think that even Bibi Nut-and-Yahoo has better sense but, if the US can produce gibbering wingnuts, why not Israel? The practical effects of an Israeli attack would be indistinguishable from those of an American attack: America would have to solve the problem. Which it probably couldn’t. Israel can bomb Iran’s nuclear codpieces, but it can’t defeat Iran. And if the Strait were blocked after an Israeli attack, the entire globe would holler, “Israel did it!” which would be true.

The distance from “Israel did it” to “The Jews did it,” though logically great, is emotionally short. People think in collective terms. Remember that after some Saudis dropped the Towers, the alleged war on terror morphed almost instantly into intense

hostility for Moslems. It doesn’t make sense, but what has that got to do with anything?

I know a lot of Jews who are all over the place politically and intellectually. They have in common a complete lack of resemblance to the scheming, hand-rubbing, heh-heh-heh Jews of Neo-nazi imagination. Few sacrifice Christian children (a temptation strongest, I can attest, among Christian parents). But...people think collectively.

Congress doesn’t support Israel because it likes Israel, but from political expediency. If the wind blows the other way, so will Congress. Gasoline at twelve dollars is a lot of wind in a commuting country.

Things worsen for America, yet we really don’t know where the country is going or how it will react. The last domestic catastrophe was the Great Depression, when America was a very different place. How bad can things get, economically, politically, internationally? How does a pampered population incapable of planting a garden respond to genuinely hard times? “It can’t happen here,” one hears. What can’t? I suspect that all sorts of things could happen, given sufficiently hard times.

The United States is today an edgy, unhappy country, sliding toward poverty, increasingly dictatorial, inchoately angry, hostile to blacks, the French, Mexicans, Moslems and, creepingly, the Chinese. (Jews, perhaps to their surprise, don’t make the enemies list.) Americans don’t do cosmopolitan. The federal pressure for diversity exists because otherwise no one would associate with anyone else. The Persian Gulf is one of few places that plausibly might wreck the industrial world. There would have to be someone to blame. And Israel can’t survive without American support.

Maybe I’m crazy. But if I were an Israeli, I’d find a nice café on Diesengoff and enjoy a double cappuccino, watch the girls, and keep my bombs in my pocket. Let somebody else take the fall. **CT**

*Fred Reed’s web site is  
www.fredoneverything.net*

# Unemployed: The face of a generation

**Andy Kroll** meets Rick Rembold, a worker who's stranded on the sidelines of the jobs crisis

**S**ometime in early June – he's not exactly sure which day – Rick Rembold joined history. That he doesn't remember comes as little surprise: Who wants their name etched into the record books for not having a job?

For Rembold, that day in June marked six months since he'd last pulled a steady paycheck, at which point his name joined the rapidly growing list of American workers deemed “long-term unemployed” by the Department of Labor. In the worst jobs crisis in generations, the ranks of Rembolds, stranded on the sidelines, have exploded by over 400% – from 1.3 million in December 2007, when the recession began, to 6.8 million this June. The extraordinary growth of this jobless underclass is a harbinger of prolonged pain for the American economy.

This summer, I set out to explore just why long-term unemployment had risen to historic levels – and stumbled across Rembold. A 56-year-old resident of Mishawaka, Indiana, he caught the unnerving mix of frustration, anger, and helplessness voiced by so many other unemployed workers I'd spoken to. “I lie awake at night with acid indigestion worrying about how I'm going to survive,” he said in a brief bio kept by the National Employment Law Project, which is how I found him. I called him up, and we talked about his languishing career, as well as his childhood and family. But a

few phone calls, I realized, weren't enough. In early August I hopped a plane to northern Indiana.

In job terms, my timing couldn't have been better. I arrived around lunchtime, and was driving through downtown South Bend, an unremarkable cluster of buildings awash in gray and brown and brick, when my cell phone rang. Rembold's breathless voice was on the other end. “Sorry I didn't pick up earlier, man, but a friend just called and tipped me off about a place up near the airport. I'm fillin' up my bike and headin' up there right now.” I told him I'd meet him there, hung a sharp U-turn, and sped north.

Twenty minutes later, I pulled into the parking lot of a modest-sized aircraft parts manufacturer tucked into a quiet business park. Ford and Chevy trucks filled the lot, most backed in. Rembold roared up soon after on his '99 Suzuki motorcycle. Barrel-chested with a thick neck, his short black hair was flecked with gray, and he was deeply tanned from long motorcycle rides with his girlfriend Terri. “They didn't even advertise this job,” he told me after a hearty handshake. Not unless you count the inconspicuous sign out front, a jobless man's oasis in the blinding heat: “NOW HIRING: Bench Inspector.”

His black leather portfolio in hand, Rembold took a two-sided application from

**I arrived around lunchtime, and was driving through downtown South Bend, an unremarkable cluster of buildings awash in gray and brown and brick, when my cell phone rang**

## JOB HUNGRY

**If the company's interested, the manager says – and it feels like a kiss-off even to me – they'll be in touch, and before we know it we're back out in the smothering heat of an Indiana summer**

a woman who greeted us inside the tiny lobby. He filled it out in minutes, the phone numbers, names, dates, and addresses committed to memory, handed it to the secretary, and in a polite but firm tone asked to speak with someone from management. While we waited, he pointed out the old Studebaker factories in a black-and-white sketch of nineteenth century South Bend on the wall, launching into a *Cliffs Notes* history of industry in this once-bustling corner of the Midwest.

A manager finally emerges with Rembold's application in hand. Rembold rushes to explain away the three jobs he had listed in the "previous employers" section – stints at a woodworking company, motorcycle shop, and local payday lender. They're not, he assures the man, indicative of his skills; they're not who he is. You see, he rushes to add, he's been in manufacturing practically his entire life, a hard and loyal worker who made his way up from the shop floor to sales and then to management. That kind of experience won't fit in three blank spots on a one-page form. Unswayed, the manager thanks him formulaically for applying.

If the company's interested, the manager says – and it feels like a kiss-off even to me – they'll be in touch, and before we know it we're back out in the smothering heat of an Indiana summer. Rembold tucks his portfolio into one of the Suzuki's leather saddlebags. "Well, that's pretty standard," he says, his tone remarkably matter-of-fact. "At least I got to talk to somebody. You're lucky to get that anymore."

### **A perfect storm hits american labor**

The numbers tell so much of the story. The 6.76 million Americans – or 46% of the entire unemployed labor force – counted as long-term unemployed in June were the most since 1948, when the statistic was first recorded, and more than double the previous record of 3 million in the recession of the early 1980s. (The numbers have since dipped slightly, with a total of 6.2 million long-term unemployed in August.) These

are people who, despite dozens of rejections, leave phone messages, send emails, tweak their cover letters, and toy with resume templates in Microsoft Word, all in the search for a job.

Not counted in this figure are so-called "discouraged workers," including plenty of former searchers who have remained on the unemployment sidelines for six months or more. In August of this year, 1.1 million Americans had simply stopped looking and so officially dropped out of the workforce. They are essentially not considered worth counting when the subject of unemployment comes up. Nonetheless, that 1.1 million figure represents an increase of 352,000 since 2009. In effect, the real long-term unemployment figure now may be closer to 7.5 million Americans.

So who are these unfortunate or unlucky people? Long-term unemployment, research shows, doesn't discriminate: no age, race, ethnicity, or educational level is immune. According to federal data, however, the hardest hit when it comes to long-term unemployment are older workers – middle aged and beyond, folks like Rick Rembold who can see retirement on the horizon but planned on another decade or more of work. Given the increasing claims of age discrimination in this recession, older Americans suffering longer bouts of joblessness may not in itself be so surprising. That education seemingly works against anyone in this older cohort is. Nearly half of the long-term unemployed who are 45 or older have "some college," a bachelor's degree, or more. By contrast, those with no education at all make up just 15% of this older category. In other words, if you're older and well educated, the outlook is truly grim.

As for the causes of long-term unemployment, there's the obvious answer: there simply aren't enough jobs. Before the Great Recession, there were 1.5 workers in the U.S. for every job slot; today, that ratio is 4.8 to one. Put another way, with normal growth instead of a recession, we'd have 10 million more jobs than we currently do. Closing

that gap would require adding 300,000 jobs every month for the next five years. In August 2010, the economy shed 54,000 jobs. You do the math.

Worse yet, if you imagine five workers queued up for that single position, the longer you're unemployed, the further back you stand. Economists have found that long-term unemployment dims a worker's prospects with each passing day. "This pattern suggests that the very-long-term unemployed will be the last group to benefit from an economic recovery," Michael Reich, an economist at the University of California-Berkeley, told Congress in June.

But when you consider the plight of the long-term unemployed, don't just think jobs. The 2008 recession was a housing-driven crisis, thanks to the rise of subprime mortgage lending, government policy, and greed. As a result, 11 million borrowers – or nearly 23% of all homeowners with a mortgage – now find themselves "underwater": that is, owing more on their mortgages than their houses are worth. Negative equity at those levels creates what Harvard economist Lawrence Katz calls a "geographic lock-in effect," stifling jobs recovery. Typically, American workers are a mobile bunch, willing to bounce from one city to the next for new jobs, but not when homeowners are staying put to avoid selling their underwater houses for a loss.

Another factor in the explosion of long-term unemployment lies in a shift away from temporary layoffs. In the recessions of 1975, 1980, and 1982, 20% of unemployed workers had been only temporarily laid off; as of August of this year, just 10% had. In their heyday, automakers and steel companies laid off workers as demand dipped, but backstopped by powerful labor unions, those workers were regularly recalled as demand and production revved up again. No more. Now, if you're long-term unemployed, you're undoubtedly trying to find a new job with a new employer, a more daunting process. Add it all up and you have Rick Rembold.

#### **"Feast or samine" in RV Land**

Rembold calls himself a Democrat – "not the peace sign, hit-the-bong type," he hastens to add, but "a tear-off-your-head-and-shit-down-your-neck Democrat." He can't stomach Glenn Beck or talk radio here in the Land of Limbaugh, and with equal zeal he watches MSNBC's Rachel Maddow and FX's "Sons of Anarchy," a gritty, violent series about outlaw motorcycle gangs.

It was a Friday morning, and we were in Rembold's kitchen, drinking coffee and talking politics. He wore jeans and a black polo shirt, and paced as he spoke. Ideas and frustrations poured out of him like water from an open spigot; the man had a lot on his mind. The night before, I had asked him to show me around the area, especially the economic engine that sustains it: the recreational vehicle, or RV, industry. Once the coffee ran dry, we piled into my car and set off.

Cities such as Elkhart and Middlebury and Mishawaka and Wakarusa are the cradle of the RV industry. Headquartered here are major manufacturers like Jayco and Forest River. At its peak, northern Indiana churned out three-quarters of all RVs on the road – motor homes and fifth-wheels, pop-up campers, travel trailers, and toy haulers. Producing them was grueling work, but you could fashion a middle-class lifestyle out of what it paid. "Workin' in the RV industry, they'll work you to death," Rembold said. "People would literally be sprintin' from one place to the next with power tools in their hands."

Then came "the Panic of '08," as one RV salesman put it to me. Teetering banks choked off consumer lending as credit markets froze. The downturn pummeled the industry. In 2009, sales of fifth-wheels, a smaller trailer you hitch to a truck or SUV, plummeted by 30%, travel trailers by 23.5%, campers by 28%. Manufacturers like Jayco, Monaco Coach, and others collectively laid off thousands, and the region's unemployment rate spiked by more than 10% in a year. When a newly elected Barack Obama

**Teetering banks choked off consumer lending as credit markets froze. The downturn pummeled the industry**

## JOB HUNGRY

**Like millions in his predicament, Rembold knows his chances of finding a decent-paying job doing what he loves decrease with each temporary, non-manufacturing job he's taken**

arrived in Elkhart in February 2009 to tout his stimulus plan, the jobless rate was 15.3%; a month later, it reached 18.9%, more than twice the national rate. At one point, Elkhart County, with a population of 200,000, was shedding 95 jobs a day.

In the 1990s and first years of the new century, RV manufacturers couldn't hire enough workers. They ran ads in regional and national newspapers looking for more bodies. "We couldn't even get people to drive over from South Bend to work in Elkhart," a sales rep for Jayco told me.

By the time I arrived, though, the industry had left its feast years, hit the famine ones fast, and was showing the first signs of crawling back. Driving through Middlebury, a town of 3,200 east of Elkhart, I saw a few carrier trucks hustling in or out of plants, some full employee parking lots, and rows of gleaming new RVs dotting the green landscape like herds of boxy cattle.

Whether the industry will ever fully recover, however, is unclear. The manufacturers I spoke to were optimistic about future sales. "Despite the logic of what's going on in the economy, the buyers are still there," said Jeremiah Borkowski, a spokesman for Thor Motor Coach. But a 2009 analysis by Indiana University's Business Research Center projected that by 2013 annual RV shipments still won't have returned to their 2006 peak. "I personally don't think it'll ever rebound to pre-2008 levels," says Bill Dawson, vice president and general manager of Clean Seal Inc., a South Bend-based supplier of parts to the RV industry. Dawson points to industry contractions – Thor's \$209 million acquisition of Heartland RV, the Damon Motor Coach-Four Winds merger, as well as numerous factory closings – and says, "Fewer players mean fewer units and fewer people making them."

Rembold knows the RV industry's ebb and flow all too well. He's lived in its shadow for the majority of his working career, including 18 years with Architectural Wood Company (AWC), an Elkhart-based manufacturer of wood products used to outfit

RVs and conversion vans. He's made hand-crafted tables, faceplates, valences, and overhead consoles, usually from oak or maple, finishing them with the gloss that gives Kimball grand pianos and Fender guitars their shine.

But by the 1990s and 2000s, his line of work looked to be headed the way of the 8-track tape. The conversion van industry was sinking. RV manufacturers had begun replacing wood with cheaper plastics and vinyl-wrapped plywood. (At an RV show we visited, Rembold could step inside a vehicle and determine by smell alone if the manufacturer used the real thing or not.) Orders plummeted at AWC. By early 2006, the company's financial health was so dire that the owner, a good friend of Rembold's, let him go. A few years later, the company itself folded.

Rembold then caroomed from one job to the next: selling used cars and motorcycles, driving a semi truck, working behind six inches of bulletproof glass as a teller at Check\$mart. He briefly ended up back in RVs, supervising employees sewing tents for campers, and then, last winter, temped at a struggling wood shop. That was his last job. After the holidays, he was never called back.

Like millions in his predicament, Rembold knows his chances of finding a decent-paying job doing what he loves decrease with each temporary, non-manufacturing job he's taken. What doesn't fit on a resume – and so frustrates him most – is his adaptability, if only he could convince an employer of it. College degree or not, certification or not, he insists, he's always adapted to new settings. "Could I do construction? Hell, yeah, I could do it. I could measure in metric, in standard; I'd correct cutting mistakes, do it all. I just can't get anyone to let me do it."

As we talked, the RV plants gave way to lush farmland and we found ourselves driving through Amish country, sharing quiet two-lane roads with horse-drawn buggies. By early afternoon we rolled into the town

of Topeka (pop. 1,200), past the Seed and Stove store and the Do-It Better hardware shop. Then Rembold's cell phone buzzed, a rare break in the conversation. It was his daughter, Angie, 28, the youngest of his three kids.

He listened, then yanked off his sunglasses. "You what?"

Angie managed the Check\$mart in Goshen, the check-cashing outfit Rembold once worked for, and she was good at her job, Rembold had told me earlier. Now she was agitated, talking so loudly that I caught bits and pieces of the conversation over the din of the radio. Something about a bonus owed that she didn't receive. When Rembold abruptly hung up, he muttered, "Jesus H. Christ."

Later, over lunch at what looked to be Topeka's lone diner, he explained that Angie planned to quit her job over the unpaid bonus. After a full morning telling me about the nightmare of being out of work, he looked stunned. "You'd think she'd have learned from my situation. I don't think she realizes how her life is going to change."

### **The trauma of long-term unemployment**

It's hard, even for the long-term unemployed, to grasp just how drastically life can change without work. Studying past recessions to discover just what does happen, researchers often focus on the collapse of the steel industry in Pennsylvania in the late 1970s that would turn a once-thriving region into a landscape of shuttered factories and ghost towns. Eighty thousand people worked in steel in the 1940s; by 1987, 4,000 remained.

In one study, male Pennsylvania workers with high seniority experienced a 50% to 100% spike in mortality rate in the first year after job loss. The life expectancies of those laid off after age 40 decreased by one to one-and-a-half years. In the long run, these laid-off Pennsylvanians suffered a 15% to 20% reduction in earnings. Those hardest hit in terms of lifelong earnings, economists found, were not low-skilled laborers

or highly skilled wealthy elites, but workers who had managed to forge a middle-class lifestyle.

Suicide rates also increase, researchers have found, when unemployment rises. (In Elkhart County, where Rembold lives, suicides exceeded the annual average by 40% last year.)

The 1980s recession in Pennsylvania was no outlier either, economic researchers have discovered, and the effects of long-term unemployment spread well beyond directly afflicted workers. In the short run, for instance, a child whose parent loses his or her job is 15% more likely to repeat a grade year in school, according to University of California-Davis economists Ann Huff Stevens and Jessamyn Schaller. This is especially true for children with less-educated parents.

Over their lifetime, the children of jobless fathers earn, on average, 9% less each year than similar children without laid-off dads, and are more likely to receive unemployment insurance and social welfare support at some point in their lifetimes. New research also suggests that the children of laid-off parents may have lower homeownership rates and higher divorce rates.

### **"I'm not competing with some college kid"**

In the early evening, Rembold and I holed up in his office, a small room off the main hallway with a computer, two desks, and countless framed photos. Rembold clicked open a folder on his Internet browser labeled "Careers" and walked me through his daily online job-hunting routine. He checks half-a-dozen job boards regularly, though openings tend to pay only in the \$8- to \$10-an-hour range. He rejects most of those out of hand.

"Wouldn't that be better than no job at all?" I ask.

Rembold gnaws on the question. "I can't afford my home at \$8 or \$10 an hour," he finally replies. Right now, he's getting by on unemployment checks, a small inheritance from his mother that's rapidly dwindling, and loans from family members. Still, he'd

**The children of jobless fathers earn, on average, Right now, he's getting by on unemployment checks, a small inheritance from his mother that's rapidly dwindling, and loans from family members**

## JOB HUNGRY

**He still has the big screen in the basement, the DVD collection, the video-game systems for when the grandkids visit, a life's worth of possessions from decades of earning good money**

rather keep trolling the job boards in the hopes of finding something offering a living wage. "I've got a mortgage to pay, for Christ's sake," he told me. The few openings he sees with good pay, however, involve odd hours, dusk-to-dawn shifts that would mean he'd almost never see Terri, whose schedule at an aluminum company in Elkhart is early morning to mid-afternoon.

And then, under the dollar signs lurks something else: self-respect. Unlike his father, Rembold never went to college, and doesn't consider himself too good for service-sector jobs. But he visibly agonizes over the fact that, as a 56-year-old man with decades of experience, he's competing with people half his age for low-wage jobs. After all, as a machine operator fresh out of high school at White Farm Equipment, he earned \$8.64 an hour. That was 1976. Adjusted for inflation, that's equivalent to \$42.42 today. No wonder the man's reluctant to flip burgers or trim hedges for \$9 an hour.

His friends have suggested selling his condo and moving somewhere smaller and cheaper, maybe renting for a while, but that's the last thing he wants. It's that self-respect again. He's already sold off one motorcycle and various musical instruments, and he and Terri now skip the big vacations that were part of their past life. Which isn't to say that Rembold currently lives like a monk. He still has the big screen in the basement, the DVD collection, the video-game systems for when the grandkids visit, a life's worth of possessions from decades of earning good money. "Why should you have to give up your home?" he wanted to know. "It's so unbelievable to me that I don't even want to think about it. I'm in denial."

### **A lost generation?**

What's to be done for people like Rick Rembold? As in most economic debates, the answer to this question divides economists and policymakers. On the left are those who lobby for more aid to jobless Americans, including another extension of unemployment insurance beyond the present cut-off

date of 99 weeks. (In normal times, laid-off workers once got 26 weeks of unemployment insurance.) Some Democrats in the Senate had hoped to extend unemployment insurance by another 20 weeks up to 119 weeks, an effort spearheaded by Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.) that ultimately failed in the face of Republican opposition. That same camp supports a one-time "re-employment bonus," a lump-sum payment that unemployed workers would receive to reward them for finding a new job and leaving the unemployment rolls.

Another idea gaining traction in policy circles is "wage insurance," in which the government would supplement the income of workers rehired at lower-paying jobs. Consider Rembold who, in his prime, earned \$25 an hour. He says can't live on a \$10-an-hour job, but if that were to become \$12 or \$15 an hour, thanks to a government subsidy, he'd be much more interested.

More conservative voices believe cutting jobless benefits – a bitter pill, to be sure – will force people back into the workforce. The Rembolds of America will then scramble harder and take those low-wage jobs faster.

Of course, those who can't find work at all will be left adrift with no safety net. What's more, the cost of such cuts to taxpayers might actually prove higher, economists note, because without those benefits the jobless might instead apply for disability or other support programs and give up the search altogether.

Ideally, of course, employers and governments should avoid widespread layoffs altogether. One option sometimes suggested would be a "work-share" program. Imagine a factory of 100 workers with a boss looking to cut costs. Instead of laying off 25 workers, he would reduce all of his workers' hours by 25%. The government would then step in to fill the earnings gap. Think of it as the equivalent of collecting unemployment before you're laid off, a preventive measure to avoid the trauma – to income, health, family – of job loss.

None of this is likely to happen soon which is little consolation for the long-term unemployed like Rembold. Unfortunately, there are few proven solutions to their situation. Job retraining programs for unemployed workers are all the rage these days, touted by Education Secretary Arne Duncan, Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner, and President Obama as a transition to a new line of work. But a 2008 study commissioned by the Labor Department found minimal-to-no gains for 160,000 workers who went through retraining, concluding that the “ultimate gains from participation are small or nonexistent.”

In the end, facing an economy that may never again generate in such quantity the sorts of “middle class” jobs Rembold was used to, what we may be seeing is the creation of a graying class of permanently unemployed (or underemployed) Americans, a genuine lost generation who will never recover from the recession of 2008. As Mike Konczal and Arjun Jayadev of the Roosevelt Institute, a left-leaning think tank, recently wrote, unemployed workers today are more likely to abandon the workforce than find work – something never before seen in four decades’ worth of labor data. “These workers need targeted intervention,” they concluded, “before they become completely lost to the normal labor market.”

**“All I need is one chance”**

I first noticed Rembold’s tic on Sunday, my last day in Indiana. Out of nowhere, without provocation, he’d suddenly say things like “Man, I just need a job,” or “All I need is a chance,” or “I wanna work, make stuff with my hands.” He’d been filling the lulls in our conversations with these little out-

bursts, symptoms, I assumed, of the worry and anxiety that never left his side. Which is why I called a few weeks after my visit, hoping for good news.

And there was, after a fashion. Angie, his daughter, had ended up sticking with Check\$mart, much to his relief. But for him, the leads were sparser than ever. “There’s this neighbor here,” he said, “her son’s a shift manager at the Walmart, so he’s gonna see what they might have.” He also mentioned an electronic wire and cable manufacturer with openings in Bremen, a half-hour south. He’d recently applied there for the third time this year. This time around, he went on, he planned to march in and demand the interview he’d never gotten. “I mean, what’s it take to get in to see someone there?” he asked me.

Rembold doesn’t have time on his side. Unlike the now-famous “99ers,” the folks who received nearly two years’ worth of unemployment benefits, his will expire sometime this winter, short of the 99-week mark. He’s not sure what he’ll do by then if he can’t find work. Maybe take one of those \$8-an-hour jobs after all. For now, though, he’s just checking the job boards each morning, shipping off resumes and cover letters, firing up the Suzuki, chasing leads.

I asked if he still had any hope left that something good would happen. “I don’t know,” he replied. “ ‘Course if ya don’t go, ya don’t know.” **CT**

*Andy Kroll is a reporter in the D.C. bureau of Mother Jones magazine and an associate editor at TomDispatch.com, where this essay was first published. It was written with research support from the Investigative Fund at the Nation Institute.*

**Unemployed workers today are more likely to abandon the workforce than find work – something never before seen in four decades’ worth of labor data**

**READ THE BEST OF TOM ENGELHARDT**  
<http://coldtype.net/tom.html>

# A tale of two boobs

A weird telephone call brings back memories of Long Dong Silver and pubic hair on Coke cans, writes **Bill Berkowitz**

Clarence Thomas' wife, is perhaps the most politically involved spouse of a Supreme Court Justice in the history of the Supreme Court

Ginni Thomas, the wife of US Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, has a lot on her plate these days. When not working to build Liberty Central, her new Tea Party-like organization, she recently made a little time for an early-morning chat with Anita Hill, urging her to 'apologize' to her husband for sexual harassment charges made at his confirmation hearings some 19 years ago.

Given Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas' now oft-testified-to predilection for big breasts, and his wife's seemingly unrestrained desire to resurface questions about her husband's fondness for pornography, this story could be called "A Tale of Two Boobs." It is also a story of the agglomeration of raw political power through the garnering of unlimited, and undisclosed, resources.

Virginia "Ginni" Thomas, Clarence Thomas' wife, is perhaps the most politically involved spouse of a Supreme Court Justice in the history of the Supreme Court. And, while Ginni Thomas is devoting most of her time and energy to building Liberty Central, her relatively new organization, into a right-wing powerhouse, she recently took time out of her early-morning activities to revive an old story, this bringing vivid memories of pubic hair on a Coke can, and the acting chops of Long Dong Silver, back into our national consciousness.

Ginni Thomas' Tea Party-like organiza-

tion, Liberty Central – a 501(c)(4) organization actively promoting the candidacies of Tea Party-endorsed candidates – was launched in 2009 with two unidentified gifts of \$500,000 and \$50,000, gifts that instantly made the group a political player. Liberty Central's stated mission is "to promote education, civil discourse, and activism focused on protecting the core founding principles of the United States."

While her recent early-morning telephone call to Anita Hill – ostensibly seeking Hill's apology for supposedly wrongfully accusing her husband, Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, of sexual harassment at his confirmation hearings 19 years ago – seemed civil enough, made national headlines for Ginni, and made her easy fodder for late-night television talk-show hosts, it probably did little for "protecting core founding principles of the United States."

While the anonymous donations helped put Liberty Central on the map, Ginni Thomas needed no introduction to conservative politics.

As the *New York Times*' Jackie Calmes pointed out earlier this month, "For three decades, Mrs. Thomas has been a familiar figure among conservative activists in Washington – since before she met her husband of 23 years, Justice Clarence Thomas of the Supreme Court. But this year she has emerged in her most politically prominent role yet:

Mrs. Thomas is the founder and head of a new nonprofit group, Liberty Central, dedicated to opposing what she characterizes as the leftist ‘tyranny’ of President Obama and Democrats in Congress ...” Calmes pointed out that Thomas’ role in Liberty Central was “the most partisan role ever for a spouse of a justice on the nation’s highest court.”

According to the *New York Times*, Thomas told Fox News in April, at a Tea Party rally in Atlanta that her organization “will be bigger than the Tea Party movement.” And one of the ways Liberty Central might achieve that status would be by raking in huge amounts of money from undisclosed sources, an opportunity made available by “the ruling last January by the Supreme Court in the Citizens United case, which eased restrictions on independent campaign spending by corporations and unions,” a 5-4 decision that saw her husband voting with the majority. The *Times* noted that “Wealthy individuals and some corporations, emboldened by the ruling, are giving to such groups to influence the election but still hide their tracks.”

Earlier this month, Liberty Central began spending some of its largesse on “its first ad campaign,” the *Times* reported. “[T]he ads were limited to Web sites for the conservative talk-show hosts Rush Limbaugh and Mark Levin – suggesting an effort to build membership for Liberty Central, not elect candidates. The ads link to Liberty Central’s Web site and a video of Mrs. Thomas soliciting 100,000 signatures against the ‘Obama tax increase’ – referring to the scheduled expiration of the Bush tax cuts on Dec. 31.”

“It’s shocking that you would have a Supreme Court justice sitting on a case that might implicate in a very fundamental way the interests of someone who might have contributed to his wife’s organization,” Deborah L. Rhode, law professor and director of the Stanford University Center on the Legal Profession, told the *New York Times*.

“The fact that we can’t find that out is the first problem,” she said, adding, “And how can the public form a judgment about propriety if it doesn’t have the basic

underlying facts?”

Long before the Citizens United decision and even her husband’s, appointment to the Supreme Court, Ginni Thomas was a rising star within the conservative movement. On the Liberty Central website, a number of conservative leaders eagerly sing her praises: Edwin J. Feulner, President, The Heritage Foundation (“Liberty Central fills a vital role in connecting the grassroots with our Founders’ principles.”); Robert P. George, McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence and Director of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions, Princeton University (“I support Liberty Central because I deeply share Virginia Thomas’s vision of an America rededicated to its founding principles.... Liberty Central will rally us to this noblest of causes.”); Donald Rumsfeld, former Secretary of Defense (“Ginni Thomas has been a good friend for years.... I am impressed by the energy and enthusiasm Ginni Thomas brings to the cause of freedom and individual rights. Ginni can help channel the frustration felt by millions across America at the current course of our country.”); Morton C. Blackwell, President, The Leadership Institute (“Ginni Thomas is a rising star among conservatives. She’s a rare leader – highly principled, remarkably smart, and pleasantly persistent. She has everything it takes for her following to grow and grow.”); Dr. Larry Arnn, President, Hillsdale College (“Virginia Thomas is an urgent and high-minded soul. She loves her country and wishes it good. She thinks its institutions, the original ones, are the key to the future. She is prepared to fight for that. She does so with vigor and effect.”)

#### **Reviving the spectre of pubic hair on Coke cans and Long Dong Silver**

While it is unclear whether it was her sense of urgency or high-mindedness that drove Ginni Thomas to telephone Brandeis University professor Anita Hill at work in mid-October, the act itself was surprising, bizarre and just plain weird.

This is what Hill heard on her voicemail: “Good morning Anita Hill, it’s Ginni

**While it is unclear whether it was her sense of urgency or high-mindedness that drove Ginni Thomas to telephone Brandeis University professor Anita Hill at work in mid-October, the act itself was surprising, bizarre and just plain weird**

## NO APOLOGIES

**For her troubles, Hill was labeled “nutty and slutty,” by the early 1990s version of the right-wing hit machine**

Thomas. “I just wanted to reach across the airwaves and the years and ask you to consider something. I would love you to consider an apology sometime and some full explanation of why you did what you did with my husband. So give it some thought and certainly pray about this and come to understand why you did what you did. OK. Have a good day.”

Hill reported the call to the campus police. “I initially thought it was a prank,” she told ABC News. “And if it was, I thought the authorities should know about it.”

Hill told ABC News: “Even if it wasn’t a prank, it was in no way conciliatory for her to begin with the presumption that I did something wrong in 1991. I simply testified to the truth of my experience. For her to say otherwise is not extending an olive branch, it’s accusatory.”

She continued: “I don’t apologize. I have no intention of apologizing, and I stand by my testimony in 1991.”

During her 1991 Senate testimony, Hill claimed that Clarence Thomas often made sexual comments to her at work, and also frequently referenced scenes from hardcore pornographic films. “If I used that kind of grotesque language with one person, it would seem to me that there would be traces of it throughout the employees who worked closely with me, or the other individuals who heard bits and pieces of it or various levels of it,” Thomas indignantly responded to the committee.

### **Called ‘nutty and slutty’**

For her troubles, Hill was labeled “nutty and slutty,” by the early 1990s version of the right-wing hit machine.

When Ginni Thomas was contacted by Mark Matthews of ABC’s affiliate KGO, she told him in a e-mail that she “did place a call to Ms. Hill at her office extending an olive branch to her after all these years, in hopes that we could ultimately get past what happened so long ago. That offer still stands, I would be very happy to meet and talk with her if she would be willing to do the same.

Certainly no offense was ever intended.”

Why Ginni Thomas would make this strange call just weeks before an election she was so deeply involved with, is anybody’s guess. Whatever the reasons, she succeeded in cracking open a creaky old window, and the relatively unknown Lillian McEwen, a former lawyer, prosecutor, administrative law judge for federal agencies, and an old flame of Clarence Thomas, is peeking through it; with a tell-all manuscript in hand.

In a *Washington Post* story dated October 22, and headlined “Lillian McEwen breaks her 19-year silence about Justice Clarence Thomas,” McEwen offered up some much belated corroborative information regarding Clarence Thomas’ penchant for well-endowed females and his devotion to pornography.

McEwen has written a memoir which she is “shopping to publishers,” the *Washington Post* reported. “He was always actively watching the women he worked with to see if they could be potential partners,” McEwen said. “It was a hobby of his.”

“He was obsessed with porn,” McEwen said. “He would talk about what he had seen in magazines and films, if there was something worth noting.” The *Washington Post* reported that “According to McEwen, Thomas would also tell her about women he encountered at work. He was partial to women with large breasts, she said. In an instance at work, Thomas was so impressed that he asked one woman her bra size, McEwen recalled him telling her.”

Whatever damage Ginni Thomas may have done to her husband’s dubious reputation by calling Anita Hill, thus providing the vehicle for the media to resurface his pornography Jones and charges of inappropriate sexual behavior, will not likely have any affect either on his career as a Justice, or her increasingly financially rewarding work as a conservative activist. She is too firmly planted in the conservative firmament to be dislodged by Lillian McEwen’s revelations. The only thing that might affect either of their careers is another appearance by Mr. Long Dong Silver himself. **CT**

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

# BP, this isn't over!

**Dahr Jamail** tells how local residents are speaking out about the horrible effects of the chemicals used after the Deepwater Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico

**G**ulf coast fishers, conservationists, seafood distributors and oil workers rallied at Louisiana's capital, Baton Rouge, on October 30 to demand that oil giant BP be held accountable for the "ongoing" use of toxic dispersants in the Gulf of Mexico.

"We don't have the open sores and blisters caused by BP's toxic dispersants that the people in Plaquemine's Parish have," Karen Hopkins from Grand Isle, La., told IPS. "We are being poisoned by BP's same dispersants, but our symptoms are more lethargy and depression symptoms caused by chemical poisoning."

Hopkins, who works for Dean Blanchard Seafood, a large and well-known seafood distributor, was a member of the October 30 Rally for Gulf Change, whose organizers said they were working toward "preserving our God-given rights to clean air and water for future generations."

Drew Landry, who describes himself as "a songwriter who works for a commercial craw-fisherman," said that he first grew concerned about BP's mishandling of the oil disaster, which began on April 20 when the Deepwater Horizon rig exploded in the Gulf of Mexico, by what he saw the oil giant do the following day.

"I played a concert in New Orleans on April 20, and the next morning went to take one of the classes on how to clean oil," Lan-

dry said. "I realized it was not about cleaning oil, but rather BP's effort to get a roster of names of commercial fishermen from whom they'd have to defend themselves against in the future."

The organizers and speakers at the rally that was held on the steps of the state capitol building were most concerned with BP's massive use of toxic dispersants to sink the oil. The dispersants were also injected at the wellhead to keep most of the oil from reaching the surface.

BP used Corexit 9500 and Corexit 9527, both of which are banned in Britain and at least 19 other countries. Chemicals released from the combination of crude oil and dispersants can cause health problems that include central nervous system depression, respiratory problems, neurotoxic effects, genetic mutations, leukemia, birth defects, cardiac arrhythmia and cardiovascular damage, among many others.

"I've had lung problems, auto-immune problems, nausea, headaches and bronchitis because of BP's disaster," Beverly Armand from Grand Isle told IPS. "When I leave the area, it clears up, and when I go back, I get sick again."

Armand said her doctor has placed her on three different antibiotics, none of which has been very effective, and had her blood tested for hydrocarbons.

"My creatine level is high, and they found

**Chemicals released from the combination of crude oil and dispersants can cause health problems**

## TOXIC SHOCK

**“All the fishermen in this room will tell you that they [BP] are still using Corexit. The dead and dying birds and wildlife are merely a reflection of what is happening to us”**

creosote in my blood,” she explained. “And we still have fresh oil coming in, and BP is still spraying Corexit. The stuff they are calling algae is foam caused by the dispersants.”

Protesters held signs that read “Hell No It’s Not Over,” “Ban Corexit Now,” and a drawing of a pelican with the words “I want my life back”—the last also a reference to comments by the former chief executive of BP, Tony Hayward, which were widely deemed insensitive to struggling Gulf residents.

Organizers said that several people were unable to attend the rally because Interstate 10 from Lafayette was closed due to a chemical spill.

Susan Price, a small business owner from Chauvin, La., said that she has been suffering from health problems since she was exposed in August to chemicals she believes are from the oil disaster.

“I’m worried for my grandchildren,” Price said at the rally. “The seafood is woefully under-tested for toxins, while the government and BP are patting themselves on the back for a job well done. We will not be lulled, be silenced, or stand down. We will fight to protect our people and our land.”

James Miller, a commercial fisherman from Mississippi, told onlookers that he found oil and dispersants in the water while fishing recently.

“I’ve had diarrhea, vomiting, the sweats, and been hospitalized for three days,” said Miller, who worked 73 days for BP as an oil spill responder. “I’ve seen the dead turtles, dead birds, dead dolphins and dead fish, and I’ve taken people out on my boat to show them the oil. It’s still there, and I can tell you the seafood is not safe to eat.”

Later that afternoon, the group convened a meeting at the Manship Theater in downtown Baton Rouge.

Rob Coulan, a businessman from Harvey, La., spoke of neurotoxic side effects of the dispersants that have been well documented since at least 1987. “BP knew what this stuff would do long before they ever used it in the Gulf,” he said.

“BP used a world record amount of dispersants in our Gulf,” Marylee Orr, the executive director of Louisiana Environmental Action Network, said. “And we are doing petroleum hydrocarbon tests on soils, waters, and seafood and finding extremely high levels.”

“We still have oil, and all the problems associated with it,” Orr added. “And all the fishermen in this room will tell you that they [BP] are still using Corexit. The dead and dying birds and wildlife are merely a reflection of what is happening to us.”

Cherri Foytlin, whose husband works in the Gulf oil industry, announced that every Louisiana state representative and senator had been invited to both events. While she said that two had responded to her invitation by agreeing to meet with them, no one showed up at either event.

“In five to 10 years from now, people all along the Gulf Coast are going to be dropping dead from cancer, and that includes children,” Foytlin said, before directing her next comments towards BP. “I’m not your experiment. This is my life. Our Gulf is not your experiment.” **CT**

*Dahr Jamail is an independent journalist and author. In 2003, he went to Iraq to report on what no corporate news source would—the real human toll of war and occupation. His books include *The Will to Resist: Soldiers Who Refuse to Fight in Iraq and Afghanistan* [3] and *Beyond the Green Zone: Dispatches from an Unembedded Journalist in Occupied Iraq* [4].*

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# The racist rabbi

**Jonathan Cook** on how a small Galilee city is vying for the title of 'most racist' in Israel

**T**he tranquility of Safed, a small Israeli city nestled high in the hills of the Upper Galilee close to the Lebanese border, is not usually disturbed except by the occasional pilgrimage by Madonna or other famous devotees of the Jewish mystical teachings of Kabbalah.

But in the past few weeks, Safed – one of Judaism's four holy cities – has been making headlines of a very different kind. Gideon Levy, a columnist for the Israeli daily *Haaretz*, has declared it “the most racist city in the country”.

The unflattering, and hotly contested, epithet follows an edict from Safed's senior rabbis ordering residents not to sell or rent homes to “non-Jews” – a reference to the country's Palestinian Arab citizens, who comprise a fifth of Israel's population.

At an emergency meeting, called last month to discuss the dangers of “assimilation” caused by Arab men dating Jewish women, the 18 rabbis warned that Safed was facing an “Arab takeover”. Jewish residents were told to inform on neighbours who try to sell or rent to Arabs.

The number of Arabs in the city, though low, has been steadily rising as Safed Academic College has expanded. There are now some 1,300 Arab students enrolled at the school.

The rabbis' statements have provoked

a series of riots by local religious Jews, in which several Arab homes have been attacked to chants of “Death to the Arabs”. In one recent incident, three Arab students were beaten as shots were fired.

So far three Jewish youths, including an off-duty policeman, have been charged with participating in the violence. The policeman is accused of firing his gun.

The anti-Arab campaign escalated as posters were plastered across the city threatening to burn down the home of an elderly Jew if he did not stop renting to Arab students.

The owner, 89-year-old Eli Zvieli, said the posters appeared after he received phone threats and visits from several rabbis warning him to change his mind.

Jamil Khalaili, 20, a physiotherapy student at the college who rents an apartment with a friend in a Jewish neighbourhood, said the atmosphere in Safed was rapidly deteriorating.

“We're being treated like criminals, like we're trying to steal their homes,” he said. “It's got the point where many of my friends are wondering whether to leave. I want to study here but not if it costs me my life.”

Leading the opposition to the presence of Arab students in the city is Safed's chief rabbi, Shmuel Eliyahu, who is employed by the municipality as head of its religious council.

**The anti-Arab campaign escalated as posters were plastered across the city threatening to burn down the home of an elderly Jew if he did not stop renting to Arab students**

## ISRAEL'S SHAME

**Inhabitants awoke recently to find a Palestinian flag draped on the top of a renovated mosque – one of the many old stone buildings in Safed that attest to the city's habitation long before Israel's establishment**

“When a non-Jew moves in, residents begin to worry about their children, about their daughters. Many Arab students have been known to date Jewish girls,” he told Israel National News, the main news agency of the settlement movement.

The 18 rabbis issued their joint statement after learning of the city's plan to build a medical school, which is expected to draw Arab students from across the Galilee.

They urged Jewish residents to shun a “neighbour or acquaintance” who rents to Arabs. “Refrain from doing business with him, deny him the right to read from the Torah, and similarly ostracize him until he renounces this harmful deed,” it read.

They have been given backing by a former chief rabbi, Ovadia Yosef, who used a recent sermon to tell his followers that “selling to [non-Jews], even for a lot of money, is not allowed. We won't let them take control of us here.”

Similar anti-Arab sentiments have been heard in two other Jewish cities in the Galilee, Karmiel and Upper Nazareth. Both were established decades ago as part of a government “Judaisation” programme to settle more Jews in the country's most heavily Arab-populated region.

In Karmiel, 30km west of Safed, ads in local newspapers have been promoting a special email address for residents to inform on neighbours planning to sell homes to Arabs. According to Ynet, a popular news website, the email account is overseen by officials for Oren Milstein, the city's deputy mayor until he was fired recently.

Adi Eldar, the mayor, said Mr Milstein had “damaged the city's image” after he gave a newspaper interview in which he boasted that he had prevented the sale of 30 homes to Arab families.

Mr Milstein's replacement as deputy mayor, Rina Greenberg, is a member of the far-right Yisrael Beiteinu party of Avigdor Lieberman, Israel's foreign minister, who advocates ridding the country of many of its Arab citizens.

Meanwhile, the mayor of Upper Nazareth, Shimon Gapso, who is also allied to Yisrael Beiteinu, has announced plans to build a new neighbourhood for 3,000 religious Jews to halt what he called the city's “demographic deterioration”.

Hundreds of Arab families from neighbouring Nazareth have relocated to the Jewish city to escape overcrowding. Today, one in eight of Upper Nazareth's 42,000-strong population is Arab.

In August, Mr Gapso said he felt “as happy as if I had a new baby” at the news that 15 extremist families from the former Gaza settlement of Gush Katif were establishing a Jewish seminary in his city.

Hatia Chomsky-Porat, who leads Galilee activists for Sikkuy, a group advocating better relations between Jews and Arabs, said: “The political atmosphere is growing darker all the time. Racism among Jews is entirely mainstream now.”

In Safed, the Arab student body, heavily outnumbered by nearly 40,000 Jewish residents, has tried to keep a low profile. However, one small act of defiance appears to have further contributed to Jewish residents' fears of a “takeover”.

Inhabitants awoke recently to find a Palestinian flag draped on the top of a renovated mosque – one of the many old stone buildings in Safed that attest to the city's habitation long before Israel's establishment.

In 1948, when Jewish forces captured the town, Safed was a mixed city of 10,000 Palestinians and 2,000 Jews. All the Palestinian inhabitants were expelled, including a 13-year-old Mahmoud Abbas, now the president of the Palestinian Authority.

Mr Khaliali said the city's history appeared still to haunt many of its Jewish residents, who expressed fears that Arab students were there to reclaim refugee property as the vanguard of a movement for the Palestinian right of return.

It is not the first time Mr Eliyahu, the son of a former chief rabbi of Israel, has been accused of inciting against the city's Arab

population.

In 2002, during a wave of suicide attacks at the start of the second intifada, he called on Safed college to expel all Arab students.

Two years later he launched a campaign against intermarriage, accusing Arab men of waging "another form of war" against Jewish women by "seducing" them.

He narrowly avoided prosecution for incitement in 2006 after he agreed to retract his earlier statements.

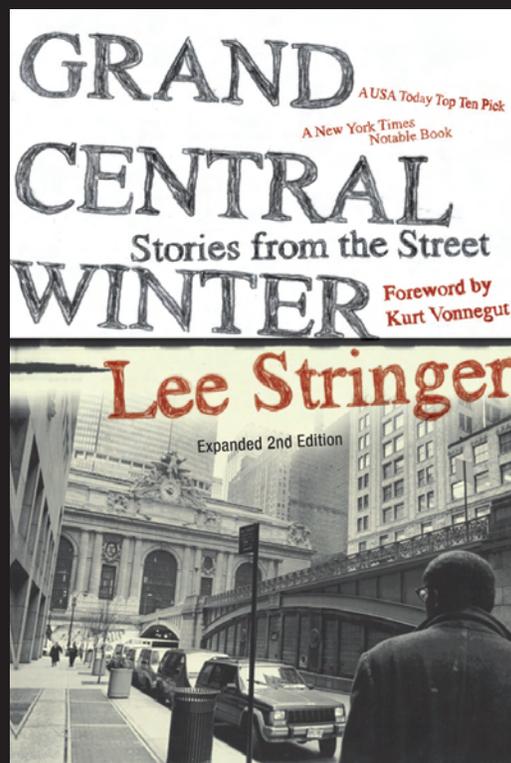
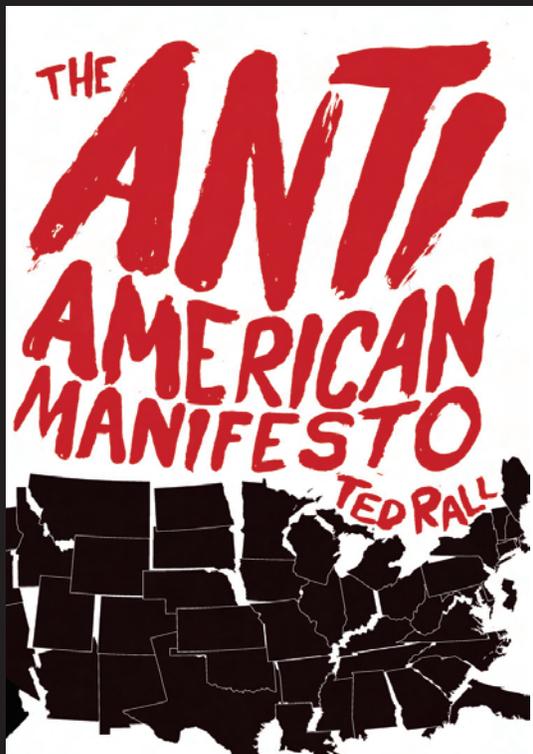
The Religious Action Centre, a group of Reform movement Jews, and several Arab

MPs have demanded that Yehuda Weinstein, the attorney-general, investigate Mr Eliyahu and the other rabbis for incitement to violence. **CT**

*Jonathan Cook is a writer and journalist based in Nazareth, Israel. His latest books are "Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East" (Pluto Press) and "Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair" (Zed Books). His website is [www.jkcook.net](http://www.jkcook.net)*

He launched a campaign against intermarriage, accusing Arab men of waging "another form of war" against Jewish women by "seducing" them

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# The party game is over. Stand and fight!

**John Pilger** says we should heed the words of a long-dead poet and take to the streets to regain our rights

**The debt is exclusively the responsibility of those who incurred it, the super-rich and the gamblers**

*Rise like lions after slumber  
In unvanquishable number.  
Shake your chains to earth like dew.  
Which in sleep has fallen on you.  
Ye are many – they are few.*

**T**hese days, the stirring lines of Percy Shelley's *The Mask of Anarchy* may seem unattainable. I don't think so. Shelley was both a Romantic and political truth-teller. His words resonate now because only one political course is left to those who are disenfranchised and whose ruin is announced on a government spreadsheet.

Born of the "never again" spirit of 1945, social democracy in Britain has surrendered to an extreme political cult of money worship. This reached its apogee when £1 trillion of public money was handed unconditionally to corrupt banks by a Labour government whose leader, Gordon Brown, had described "financiers" as the nation's "great example" and his personal "inspiration".

This is not to say Parliamentary politics is meaningless. They have one meaning now: the replacement of democracy by a business plan for every human activity, every dream, every decency, every hope, every child born. The old myths of British rectitude, imperial in origin, provided false comfort while the Blair gang, assisted by venal MPs, finished Thatcher's work and built the foundation

of the present "coalition". This is led by a former PR man for an asset stripper and by a bagman who will inherit his knighthood and the tax-avoided fortune of his father, the 17th Baronet of Ballentaylor. David Cameron and George Osborne are essentially fossilised spivs who, in colonial times, would have been sent by their daddies to claim foreign terrain and plunder.

Today, they are claiming 21st century Britain and imposing their vicious, antique ideology, albeit served as economic snake oil. Their designs have nothing to do with a "deficit crisis". A deficit of 10 per cent is not remotely a crisis. When Britain was officially bankrupt at the end of the second world war, the government built its greatest public institutions, such as the National Health Service and the great arts edifices of London's South Bank.

There is no economic rationale for the assault described cravenly by the BBC as a "public spending review". The debt is exclusively the responsibility of those who incurred it, the super-rich and the gamblers. However, that's beside the point. What is happening in Britain is the seizure of an opportunity to destroy the tenuous humanity of the modern state. It is a coup, a "shock doctrine" as applied to Pinochet's Chile and Yeltsin's Russia.

In Britain, there is no need for tanks in the streets. In its managerial indifference to

the freedoms it is said to hold dear, bourgeois Britain has allowed parliament to create a surveillance state with 3,000 new criminal offences and laws: more than for the whole of the previous century. Powers of arrest and detention have never been greater. The police have the impunity to kill; asylum seekers can be “restrained” to death on commercial flights and should fellow passengers object, anti-terrorism laws will deal with them. Abroad, British militarism colludes with torturers and death squads.

#### Writers with nothing to say

The playwright Athol Fugard is right. With Harold Pinter gone, no acclaimed writer or artist dare depart from their well remunerated vanity. With so much in need of saying, they have nothing to say. Liberalism, the vainest ideology, has hauled up its ladder. The chief opportunist, Nick Clegg, leader of the minority Liberal Democrats, gave no electoral hint of his odious faction’s compliance with the dismantling of much of British post-war society. The theft of £83bn in jobs and services matches almost exactly the amount of tax legally avoided by piratical corporations like Rupert Murdoch’s. Without fanfare, the super-rich have been assured they can dodge £40bn in tax payments in the secrecy of Swiss banks. The day this was sewn up, Osborne attacked those who “cheat” the welfare system. He omitted the real amount lost, a minuscule £0.5bn, and that £10.5bn in benefit payments were not claimed at all. The Labour Party is his silent partner.

The propaganda arm in the press and broadcasting dutifully presents this as unfortunate but necessary. Mark how the fire-fighters’ action is “covered”. On Channel 4 News, following an item that portrayed modest, courageous public servants as ba-

sically reckless, the presenter Jon Snow demanded that the leaders of the London Fire Authority and the Fire Brigades Union go straight from the studio and “mediate” now, this minute. “I’ll get the taxis!” he declared. Forget the thousands of jobs that are to be eliminated from the fire service and the public danger that will arise. Knock their jolly heads together. “Good stuff!” said the presenter.

Ken Loach’s 1980s documentary series, *Questions of Leadership*, opens with a sequence of earnest young trade unionists on platforms, exhorting the masses. They are then shown older, florid, self-satisfied and finally adorned in the ermine of the House of Lords. Once, at a Durham Miners’ Gala, I asked Tony Woodley, now the joint general secretary of Unite, “Isn’t the problem the clockwork collaboration of the union leadership?” He almost agreed, implying that the rise of bloats like himself would change that. The British Airways’ cabin crew strike, over which Woodley presides, is said to have made gains. Has it? And why haven’t the British unions risen as one against totalitarian laws that place free trade unionism in a vice?

The BA workers, the fire-fighters, the council workers, the post office workers, the NHS workers, the London Underground staff, the teachers, the lecturers, the students can more than match the French if they are resolute and imaginative, forging, with the wider social justice movement, potentially the greatest popular resistance ever. Look at the web; and listen to the public’s support at fire stations. There is no other way now. Direct action. Civil disobedience. Unerring. Read Shelley and do it. **CT**

*John Pilger’s latest book, Freedom Next Time, is now available in paperback.*

**The theft of £83bn in jobs and services matches almost exactly the amount of tax legally avoided by piratical corporations like Rupert Murdoch’s**

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# Canada stands by Israel

**Jim Miles** examines the decision by Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper to offer unqualified support for Israel

**The very real threat is to Palestine, yet the Israelis have deviously managed through repetitive rhetoric to try and maintain the world view of themselves as victims**

A couple weeks after being rejected by the General Assembly for a position on the Security Council, Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper has expressed his sour grapes at the rejection stating that Canada will not "pretend" to be an "honest broker." The other option then is dishonesty.

There is plenty of that in Canada's position. In his speech supporting Israel at a "gathering of international parliamentarians and experts," he performed the old standard of conflating the Holocaust with the creation of Israel, yet he should know that the Zionist cause began well before there were any indications of that genocide. Christian Zionism could be argued to have begun even before the European variety showed its colours at the turn of Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Both Christian Zionists and Jewish Zionists understood that to occupy Palestine meant the displacement by some means – some form of ethnic cleansing or genocide, of the indigenous people – the Palestinians – who resided there and had since the beginning of the Christian era.

With the holocaust newly behind them, the UN offered a plan – it was just a plan and not a declaration of the creation of a state; Israel did that unilaterally – offering the Jewish population more than their share of the land base when numerated on a per capita basis. Harper then disingenuously says Israel

is "the only country in the world whose very existence is under attack." But wait a moment. If the Israelis claim, as they do, that they have a mandate from the UN to establish the state, then that claim would apply equally to the Palestinians as they were also mandated a state alongside the Jewish state.

Not only is the state of Palestine threatened, its very existence is threatened as it has essentially been dismantled and split up into many little cantons or bantustans or in the case of Gaza, a large outdoor prison. After the Israeli pre-emptive war of 1967, the Palestinians were left with only 20 per cent of the land. That small portion has shrunk into the little truncated areas of today, with the whole region occupied by the military, with both the Israeli military and civilian governments ignoring international law as it relates to occupation and human rights.

The very real threat is to Palestine, yet the Israelis have deviously managed through repetitive rhetoric to try and maintain the world view of themselves as victims. Israel exists. It has declared itself. It will continue to exist. It originated several wars, including the nakba of 1948, the Six Day War of 1967, the invasion and occupation of Southern Lebanon, the invasion and occupation of Syrian territory, a second attack and invasion on Lebanon, and the ruthless and barbaric attack on the defenceless citizens of the Gaza strip.

Harper argues that Israel “is consistently and conspicuously singled out for condemnation.” I would have to agree with him on this point, but with cause. Israel has full supremacy over the region due to its several hundred nuclear weapons that preclude any attack on Israel by any other state in the region. It has the support of the largest military and largest economy in the world, the U.S., a partner that believes and acts in a pre-emptive manner, ignoring the very same international standards as Israel does. Yes, there are many other problem areas in the world, but the U.S. occupation of areas of the Middle East, its military and financial support of Israel (\$3 billion a year), its kowtowing to any demands that Israel makes for fear of its own domestic votes, its support of non-democratic and oppressive regimes, creates an identical powerful set of international crimes.

Harper, of course, uses condemnation as a sign of anti-Semitism. No, it quite simply is a sign of opposition to criminal activity that has the intent of displacing all the Palestinians. The historical record is replete with statements about the Zionist knowledge of and willingness to express that they would have to use force in one manner or another to create an ethnic Jewish state.

Yes, there is anti-Semitism in the world, but more importantly there is also a strong and completely separate strand of condemnation that is simply against the criminal abuse, murder, imprisonment, torture, and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people, the people who are truly threatened in the region, whose country has essentially disappeared from the steady encroachment of the Jewish settlers on their land. That is not anti-Semitism, perhaps anti-Zionist at worst. Nor is it an attack on the Jewish faith.

Harper himself is a fundamentalist right wing Christian. Under his beliefs that the Jewish people are the chosen people, that the land of Palestine is really the land of Israel as a God-given covenant, and that the land of Israel needs to be repopulated by the Jewish people before the Christian messiah can return, he needs to ask himself some

questions. What kind of God is it that allows for the greed and arrogance of occupying a land and dispossessing and killing its indigenous populations, of placing them in cantonments/reservations and denying them all the opportunities that the supposed democratic and free societies they claim to be are able to provide?

What kind of God is it whose chosen ones and their main ally torture, incarcerate, starve, invade, and destroy civilian infrastructures in other territories, who rob their resources (oil, water), and carry the strongest and most deadliest of the weapons of mass destruction while trying to argue that others should not have them?

In light of the Israeli atrocities against the Palestinian people and their threats and actions against other countries, will God remove them from his graces, deliver them some humility, so that they may again at some future time serve as beacons and examples of God's divine graces?

Are the Israelis acting on an anthropomorphized divinity by which they get to claim their own fundamentals, however contrary to either humane or divine love and compassion they may be, contrary to not only humanitarian law but divine law?

Harper's ignorance of Palestinian/Israeli history has to be wilful. Neither the existence of the Jewish people nor the state of Israel is threatened, they are far too strong for that. Anti-Semitism does exist, and I agree it needs to be expurgated. At the same time the state of Israel still needs to be recognized for its true character as a non-democratic occupier of Palestine whose actions contravene most accepted international norms. Israel and the U.S. both need to accept these international norms before the majority of the rest of the world will be able to stop their condemnation of their actions.

Harper's comments express an ignorance and conceit – and dishonesty – placing him alongside the best hubris and rhetoric offered by his U.S. and Israeli compatriots.

He will probably take that as a compliment.

**Yes, there is anti-Semitism in the world, but more importantly there is also a strong and completely separate strand of condemnation that is simply against the criminal abuse, murder, imprisonment, torture, and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people**

*Jim Miles is a Canadian educator and a regular contributor/columnist of opinion pieces*

**CT**

# Tariq Aziz faces judicial murder in Iraq

It's barbaric and another war crime, writes **Bill Van Auken**, of the death sentence on a 74-year-old Iraqi diplomat

From its inception, this kangaroo court has employed the crudest methods of "victors' justice"

The sentencing of former Iraqi foreign minister Tariq Aziz to hang is a barbaric act of political vengeance by the US puppet government in Baghdad and yet another in the litany of war crimes committed by Washington since the 2003 invasion.

Aziz, for decades Iraq's chief diplomatic representative on the world stage, voluntarily turned himself in to the US military in 2003. He apparently trusted that his longstanding international reputation – including his diplomatic relations with successive US administrations – would protect him.

Instead, the ailing 74-year-old has been subjected to more than seven years of solitary confinement, first by American military jailers at Camp Cropper, near Baghdad's international airport, and, more recently, by Iraqi security forces. When US occupation forces turned Aziz over to the Iraqi government last July he confided to his lawyer, "I am sure they are going to kill me."

Previously, Aziz had been sentenced to a combined prison term of 22 years on allegations that he was involved in the execution of merchants accused of price-gouging during the US-UN embargo of Iraq and in the suppression of Kurdish opposition in the north of the country.

The jail term represented a de facto life sentence, given that Aziz is in poor health, suffering from strokes and lung disease

while in prison and undergoing an operation for a blood clot in his brain last January.

In the latest decision, the former foreign minister has been sentenced to death for the Ba'athist regime's crackdown in the 1980s on Shi'ite Islamists, including the Da'wa party. Supporters of the party carried out a series of Iranian-backed terrorist attacks during that period, including attempted assassinations of both Aziz and Saddam Hussein. At the time, it should be recalled, Washington was supporting Saddam Hussein as a bulwark against the spread of the Iranian revolution to the Shia populations of the Arab world.

## Kangaroo court

The tribunal that handed down these sentences was created by a decree issued under the US occupation's Coalition Provisional Authority for the purpose of trying members of the Ba'athist government that the US invasion overthrew. Its staff was hand-picked and paid by the US Embassy in Baghdad. From its inception, this kangaroo court has employed the crudest methods of "victors' justice."

The man who will probably sign Aziz's death warrant is Iraq's caretaker prime minister, Nur al-Maliki, the leading figure in the Da'wa Party, while the judge who issued the sentence, Mahmud Saleh al-Hasan, is a

member of Maliki's Shi'ite political bloc, the State of Law Coalition.

Aziz went through his multiple trials largely without any legal representation, as lawyers who dared to defend him were threatened with death by Shi'ite militias linked to the US-backed regime.

Essentially, he was found guilty of the crimes of Saddam Hussein's secret police by virtue of his representation of the Iraqi government as the country's chief diplomat. Those familiar with the workings of the Ba'athist regime dispute this logic, pointing out that Aziz was never part of the inner circle that controlled the security forces, drawn largely from Hussein's Tikrit-based clan.

There is no small irony in Aziz being sentenced to death for religious-based persecution. Born in 1936 to an impoverished Christian family in northern Iraq, Aziz was drawn into nationalist politics in his 20s, working for the overthrow of the British-backed monarchy. Like many of the radicalized young people of the Arab world of his generation, he believed that nationalist revolution could liberate the region from the legacy of colonialism, including the ethno-religious divisions exacerbated by the divide-and-rule methods of European imperialism.

The Iraqi political forces overseeing his trial are linked to militias implicated in the massive sectarian-based bloodletting provoked by the US occupation. Iraq's Christian population has been decimated, and the possibility that someone born a Christian like Aziz could assume a prominent post in the current regime is absolutely nil.

### **Criminal war and occupation**

More fundamentally, however, the court and the regime itself are creations of a criminal war and occupation carried out by US imperialism. The death sentence was dictated from Washington.

While the European Union has declared the death sentence decreed against Tariq Aziz "unacceptable" and the Vatican and

several European governments have called for clemency, the Obama administration has maintained a guilty silence.

The obvious question raised by the judicial lynching of Tariq Aziz is: Who are Washington and its local compradors to try anyone for crimes against the Iraqi people?

As Tariq Aziz himself told the British *Guardian* last August, in his only interview since his imprisonment, "We are all victims of America and Britain. They killed our country."

The last seven-and-a-half years of US-led occupation have destroyed Iraqi society, claiming the lives of well over a million people, turning more than four million into refugees, and leaving millions more hungry, unemployed and lacking the most essential services.

To sentence Tariq Aziz to death while the authors of these crimes – in both the Bush and the Obama administrations – enjoy impunity is not only a crime, but an obscenity.

Pointing to the rushed character of the death sentence, which was handed down without the usual 30-day warning that such a decision was pending, Aziz's lawyers said it was politically driven. They charged that the court acted on behalf of Maliki and his patrons in Washington to distract public opinion from the recent release by WikiLeaks of nearly 400,000 classified US documents exposing the massacre of civilians and systematic torture carried out by Iraqi puppet security forces with tacit US approval.

The drum head court that sentenced Aziz was acting as an instrument of US policy no less than the infamous US-trained Wolf Brigade, to which, as the WikiLeaks documents have exposed, the US military turned over detainees so they could be tortured – often to death – with electric drills, high voltage shocks and other instruments of refined savagery.

Washington has its own reasons for wanting the former Iraqi foreign minister dead. There are those within the ruling establish-

**To sentence Tariq Aziz to death while the authors of these crimes – in both the Bush and the Obama administrations – enjoy impunity is not only a crime, but an obscenity**

## POLITICAL VENGEANCE

We feel that LMHR is a version of that: it reaches people other anti-racist movements can't reach

ment who still bitterly resent his highly articulate refutation of the manufactured pretexts – “weapons of mass destruction” and Al Qaeda connections – for the US invasion. More fundamentally, Aziz’s long diplomatic career places him in a unique position to expose the criminal record of US imperialism in relation to Iraq. It was he who first received Donald Rumsfeld (Bush’s defense secretary at the time of the 2003 invasion) when he was sent in 1983 as a special envoy of the Reagan administration to offer US support to Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq war.

He was at the center of the diplomatic maneuvers between Washington and Baghdad that preceded the first Gulf War, when the US ambassador in Baghdad, April Glaspie, gave what amounted to a green light for Iraq’s 1990 invasion of Kuwait, which in turn provided the casus belli for a massive intervention by the US military in the Persian Gulf.

He could further expose the way in which Washington systematically rejected evidence that Iraq had no “weapons of mass destruction” and sabotaged every attempt to prevent the war it launched in 2003.

The US ruling elite has a vested interest in seeing that the secrets held by Tariq Aziz about the last 30 years of US-Iraqi relations go with him to the grave. Why keep alive a man who could be called as a star witness in their own war crimes trials?

It is for this reason that the international working class should oppose the execution of Tariq Aziz and demand his immediate release. Justice for the suffering people of Iraq can come only with the prosecution of those responsible for waging an illegal war of aggression and the innumerable crimes that it has engendered. **CT**

*Bill Van Auken is editor of World Socialist Web Site at [www.wsws.org](http://www.wsws.org), where this essay was originally published.*

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# John Stewart and the Left

America's favourite TV comedian may be funny, but he's hardly a liberal, writes **William Blum**

**T**he left in America is desperate; desperate for someone who can inspire them, if not lead them to a better world; or at least make them laugh. TV star Jon Stewart is sometimes funny, especially when he doesn't try too hard to be funny, which is not often enough. But as a political leader, or simply political educator for the left, forget it. He's not even what I would call a genuine, committed leftist. What does he have to teach the left? He himself would certainly not want you to entertain the thought that Jon Stewart is in any way a man of the left.

He billed his October 30 rally on the National Mall in Washington, DC, as the Million Moderate March. Would a person with a real desire for important progressive social and political change, i.e. a "leftist", so ostentatiously brand himself a "moderate"? Even if by "moderate" he refers mainly to tone of voice or choice of words why is that so important? If a politician strongly supports things which you are passionate about, why should it bother you if the politician is vehement in his arguments, even angry? And if the politician is strongly against what you're passionate about does it make you feel any better about the guy if he never raises his voice or sharply criticizes those on the other side? What kind of cause is that to commit yourself to?

Stewart, in fact, appears to dislike the

left, perhaps strongly. In the lead-up to the rally he criticized the left for various things, including calling George W. Bush a "war criminal". Wow! How immoderate of us. Do I have to list here the 500 war crimes committed by George W. Bush? If I did so, would that make me one of what Stewart calls the "crazies"? In his talk at the rally, Stewart spoke of our "real fears" – "of terrorists, racists, Stalinists, and theocrats". Stalinists? Where did that come from, Glenn Beck? What decade is Stewart living in? What about capitalists or the corporations? Is there no reason to fear them? Is it Stalinists who are responsible for the collapse of our jobs and homes, our economy? Writer Chris Hedges asks: "Being nice and moderate will not help. These are corporate forces that are intent on reconfiguring the United States into a system of neofeudalism. These corporate forces will not be halted by funny signs, comics dressed up like Captain America or nice words."

Stewart also grouped together "Marxists actively subverting our constitution, racists and homophobes". Welcome to the Jon Stewart Tea Party. In his recent long interview of President Obama on his TV show, Stewart did not mention any of America's wars. That would have been impolite and divisive; maybe even not nice.

He billed his rally as being "for people who are politically dissatisfied but who are

**In the lead-up to the rally he criticized the left for various things, including calling George W. Bush a "war criminal". Wow! How immoderate of us**

## ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

**“Why are gentiles needed?” he continued. “They will work, they will plow, they will reap. We will sit like an effendi [master] and eat,” he said to some laughter**

not ideological”. (*Democracy Now*, November 1, 2010) Really, Jon? You have no ideology? To those who like to tell themselves and others that they don’t have any particular ideology I say this: If you have thoughts about why the world is the way it is, why society is the way it is, why people are the way they are, what a better way would look like, and if your thoughts are fairly well organized, then that’s your ideology, even if it’s not wholly conscious as such. Better to organize those thoughts as best you can, become very conscious of them, and then consciously avoid getting involved with individuals or political movements who have an incompatible ideology. It’s like a very bad marriage.

### **America’s press corps(e)**

“Goyim [non-Jews] were born only to serve us. Without that, they have no place in the world; only to serve the People of Israel,” said Rabbi Ovadia Yosef in a sermon in Israel on October 16. Rabbi Yosef is the former Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel and the founder and spiritual leader of the Shas Party, one of the three major components of the current Israeli government. “Why are gentiles needed?” he continued. “They will work, they will plow, they will reap. We will sit like an effendi [master] and eat,” he said to some laughter.

Pretty shocking, right? Apparently not shocking enough for the free and independent American mainstream media. Not one daily newspaper has picked it up. Not one radio or TV station. Neither have the two leading US news agencies, Associated Press and United Press International, which usually pick up anything at all newsworthy. And the words of course did not cross the lips of any American politician or State Department official. Rabbi Yosef’s words were reported in English only by the Jewish Telegraph Agency, a US-based news service (October 18), and then picked up by a few relatively obscure news agencies or progressive websites. We can all imagine the news coverage if someone like Iranian president

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said something like “Jews have no place in the world but to serve Islam”.

On October 8, 2001, the second day of the US bombing of Afghanistan, the transmitters for the Taliban government’s Radio Shari were bombed and shortly after this the US bombed some 20 regional radio sites. US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld defended the targeting of these facilities, saying: “Naturally, they cannot be considered to be free media outlets. They are mouthpieces of the Taliban and those harboring terrorists.”

In 1999, during the US/NATO 78-day bombing of the former Yugoslavia, state-owned Radio Television Serbia (RTS) was targeted because it was broadcasting things which the United States and NATO did not like (such as how much horror the bombing was causing). The bombs took the lives of many of the station’s staff, and both legs of one of the survivors, which had to be amputated to free him from the wreckage. UK Prime Minister Tony Blair told reporters that the bombing was “entirely justified” for the station was “part of the apparatus of dictatorship and power of Milosevic”. Threatening more such attacks on Serbian media, Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon declared a few hours after the bombing: “Stay tuned. It is not difficult to track down where TV signals emanate from.”

Accordingly, and with all due forethought, I call for the bombing of the leading members of the United States mainstream media – from the *New York Times* to CNN, from NPR to Fox News – for, naturally, they cannot be considered to be free media outlets, and are part of the apparatus of imperialism and power of the United States.

### **Anti-communism 101: Hijacking history**

We like to think of death as the time for truth. No matter how much the deceased may have lived a lie, when he goes to meet his presumed maker the real, sordid facts of his life will out. Or at least they should; the obituary being the final chance to set the

record straight. But obituaries very seldom perform this function, certainly not obituaries of those who played an important role in American foreign policy; the myths surrounding foreign policy and the deceased individual's role therein accompany him to the grave, and thence into Texas-approved American history textbooks.

In January, I commented in this report on the obituary of Lincoln Gordon 5, former ambassador to Brazil and State Department official. The obituary in the *Washington Post* painted him, as I put it, as a “boy wonder, intellectual shining light, distinguished leader of men, outstanding American patriot.” No mention whatsoever was made of the leading role played by Gordon in the military overthrow of a progressive Brazilian government in 1964, resulting in a very brutal dictatorship for the next 21 years. Later, Gordon blatantly lied about his role in testimony before Congress.

Now we have the death a few weeks ago of Phillips Talbot, who was appointed by President Kennedy to be Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian affairs and later became ambassador to Greece. In 1967 the Greek military and intelligence service, both closely tied to the CIA, overthrew another progressive government, that of George Papandreou and his son, cabinet minister Andreas Papandreou. For the next seven years the Greek people suffered utterly grievous suppression and torture. Talbot's obituary states: “Dr. Talbot was asleep in his bed while tanks rumbled through the streets of Athens and was completely surprised when Armed Forces radio announced at 6:10 a.m. that the military had taken control of the country. Dr. Talbot was adamant that the United States was impartial throughout the transition. ‘You may be assured that there has been no American involvement in or, in fact, prior knowledge of the climactic events that those residing in this country have lived through in the past couple of years,’ Dr. Talbot told the *New York Times* in 1969 shortly before he returned home.”

Andreas Papandreou had been arrested at the time of the coup and held in prison for eight months. Shortly after his release, he and his wife Margaret visited Ambassador Talbot in Athens. Papandreou later related the following:

“I asked Talbot whether America could have intervened the night of the coup, to prevent the death of democracy in Greece. He denied that they could have done anything about it. Then Margaret asked a critical question: What if the coup had been a Communist or a Leftist coup? Talbot answered without hesitation. Then, of course, they would have intervened, and they would have crushed the coup.”

In November 1999, during a visit to Greece, President Bill Clinton was moved to declare:

“When the junta took over in 1967 here the United States allowed its interests in prosecuting the cold war to prevail over its interest – I should say its obligation – to support democracy, which was, after all, the cause for which we fought the cold war.(sic) It is important that we acknowledge that.”

Clinton's surprising admission prompted the retired Phillips Talbot to write to the *New York Times*: “With all due respect to President Clinton, he is wrong to imply that the United States supported the Greek coup in 1967. The coup was the product of Greek political rivalries and was contrary to American interests in every respect. ... Some Greeks have asserted that the United States could have restored a civilian government. In fact, we had neither the right nor the means to overturn the junta, bad as it was.”

Or, as Bart Simpson would put it: “I didn't do it, no one saw me do it, you can't prove anything!”

After reading Talbot's letter in the *Times* in 1999 I wrote to him at his New York address reminding him of what Andreas Papandreou had reported on this very subject. I received no reply.

The cases of Brazil and Greece were of course just two of many leftist governments overthrown, as well as revolutionary move-

**In 1967 the Greek military and intelligence service, both closely tied to the CIA, overthrew another progressive government, that of George Papandreou and his son, cabinet minister Andreas Papandreou**

## ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

**It is remarkable the number of people who make fun of conspiracy theories but who accept without question the existence of an International Communist Conspiracy**

ments suppressed, by the United States during the Cold War on the grounds that America had a moral right and obligation to defeat the evil of Soviet communism that was – we were told – instigating these forces. It was always a myth. Bolshevism and Western liberalism were united in their opposition to popular revolution. Russia was a country with a revolutionary past, not a revolutionary present. Even in Cuba, the Soviets were always a little embarrassed by the Castro-Guevara radical fervor. Stalin would have had such men imprisoned.

The Cold War was not actually a struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union. It was a struggle between the United States and the Third World. What there was, was people all over the Third World fighting for economic and political changes against US-supported repressive regimes, or setting up their own progressive governments. These acts of self-determination didn't coincide with the needs of the American power elite, and so the United States moved to crush those governments and movements even though the Soviet Union was playing virtually no role at all in the scenarios. It is remarkable the number of people who make fun of conspiracy theories but who accept without question the existence of an International Communist Conspiracy.

### **CovertAction Quarterly**

From 1978 to 2005 one of the leading progressive print (Remember that word?) magazines in the world, dealing primarily with US foreign policy, the CIA/NSA/FBI, repression at home and abroad, and corporate crime. The magazine, initially called *CovertAction Information Bulletin*, regularly published the names and career histories around the globe of undercover CIA officers derived from careful research of open, public sources.

This so infuriated the powers-that-be that Congress passed the Intelligence Identities Protection Act in 1982, which made the practice of revealing the name of an

undercover officer illegal under US law. The law was a virtual bill of attainder – it is unconstitutional for Congress to enact legislation directed at a specific individual or organization. At the time, members of the House Intelligence Committee were telling journalists and lawyers that the legislation was aimed only at *CovertAction Information Bulletin* and its editors, but this was always said off the record and no one would confirm it on the record; although during the House debate Congressman William Young (R.-FL) declared: “What we're after today are the Philip Agees of the world.” Ironically, the law became the basis for the prosecution of George W. Bush special counsel Lewis ‘Scooter’ Libby, who outed CIA employee Valerie Plame.

Amongst the magazine's numerous contributors were Philip Agee, John Stockwell, Ralph McGehee, Ellen Ray, William Schaap, Louis Wolf, Michael Parenti, Noam Chomsky, Mumia Abu-Jamal, Leonard Peltier, Diana Johnstone, Sean Gervasi, Philip Wheaton, Immanuel Wallerstein, Kathy Kelly, Tony Benn, Ramsey Clark, David MacMichael, Edward Herman, William Blum, Michel Chossudovsky, Marjorie Cohn, James Petras, Gregory Elich, and many other prominent progressive writers.

A recent *Washington Post* story states: “The private papers of Philip Agee, the disaffected CIA operative whose unauthorized publication of agency secrets 35 years ago was arguably far more damaging than anything WikiLeaks has produced, have been obtained by New York University, which plans to make them public next spring.”

Individual copies or the entire set of 78 issues (mostly original copies and about a dozen in quality photocopy format) are available for purchase: \$3.00 per issue, 25 copies for \$65.00, 50 for \$115, or all 78 for \$165, including postage in the United States.

To place an order, write:

**Louis Wolf, 1500 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Room 732, Washington, DC 20005**  
... or e-mail [louw7@live.com](mailto:louw7@live.com) **CT**

# The CIA: A good place to cut spending

David Swanson looks at a book that exposes the CIA's kidnapping of a civilian in Italy

I know it seems like more of a noble sacrifice to cut spending on things people less fortunate than ourselves need, but can somebody explain to me why it wouldn't be at least that noble to eliminate the budget of the CIA, which serves no one?

The *Washington Post* and the Obama administration have been busy telling us that it's legal to kidnap people and send them to countries that torture. They may call it "renditioning" to nations that use "enhanced interrogation techniques," but a new book details what this means in clear English.

A man was walking near his home in Milano, Italy, and was stopped and questioned by a policeman. When they had been engaged in conversation for some minutes, the side door of a van parked behind the man crashed open with a thunderous sound, two extremely large and strong men grabbed the civilian and hauled him inside, and the door slammed shut three seconds after it had opened, as the van accelerated and the two men hit and kicked their victim repeatedly in the dark of the van's interior, pounding his head, chest, stomach, and legs. They stopped. They stuffed a gag in his mouth and put a hood over his head, as they cinched cords tight around his wrists and ankles. Hours later they threw him into another vehicle. An hour later they took him out, stood him up, cut his clothes off,

shoved something hard up his anus, stuck a diaper and pajamas on him, wrapped his head almost entirely with duct tape, and tossed him into an airplane.

The torture he received when he got where he was going left him nearly dead, prematurely aged, and barely able to walk. It was US-sponsored and Egyptian administered. And it is described in all of its almost unbearable detail in Steve Hendricks' *A Kidnapping in Milan: The CIA on Trial*.

Believe it or not, most of this book is enjoyable. Hendricks knows the United States and Italy and how to write about one for readers in the other. His remarks on Italian culture are outdone only by his background on Muslim terrorism, his account of who this kidnapping victim was, and the inclusion of dialogue picked up by Italian wiretaps of terrorism suspects' private conversations. But just as terrific reading are Hendricks' histories of the practice of rendition, of the use of torture, of U.S.-Italian relations, of domestic Italian terrorism, and of modern Egypt.

## **Paid for by US tax dollars**

Not to ruin the punch line – and this has long been public knowledge – the kidnapping, transporting, imprisoning, and torturing of this man and many others is paid for with U.S. tax dollars. I'm sure it all sounds very important and rational given how de-

**The torture he received when he got where he was going left him nearly dead, prematurely aged, and barely able to walk. It was US-sponsored and Egyptian administered**

## BUTCHERS AND BUNGLERS

**No doubt some of these CIA bunglers and butchers were outsourced and untrained, but they also believed they were above the law**

monically evil Muslims are supposed to be. But how do you justify the dozens of CIA agents living it up in Italy's most luxurious hotels while plotting this operation? And how do you rationalize the damage done to U.S. relations with Italy? Of course, Italians quickly discovered that the CIA was behind this crime. It would have been harder to track them if they'd worn neon signs on their chests. They used cell phones and frequent flyer accounts that were easily identified, not to mention names and addresses similar to their real ones. Hendricks describes their methods as Keystone Kommandoism.

### **Above the law**

No doubt some of these CIA bunglers and butchers were outsourced and untrained, but they also believed they were above the law. They thought they had immunity. Italian law enforcement thought otherwise. For decades during the Cold War, the CIA kept an army and caches of weapons in Italy to be used if communists were ever able to gain significant political power. A long list of abuses has come to light and no one ever been held accountable. Magistrate Armando Spataro, like many Italians, adored the United States. When reporters asked him why he had indicted two dozen CIA agents, Spataro said he was opposing lawlessness, not his beloved United States. He warned of following the path of Mussolini. He pointed out that Italy had defeated domestic terrorists with the rule of law. He showed that the new U.S. lawlessness was just encouraging terror. His record of prosecuting leftist ter-

rorists and his indictment for terrorism of the victim himself of the U.S. kidnapping made claims of bias difficult to pin on Spataro. The approach resorted to by the U.S. media was – to the extent possible – to ignore the whole thing, especially when Spataro won convictions of the agents tried in absentia.

The Italian legal system is one thing, its government in Rome quite another. The latter will never ask the United States to extradite the convicts unless the U.S. president requests it first, just as the United States would never kidnap a man in Italy without telling the Italian president and the Italian spy service first. So, none of the culprits are behind bars, but they are unable to live in or travel to Europe. And a strong signal has been sent about the likelihood of Italy tolerating more such crimes. This is the sort of message Nancy Pelosi would have sent by impeaching Bush even if the Senate had not convicted him.

Hendricks tracked down most of the scofflaws. They're spread around the United States engaged in a variety of work, most of them completely unknown to the public. The man chiefly responsible, on the other hand, is undergoing a public rehabilitation and is about to open a presidential library, while the man responsible for the continued practice and for the freedom of his predecessor has two more years in the White House. **CT**

*David Swanson is the author of the forthcoming book "War Is A Lie,"*  
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# US busting labour unions in Iraq

Saddam Hussein didn't like unions. The present Iraq government isn't keen on them, either, writes **Sherwood Ross**

**I**t is only in comic books and Hollywood movies that America's superheroes exist to defend the underdog. In practice, the armies of America have fanned out around the globe to show they are the willing servants of the corporate overdog. As Noam Chomsky writes in his book, *Imperial Ambitions*, You can almost predict (U.S.) policy by that simple principle: Does it help rich people or does it help the general population? And from that you can virtually deduce what's going to happen." There is no more disgraceful example than Iraq.

Instead of supporting Iraq's pro-democracy labor unions, which would have put Washington on the side of the working-class, the U.S. signaled its attitude toward Iraqi labor unions in 2003 "when coalition troops stormed the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) headquarters in Baghdad, ransacked their offices, arrested eight union workers, and shut down the office," wrote Matthew Harwood in the April, 2005, issue of the *Washington Monthly*. Harwood added that when historians re-examine what went wrong during the U.S. occupation of Iraq, "somewhere on the list will be the administration's indifference, indeed hostility, to Iraqi organized labor. The Iraqi people are paying a price for that attitude."

This hostility continues to this very day. In an article titled, "Union busting, Iraq-

Style," published in the October 25th issue of the *Nation* magazine, author David Bacon writes "because Iraqi unions have organized opposition to privatization since the start of the occupation, the (Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-) Maliki administration is enforcing with a vengeance Saddam Hussein's prohibition of public sector unions." Last March, he writes, after oil workers protested low pay and their union's "illegal" status, "leaders were transferred hundreds of miles from home."

The unions' "crime" in Iraq is to oppose production-sharing agreements with foreign oil companies, which would then get a share of what they produce rather than a fee for services. In the past, some oil outfits used this tack to swindle their government partners out of huge sums. In Iran, BP's predecessor in the Fifties wouldn't even tell Tehran how much oil it was extracting! "Although the (Iraqi) oil union doesn't oppose all foreign investment, it has criticized the (Maliki) government for signing unfavorable contracts with oil corporations, in particular production-sharing agreements..." writes Bacon.

"Unions began to reorganize as soon as Saddam Hussein's regime fell, but they quickly found that Washington's vision of democracy didn't include their rights. After the 2003 invasion, occupation czar Paul Bremer decided to keep on the books

**The unions' "crime" in Iraq is to oppose production-sharing agreements with foreign oil companies, which would then get a share of what they produce rather than a fee for services**

## WAR ON WORKERS

**The workers “were given leftover food in boxes and garbage bags after the troops ate”**

Saddam’s Law 150, which bans public sector unions,” Bacon pointed out. And while unions are suppressed, multinational oil firms are descending on Basra’s oilfields.

Bacon says the Maliki government has signed contracts with 18 companies including ExxonMobil, Royal Dutch Shell, Italy’s ENI, Russia’s Gazprom and Lukoil, Malaysia’s Petronas and a BP-Chinese National Petroleum Corp. partnership. Standing guard over the oilfields is the U.S. Army and private contractors.

### **Unions prohibited**

Author Bacon noted further that last month the U.S. Commerce Department dispatched a trade mission to Iraq for U.S. companies that included big defense contractors. Among them was Boeing, General Electric (GE), American Cargo Transport and 12 other engineering and transportation firms out to win a share of \$80 billion for work on ports and power plants while at the same time, Bacon writes, “it prohibits unions in those industries.” GE, by the way, already has landed a \$3 billion contract to rebuild power plants. Typically, the government put down a demonstration of Basra workers asking where \$13 billion allegedly spent for electricity reconstruction had gone. It was a good question since their homes are only getting a few hours of electricity daily.

In response, oil minister Hussein al-Shahrastani kicked the Electrical Utility Workers Union out of its Basra offices. Hashmeya Muhsin, that union’s leader, charges, “If people are desperate enough, the government believes they’ll accept anything to get electricity, including privatization. It knows we won’t accept that, so it wants to paralyze

us so we can’t speak out.” Similarly, The Nation article quotes Hassan Juma, president of the Federation of Oil Employees of Iraq, as saying, “The government doesn’t want workers to have rights, because it wants people to be weak and at the mercy of employers.” Maybe that’s the real reason why the president of Basra’s Iraqi Teachers’ Union was tossed in jail last January.

As bad off as Iraqi workers may be, Third Country Nationals (TCN) shipped into Iraq are often fare worse. Author Pratap Chatterjee in his book *Halliburton’s Army*, writes that workers “who dared to stage labor strikes and sickouts to protest their treatment at military camps faced immediate dismissal.” Workers complain they are treated “like human cattle” by some of their bosses. Rory Mayberry, a former Halliburton/KBR contractor employed at the Balad, Iraq, Camp Anaconda dining facilities in 2004, said the U.S. firm was supposed to feed 600 Turkish and Filipino workers meals. Instead, the workers “were given leftover food in boxes and garbage bags after the troops ate.” As long as such practices by the U.S. government and U.S. corporations continue, look for the gap between rich and poor to widen globally, just as it has been widening in America. Look for continued injustice, continued unrest, continued repression, and continued war. You’d think by now the union-busters would catch on that there is a better way. But they are proving they only have eyes for the dollars. **CT**

*Sherwood Ross, who formerly reported for the Chicago Daily News and wire services, runs the Anti-War News Service from Coral Gables, Florida, USA.*

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# The Free Market explained

An excerpt from the new book, *Rich People Things*, by **Chris Lehmann**

Supplying a critical anatomy of the American romance with the free market is like trying to paint a white fence in a blizzard: Your target is everywhere and nowhere, firmly anchored in the landscape yet at the same time so diffusely scattered throughout the ozone that you hardly know where to begin.

The notion of a self-regulated market, magically governed by the invisible hand of self-interest, dates back, of course, to Adam Smith's famed eighteenth-century treatise, *On the Wealth of Nations*. Smith's Scottish Enlightenment vision of economic enterprise as a mystical haven of uncoerced social relations has always been catnip to the ownership class in the resource-rich and labor-stunted New World. Smith's thesis – a heady world-historical expansion of how he saw the division of labor unfold in a Scottish pin factory – seemed intuitively true in an early American Republic long on frontier expansionism and short on fixed class division and institutions of social welfare. If anywhere could be the natural home of a free market, why, this certainly must be

the place.

Meanwhile, Smith's British compatriots took a far more dour view of his achievements. As economic historian Michael Perelman recounts, Francis Horner, the editor of the *Edinburgh Review* and chairman of the Bullion Committee in the British Parliament, declined an invitation to contribute an introduction to an 1803 reissue of

Smith's book with this candid assessment: "I should be reluctant to expose S's errors before his work had operated its full effect. We owe much at present to the superstitious worship of S's name; and we must not impair that feeling, till the victory is more complete. . . . [U]ntil we can give a correct and precise theory of the origin of wealth, his popular and plausible and loose hypothesis is as good for the vulgar as any others."

He might as well have added, "Turn the Yanks loose on it." But even on our shores, Smith has largely become enshrined as a post hoc prophet of market sovereignty for the modern right, which has made an industry of reviling the New Deal and the notion of government intervention in the economy. Perel-

**Smith has largely become enshrined as a post hoc prophet of market sovereignty for the modern right, which has made an industry of reviling the New Deal and the notion of government intervention in the economy**



**RICH PEOPLE THINGS**

Chris Lehmann

OR Books, \$16

## BOOK EXCERPT

**Today's economic regulators have doubled down on the cartelized finance sector with lavish too-big-to-fail bailouts**

man quotes a latter-day Smith scholar who observes, "There were more new editions of *The Wealth of Nations* published in the 1990s than in the 1890s, and more in the 1890s than in the 1790s."

Those dates are not without significance in our economic history. The 1890s marked the full onset of the Industrial Revolution in America and set the stage for the corporatist model of business enterprise pioneered by Progressive economic and legal thinkers. Under this dispensation – notably the landmark 1888 Sherman Antitrust Act's corporate-friendly interpretation in the courts – the breakup of smaller family-held business empires produced, ironically enough, the golden age of incorporation, as joint stock companies displaced the more parochial brands of nineteenth-century business ownership. Thus was born modern managerial capitalism, a system whereby, as historian Alfred D. Chandler puts it, a new professional class of managers "came to command those enterprises where financiers were originally influential. . . . [B]y the 1950s the managerial firm had become the standard form of modern business enterprise."

This shift meant, among other things, that the conceit of a free market founded and protected by stalwart individual entrepreneurs – always a diaphanous account of the operations of industrial enterprise – had withered almost entirely under the sway of what Chandler calls the "administrative coordination" of the managerial regime: the movement of corporate enterprise outward into ever greater swathes of market share at the same time its systems of production and distribution recombined into vertically integrated cartels. And in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, those tendencies have not abated; unlike the New Deal's battery of efforts to deconcentrate finance and industry, and thereby stimulate consumer demand and job growth in public-backed enterprise, today's economic regulators have doubled down on the cartelized finance sector with lavish

too-big-to-fail bailouts. The result is virtually a photographic negative of free-market theory, with federal income support going straight into the coffers of finance capital. This boondoggle, when gamed by an exceptionally crafty charity case such as Goldman Sachs, produces yet another garish turn of the screw: Goldman made most of its fortune in 2009 by wheeling from the Treasury's welfare window to exploit the infinitesimally low interest rates the firm commands as a Potemkin consumer banking shop to vacuum up virtually free profits in the municipal and federal bond markets. Nary a pin has been made in the process.

And the odd thing is that in the face of such grievous gaming of the finance dole, public discourse has doubled down on free-market dogma. University of Chicago behavioral economist Steven Levitt has leveraged classical marketspeak into an all-purpose pop explanation of virtually everything in his franchise. Sales of Ayn Rand novels (tracts that make Smithian free-market orthodoxy seem like wild-eyed syndicalism by comparison) have spiked; and anemic legislative bids to expand health-care coverage and to gesture vaguely in the direction of re-regulating our debt-ravaged financial system routinely provoke hysterical cries of "Socialism!"

All of which prompts one to wonder if there isn't a deep overcompensating strain in the American worship of free-market pieties. The craving for Smith-style truism appears to kick in most desperately when economic reality comports least to elegant free-market theory – in much the same way that, say, the tribal incantations of the 1990s "men's movement" took deepest hold among stoop-shouldered Boomer office workers; or that preachers in hulking multimedia Sun-belt megachurches profess to bear the unsullied truth of the Holy Ghost and the primitive gospel.

In reality, the market has no organic existence at all. It has always been a contrivance of contract law, interlocking trusts,

and trade protocols – and its putative freedom is primarily a function of who is best positioned to benefit from this or that set of advantageous relationships. The explosion of global “free trade” agreements that revved up in the Clinton era were free for many local manufacturing economies in the United States only in the bitterest sense, i.e., that one suddenly takes on a great deal of free time when one’s job migrates south. Likewise, the free market in health care that conservative activists are now so hot to preserve from the federal government’s meddlesome regulating hand is in fact an elaborate patchwork of gamed Medicare contracts, erratically enforced state regulatory codes that are still the only government curbs on the excesses of most major insurers, and the lobbying wish list of a pharmaceutical Leviathan that seeks to secure patent rights to its most lucrative products, like the next generation of microbionic cancer drugs, into perpetuity. But the myth of the free market remains a powerful intellectual opiate, and its pushers are legion, from Malcolm Gladwell to Steve Forbes to Sarah Palin.

Indeed, probably the most effective way

to break the free market’s spell would be to transform its most debilitating cultural products into a globalized twelve-step program. See, for instance, how New Economy laissez-faire ideologues like Virginia Postrel or Chris Anderson fare in the hypercapitalist but viciously authoritarian island paradise of Singapore. Or put Thomas Friedman to work in a Marianas textile factory for a couple of months and let him see how flat the market-mastered world looks to him then. Take the utopian theorists of “seasteading” libertarianism at their word, and let them fashion their stateless free-market utopia out of all reach of all international sea treaty enforcement. Put Steve Forbes to work as a union organizer in the shadows of the breathtaking architectural homage to investor-class excess known as the Abu Dhabi skyline – where the local construction industry is awash in sweated day labor. Indeed, I can see a whole Survivor-style reality television franchise in the offing: Capitalist Detox Island. True, it might be a hard sell to advertisers – unless, that is, you compel TARP recipients to purchase ad time. Now that’s a manipulation of market forces I can get behind. **CT**

**Put Thomas Friedman to work in a Marianas textile factory for a couple of months and let him see how flat the market-mastered world looks to him then**

HURWITT'S EYE

Mark Hurwitt



# Conned by democracy

Ramzy Baroud tries to make sense of slow progress in the introduction of democracy throughout the Middle East

**Arabs are not judged by the genuineness of their democracy; rather, the success of their democratic experiences is judged on the basis of how well they can serve and protect US interest**

**D**emocracy in the Middle East continues to be a hugely popular topic of discussion. Its virtues are tirelessly praised by rulers and oppositions alike, by intellectuals and ordinary people, by political prisoners and their prison guards. Yet, in actuality, it also remains an illusion, if not a front to ensure the demise of any real possibility of public participation in decision-making.

Bahrain was the latest Arab country to hold free and fair elections. It managed a reasonable voter turnout of 67 percent. The opposition also did very well, winning 45 percent of the seats. In terms of fairness and transparency, the Bahraini elections could serve as an excellent example of how ‘things are changing’ in the Middle East. More, they might provide Western leaders, such as US President Barack Obama an opportunity to commend the contribution of American guidance to ‘progress’ in the region.

In actual fact, nothing is changing – except for the insistence by some that it is. Arab governments have made two important discoveries in the last decade.

The first discovery is that US interests cannot peacefully co-exist with true democracies in the region. Egypt had a rude awakening in 2005, when Muslim Brotherhood candidates won a fifth of the votes, if not more. This was followed by the unmatched democratic revolution in Palestine when Hamas

won the majority of the vote. The aftermath of both of these events was enough to remind both Arabs and the US of the folly of their so-called democracy project.

The second realization is that Arabs are not judged by the genuineness of their democracy; rather, the success of their democratic experiences is judged on the basis of how well they can serve and protect US interests. Since the democracy radar is measured by Washington, Arab countries deemed lacking in democratic reforms are often cited as promising and fledgling democracies in Congressional reports or White House statements. Countries deemed hostile to US economic and political interests are remorselessly shunned, as if their experiments with democracy could never yield anything of worth or consideration.

These two realizations led to a superficial change of course, forming a new trend that Shadi Hamid, writing in *Foreign Policy*, refers to as “free but unfair – and rather meaningless – election.”

Free elections are known to be the cornerstone of true democracy. Thus by giving the impression of freedom, automatically one tends to conclude fairness. But fairness is nowhere to be found, for if it truly exists then change becomes possible and is likely to follow. Those who have followed the new democratic experiences of some Arab countries will have observed that they have also

been defined by the same political stagnation of the pre-democracy years.

American journalist, Sydney J. Harris once wrote, “Democracy is the only system that persists in asking the powers that be whether they are the powers that ought to be.” If Harris is correct, then whatever is underway in the Middle East is anything but democracy. Although new parliamentarians are elected, new faces flash on television, and an increasing number of women are paraded along with their male colleagues following each election, the powers that be remain unchanged, unhinged and truly unchallenged.

Most polls, whether conducted by Arab or non-Arab pollsters, indicate that the vast majority of Arab people view democracy in very positive terms. But the plot has truly thickened in recent years, when on the one hand democracy has become a household name in much of the Middle East, and not one ruler or government contests its virtues. Yet, no true democracy has in fact actualized in any shape or form.

Have Middle Eastern ruling elites figured out the democracy trick, the great con of our time? Have they realized that democracy in the Middle East is only what the White House says it can be?

Israel has mastered this very trick since the day of its inception. This is what Hasan Afif El-Hasan argues in his new and very instructive book, *Is the Two-State Solution Already Dead?* “The identity of the Israelis in their legal documents and ID cards is expressed in terms of their group religious affiliation as ‘Jewish,’ ‘Muslim,’ ‘Christian,’ ‘Bahai,’ ‘Durzi,’ etc., where all privileges are conferred by the state on the Jews by virtue of being Jews, thus making Israel an religio-ethnocracy rather than a liberal democracy.”

Israel’s unique democracy is in fact getting more unique, as non-Jewish citizens of Israel are subjected to increasing levels of legal harassment and are constantly asked to jump through all sorts of political hoops to prove their loyalty to the Jewish state. Still,

clever and persistent Israel has managed to present itself to the world at large, Arabs included, as being a model democracy.

This was and continues to be the original democracy con in the Middle East. It took some Arab governments decades to catch up and also present themselves as democratic, whatever the reality on the ground. This is not your everyday democracy scheme. It is particularly devious because it can boast of being free, fair and transparent – and the numbers would actually attest to that – but the political structure would still be construed in such a way that the freely elected parliaments are blocked from legislating effectively to challenge the powers that be. If any legislation is allowed to pass, through, say, unelected upper houses, and approved by the ultimate ruler (both usually serving as an insurance system against elected parliaments), it tends to be unimportant and largely decorative.

Since democracy is always a work in progress, for no country can claim to be perfectly democratic, then Middle East governments can always use this idea to justify their own shortcomings. Expectedly, the US tends to honor that, bestowing praise on their friends, and condemning their enemies – the former for courageously taking on democratic initiatives and the latter for failing the democracy test.

The great democracy con would not succeed, were it not for the fact that many players, including the US, are so invested in its success. As for the ordinary people, who are eager to see their rights respected, freedoms honored, and political horizons expanded, well, they can always vote – even if only their vote actually counts for nothing, and only further validates the very system they are trying to change. **CT**

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