

AMERICA'S DISAPPEARED | ANDY WORTHINGTON
WE ARE ALL BRADLEY MANNING | CHRIS HEDGES
THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD TO HELL | MARK MULÉ

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DEATH OF A PRESIDENT

BERNARDO LONDONO



HUGO CHAVEZ AND HIS LEGACY: GREG PALAST, PEPE ESCOBAR, JEFFERY R. WEBBER



Cover Photo:
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America's disappeared

Andy Worthington looks forward to the day when someone will be held responsible for the US crimes of 'rendition' and torture

Injustices do not become any less unjust the longer they are unaddressed; and when it comes to the "war on terror" launched by George W. Bush following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, those injustices continue to fester and to poison America's soul.

One of those injustices is Guantánamo, where 166 men are still imprisoned, even though 86 of them were cleared for release by a task force established by the president four years ago. Another is Bagram in Afghanistan (renamed and rebranded the Parwan Detention Facility), where the Geneva Conventions were torn up by Bush and have not been reinstated and where foreign prisoners seized elsewhere and rendered to US custody in Afghanistan remain imprisoned. Some of those men have been held for as long as the men in Guantánamo, but without being allowed the rights to be visited by civilian lawyers: the men in Cuba were twice granted visitation rights by the Supreme Court – in 2004 and 2008 – even though those rights have since been taken away by judges in the Court of Appeals in Washington, DC, demonstrating a susceptibility to the general hysteria regarding the "war on terror" rather than a desire to bring justice to the men in Guantánamo.

Another profound injustice – involving the kidnapping of prisoners anywhere in the world, and their rendition to "black sites"

run by the CIA or to torture dungeons in other countries – also remains unaddressed.

Some of "America's Disappeared" eventually turned up at Guantánamo, and the foreign prisoners held at Bagram also fit into that category. What happened to others, however, is as unknown now as it was six years ago, when six NGOs – including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Reprieve – issued a report, *Off the Record: US Responsibility for Enforced Disappearances in the 'War on Terror'*, identifying 39 prisoners whose whereabouts were unknown.

At the time – June 2007 – there was some interest in the story because Bush had run into a credibility problem in his second term, but interest had already waned by 2010, Barack Obama's second year in office. That was the year a follow-up report, the *Joint Study on Global Practices in Relation to Secret Detention in the Context of Counter-Terrorism*, was published by the United Nations.

I was the lead author of the sections dealing with US disappearances in the "war on terror," which was prepared for the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, for the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, and for the Working Groups

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on arbitrary detention and enforced or involuntary disappearances.

In the report, I noted, “Based on figures disclosed in one of the Office of Legal Counsel’s notorious ‘torture memos’, written in May 2005 by Assistant Attorney General Stephen Bradbury” and made available by Obama as part of a court case in April 2009, “the CIA had, by May 2005, ‘taken custody of 94 prisoners [redacted] and [had] employed enhanced techniques to varying degrees in the interrogations of 28 of these detainees.”

Those 94 men were part of the “high-value detainee” program and were held in secret prisons run by the CIA in Thailand, Poland, Lithuania, Romania, and Morocco, although most also passed through the network of secret prisons in Afghanistan en route.

An unspecified number of other prisoners, however, were also rendered to other countries for torture, including Egypt, Jordan and Syria. The only estimate of numbers came in September 2007, when CIA director Michael Hayden told Charlie Rose that the number was “mid-range, two figures since September 11, 2001,” without elaborating. As Rose stated in response, “Two figures. So 50, 60. Whatever. Doesn’t matter. Have been renditioned to somewhere.”

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54 governments complicit

Last month, the latest update in this sordid and neglected story arrived through the Open Society Justice Initiative, which issued a new report, *Globalizing Torture: CIA Secret Detention and Extraordinary Rendition*. As the press release explained, the report “identifies for the first time a total of 136 named victims and describes the complicity of 54 foreign governments in these operations.” The governments, “ranging from Iceland and Australia to Morocco and Thailand,” are revealed to have “enabled secret detention and extraordinary rendition operations in various ways, such as hosting

CIA prisons, assisting in the capture and transport of detainees, and permitting the use of domestic airspace for secret flights.”

The press release also noted that “the report underscores the US government’s failure to confront the legacy of abuses committed in the name of counterterrorism.” It was not lost on the Open Society Justice Initiative that the report was being published while the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence sits on a 6,000-page report that took three years to complete, which provides a comprehensive analysis of the CIA’s torture program under the Bush administration. At the same time, Kathryn Bigelow’s movie *Zero Dark Thirty* continues to pump out the irresponsible false message that torture played a key role in identifying the location of Osama bin Laden, and John Brennan was about to be confirmed the director of the CIA, even though, under George W. Bush, he had explicitly supported torture and renditions.

Amrit Singh, the author of the report and a senior legal officer at the Open Society Justice Initiative, said, “The time has come for the US and its partner governments to own up to the truth and secure accountability for the abuses committed around the world as part of these CIA programs. The taint of torture and other abuses associated with these programs will continue to cling to the US and its collaborators as long as they hide behind a veil of secrecy and refuse to hold their officials accountable.”

That is true, of course, but it remains to be seen whether anything can awaken the American media or the public to sufficient outrage that any action will be taken to hold anyone accountable. Singh notes that the best hopes for accountability still lie elsewhere – in Europe, where, in December 2012, the European Court of Human Rights held that the Macedonian government had violated the rights of Khaled El-Masri, a German citizen, during an operation with the CIA that led, in a case of mistaken identity, to El-Masri’s being kidnapped and rendered

to a “black site” in Afghanistan, where his treatment “amounted to torture.”

In addition, in 2009, an Italian court convicted in absentia 23 Americans – almost all CIA officials and operatives – for the brazen daylight kidnapping in Milan, in February 2003, of a cleric, Abu Omar, who was subsequently rendered to torture in Egypt. And, just last month, an Italian appellate court sentenced the country’s former intelligence chief, Niccolò Pollari, to ten years in prison “for complicity” in that kidnapping.

As the Open Society Justice Initiative notes, “Other legal challenges to secret detention and extraordinary rendition are pending before the European Court of Human Rights against Poland, Lithuania, Romania, and Italy; against Djibouti before the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights; and against domestic authorities or officials in Egypt, Hong Kong, Italy, and the UK”

Someone will pay

Those undertakings remain the best hope that one day someone at the highest levels of the US government will be held accountable for his crimes. In the meantime, the senior Bush officials – up to and including the former president – walk free, and Obama

has his own “kill list” and drone program, which, one day, will be seen to have been as monstrous and illegal as Bush’s program of rendition and torture.

Moreover, as the Open Society Justice Initiative also notes, “The Obama administration has not definitively repudiated extraordinary rendition. In 2009, President Obama issued an executive order disavowing torture and closing secret CIA detention sites, but the order was reportedly crafted to allow short-term, transitory detention prior to transferring detainees to countries for interrogation or trial. Current policies and practices with respect to extraordinary rendition remain secret.”

As with so much else in the “war on terror,” secrecy is never a good sign. It is too much to hope that Obama will willingly address the legacy of “America’s Disappeared,” inherited from his predecessor, but one day someone must be held accountable for this global program of torture. **CT**

*Andy Worthington is the author of **The Guantánamo Files: The Stories of the 774 Detainees in America’s Illegal Prison** (published by Pluto Press) and serves as policy advisor to the Future of Freedom Foundation. Visit his website at: <http://andyworthington.co.uk>*

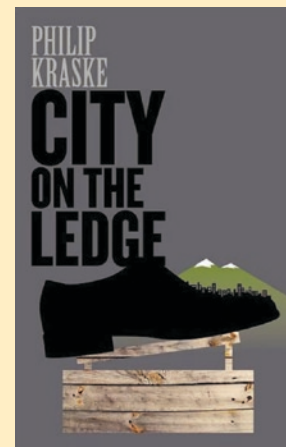
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Senior Bush officials – up to and including the former president – walk free, and Obama has his own “kill list” and drone program

CITY ON THE LEDGE

PHILIP KRASKE

Quito, Ecuador. In this unknown Andean capital ladled along the ledge of a volcano, an eruption is taking place. After centuries of oppression, the workers are on strike against the banana plantations. And if Ecuador, the top banana exporter in the world and the bargain basement of the industry, raises its price, then so will the others. Set against the emerald majesty of the Andes, full of local color, **City on the Ledge** witnesses the machinations of politicians, spies, diplomats, and lovers to pull off a revolution, or kill it before it can bloom.

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Eyes wide shut on the Iraq war

Ray McGovern recalls a moment when the curtain was lifted on the lies justifying the invasion of Iraq – and how quickly it was pulled back down

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Despite massive worldwide protests against the impending invasion, the US news media only grudgingly covered the spectacle of millions of people in the streets in dozens of cities
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Ten years ago, as President George W. Bush and his administration were putting the finishing touches on their unprovoked invasion of Iraq, the mainstream US news media had long since capitulated, accepting the conventional wisdom that nothing could – or should – stop the march to war.

The neocon conquest of the major US news outlets – the likes of the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the national TV news – was so total that the Bush administration could reliably count on them as eager co-conspirators in the Iraq adventure rather than diligent watchdogs for the American people.

By now a decade ago, the *New York Times* had published Judy Miller's infamous "mushroom cloud" article about Iraq's aluminum tubes, the *Washington Post's* op-ed page had lined up in lock-step to hail Colin Powell's misleading United Nations speech, MSNBC had dumped Phil Donahue after he allowed on a few anti-war voices, and CNN had assembled a chorus of pro-war ex-military officers as "analysts."

Despite massive worldwide protests against the impending invasion, the US news media only grudgingly covered the spectacle of millions of people in the streets in dozens of cities. The coverage mostly had a tone of bemusement about how deluded such uninformed folks could be.

The US news media's consensus was so overwhelming that it may have freed up a few lesser outlets to publish some undeniable facts, which then could be safely dismissed and ignored.

Such was the case when *Newsweek* correspondent John Barry was allowed to publish the leaked contents of an interrogation of a senior Iraqi official who inconveniently disclosed that Iraq had destroyed its stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons years earlier.

Barry, usually a reliable voice for Washington's conventional wisdom, may have struggled over what to do with the leaked document, but he ultimately wrote this truthful lede:

"Hussein Kamel, the highest-ranking Iraqi official ever to defect from Saddam Hussein's inner circle, told CIA and British intelligence officers and UN inspectors in the summer of 1995 that after the gulf war, Iraq destroyed all its chemical and biological weapons stocks and the missiles to deliver them. Kamel ... had direct knowledge of what he claimed: for 10 years he had run Iraq's nuclear, chemical, biological and missile programs."

In a classic understatement about his own report – as the White House was on the verge of unleashing the dogs of war in pursuit of Iraq's alleged WMD – Barry commented, "The defector's tale raises ques-

tions about whether the WMD stockpiles attributed to Iraq still exist.”

Barry explained that Kamel had been interrogated in separate sessions by the CIA, British intelligence, and a trio from the UN inspection team; that *Newsweek* had been able to verify the authenticity of the UN document containing the text of Kamel’s debriefing; and that Kamel had “told the same story to the CIA and the British.” Barry added that “The CIA did not respond to a request for comment.”

Barry’s story was, of course, completely accurate. According to page 13 of the transcript of the debriefing by US and UN officials, Hussein Kamel, one of Saddam Hussein’s sons-in-law, said bluntly: “All weapons – biological, chemical, missile, nuclear, were destroyed.”

The story of Kamel’s admission was published in the March 3, 2003, issue of *Newsweek* after appearing on the magazine’s Web site on Feb. 24.

No WMD in Iraq?

By then, of course, the *Newsweek* story really didn’t matter. The media “hot shots” had already shifted from covering the excuses for war to preparing for the exciting duty as embedded “war correspondents.”

No one wanted to risk being left out of those career-building moments of racing across the Iraqi desert in a Humvee, with your cameraman filming you in green-tinted night-vision video, your body bulked up by body armor, your camouflage outfit matching what the real troops were wearing, and perhaps your hair blowing in the wind.

Back at corporate headquarters, CNN’s Wolf Blitzer and other cable-news anchors couldn’t wait for the start of “shock and awe.” The pyrotechnics would surely mean a big bump in ratings. Over at Fox News and MSNBC, which was then trying to out-Fox Fox from the Right, producers were planning for video montages honoring “the Troops” as super-hero liberators of Iraq.

So there was not much buzz about the *Newsweek* scoop. The rest of the mainstream media only went through the motions of checking out this strange information about Iraq having no WMD. Reporters called the CIA for clarification.

CIA spokesman Bill Harlow responded by fishing out half of the descriptors from his “Debunking Adjectives File” at CIA’s Office of Public Affairs. He warned that the report was “incorrect, bogus, wrong, untrue.”

Would the CIA ever tell a lie? Puleeze! And so the mainstream media said, in effect, “Gosh. Thanks for letting us know. Otherwise, we might have run a story on it.”

Nor were mainstream media outlets at all interested in coming back to the story two days later, when the complete copy of the Kamel transcript, in the form of an internal UN International Atomic Energy Agency document stamped “sensitive,” was made public by Cambridge University analyst Glen Rangwala.

Rangwala had already revealed that British Prime Minister Tony Blair’s pre-war “intelligence dossier” on Iraq was largely plagiarized from a student thesis.

The conventional wisdom in Official Washington was: Why should anyone place his or her precious career between the innocents who would die in war and the war juggernaut of Bush and his neocon advisers? After all, what good would it do? The war was going to happen anyway and you would just get run over.

And what would happen if the US military did discover some cache of WMD somewhere in Iraq? You’d be forever known as that Saddam Hussein apologist who questioned the wisdom of the Great War President.

So the war juggernaut rolled on. Wolf Blitzer expressed some disappointment that the “shock and awe” bombing of Baghdad wasn’t more spectacular. NBC’s Tom Brokaw sat among a panel of ex-military officer and blurted out that “in a few days, we’re going to own that country.” MSNBC

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.....

and Fox News rushed out Madison Avenue-style tributes to “the Troops” complete with stirring sound tracks and images of thankful Iraqis. Disturbing stories and images of overflowing hospitals and innocent Iraqis being dismembered and incinerated by US bombs were played down.

However, the Bush administration found none of the promised stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons, nor any evidence of an active nuclear program. After eight years of a bloody war and occupation, the big losers were the hundreds of thousands of dead and maimed Iraqis; the nearly 4,500 dead US soldiers and more than 30,000 wounded; and the US taxpayers who got stuck with a bill of around \$1 trillion.

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More Harlowtry

Things worked out a lot better for people like CIA spokesman Bill Harlow. He found out that working for CIA Director George Tenet could be quite lucrative, even after they both left the CIA. Harlow convinced Tenet, who resigned in 2004, that an exculpatory memoir could polish up Tenet’s tarnished reputation and make money.

Harlow also volunteered to help, since he sensed the boss would need a scribe and since the advance was sizable. Tenet’s *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA*, co-written with Harlow, was released in April 2007. By then, however, even some in the mainstream media were able to see the two for the charlatans they were.

Not even Harlow’s hired pen could disguise this lame attempt at self-justification. Pro that he is, Harlow simply could not manage to make a silk purse out of the sow’s ear of Tenet’s career.

At the Center of the Storm amounted to an unintentional self-indictment of Tenet for the crimes with which Socrates was charged: making the worse cause appear the better, and corrupting the youth. At the time, I found myself thinking that Tenet wished he had opted to just fade away, as

old soldiers and spies used to do.

And I would have been right, I suppose – except for the money. A \$4 million advance was nothing at which to sniff, even if Tenet had to share it with Harlow.

Despite what should have been a negative credibility rating, Harlow remained a trusted figure for many old news media friends. He was sent into the breach once more in August 2011 to help Tenet fend off explosive charges from former White House counter-terrorism czar Richard Clarke that Tenet had withheld information from him that could have thwarted the attacks of 9/11.

In an interview aired on a local PBS affiliate in Colorado, Clarke directly accused Tenet and two other senior CIA officials, Cofer Black and Richard Blee, of sitting on information about two of the hijackers of American Airlines Flight 77 – al-Hazmi and al-Mihdhar.

The two had entered the United States more than a year before the 9/11 attacks, and CIA knew it. After 9/11, the agency covered up its failure by keeping relevant information away from Congress and the 9/11 Commission, Clarke said.

Withholding intelligence on two of the 9/11 hijackers would have been particularly unconscionable – the epitome of malfeasance, not just misfeasance. That’s why Richard Clarke’s conclusion that he should have received information from CIA about al-Hazmi and al-Mihdhar “unless somebody intervened to stop the normal automatic distribution” amounts, in my view, to a criminal charge, given the eventual role of the two in hijacking of AA-77, the plane that struck the Pentagon.

Tenet has denied that the information on the two hijackers was “intentionally withheld” from Clarke, and he enlisted the other two former CIA operatives, Cofer Black (more recently a senior official of Blackwater) and Richard Blee (an even more shadowy figure), to concur in saying, Not us; we didn’t withhold.

Whom to believe? To me, it's a no-brainer. One would have to have been born yesterday to regard the "George is right" testimony from Black and Blee as corroborative.

Harlow to the Rescue

To dirty up Clarke a bit more, Bill Harlow emerged to empty the remaining half of the descriptors from his old "Debunking Adjectives File." According to Harlow, Clarke's charges were "reckless and profoundly wrong ... baseless ... belied by the record ... unworthy of serious consideration."

And so, naturally, the mainstream media dropped this extraordinary story involving the former White House counterterrorism chief, Richard Clarke, accusing the former CIA head, George Tenet, with suppressing information that could well have prevented 9/11.

Plus, by all indications, Harlow is still able to work his fraudulent magic on the Fawning Corporate Media. If Harlow says it's not true ... and hurls a bunch of pejorative adjectives to discredit a very serious charge ... well, I guess we'll have to leave it there, as the mainstream media is so fond of saying. No matter Clarke's well-deserved reputation for honesty and professionalism – and Tenet's and Harlow's reputations for the opposite.

The versatile Bill Harlow came back again this past January to help Jose Rodriguez, the CIA operations chief who oversaw waterboarding and other torture and then destroyed the videotaped evidence, argue his case in the ever-hospitable, neocon-

dominated *Washington Post*.

Their argument this time was that "enhanced interrogation" – or what the rest of us would call "torture" – helped locate al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. Even the Senate Intelligence Committee has refuted that claim.

Never mind. The *Washington Post* Sunday Outlook section on Jan. 6, 2013, ran a long article titled, "Sorry, Hollywood. What we did wasn't torture." The *Post* noted that the Rodriguez piece was "written with former CIA spokesman Bill Harlow," but offered readers no help in gauging Harlow's checkered credibility.

Rodriguez and Harlow disdained the word "torture," but argued, in the context of the "hunt-for-bin-Laden" movie "Zero Dark Thirty," that the rough-them-up tactics really helped. The two resorted to the George W. Bush-era word game that waterboarding, stress positions, sleep deprivation and other calculated pain inflicted on detainees in the CIA's custody weren't really "torture."

A decade after so many falsehoods led the United States into the disastrous Iraq War, it is curious indeed that the mainstream US news media still affords some of the principal liars so much respect and "credibility."

CT

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He served for 27 years as a CIA analyst, and is a co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS). This essay was originally published at <http://consortiumnews.com>

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Corruption pays

If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. **Chellis Glendinning** finds there's a way to get her Jeep registered in Bolivia

.....
All that mattered at that moment was that the officers were clumsily juggling paper and pencils – and working against the clock to avert a car-owners' riot
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I had already spent more hours attempting – with zero success, I might add – to be awarded the 2013 roseta/ decal the police require on your windshield than I had the year before: six hours, to be exact – and yet my time was running out. The deadline was in two days, and after that, well, I might as well kiss my 1978 Jeep adios.

Granted, last year my illustrious motor vehicle – which I had polished to resemble an antique car of worth and then (what's a gal to do for six hours in the December sun) polished again and then moved on to polish the hoods of the other cars in line – only passed because fifteen minutes before close-up time, the police computer croaked. A flurry of perplexity ensued, but Bolivian law enforcement, fine-tuned by history to sense an uprising in the making, knew to whip out the old paper forms.

OK I could not have predicted that, twenty feet from the target of our ambition, construction workers were heaving sawdust over the fence when our cars passed by, so my efforts to make my Jeep at least look roseta-worthy had gone for naught. But all that mattered at that moment was that the officers were clumsily juggling paper and pencils – and working against the clock to avert a car-owners' riot.

So, without even getting to show my brand-new fire extinguisher – and despite

that my brights ponied up exactly nada in the realm of lighting – I got the damn roseta.

So when Roseta Time rolled around this year, I rolled my eyes with annoyance – and this was even before I knew that the chassis number scrawled on the pages of my car's documents was not to be found on said chassis. I learned this only after waiting in line for an hour (and slipping the officer 30 bolivianos due to a horn that had decided to imitate Marcel Marceau's voice) when an unduly large cluster of black-booted, olive-clad men surrounded my open hood with serious question marks on their foreheads. My plastic folder holding all the files was broken open and searched, and sure enough VJ8J83EEE41672 appeared everywhere on paper but nowhere on metal. A Gogolesque disaster.

Far be it from me to describe how the other five hours were used up searching a means for a number-less chassis to pass the 2013 inspection, but I will reveal that my brilliant idea of hiring a welder to fabricate a VJ8J83EEE41672 plaque was rejected by Freddy the mechanic as the fastest route to getting to know the ex-ministers and ex-judges of the Evo Morales administration, accused of corruption, in the Palmasola slammer. And farther be it from me to tell you that, just the day before, I had learned that, previously unbeknownst, the docu-

ments that would grant me the roseta for the Jeep's natural-gas tanks had been falsified both before my time and under mine own blind eyes.

No. Let us speak now of only the 2013 roseta.

I got wind of a station outside of Quillacollo where twenty Coca-Cola trucks in various states of mechanical tragedy were to be "passed" with no inspection whatsoever, just with a slip under the table of 50 bolivianos.

I think we can agree that Context is Everything. The Mayan calendar provided some big thoughts here in Bolivia, the kind that elsewhere were being tossed about by shamans and New Agers, you know, people on the fringe – but that here were being disseminated from the Palace itself. Before the solstice our *Canciller/Secretary of State* David Choquehuanca announced: "*El 21 de diciembre de 2012 es el fin del egoism, de la división, el 21 de diciembre tiene que ser el fin de Coca Cola, el comienzo del 'moco-chinchi,' del 'wilaparu'*" / December 21 is the end of egoism, of division, December 21 has to be the end of Coca-Cola and the beginning of our natural peach and corn drinks."

I was sure this meant that the government was going to surprise us the morning of the southern hemisphere's longest day with one of its celebrated military take-overs, this time at the bottling factories, and I confess I thought it a worthy plan. But then I got confused. In mid-December I saw that said corporation had sprung for a sixty-foot-tall Christmas tree made of 2.5-liter Coke bottles (all full) in the parking lot at the ritzy supermarket I.C. Norte. Why would a company whose days were numbered spend massive bucks on a holiday ornament? I said to myself.

I got in line behind three ratty-looking Coca-Cola trucks. Just the day before the United Nations had agreed for the first time in history to revise its norms concerning illicit drugs and approve the legality of the coca plant. Strange: all these years campesini-

nos and mineros could not legally chew their own coca grown in their own little plots – while Coca-Cola had held the right as a multinational corporation to extricate tons of the sacred leaves for massive international use in its secret recipe.

At first things at the make-shift "inspection" station were subdued. Drivers sat on neighboring stoops in dour silence, a girl was searching for a lost Chihuahua under the wheels, and dust blew up the street in billows. Then, in a Hundreth Monkey sort of move, everyone got up and walked toward an iron gate up the block, their papers flapping in the breeze. I followed.

Now, in the familiarity of a huddle, the drivers made jokes about the deteriorated state of their tires and turning signals, their brake pads and carburetors – and about the fact that they were engaging in an illegal act under legal watch. We were to amass our documents in a particular order, staple them together, and hand them in a stack to a woman at the gate. My God! The cops were not even going to stroll vehicle to vehicle and glance in to see if you had a fire extinguisher!

Then, as if from a puff of smoke, a photographer appeared. Like a gaggle of gosslings following the Great Mama, they, I, and the now-found Chihuahua skittered at his ankles from one mastodon of a truck to the next for a snapshot of each license plate and each driver's mug. Each could go home after his picture was taken, but no, they moved down the line of parked vehicles in a clump of excited camaraderie, smiling and cheering as each truck was crossed off. The tall one with the blazing yellow eyes whispered to me in a throaty voice like a Latin version of Rod Stewart: "Fifty bolivianos."

"Remember what Choquehuanca said?" I asked as I surreptitiously stuffed the bills into his jeans pocket.

He clamped his eyes on mine like a vinchuca bug on a sleeping vein. "The Coca-Cola corporation is a world economy in itself," he said wryly.

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The drivers made jokes about the deteriorated state of their tires and turning signals, their brake pads and carburetors – and about the fact that they were engaging in an illegal act under legal watch

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TAXING TIMES

I felt as triumphant as if I had been awarded el Premio Miguel de Cervantes – not because I had joined in the grand old tradition; no, rather because I had exited with the coveted roseta

“Yah, but does it have its own military?”
“The US Marines.”

My photo came out a little different from the solemn shots of the drivers; it shows a beaming *norteamericana*, “!Estoy muuuuy feliz!” bursting from open mouth and proudly holding up a fire extinguisher -- which, let’s face it, was the only thing on the check list she had to brag about. If you want the Real Thing, this is it: Bolivian corruption, not in the high halls of governance with judges and lawyers at your side, but at street level – and due to the fact that the previous owner of my Jeep had apparently done things as they are done in these parts, I am right in there, doing as is done to get the job done.

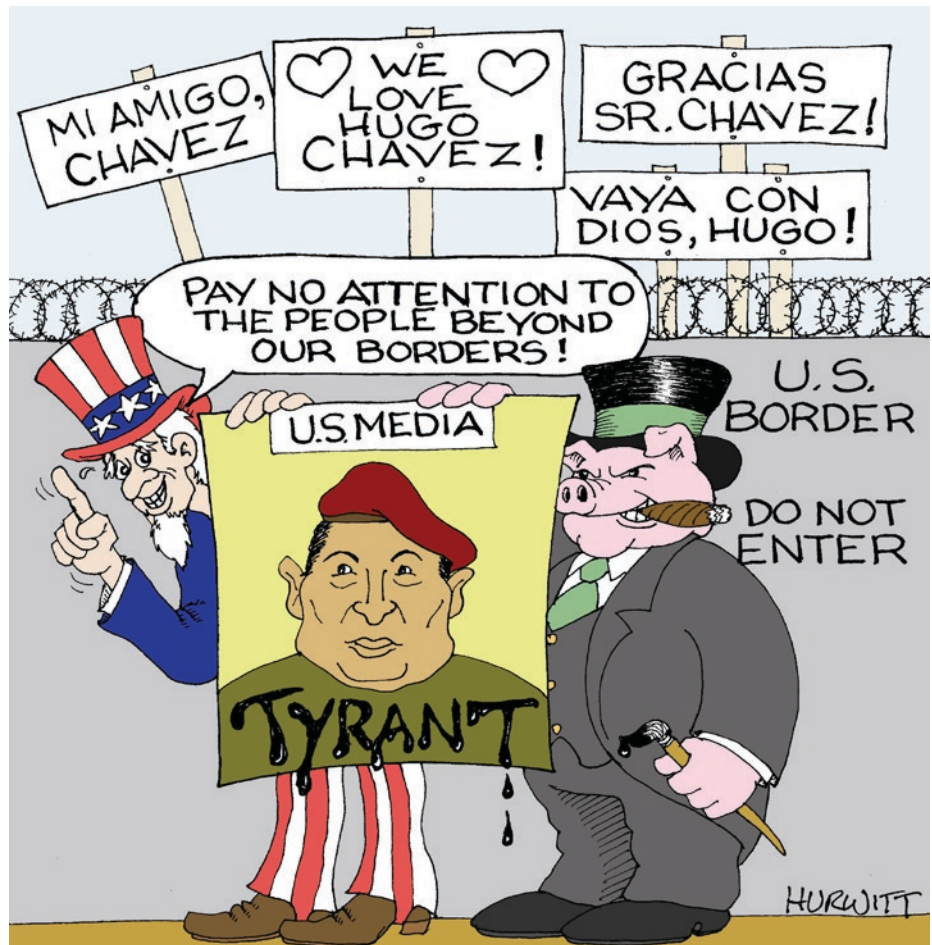
I have to admit: standing among the Santa-Claus-red trucks, I felt as triumphant as if I had been awarded *el Premio Miguel de Cervantes* – not because I had joined in

the grand old tradition; no, rather because I had exited with the coveted roseta. I popped Glenn Miller’s “In the Mood” into the Jeep’s stereo, said a quick prayer to Che Guevara that it would start, turned the ignition (successfully), and tore out as fast as an engine on natural gas can tear.

Except for one cola I had downed at the San Francisco premiere of *Apocalypse Now*, I hadn’t had a soft drink since 1965. I stopped on Juan de la Rosa for a Coke. **CT**

*Chellis Glendinning is the author of five books, including **Off the Map: An Expedition Deep into Empire and the Global Economy and Chiva: A Village Takes on the Global Heroin Trade**. She may be contacted via www.chellisglendinning.org. This essay originally appeared at <http://counterpunch.org>*

HURWITT'S EYE
Mark Hurwitt



Scale implosion

James Howard Kunstler on the inevitable decline of big box shopping centres

Back in the day when big box retail started to explode upon the American landscape like a raging economic scrofula, I attended many a town planning board meeting where the pro and con factions faced off over the permitting hurdle. The meetings were often raucous and wrathful and almost all the time the pro forces won – for the excellent reason that they were funded and organized by the chain stores themselves (in an early demonstration of the new axioms that money-is-speech and corporations are people, too!).

The chain stores won not only because they flung money around – sometimes directly into the wallets of public officials – but because a sizeable chunk of every local population longed for the dazzling new mode of commerce. “We Want Bargain Shopping” was their rallying cry. The unintended consequence of their victories through the 1970s and beyond was the total destruction of local economic networks, that is, Main Streets and downtowns, in effect destroying many of their own livelihoods. Wasn’t that a bargain, though?

Despite the obvious damage now visible in the entropic desolation of every American home town, WalMart managed to install itself in the pantheon of American Dream icons, along with apple pie, motherhood, and Coca Cola. In most of the country there is no other place to buy goods (and no other place to get

a paycheck, scant and demeaning as it may be). America made itself hostage to bargain shopping and then committed suicide. Here we find another axiom of human affairs at work: people get what they deserve, not what they expect. Life is tragic.

The older generations responsible for all that may be done for, but the momentum has now turned in the opposite direction. Though the public hasn’t grasped it yet, WalMart and its kindred malignant organisms have entered their own yeast-overgrowth death spiral. In a now permanently contracting economy the big box model fails spectacularly. Every element of economic reality is now poised to squash them. Diesel fuel prices are heading well north of \$4 again. If they push toward \$5 this year you can say goodbye to the “warehouse on wheels” distribution method. (The truckers, who are mostly independent contractors, can say hello to the re-po men come to take possession of their mortgaged rigs.) Global currency wars (competitive devaluations) are about to destroy trade relationships. Say goodbye to the 12,000 mile supply chain from Guangzhou to Hackensack. Say goodbye to the growth financing model in which it becomes necessary to open dozens of new stores every year to keep the credit revolving.

Then there is the matter of the American customers themselves. The WalMart shop-

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DEATH SPIRAL

.....
The coming implosion of big box retail implies tremendous opportunities for young people to make a livelihood in the imperative rebuilding of local economies
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pers are exactly the demographic that is getting squashed in the contraction of this phony-baloney corporate buccaneer parasite revolving credit crony capital economy. Unlike the Federal Reserve, WalMart shoppers can't print their own money, and they can't bundle their MasterCard and Visa debts into CDOs to be fobbed off on Scandinavian pension funds for quick profits. They have only one real choice: buy less stuff, especially the stuff of leisure, comfort, and convenience.

The potential for all sorts of economic hardship is obvious in this burgeoning dynamic. But the coming implosion of big box retail implies tremendous opportunities for young people to make a livelihood in the imperative rebuilding of local economies. At this stage it is probably discouraging for them, because all their life programming has conditioned them to be hostages of giant corporations and so to feel helpless. In a town like the old factory village I live in (population 2500) few of the few remaining young adults might venture to open a retail operation in one of the dozen-odd vacant storefronts on Main Street. The presence of K-Mart, Tractor Supply, and Radio Shack a quarter mile west in the strip mall would seem to mock their dim inklings that something is in the wind. But K-Mart will close over 200 boxes this year, and Radio Shack is committed to shutter around 500 stores. They could be gone in this town well before Santa Claus starts checking his lists. If they

go down, opportunities will blossom. There will be no new chain store brands to replace the dying ones. That phase of our history is over.

What we're on the brink of is scale implosion. Everything gigantic in American life is about to get smaller or die. Everything that we do to support economic activities at gigantic scale is going to hamper our journey into the new reality. The campaign to sustain the unsustainable, which is the official policy of US leadership, will only produce deeper whirls of entropy. I hope young people recognize this and can marshal their enthusiasm to get to work. It's already happening in the local farming scene; now it needs to happen in a commercial economy that will support local agriculture.

The additional tragedy of the big box saga is that it scuttled social roles and social relations in every American community. On top of the insult of destroying the geographic places we call home, the chain stores also destroyed people's place in the order of daily life, including the duties, responsibilities, obligations, and ceremonies that prompt citizens to care for each other. We can get that all back, but it won't be a bargain. **CT**

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*James Howard Kunstler's latest book is **Too Much Magic: Wishful Thinking, Technology and the State of the Nation.** This article originally appeared at <http://kunstler.com>*



Proved innocent, but still in jail

Mark Clemson tells the unbelievable story of a man who was sentenced to life imprisonment although he was in jail when double murder was committed

Daniel Taylor was in police custody when a November 1992 double murder took place in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood – but cops and prosecutors accused him of being involved anyway, and sent him to prison for it. Twenty years later, Mark Clements, a victim of police torture and wrongly convicted himself, tells the story of an innocent man who is still in jail.

The State of Illinois has been labeled the wrongful conviction capital of the US, and when you read about the case of Daniel Taylor – a Black Chicagoan who has spent more than half of his life in prison for a crime he couldn't have committed – you'll understand why.

In 1992, Taylor was 17 years old and a resident of the Maryville youth shelter. He was known to police to be a gang member. According to police records, at 6:30 p.m. on November 16, 1992, he was arrested for disorderly conduct – officers from District 23 claimed they witnessed him causing a street disturbance. He was put in a lockup and not released until he posted a bond. He didn't emerge from jail until after 10 p.m.

At 8:43 p.m., while Taylor was behind bars, a double murder was committed

in the Uptown neighborhood. The apartment where the two victims were found dead was known by neighbors to be connected to drugs and prostitution.

Police quickly identified a man named Dennis Mixon as having been involved in the murders – an eyewitness said she saw Mixon among a group of men leaving the scene after the shootings. Even so, Mixon wouldn't be arrested until the following March.

Around two weeks later, police arrested 15-year-old Lewis Gardner and 19-year-old Akia Phillips on drug charges. During interrogation, the two teenagers confessed to being lookouts when the murders were committed, and named six others they said were involved, one of them being Daniel Taylor.

At 2 a.m. the next morning, police roused Taylor from his sleep at a Department of Children and Family Services group home and took him to the police station at Belmont and Western.

False confession

Taylor initially denied any knowledge of the crime, but later gave detectives a confession that ran to 27 pages. No advocate for the teenager was present during the interrogation – Taylor says he was handcuffed to a chair, struck with a flashlight and

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At 8:43 p.m., while Taylor was behind bars, a double murder was committed in the Uptown neighborhood
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Prosecutors claimed that the arrest report and bond slip were wrong, and that police at the Town Hall station were covering up for having released Taylor from custody early
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threatened with worse unless he confessed. Taylor later said he decided to tell the detectives what they wanted to hear, putting together details of the crime from their questioning – and from Akia Phillips’s statement, which the cops gave him to read. In his false confession, Taylor said that he had held down one of the victims while she was shot.

Taylor was put in a lineup, and the witness who saw four men come out of the building after the shootings said she had seen Taylor around the neighborhood, but not the night of the murders. She later told *Chicago Tribune* reporters that police pressured her to identify Taylor and several other suspects, but she refused.

Nevertheless, the cops had Taylor’s confession. He was charged with murder, as a juvenile. The jury voted to convict him and his co-defendants, and he was sentenced to life in prison.

Incredibly, the court heard evidence proving Taylor couldn’t have participated in the murders. According to Tribune reporter Steve Mills:

“Taylor’s lawyer, Nathan Diamond-Falk, showed jurors an enlarged arrest report and bond slip showing Taylor was arrested two hours before the 8:45 p.m. murders, taken to the now-shuttered Town Hall police station at Halsted and Addison Streets, and was not released until 10 p.m. Police officers from the station testified in Taylor’s defense, but the testimony was less than robust in part because Taylor’s lawyer did not have all of the documents generated in the case.”

Basically, prosecutors claimed that the arrest report and bond slip were wrong, and that police at the Town Hall station were covering up for having released Taylor from custody early. The confession by Taylor proved he was involved, they claimed.

Yet we now know – after revelations about police torture under former Com-

mander Jon Burge, but also about coerced confessions in many other circumstances – that Chicago cops specialized in getting suspects, many of them young, poor and African American, to confess to crimes they didn’t commit. In this particular murder case, all eight defendants made confessions that implicated the others, but seven of the eight – all except for Mixon – have since maintained their innocence.

Prosecutors at the trial could have questioned the confessions or stopped the drive to put Taylor and the other men behind bars, but they were politically ambitious – Thomas Needham, for instance, became a top aide to former Mayor Richard Daley, then a top Police Department lawyer and now is in private practice – and wanted the convictions more than they wanted justice.

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Mother was an addict

The story of Taylor’s life also shows why he might have confessed falsely – his childhood years were vulnerable. Taylor’s mother was addicted to drugs and lost custody of her son. “Being in the state, having no family that’s your blood, it gets to you sometimes,” he said of his life in the DCFS group home to Steve Mills. “It’s almost like jail. It’s not really home.”

Taylor turned to the Vice Lords about three months before he was arrested for the murder – his friends were Vice Lords, he said, so it made sense to him to join them. They sold drugs, mostly small amounts of cocaine and marijuana – which is how Taylor came to be known to police patrolling in the Uptown area.

In February of last year, further evidence of Taylor’s innocence came to light – files obtained by the Illinois Attorney General show that the assistant state’s attorney who took Taylor’s confession had been informed at the time by police that Taylor had been in lockup, but this

documentation was concealed from the defense.

Taylor is currently represented by Karen Daniel of the Northwestern University School of Law's Center on Wrongful Convictions. Daniel has filed a new petition arguing that Taylor is innocent and should be released immediately or granted a new trial, based on the evidence concealed by prosecutors for two decades.

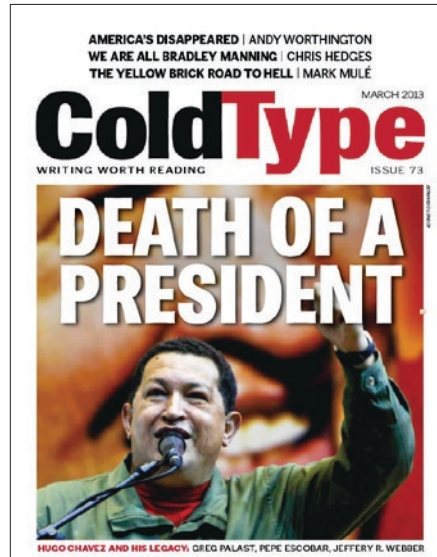
There is no doubt that Daniel Taylor is innocent of the crime he has spent more than 20 years in prison for. Yet he must keep waiting to find out if the current

Cook County State's Attorney Anita Alvarez will correct this injustice and free him. **CT**

Mark Clements was 16-years-old when he was tortured into confessing to crimes he did not commit by police officers under the command of Jon Burge. He spent 27 years in prison for arson and murder – and was released last August after the circumstances surrounding his “confession” came to light.

Originally published by Socialist Worker at <http://socialistworker.org>

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Letter from a drone protester's jail cell

Anti-war protester **Brian Terrell** finds time for a 'little way' of contemplation

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A federal prison since 1988, this place retains the appearance of the small, private, liberal arts college in a small Mid-American town that it once was
.....

Greetings from the Federal Prison Camp in Yankton, South Dakota! As of this writing, I am two months into a six month sentence imposed due to my protest of war crimes committed by remote control from Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri against the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Betsy accompanied me here to Yankton on November 29, and that evening the Emmaus House Catholic Worker community, Beth Preheim, Michael Sprong and Dagmar Hoxie, hosted an evening of music, good food and good company to see me off. Activists from around the Midwest attended, including some sisters from the Benedictine monastery here.

In the morning after a great breakfast and Gospel prayer, Betsy and Dagmar and Michael, along with Renee Espeland and Elton Davis, Catholic Workers from Des Moines, and Jerry Ebner, a Catholic Worker from Omaha, walked a "last mile" with me to the gate of the prison where I expect to remain until the end of May.

An article in that morning's *Yankton Daily Press and Dakotan*, "Terrell: American Drone Strikes Must Stop", based on an interview from the previous day, was widely read by prisoners and keepers alike and made for an interesting reception. It helped to have a sympathetic introduction to the local paper with a clear explanation of the issues that

led me to Whiteman and then to Yankton.

While I have been in prison camps like this on several occasions before, most of my experience of incarceration has been in county and city jails, crowded, dank, airless, filthy, windowless boxes of concrete and steel, with hideous acoustics and where weeks can go by without a breath of fresh air. Yankton is not like this.

This prison camp occupies the derelict shell of Yankton College founded in 1881. For more than a century Yankton College operated under the motto, "Christ for the world."

A federal prison since 1988, this place retains the appearance of the small, private, liberal arts college in a small Mid-American town that it once was. Most buildings are on the historical register and still bear the names of alumni and benefactors. The class of 1938 is still memorialized in a marble tablet set in the sidewalk that hundreds of convicts walk each day.

The well kept grounds are especially lovely in a snowfall and all reports are that in the spring and summer the foliage and flowers are splendid. This bucolic illusion is shattered every few minutes by the rude squawk and squeal of the public address system barking out orders and summoning inmates by name and number.

In its present incarnation, the "campus" is demographically far more diverse and

colorful than the student body of even the most progressive of small institutions of higher learning. On the other hand, there is no church college so puritanical and rigid as to impose a dress code austere as this prison's, with its uniform and unrelieved khaki, olive drab and grey. I do not know if the old Yankton College was co-ed, but it definitely is not now.

My fellow prisoners are all convicted of non-violent federal crimes, mostly drug related and most based on the most tenuous of conspiracy allegations. Most are here for many years, many for decades. Few have been found guilty at trial by judge or jury as most plead out to avoid even harsher penalties. These are victims of the "war on drugs", in reality merely one front in the US Empire global war against the poor.

Maintaining white domination

Michelle Alexander's bestselling book, *The New Jim Crow*, effectively indicts America's penchant for mass-incarceration as the successor to slavery and "separate but equal", the latest tactic of a racist society to maintain white dominance.

Many of the other middle aged white men here are "white collar" criminals, not more guilty though than their peers who are outside and making out like bandits in business and finance. A corrupt and morally bankrupt political and economic system requires scapegoats, a ritual bleeding as it were, to maintain a façade of rectitude and self-correction.

At Christmas, especially, the cost of this senseless incarceration on these men and their loved ones was painfully apparent.

I am an anomaly here, and not only as the lone antiwar protestor. My own unlawful detention will only be for a few months compared to the years of the others. As a petty offender, I will not be followed when I leave by a felon's record or by years more invasive supervised release. In many ways, I am a visitor in this place.

There is a lot to do though to pass the time. For the first time in years, I am on a payroll, 11 cents an hour, sweeping and mopping two flights of stairs twice a day. Three afternoons a week I take an aerobics class and in all but the worst weather, I walk for an hour or two around a quarter mile track. It is a blessing and a pleasure that I cannot take for granted, walking under the trees and the evening sky. The ubiquitous surveillance cameras cannot spoil this.

The track is where I can find something close to solitude, especially when the temperature is in the single digits and the snow is blowing. The track also offers the rare opportunity for two people to have an almost private conversation.

Since I am over 50 years old, I am privileged to occupy a lower bunk in a cinder-block warehouse with 60 inmates to a room. Most inmates are generous and tolerant and try hard to accommodate one another in tight quarters. Still, living with 60 guys is living with 60 guys.

The library is heavy on crime novels but with a selection of classics. With books and magazines from the outside and a subscription to the *New York Times*, I have plenty to read.

Like the old coal miners' company store, the commissary stocks a limited selection sold at inflated prices to a captive clientele. My biggest expense is telephone time at a predatory rate of 25 cents a minute.

Stamps are rationed to 20 per week and can't be sent from outside, and so I cannot begin to reply to the hundreds of cards and letters I've received. I am deeply grateful for each message of solidarity and friendship, of each promise of prayers.

Most encouraging is the daily word that comes in the mail of growing awareness, outrage and resistance to drone warfare. Friends recount for me a movement of protest growing in numbers and creativity in communities around the country and abroad.

In the weeks before my "surrender" to

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Most inmates are generous and tolerant and try hard to accommodate one another in tight quarters. Still, living with 60 guys is living with 60 guys

I am involuntarily and against my nature consigned to a “little way” of contemplation for this little while.

authorities, I met with activists in Minnesota, Illinois, New York, Missouri and Iowa, speaking in churches, halls, and taverns and gave countless interviews to the media. This all came to an abrupt halt as the prison doors shut behind me.

With so much going on, it is hard to be caged up here on the frozen prairie, a discipline that chafes. I confess to feeling envious of those doing the work and at times feel as though I have abandoned them. I find some consolation deep in the old Catholic tradition that holds that one contributes to the good works of others through prayer and by “offering up” deprivations and humiliations for their intentions. From this penitential place, I have nothing more to give.

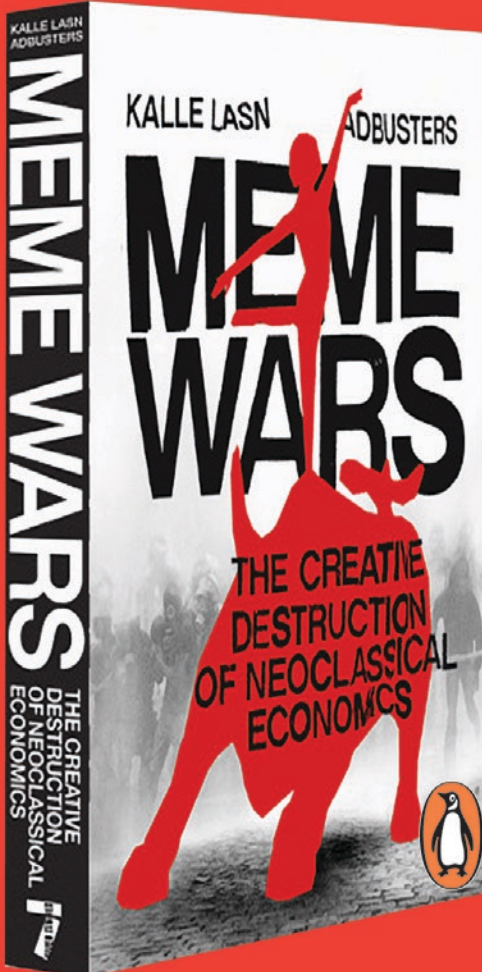
I am involuntarily and against my nature consigned to a “little way” of contemplation for this while.

My thanks to all who help spread the word and who give material, emotional and spiritual support for me here in prison and for the folks on the farm in Maloy. We are well provided for.

Your loving prisoner 06125-026,
Brian

CT

Brian Terrell, a co-coordinator of *Voices for Creative Nonviolence*, was sent to jail for having nonviolently protested drone wars. Write to him at **BRIAN TERRELL 06125-026, FPC YANKTON, FEDERAL PRISON CAMP, P.O. BOX 700, YANKTON, SD 57078**



HEY ALL YOU STUDENTS, OUTLIERS AND WORLD CHANGERS OUT THERE,

Meme Wars: The Creative Destruction of Neoclassical Economics is a textbook for the future of economics – a future that realizes the reality of economics is about people, not curves. Featuring the likes of Herman Daly, Joseph Stiglitz, John Ralston Saul and Steve Keen, and art by Edward Burtynsky, Chris Jordan and Jonathan Barnbrook, *Meme Wars* relays a powerful paradigm shift – away from neoclassical left-cortex logic freaks toward something new.

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Peace through weakness

Edward S. Herman challenges the assumption that national security is best attained through the barrel of a gun

One of the agreed-on truths of the US political establishment is that peace results from adequate strength, which will provide us with “national security” as well as other benefits. This was a favorite Reaganite slogan, repeated recently by Paul Ryan, who said that “Peace through strength is not just a slogan. It’s not just something we say, it’s what we do. It’s our doctrine.” (Mitchell Landsberg, “Paul Ryan Fires up Colorado Crowd with Focus on Military,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 21, 2012.)

As Ryan indicates peace-through-strength is “what we [i.e., the leaders of the United States] do,” with this doctrine internalized and kept operational by Democratic as well as Republican politicians. This doctrine and policy thrust is obviously very convenient, even essential, to the military-industrial-complex (MIC), which stands ready, willing and able to increase national strength in the interest of peace, as well as for bonanzas of profits, higher salaries, jobs, honor, and the security and operational freedom of Israel and other friends and clients.

One major difficulty with this peace-through-strength doctrine, however, is that the underlying set of vested interests that supposedly implement it may find actual war serving their interests better than peace. War means even more business, prestige and power for the MIC, so that while its

leaders and publicists may stress the peace aim for public relations purposes they may really work to subvert peace. Threats of demonized enemies and contrived fears of terrorists in themselves will help enlarge budgets, but actually engaging in wars and attacks on these enemies increase budgets further. The wars may also enlarge spheres of control of the state supposedly only seeking peace and security, which may greatly increase the privileged access of US transnationals to energy resources and growing markets. Thus, if strength brings war rather than peace this may be seen as good, at least for some and at least in the short-run.

A related point stressed by Gareth Porter in his *Perils of Dominance* (University of California: 2005), with the book subtitled “Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam,” is that a great excess of military power leads to more aggressive behavior, effectively refusing to negotiate (with insistence on de facto surrender), and ending up more frequently in wars, often Orwellianized into wars for peace. And this structural and vested interest bias makes for a preference for escalation during wars rather than any negotiated settlement.

The “perils of dominance” emphasized by Porter adds to the war-making proclivities of a system where an MIC and/or military-fighting-oriented elite needs and wants wars. What they prefer is a nice series of

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Threats of demonized enemies and contrived fears of terrorists in themselves will help enlarge budgets, but actually engaging in wars and attacks on these enemies increase budgets further

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A reduction in the imbalance of nuclear weapons capability in the Middle East might well reduce the probability of war
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small wars like the ones on Serbia in 1999, Panama in 1989-1990, or the first Persian Gulf war on Iraq in 1990-1991, where the demonized enemy can be beaten quickly and with relatively moderate financial cost and a low attacker body count (zero in the bombing war on Serbia). But there is always the risk that what seemed like potential cake-walks drag on for a long time and with large financial and casualty costs to the aggressor (those suffered by the target, classically “mere gooks,” are ignorable for the leaders of the aggressor).

The ongoing Iran crisis has been an object lesson in these perils. Both Israel and the United States have threatened Iran with military attack and regime change, and Israel has clearly been trying to coax or pressure the United States into going to war with Iran on its behalf. Iran does not have a single nuclear weapon, and is subject to almost continuous IAEA inspections on its nuclear program, whereas Israel has been able with Western assistance to build up a sizable nuclear arsenal and remain outside of IAEA jurisdiction and free from inspections. Iran is, however, an independent power in an area that the United States wants to dominate as thoroughly as possible and where Israel wants freedom of action to attack any neighbor or group (i.e., “terrorists”) that challenge its “Greater Israel” dispossession process.

The alleged Iran nuclear “threat” is in large measure an excuse for hostile US-Israeli actions toward Iran that are based on the threat of an independent power source, with the IAEA and EU following in lockstep as the servile instruments they are. (See Herman and Peterson, *The Iran ‘Threat’ in a Kafkaesque World*, Journal Of Palestine Studies, Autumn, 2012.) But it is true that an Iranian nuclear weapons capability would threaten the United States and Israel – not of any Iranian offensive attack, which would be suicidal, but of an Iranian defense capability that might constrain US and especially Israeli aggression rights in the area.

Serious self-defense would be the Iranian threat. Israeli analyst Martin van Creveld stated in a much quoted statement (but not in the NYT) that the Iranians “would be crazy” if they didn’t try to acquire nuclear weapons. He was clearly not referring to any enhanced ability to attack, but rather to an ability to defend. In other words, a reduction in the imbalance of nuclear weapons capability in the Middle East might well reduce the probability of war.

The policy conclusion from all this, and implicit advice to activists and democrats, is that it is urgently important to fight very hard against the quest for military superiority and dominance, which means fighting against the permanent war system, the vast base network, and the high budgets of the MIC. Peace is by no means assured by “weakness” (which as used here includes military preparedness limited to genuine defense needs), but weakness means a diminished seeming ease of knocking over weak targets, reduced plausibility in pushes for wars by powerful vested interests, and a loss in the credibility of phony PR diplomacy and “peace processes” designed to evade peace.

In his empire-friendly book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (Viking: 2011), Steven Pinker makes his empirical case for the existence of a unique “Democratic Peace” in our time by defining that peace as one between the great democracies, completely ignoring in this definition their continuous attacks on the lesser countries that are more or less easily bullied. He also starts his analysis of this Democratic Peace in 1946, right after a gigantic war that took over 50 million lives. But most interesting, perhaps, is his focus on our individual natures as the root of the new peacefulness, allegedly steadily improving in the Civilized West, except for the savages in the ghettos who are fortunately (in his view) increasingly pulled off the streets and put in prisons; this is part of what he calls “The Civilizing Process” (see his chap-

ter 3), and in a 2007 Technology Entertainment Design (TED) lecture, Pinker publicly thanked Bill Clinton for his pioneering effort in large-scale imprisonment: "President Clinton, if you're here, thank you."

But Pinker completely ignores institutional factors making for war, such as the growth of the MIC and the perils of dominance. You may be sure that he never cites Gareth Porter, Andrew Bacevich or Chalmers Johnson in his book featuring the decline in violence. And the role of slavery and the subsequent institutionalized racism in producing the ghettos and crime in the streets is also essentially ignored by Pinker. This is social science at its ideological pit.

Gay and Women's Rights to Kill

We may be living in a period when civil liberties are under attack, a global war on terror has been institutionalized, drone bombings increase and drone bases proliferate, and the entire globe has been declared a US "free fire zone," but pieces of social progress continue to take place, even if some are problematic. Gay rights have steadily advanced, and perhaps women's rights as well. President Obama has pushed for gay rights in the military, and now we have the Joint Chiefs eliminating the 1994 official ban on women's combat role in US wars. These are a strange form of progress, a new right to participate in killing people abroad,

and they are accompanied by Katherine Bigelow's putting a positive spin not only on torture, but on a woman's heroic role in the torture machinery (see Susie Day's "Zero Dark Thirty: the Woman's Guide to Success Through Torture," MRZine, January 28, 2013).

My tentative interpretation of this form of progress is that granting these social advances is easier than stopping the war machine, and that they may be advanced at least in part by the desire to placate political constituencies that do not like or are clearly harmed by war, buying their acquiescence or at least keeping them a bit more quiet. I interpret Lyndon Johnson's civil rights and war on poverty energy in the same fashion: at least in part buying support for or toleration of his steady escalation of the war in Vietnam. Obviously the social advances of the gay minority and still discriminated-against female (possible) majority are forms of progress, but wouldn't it be wonderful if they weren't engineered in any way to protect the outward explosion of "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today" (Martin Luther King)?

CT

Edward S. Herman is an economist and media analyst with a specialty in corporate and regulatory issues as well as political economy and the media.

This essay originally appeared at <http://www.zcommunications.org/zmag>

The role of slavery and the subsequent institutionalized racism in producing the ghettos and crime in the streets is also essentially ignored by Pinker

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Workers under siege

Unions are the only organised line of defence against the right wing assault on social programs and government regulations, writes **Linda McQuaig**

.....
Hard-fought union gains – job security, workplace pensions, as well as broader social goals like public pensions and unemployment insurance – have been under fierce attack by the corporate world
.....

Although much denigrated by the right these days, union activists are, as the old saying notes, “the people who brought you the weekend.”

The right apparently wants you to believe that the weekend is now out of date.

Canada’s Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Ontario Conservative Leader Tim Hudak, along with influential members of the corporate and media world, are hostile to unions, rarely missing an opportunity to portray union leaders as autocratic “bosses.”

Yet, if you’re middle class, a union probably helped you or your ancestors get there. In the 19th century, workers typically toiled 10 to 16 hours a day, six or seven days a week. Unions fought to change that. In the decades that followed the Great Depression, unions won higher wages and better working conditions for their members, setting a standard with ripple effects that led to a better deal for all workers.

But in recent decades, many of the precious, hard-fought union gains – job security, workplace pensions, as well as broader social goals like public pensions and unemployment insurance – have been under fierce attack by the corporate world (where workers really are under the thumb of unelected “bosses”).

Part of the strategy has been to pit worker against worker. So, as private sector work-

ers have lost ground, they’ve been encouraged to resent public sector workers, whose unions have generally been stronger and better able to protect them.

With workers increasingly baited into a dogfight against each other, it’s been easier to make the case that unions are no longer relevant.

But, given the intensity of the attack, unions are likely more necessary than ever. If you’ve grown attached to the weekend, not to mention the eight-hour day, this probably isn’t the time to throw unions under the bus.

In fact, they’re really the only organized line of defence against the broad right-wing assault on a wide range of social programs and government regulations important to most Canadians.

We’re told that many of these benefits and protections have to be cut back to make our economy more flexible in an era of globalization.

In fact, what is referred to as “globalization” is simply the set of laws governing the global economy. There’s nothing natural or inevitable about these laws, which have been crafted by corporate interests and their think-tanks. They just reflect the growing political muscle of the corporate elite, which has reshaped international and domestic laws in recent decades to their own advantage.

One of the most outrageous attacks on hard-won benefits was Harper's decision last year to raise public pension eligibility by two years. Most commentators supported the move, noting that people are living longer.

But this misses the point. The real question is: as the country has grown richer, who should benefit? Under the more egalitarian system that prevailed during the early postwar decades, the economic benefits would have been more widely shared and could have been used to actually lower the retirement age (or extend holiday time, such as in Scandinavia, where the norm is six weeks paid vacation).

A few decades ago, North Americans often whimsically posed the question: in the future, what will we do with all our leisure time?

As it turned out, our leisure time shrunk (with two years of it now snatched away by the Harper government).

Indeed, instead of being widely shared, almost all the benefits of economic growth in recent decades have been siphoned off by a small corporate elite.

It's that same corporate elite, and its political and media supporters, who now assure us that unions are no longer relevant.

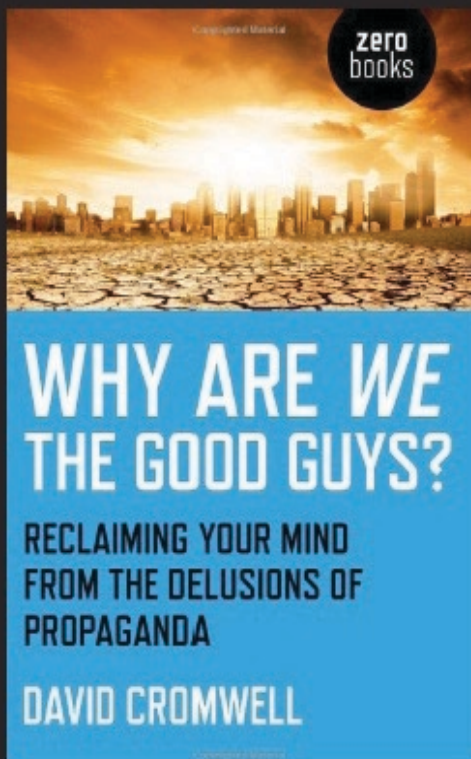
This is curious, since corporations still see the wisdom in collective action for themselves; they band together to form business lobby groups. But, when it comes to working people, collective action is apparently out of date.

Lined up against today's worker is the corporate world – the most powerful set of interests in history.

But, hey, why would a worker want to act collectively when she could take on this corporate Goliath all on her own? **CT**

*Linda McQuaig's latest book is **The Trouble With Billionaires**. This article was originally published by the Toronto Star*

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Under the more egalitarian system that prevailed during the early postwar decades, the economic benefits would have been more widely shared and could have been used to actually lower the retirement age



"One of the beacons in a politically dark world is the light cast by a few who analyse and reveal how journalism works in the cause of power. David Cromwell has pride of place in this company" – John Pilger

WHY ARE WE THE GOOD GUYS?

Reclaiming your Mind from the Delusions of Propaganda

DAVID CROMWELL

\$26.95

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The Yellow Brick Road – to Hell

A musician accepts a non-union tour of *The Wizard of Oz* and learns what exploitation is really like. **Mark Mulé** tells his story

.....
The producer's insane schedule was literally putting his employees' lives at risk.
.....

The Yellow Brick Road To Hell started last year when I was forced through my financial circumstances to play drums and percussion on a non-union tour of “The Wizard of Oz.” The tour gave me an old-fashioned schooling on what union membership is truly about. It turns out that wages and benefits are just the tip of the iceberg of what the union does for us.

First things first – the money. The pay for this non-union tour was about a third of what I had always made on the union touring contract (called “Pamphlet B,” for those in the know.) Also, on a non-union tour, there’s no overtime pay. And no rehearsal pay. It’s just a straight, flat salary.

Let me put this into perspective. On tech rehearsal days, we had to play “10 out of 12,” meaning 10 hours of playing with two hours to forage for grub.

But it wasn’t just about the hours. It was about the days. There was a period on this tour when we played 13 towns in 14 days while travelling thousands of miles.

The last five weeks of the tour consisted of a string of consecutive 4 a.m. bus calls, 10 to 14 hour bus rides straight to the venue (often a freezing hockey stadium), followed by five hours’ rest in a hotel room.

The grueling, no-sleep schedule included our bus driver, by the way. I spoke to him about this after he nearly went head-on into a highway divider at more than 60 miles per

hour one morning. “Aren’t you entitled to more down time?” I asked. His answer was that not only was he entitled to it, but required by federal law to have more rest. The producer’s insane schedule was literally putting his employees’ lives at risk.

During this farce of a tour, I was living under a so-called contract that basically said I had no rights.

Now, most of you know that union contracts are rock-solid. If a producer violates a union contract, the union will back you up 100 percent.

A non-union contract is a totally different animal. It’s more like indentured servitude. Here is some actual language from my “agreement”:

MUSICIAN agrees that Employer shall be entitled to Musician’s services exclusively hereunder for the entire Period, excluding breaks, and MUSICIAN shall not render performing services for any party other than the Employer during such period without Employer’s prior written consent. Execution of this contract hereby commits MUSICIAN to the entire time period outlined in Paragraph 1 above.

It’s the last sentence that got me. The tour was scheduled for five-and-a-half months. This sort of bondage was what one might find on a contract between a ship’s captain and a destitute passenger desperate to book passage to the New World in 1697.

Then there was this:

It is agreed that the attached MUSICIAN Handbook will be an integral part of this contract.

Huh? What “handbook?” Nobody said anything about a “handbook.” What’s in this “handbook?” What if there’s a “musician must clean the bus latrine every Wednesday” clause in the “handbook?” It turns out there actually was no handbook – or at least, I never saw one.

The whole contract went on like this. Instead of signing it as is, I took matters into my own hands and penciled in some revisions. No one cared and it made no difference anyway.

All of this was perverse, but the really insane part was that the tour was a nearly endless stream of one-nighters with no scheduled day off. OK, I’m lying. There was exactly one scheduled day off, that being Christmas.

Compare that with the standard union tour agreement, which requires that musicians be given two “golden days” off (no travel, no show) and two additional days off (no show, travel allowed), per month.

“These non-union guys are literally going to put me on a bus for five-and-a-half months straight,” I thought to myself. And they did. Five-and-a-half months and 29,531 miles with no scheduled day off except Christmas. And had there been a theatre (or hockey stadium) available on Christmas, you can bet that day off would have been snatched away like candy from a baby.

Unplanned days off

Luckily, we did scrimp a few unplanned days off from time to time. One time we couldn’t get to the venue because of iced over and closed Canadian mountain roads. (The crew was marooned on the side of the road for many hours and the decision was made for us not to attempt the trip.) We also manufactured several days off by altering the travel schedule. Sometimes we elected to pack up and travel the same night after performing

one or two shows, just so we could create a day off the next day.

Now let’s talk about respect. I overheard some producers refer to the performers as “the dogs.” No kidding. But the actual dogs on this show (the ones who played Dorothy’s dog Toto) actually had better contracts than the humans. Those dogs travelled by airplane whenever the distance was more than a few hundred miles between venues. And I would bet that they made more money too.

But perhaps the greatest evil and the most egregious crime perpetrated against the actors, musicians, and most importantly, the audience, was the use of the virtual orchestra machine. Non-union producers of musical theatre are absolutely in love with this mechanical monstrosity.

Our orchestra consisted of one keyboard (that came with an optional conductor), one drummer/percussionist (nearly optional), one trumpet player (totally optional and only present because he was married to an excellent stage manager who absolutely would not go on this tour without her husband – bless her – and a “tapper.”

As some of you may know, the virtual orchestra machine is operated by tapping a single key on a miniature keyboard which triggers a computer simulated “orchestra.”

Thus the title of “tapper” is given to the operator of this crime against humanity masquerading as “musical accompaniment” for a so-called “Broadway tour.”

The thing sounded like crap, broke down several times per week (even nightly for a while), and sounded like crap (yes, I realize I wrote that twice).

Forcing a musician to play with a virtual orchestra machine is perhaps the most grievous form of torture one can imagine. No matter how good technology gets, nothing can replace the real thing. Playing with that thing crushed my soul. It made me fall out of love with music for the tour.

All of this did not go entirely unnoticed by perhaps the biggest loser when it comes to a non-union tour: the audience.

Our orchestra consisted of one keyboard, one drummer/percussionist, one trumpet player (totally optional and only present because he was married to an excellent stage manager who absolutely would not go on this tour without her husband – bless her – and a “tapper”

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Our audiences paid top dollar to see what was advertised as a Broadway show (it was nothing of the sort). But they were not fooled. In Hartford, an audience member looked down into the pit and saw our entire ensemble, which consisted of the virtual orchestra monstrosity, two trumpets, a flugelhorn, and my drums. That was all of us: four live musicians and a computer. And he exclaimed, somewhere between sarcasm and anger, "Wow, the 'orchestra' sounded perfect!"

There was more. The main backdrop used in the show had gigantic, visible tears in it that were never fixed. And there were some of the rattiest costumes I've ever seen. One critic observed that Glinda's dress looked like it had been balled up and thrown in a closet for years.

In short, the production values of this tour were the lowest of any show I have ever been a part of.

Yet the ticket prices were as high as those for a first-run Broadway tour, in some cases as much as \$120. I calculated the ticket sales for an average week of the tour, and the number I came up with was \$850,000. And that was just an average week. A sold-out weekend in St. Louis at the Fox Theatre, for example, could have had our producers taking in as much as \$1.4 million according to my calculations.

How much profit were our producers really making? I asked our company manager about that. He told me that the weekly overhead (or "nut") for the show was under \$100,000. So we're talking profits that could approach \$1 million in a good week.

This tour was not about good business. It was about business conducted unethically in order to make a killing. It was about greed, pure and simple.

Producers will tell you that there's a new business model for touring musical theatre productions. They will tell you that they simply can't afford the over-the-top "lavish" demands of the unions (like a per diem high enough to pay for a couple of decent meals

per week instead of the endless fast food norm). I don't believe them. Nor should you. Nor should audiences.

I believe you should get what you pay for. Always. I believe in ethical business practices. There is plenty of money to be made in an ethical manner. A producer does not have to pay sweatshop wages and maintain sub-standard production values to make money. There simply is no need or place for the obscene greed that has become so pervasive in this industry and business in general.

That is what a union is all about: maintaining high standards. Sure, a union negotiates the best possible compensation package for its members. That is certainly an important reason for the existence of unions. But a union agreement also helps ensure that the product is the best that it can be. It helps assure a consumer that the product they consume is created by people who give their heart and soul to their life's work.

Too often, employers and right-wing talking heads bombard us with anti-union sentiment based on the false assumption that unions and their members are greedy, lazy and overpaid. I think when those folks make those accusations, they should take a good look in the mirror.

It's all about ethics. A lack of ethics creates a lack of excellence. And in my business I see an alarming number of ethically challenged employers excusing their ethically challenged behavior in order to squeeze more profit from less product. In my opinion, this is the definition of greed. **CT**

.....
Mark Mulé, a drummer and percussionist, he has played for musical theatre his whole life. For the complete story of this "tour from hell," readers can purchase Mulé's e-book, **WOZ A View From the Pit**, which is available from Amazon.com. E-mail Mark Mulé at mmule802@gmail.com.

This story was first published in the January 2013 issue of *Allegro*, the magazine of the New York City musicians' union – <http://Local802afm.org>

Vaya con dios, Hugo Chavez, mi amigo

Greg Palast tells why Hugo Chavez was deemed so dangerous by oil-hungry politicians and greedy businessmen in Venezuela and the United States

Venezuelan President Chavez once asked me why the US elite wanted to kill him. My dear Hugo: It's the oil. And it's the Koch Brothers – and it's the ketchup.

Reverend Pat Robertson said, “Hugo Chavez thinks we're trying to assassinate him. I think that we really ought to go ahead and do it.”

It was 2005 and Robertson was channeling the frustration of George Bush's State Department. Despite Bush's providing intelligence, funds and even a note of congratulations to the crew who kidnapped Chavez (we'll get there), Hugo remained in office, reelected and wildly popular.

But why the Bush regime's hate, hate, HATE of the President of Venezuela?

Reverend Pat wasn't coy about the answer: It's the oil. “This is a dangerous enemy to our South controlling a huge pool of oil.”

A really BIG pool of oil. Indeed, according to Guy Caruso, former chief of oil intelligence for the CIA, Venezuela holds a recoverable reserve of 1.36 trillion barrels, that is, a whole lot more than Saudi Arabia.

If we didn't kill Chavez, we'd have to do an “Iraq” on his nation. So the Reverend suggests, “We don't need another \$200 billion war....It's a whole lot easier to have some of the covert operatives do the job and then get it over with.”

Chavez himself told me he was stunned by Bush's attacks: Chavez had been quite chummy with Bush Senior and with Bill Clinton.

So what made Chavez suddenly “a dangerous enemy”? Here's the answer you won't find in the *New York Times*:

Just after Bush's inauguration in 2001, Chavez's congress voted in a new “Law of Hydrocarbons.” Henceforth, Exxon, British Petroleum, Shell Oil and Chevron would get to keep 70% of the sales revenues from the crude they sucked out of Venezuela. Not bad, considering the price of oil was rising toward \$100 a barrel.

But to the oil companies, which had bitch-slapped Venezuela's prior government into giving them 84% of the sales price, a cut to 70% was “no bueno.” Worse, Venezuela had been charging a joke of a royalty – just one percent – on “heavy” crude from the Orinoco Basin. Chavez told Exxon and friends they'd now have to pay 16.6%.

Clearly, Chavez had to be taught a lesson about the etiquette of dealings with Big Oil.

On April 11, 2002, President Chavez was kidnapped at gunpoint and flown to an island prison in the Caribbean Sea. On April 12, Pedro Carmona, a business partner of the US oil companies and president of the nation's Chamber of Commerce, declared himself President of Venezuela – giving a whole new meaning to the term, “corporate

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On April 11, 2002, President Chavez was kidnapped at gunpoint and flown to an island prison in the Caribbean Sea.
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Chavez had provoked the coup not just by clawing back some of the bloated royalties of the oil companies. It's what he did with that oil money that drove Venezuela's One Percent to violence
.....

takeover.”

US Ambassador Charles Shapiro immediately rushed down from his hilltop embassy to have his picture taken grinning with the self-proclaimed “President” and the leaders of the coup d’état.

Bush’s White House spokesman admitted that Chavez was, “democratically elected,” but, he added, “Legitimacy is something that is conferred not by just the majority of voters.” I see.

With an armed and angry citizenry marching on the Presidential Palace in Caracas ready to string up the coup plotters, Carmona, the Pretend President from Exxon returned his captive Chavez back to his desk within 48 hours.

Chavez had provoked the coup not just by clawing back some of the bloated royalties of the oil companies. It’s what he did with that oil money that drove Venezuela’s One Percent to violence.

In Caracas, I ran into the reporter for a TV station whose owner is generally credited with plotting the coup against the president. While doing a publicity photo shoot, leaning back against a tree, showing her wide-open legs nearly up to where they met, the reporter pointed down the hill to the “ranchos,” the slums above Caracas, where shacks, once made of cardboard and tin, were quickly transforming into homes of cinder blocks and cement.

“He [Chavez] gives them bread and bricks, so they vote for him, of course.” She was disgusted by “them,” the 80% of Venezuelans who are *negro e indio* (Black and Indian) – and poor. Chavez, himself *negro e indio*, had, for the first time in Venezuela’s history, shifted the oil wealth from the privileged class that called themselves “Span-ish,” to the dark-skinned masses.

While trolling around the poor housing blocks of Caracas, I ran into a local, Arturo Quiran, a merchant seaman and no big fan of Chavez. But over a beer at his kitchen table, he told me,

“Fifteen years ago under [then-Presi-

dent] Carlos Andrés Pérez, there was a lot of oil money in Venezuela. The ‘oil boom’ we called it. Here in Venezuela there was a lot of money, but we didn’t see it.”

But then came Hugo Chavez, and now the poor in his neighborhood, he said, “get medical attention, free operations, x-rays, medicines; education also. People who never knew how to write now know how to sign their own papers.”

Chavez’s Robin Hood thing, shifting oil money from the rich to the poor, would have been grudgingly tolerated by the US. But Chavez, who told me, “We are no longer an oil colony,” went further...too much further, in the eyes of the American corporate elite.

Venezuela had landless citizens by the millions – and unused land by the millions of acres tied up, untilled, on which a tiny elite of plantation owners squatted. Chavez’s congress passed in a law in 2001 requiring untilled land to be sold to the landless. It was a program long promised by Venezuela’s politicians at the urging of John F. Kennedy as part of his “Alliance for Progress.”

Plantation owner Heinz Corporation didn’t like that one bit. In retaliation, Heinz closed its ketchup plant in the state of Maturin and fired all the workers. Chavez seized Heinz’ plant and put the workers back on the job. Chavez didn’t realize that he’d just squeezed the tomatoes of America’s powerful Heinz family and Mrs. Heinz’ husband, Senator John Kerry, now US Secretary of State.

Or, knowing Chavez as I do, he didn’t give a damn.

Chavez could survive the ketchup coup, the Exxon “presidency,” even his taking back a piece of the windfall of oil company profits, but he dangerously tried the patience of America’s least forgiving billionaires: The Koch Brothers. How? Well, that’s another story for another day. [Read about it in the book, *Billionaires & Ballot Bandits*. Go to <http://BallotBandits.org>].

Elected presidents who annoy Big Oil have ended up in exile – or coffins: Mossadegh of Iran after he nationalized BP's fields (1953), Elchibey, President of Azerbaijan, after he refused demands of BP for his Caspian fields (1993), President Alfredo Palacio of Ecuador after he terminated Occidental's drilling concession (2005).

"It's a chess game, Mr. Palast," Chavez told me. He was showing me a very long, and very sharp sword once owned by Simon Bolivar, the Great Liberator. "And I am," Chavez said, "a very good chess player."

In the film *The Seventh Seal*, a medieval knight bets his life on a game of chess with the Grim Reaper. Death cheats, of course, and takes the knight. No mortal can indefinitely outplay Death who, this week, Chavez must know, will checkmate the new Bolivar of Venezuela.

But in one last move, the Bolivarian grandmaster played a brilliant endgame, naming Vice-President Nicolas Maduro, as good and decent a man as they come, as heir to the fight for those in the "ranchos."

The One Percent of Venezuela, planning on Chavez's death to return them the power and riches they couldn't win in an election, are livid with the choice of Maduro.

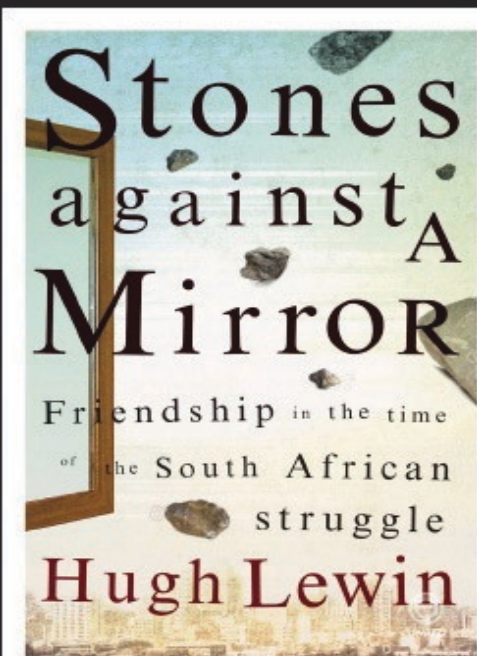
Chavez sent Maduro to meet me in my downtown New York office back in 2004. In our run-down detective digs on Second Avenue, Maduro and I traded information on assassination plots and oil policy.

Even then, Chavez was carefully preparing for the day when Venezuela's *negros e indios* would lose their king – but still stay in the game.

Class war on a chessboard. Even in death, I wouldn't bet against Hugo Chavez. **CT**

Greg Palast covered Venezuela for BBC Television *Newsnight* and Harper's Magazine. Palast is the author of the New York Times bestsellers *Billionaires & Ballot Bandits: How to Steal an Election in 9 Easy Steps*, *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy*, *Armed Madhouse* and the highly acclaimed *Vultures' Picnic*, named Book of the Year 2012 on BBC *Newsnight* Review.

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In one last move, the Bolivarian grandmaster played a brilliant endgame, naming Vice-President Nicolas Maduro, as good and decent a man as they come, as heir to the fight for those in the "ranchos"



"A fearless exploration into the deepest ground – the personal moral ambiguity of betrayal under brutal interrogation – actual betrayal of the writer by the most trusted associate and closest friend"

– Nadine Gordimer

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El Comandante has left the building

Pepe Escobar on the travails and accomplishments of Hugo Chavez

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Western
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Now that would be some movie; the story of a man of the people who rises against all odds to become the political Elvis of Latin America. Bigger than Elvis, actually; a president who won 13 out of 14 national democratic elections. No chance you will ever see such a movie winning an Oscar – much less produced in Hollywood. Unless, of course, Oliver Stone convinces HBO about a cable/DVD special.

How enlightening to watch world leaders' reactions to the death of Venezuela's El Comandante Hugo Chavez. Uruguay's President Jose Mujica – a man who actually shuns 90% of his salary because he insists he covers his basic necessities with much less – once again reminded everyone how he qualified Chavez as “the most generous leader I ever met”, while praising the “fortress of democracy” of which Chavez was a great builder.

Compare it with US President Barack Obama – in what sounds like a dormant cut and paste by some White House intern – reaffirming US support for “the Venezuelan people”. Would that be “the people” who have been electing and re-electing Chavez non-stop since the late 1990s? Or would that be “the people” who trade Martinis in Miami demonizing him as an evil communist?

El Comandante may have left the building – his body defeated by cancer – but the post-mortem demonization will go on forever. One key reason stands out. Venezuela holds the

largest oil reserves in the world. Washington and that crumbling Kafkaesque citadel also known as the European Union sing *All You Need is Love* non-stop to those ghastly, feudal Persian Gulf petro-monarchs (but not to “the people”) in return for their oil. By contrast, in Venezuela El Comandante came up with the subversive idea of using oil wealth to at least alleviate the problems of most of his people. Western turbo-capitalism, as is well known, does not do redistribution of wealth and empowerment of communitarian values.

According to the Foreign Ministry, Vice-President Nicolas Maduro – and not the leader of the National Assembly, Diosdado Cabello, very close to top military leaders – will be temporarily in power before new elections to be held within the next 30 days. Maduro is bound to win them handily; the Venezuelan political opposition is a fragmented joke. This spells out Chavismo without Chavez – much to the chagrin of the immense pan-American and pan-European Chavez-hating cottage industry.

It's not an accident that El Comandante became immensely popular among “the people” of not only vast swathes of Latin America but also all across the Global South. These “people” – not in the Barack Obama sense – clearly saw the direct correlation between neoliberalism and the expansion of poverty (now millions of Europeans are also tasting it). Especially in South America, it was popular reaction against neoliberalism that led – via democratic elec-

tions – to a wave of leftist governments in the past decade, from Venezuela to Bolivia, Ecuador and Uruguay.

The Bush administration – to say the least – abhorred it. They could not do anything about Lula in Brazil – a clever operator who adopted neoliberal clothes (Wall Street loved him) but remained a progressive at heart. Washington – incapable of getting rid of the coup after coup reflexes of the 1960s and 1970s – thought that Chavez was a weak link. Thus came the April 2002 coup led by a military faction, with power given to a wealthy entrepreneur. The US-backed coup lasted less than 48 hours; Chavez was duly restored to power, supported by “the people” (the real thing) and most of the army.

So there’s nothing unexpected in the announcement by Maduro, a few hours before El Comandante’s death, that two US embassy employees would be expelled in 24 hours; Air Attache David Delmonaco, and assistant Air Attache Devlin Costal. Delmonaco was accused of fomenting – what else – a coup with some factions of the Venezuelan military. Those gringos never learn.

Immense suspicion among Chavistas that El Comandante may have been poisoned – a convoluted replay of what happened to Yasser Arafat in 2004 – is also predictable. It could have been highly radioactive polonium-210, as in Arafat’s case. The Hollywood-friendly CIA may have some ideas about that.

The verdict is now open on what exact brand of revolutionary was Chavez. He always praised everyone from Mao to Che in the revolutionary pantheon. He certainly was a very skillful popular leader with a fine geopolitical eye to identify centuries-old patterns of subjugation of Latin America. Thus his constant reference to the Hispanic revolutionary tradition from Bolivar to Marti.

Chavez’s mantra was that the only way out for Latin America would be better integration; thus his impulsion of myriad mechanisms, from ALBA (the Bolivarian Alliance) to Petrocaribe, from the Banco del Sur (the Bank of the South) to UNASUR (the Union of South American countries).

As for his “socialism of the 21st century”, beyond all ideological straitjackets he did more to explore the true spirit of common values – as an antidote to the putrefaction of turbo-charged, financial capitalism – than tons of neo-Marxist academic analyses.

No wonder the Goldman Sachs gang and cohorts saw him as worse than the Black Plague. Venezuela bought Sukhoi fighter jets; entered strategic relationships with BRICS members Russia and China – not to mention other Global South actors; maintains over 30,000 Cuban doctors practicing preventive medicine living in poor communities – what led to a boom of young Venezuelans studying medicine.

Stark numbers tell most of the story that needs to be known. Venezuelan public deficit is a mere 7,4% of GDP. Public debt is 51,3% of GDP – much less than the European Union average. The public sector – defying apocalyptic “communist” accusations – accounts for only 18,4% of the economy; less than state-oriented France and even the whole of Scandinavia. In terms of geopolitics of oil, quotas are established by OPEC; so the fact that Venezuela is exporting less to the US means it’s diversifying its customers (and exporting more and more to strategic partner China).

And here’s the clincher; poverty accounted for 71% of Venezuelan citizens in 1996. In 2010, the percentage had been reduced to 21%. For a serious analysis of the Venezuelan economy in the Chavez era, see here.

Years ago, it took a superb novelist like Garcia Marquez to reveal El Comandante’s secret as The Great Communicator; he was one of them (his “people”, in the not-Barack Obama sense), from the physical appearance to the mannerisms, convivial attitude and language (the same applied to Lula in relation to most Brazilians).

So while Oliver Stone surveys the film market, one will be waiting for a Garcia Marquez to elevate Chavez to novelistic Walhalla. One thing is sure; in terms of a Global South narrative, history will record that El Comandante may have left the building; but then, after him the building was never the same again. **CT**

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The US-backed coup lasted less than 48 hours; Chavez was duly restored to power, supported by “the people” (the real thing) and most of the army

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Pepe Escobar is the author of *Globalistan: How the Globalized World is Dissolving into Liquid War* (Nimble Books, 2007) and *Red Zone Blues: a snapshot of Baghdad during the surge*. His new book, just out, is *Obama does Globalistan* (Nimble Books, 2009). He may be reached at pepeasia@yahoo.com. This article was originally published by Asia Times online.

What is the legacy of Hugo Chavez?

Jeffery R. Webber looks at the life of a towering political figure and asks, what comes next for Venezuela?

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The international legacy of the Venezuelan president for sections of the left has been tarnished by his appalling support of Qaddafi, Assad, Ahmadinejad and the Chinese state
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ON LIVE television, Venezuelan Vice President Nicolás Maduro choked on his words. Hugo Chávez, the improbable president, born in the rural poverty of Sabaneta, in the state of Barinas, in 1954 had died of cancer.

To his wealthy and light-skinned enemies, he was evil incarnate. To many impoverished Venezuelans, his contradictory and eclectic ideology – a labyrinthine blend drawing on the thought of 19th century Simón Bolívar and Ezequiel Zamora, 20th century left-military nationalism and anti-imperialism, Soviet-inflected, bureaucratic Cuban socialism, social Christianity, pragmatic neostructuralist economics and currents of socialism-from-below – made a good deal of sense, at least insofar as he had come from origins like theirs and had made the right sort of enemies.

For sound reasons, the international legacy of the Venezuelan president for sections of the left has been tarnished by his appalling support of Qaddafi, Assad, Ahmadinejad and the Chinese state. But to begin there in seeking an understanding of the profound resonance of his death for the millions upon millions of Venezuelan and Latin American victims of colonial rule, capitalist exploitation and imperial humiliation would be to resolutely miss the point.

There’s something about Chávez that en-

courages a starker-than-usual embrace of mediocrity in the quarters of the establishment press. How else to explain the appeal of Rory Carroll, whose dystopic fantasies about the life and times of Venezuela since 1999 have found their unmitigated expression in the pages of the *Guardian*, *New York Times*, and *New Statesman*, among others, over the last few weeks.

For Carroll, the Venezuelan popular classes have been the mute and manipulable playthings of the “elected autocrat,” whose life in turn is reducible to one part clown, one part monster. If we once imagined that Chávez emerged out of the debauched embrace of neoliberalism by an old rotating political elite ensconced in the traditional AD and COPEI parties in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the concomitant socio-political fissures created by the popular explosion of anti-neoliberal sentiment during the caracazo riots of 1989, and the folkloric rise of a dissident military man to the status of popular hero though a failed coup attempt of 1992 (targeting the status quo), we now stand corrected.

Following Carroll’s view, the idea that Chávez is the result of Chavismo – a pervasive groundswell of demands for social change, national liberation and deeper democracy – becomes a fraud. “We Created Chávez!” – a popular delusion.

“His dramatic sense of his own signifi-

cance,” we learn from Carroll, is rather what “helped bring him to power as the reincarnation of the liberator Simón Bolívar” – the trope of autocratic caudillo, and crocodile charisma. It was this very same “dramatic flair” that “deeply divided Venezuelans,” rather than, say, the uneven and combined development of neoliberal capitalism in a dependent country of the Global South – the trope of manufactured polarization. “He spent extravagantly on health clinics, schools, subsidies and giveaways” – the trope of populist clientelism and the underserving poor. “His elections were not fair” – the trope of creeping authoritarianism. He “dominate[d] airwaves” – the trope of media monopolization. Ultimately, though, his evil was banal, his rule was “in the final analysis,” of “an awful manager.”

“As Venezuela begins a new chapter in its history,” President Barack Obama said in response to the death of Chávez, “the United States remains committed to policies that promote democratic principles, the rule of law, and respect for human rights,” all implicitly absent in the South American country.

“At this key juncture,” Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper noted in the same register, “I hope the people of Venezuela can now build for themselves a better, brighter future based on the principles of freedom, democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights.”

Although disingenuous in the extreme, this was still more measured than Harper’s comments in 2009, just prior to a Summit of the Americas meeting. There he noted that Chávez was representative of certain leftist leaders in the Western Hemisphere who were “opposed to basically sound economic policies, want to go back to Cold War socialism...want to turn back the clock on the democratic progress that’s been made in the hemisphere.”

We are to understand from this that contemporary liberal democracy is the selection of good managers. A proper manager

for the 21st century is presumably something closer to the pliant figure of unelected free-market Italian technocrat Mario Monti, whose loss in the recent Italian elections was mourned by the same media outlets demonizing Chávez. *The Economist* spoke of the stubborn Italian electorate’s “refusal to recognize the underlying causes of Italy’s plight” achieving its full expression in “their refusal to back Mr Monti.”

The tidal wave of anti-Chávez vitriol on behalf of the world’s rulers is rooted in the refusal he represents for the poor and dispossessed, for the exploited and oppressed – a refusal to go on as before, to submit to neoliberal capitalism, and to get on one’s knees before imperialism. It’s true, in other words, that he made an awful manager.

On March 7, 2013, the conservative opposition media reported “hundreds of thousands” in the streets of Caracas mourning their manager’s demise. An editorial in the Mexican daily *La Jornada* speaks of “millions.” A quick search of Google images and Youtube produces a veritable red tide of mourners. Through Carroll’s prism these multitudes must radically misunderstand the legacy of 14 years of Chávez: “the decay, dysfunction and blight that afflict the economy and every state institution.” They must misconceive the “profound uncertainty” the late president has thrust them into. They must be blind to the “bureaucratic malaise and corruption” surrounding them.

Charges of autocracy, clientelism, and decay

Mark Weisbrot, a social-democratic economist based in the U.S., once complained that Venezuela “is probably the most lied-about country in the world.” In 14 years, Chávez won 14 national electoral contests of different varieties, coming out securely on top of 13 of them. According to Jimmy Carter, the former U.S. president, Nobel Prize winner and monitor of 92 elections worldwide in his capacity as director of the Carter Center,

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these Venezuelan contests were the “best in the world.”

In the 2006 presidential race, it was opposition candidate Manuel Rosales who engaged in petty bids of clientelism aimed at securing the votes of the poor. Most notoriously, he offered \$450 per month to 3 million impoverished Venezuelans on personal black credit cards as part of a plan called *Mi Negra*. In what his right-wing critics could only understand as a rare act of agency, the ungrateful would-be recipients apparently aligned themselves on the other side of history, backing Chávez with 62 percent of the vote.

The “suppressed media” mantra is another favorite go-to card of the opposition. In one representative report, the U.S.-based Committee to Protect Journalists claimed that the heavy hand of the Chávez government wielded control over a “media empire.” In actual fact, writes Weisbrot, Venezuelan state television reaches”

“only about 5-8 percent of the country’s audience. Of course, Chávez can interrupt normal programming with his speeches (under a law that predates his administration), and regularly does so. But the opposition still has most of the media, including radio and print media – not to mention most of the wealth and income of the country.”

Walking the downtown streets of the capital in the lead-up to the presidential elections of October 2012, with billboards of right-wing candidate Henrique Capriles Radonski hanging from the lampposts and kiosks overflowing with newspapers beaming headlines on the latest disaster induced by the Chávez regime, even the most spiritual of journalists would strain in vain to find a ghost of Stalin in Caracas.

.....
Back to some basics

At its root, explaining support for Chávez among the lower orders involves neither the complexity of quantum mechanics nor the pop-psychological theory of masses en-

tranced by a charismatic leader.

Venezuela sits on oil. Other petro-states, such as those in the Gulf, have funneled the rent into a grotesque pageantry of the rich – skyscrapers, theme parks and artificial archipelagos – built on the backs of indentured South Asian migrant laborers. They’ve done so, moreover, while aligning geopolitically with the U.S. Empire – backing the wars, and containing the Arab uprisings.

Much to the bizarre dismay of journalists like Ian James, the Venezuelan state in the last 14 years has been forced into different priorities. After recovering from the steep collapse in gross domestic product (GDP) in 2002 and 2003 – hitting -8.9 percent and -7.8 percent respectively as a consequence of political crisis spurred by an unsuccessful coup attempt and business-led oil lockout – GDP soared on high petroleum prices to 18.3 percent, 10.3 percent, 9.9 percent and 8.2 percent in the years 2004-07. There was a drop to 4.8 percent in 2008 as the international oil price took a fourth-quarter plunge from \$118 to \$58 a barrel due to centrifugal waves of the global crisis spreading out from its American and Eurozone epicenters. Within six months, however, world oil prices had largely recovered, and counter-cyclical spending brought the Venezuelan economy up to 4.2 percent growth in 2011 and 5.6 percent in 2012.

After the relative modesty of state policy between 1999 and 2002, the extra-legal whip of the right lit a fire of self-organization in the poor urban barrios of Caracas and elsewhere. The empty shell of Chávez’s electoral coalition in the early years began to be filled out and driven forward in dialectical relation to the spike in organizational capacity from below in the years immediately following 2003.

New forms of popular assembly, rank-and-file efforts in the labor movement, experiments in workers’ control, communal councils, and communes increasingly gave Venezuelan democracy life and body for the first time in decades, perhaps ever. The dis-

possessed were solidly aligned with Chávez in opposition to the domestic escualidos (the squalid ones who supported the coup) and ranged against the multifaceted machinations of US intervention and the pressures of international capital, but they were also rapidly transcending the timid confines of government policy.

From above, more state resources consequently began to flow, feeding an expanding array of parallel health and education systems for the poor. According to official national statistics, the cash income poverty level fell 37.6 percent under Chávez, from 42.8 percent of households in 1999 to 26.7 percent in 2012. Extreme poverty dropped 57.8 percent, from 16.6 percent to 7 percent between 1999 and 2011.

If these income poverty measures are expanded to include welfare improvements from the doubling in college enrolment since 2004, new access to health care for millions, and extensive housing subsidies for the poor, it is easy to see how Carroll's narrative of decay breaks down.[19] This backdrop in its entirety provides a reasoned explanation for the red tide of mourners. But it doesn't explain the challenges ahead, and a socialist left that stops here cedes unnecessary ground to Thermidorian reaction.

Assuming Maduro's victory over the right in forthcoming elections, the pragmatic bal-

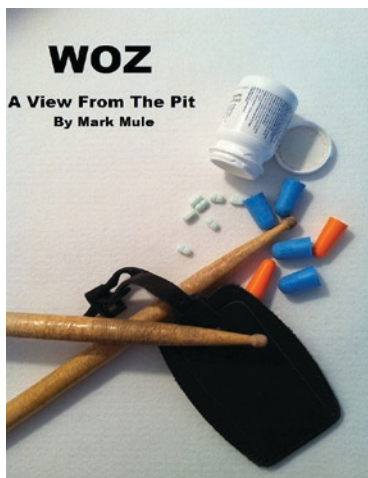
ancing of contradictory elements within the Bolivarian process that Chávez managed to sustain is likely to be much more difficult. The game, ultimately, is not a virtuous circle of mutuality, but a zero-sum competition of classes with opposing interests. The lubricant of oil has blurred this reality temporarily, but different developmental exits in which distinct classes win and lose are likely to come to the fore relatively quickly.

The conservative Chavista right within the state apparatus, the currents of reaction inside the military, the red bureaucrats enriching themselves through manipulation of markets and the union bureaucrats aligned against working-class self-organization and emancipation are the preeminent obstacles of immediate concern. At the same time, the experiences of workers' control, communal councils, communes, and popular assemblies have raised the consciousness and capacities of millions.

A dire turn is therefore not a fait accompli. Today we mourn the death of Chávez, tomorrow we return to the grind for socialism. **CT**

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Jeffery R. Webber, is the author of Red October: Left-Indigenous Struggles in Modern Bolivia. This article was originally published by Socialist Worker at <http://socialistworker.org>

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Ever wonder what really happens behind the scenes of a "Broadway" tour? Ever wonder why musicians, artists and all workers really need a union?

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On great photographs and their impact

It's a bit hard to get balance in the media coverage of grief in Israel's war on Palestine when there's no balance in the fighting, writes **Lawrence Davidson**

.....
Winning the prize with such a photo brought mixed emotions to Hansen, "I was very happy on one level, of course. ... And, I was also very sad. It was a very sad situation"
.....

Some images move us, or at least should move us, to sudden insight into the consequences of our actions. Images of innocent victims of violence, particularly children, should have the capacity to penetrate the most hardened defenses and touch our hearts. However, the truth is that this does not always occur.

Skewed information environments, operating over time, may condition us to react with compassion only to images depicting the suffering of our own community. When many of us see the anguish we have caused an "enemy," we feel not compassion or regret but annoyance. The reaction is: "Why are you showing me that? Don't you know it is their (the other's) own behavior that made us hurt them? It is their own fault."

That we react this way to the horrors we are capable of causing is a sure sign that those same actions have dehumanized us.

On Feb. 15, The World Press Photo of the Year 2012 (Picture 1, next page) was made public. The winning image, selected from 103,481 photos submitted by 5,666 photographers from 124 countries, was taken by Swedish photojournalist Paul Hansen, working for the daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*.

The photo depicts a funeral procession in the narrow streets of Gaza. Two men, visibly expressing the emotions of anguish and anger, are leading the procession. They

are carrying the bodies of two-year-old Sa-haib Hijazi and her four-year old brother Muhammad. Both children are wrapped in white shrouds. Both were killed when their house was hit by an Israeli missile strike last Nov. 20.

In making the announcement of the winning image, Santiago Lyon, vice president and director of photography for The Associated Press, said, "A picture should engage the head, the heart and the stomach. ... This picture for us on the jury reached us on these three levels."

Winning the prize with such a photo brought mixed emotions to Hansen, "I was very happy on one level, of course. ... And, I was also very sad. It was a very sad situation."

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Front page news

On Nov. 15, five days before Hansen's photo was taken, another photograph (*See 2, next page*) showed up on the front page of the *Washington Post*. This image showed Jihad Masharawi, a Palestinian journalist resident in Gaza, in deep anguish as he holds the body of his dead 11-month-old son killed when an Israeli bomb landed on their home.

Mary Ann Golon, the *Post's* director of Photography, explained, "When we looked at the selection that night of Middle East photos from the wire services, this photo



1. The World Press Photo winner of 2012, depicting a funeral procession in Palestine. (Photo Paul Hansen)



2. Jihad Masharawi holds his son's body

got everyone in the gut. ... It went straight to the heart, this sobbing man who just lost his baby son." It should also have spoken to the head, but for some of the *Post's* readers, that was not the case.

The fact that this image found its way onto the front page of the *Washington Post* meant that it was noticed by many more Americans than the Hansen photo. As a consequence Zionist readers and organizations wrote to the paper's ombudsman and the editors, "protesting the photo as

biased."

What they meant was that the *Post* should have somehow made it clear that the Palestinians had "made the Israelis do this" by periodically launching their small rockets into southern Israel. In other words, they wanted to know why the paper had not "balanced the photo of the grieving [Palestinian] father with one of Israelis who had lost a loved one from Gaza rocket fire."

The answer was that, as of that date, there were no such victims in this round of fighting: "No Israeli had been killed by Gaza rocket fire since Oct. 29, 2011, more than a year earlier."

The *Post* readers who complained were obviously ignorant of this fact. It is probably the case that the *Washington Post* itself had done nothing to enlighten them about the asymmetric nature of Israeli-Palestinian violence. However, even if the protesting readers were aware of this factor, it might have made little difference.

The grieving man was a Palestinian and,

.....
The fact that this image found its way onto the front page of the *Washington Post* meant that it was noticed by many more Americans than the Hansen photo

I pointed out that supply and demand curves only determine prices in perfectly competitive markets ... which don't exist



3. Photo of a wounded Israeli baby ended up on PM Netanyahu's Twitter account.

in the eyes of the staunch supporters of Israel, that made him responsible for his own grief. His enemy status delegitimized his emotions and thereby undercut the legitimacy of the photograph.

As soon as the *Washington Post* image appeared, the Israeli military started posting images of wounded Israelis, particularly children. One emotionally moving photo of a wounded baby also ended up on Prime Minister Netanyahu's official Twitter account (See photo 3, above). Thus began a sort of contest of emotionally moving pictures. Which ones would be seen and move the largest audience?

By virtue of their superior firepower and readiness to use it, the Israelis could not win this contest. They simply were out there killing and maiming more people than the Palestinians ever could. Thus it would be Palestinian suffering that was bound to provide the most newsworthy pictures.

This asymmetry was compounded by an apparent need, on the part of some Israelis, to advertise their willingness to be brutal. And so, Israeli images that were at once threatening and disturbing were posted on the Internet.

Sniper's view

For instance, on Feb. 15, an image was posted on Instagram, an image sharing website, by an Israeli soldier, Mir Ostrovski, who apparently belongs to a "sniper unit." It shows



4. Photograph taken by Israeli sniper Mir Ostrovski of the head of a Palestinian boy in the cross-hairs of a rifle scope.

the head and back of a Palestinian boy in the cross-hairs of a rifle. One assumes it is Ostrovski's rifle.

The photo was commented upon by the organization Breaking Silence, which represents Israeli veterans critical of their government's policies toward the Palestinians. "This is what the occupation looks like," the group wrote, "[Such] pictures are testaments to the abuse of power rooted in the military control of another people."

We can be pretty sure that was not Ostrovski's take on the situation. The head in the crosshairs, despite its youth, belonged to an enemy.

The old cliché that tells us a picture is worth a thousand words says nothing about what those words might be. As it turns out, they are not determined by the image alone. They are also determined by the state of mind of the viewer and that mind is, in turn, embedded in an information environment.

In respect to Israel and Palestine, the West's informational environment was once dominated by the Zionist narrative. That is no longer the case. The Palestinian narrative is now also present. That the first two images pasted above are in the news at all is a sign of this change.

As a result, the Zionist readers of the *Washington Post* cry foul and speak of “bias.” It would be better if they stopped complaining and tried to look at those images with an “unbiased” mind.

Perhaps it would help them do so if they considered the words of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* and their application to the Palestinian frame of mind.

*If you prick us, do we not bleed?...
if you poison us, do we not die?
And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?
If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble
you in that....
The villainy you teach me, I will execute, and
it shall go hard but I will better the instruc-
tion.*

The Israelis and their supporters should look long and hard at those images that depict the consequences of their own actions. They should think long and hard on the fact that they may pay for that action in kind. For it is primarily they, the stronger party, who must overcome the barriers to compassion and regret.

CT

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It would be better if Zionist readers of the *Post* stopped complaining and tried to look at those images with an “unbiased” mind

BENDIB’S WORLD

Khalil Bendib, OtherWords.org



No more truthless heroes

Joshua Brolier wonders when assassins became national role models

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Despite the bizarrely karmic nature of his death and setting aside the much needed conversation on gun culture and pervasive violence which our nation is being forced to address, I am just as worried by our collective need to construct a fig leaf cover up over the legacy of Chris Kyle
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On February 11, the *New York Times* reported on the funeral of retired Navy Seal sniper Chris Kyle, portraying him as a “warrior and family man.” The highly politicized and massive public funeral, held at Cowboys Stadium in Arlington, Texas, points to the severe moral schizophrenia our nation has internalized. We see ourselves as the shining “city on a hill” and therefore a US citizen who kills people in other lands becomes an unquestionably renowned hero. This must appear offensive and ridiculous to many people living beyond US borders.

Mr. Kyle was a man who professed “no regret” for killing 160 people during his four tours in Iraq. A fellow soldier and former Marine, struggling with PTSD, murdered Kyle at point blank range while they were practice shooting for fun and “therapy” at a gun range in Texas.

Despite the bizarrely karmic nature of his death and setting aside the much needed conversation on gun culture and pervasive violence which our nation is being forced to address, I am just as worried by our collective need to construct a fig leaf cover up over the legacy of Chris Kyle.

Glorifying Chris Kyle’s story integrally connects to US media and military efforts to affect public perception of ongoing warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as expanding war on terror policies which the Obama

administration is aggressively attempting to institutionalize. Now, the US not only retains the right to attack those whom it dubiously asserted were responsible for 9/11, it regards the entire world as a potential battlefield, dismissing any need for constituent and congressional approval nor any evidence of an attack being planned against the US. Though President Obama ran on an anti-war platform, he needs the legacy of Chris Kyle and others as much as any of the previous war criminals from the Bush years to sustain his current militarism.

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Protecting us from what?

For example, the same issue of the *New York Times* reports that President Obama awarded a medal of honor to Clinton Romesha for “defending an outpost” in Afghanistan. Mr. Romesha was wounded in the neck in the course of action. He was also lauded for calling in airstrikes that killed 30 Taliban fighters. As a public, to what degree do we question why Mr. Romesha nearly lost his life? Was it to protect us? How informed are we as to who these “Taliban fighters” are, and why do we have the right to take their lives or to occupy their country in the first place?

This is especially relevant as the current administration attempts to legally justify its even broader parameters for killing which

automatically categorize every male 16 or older as a militant. Other members of the military command structure have been quite willing to extend that logic to “children with potential hostile intent.”

So as we consider these issues of legality and US legacy, perhaps we should step back and remember a few big picture facts about Iraq and Afghanistan.

The belligerent and misplaced aggression and ensuing chaos after the 2003 Iraq invasion led to hundreds of thousands of casualties (over a million by some calculations) and the largest refugee crisis in the region since the Nakba, with over four million Iraqis being displaced from their homes. In addition to the many thousands of Afghan casualties, more than a decade of crushing warfare and billions of dollars per week being spent on the effort, Afghans have been “perishing under one of the highest infant and maternal mortality rates in the world. At least 36% live below the poverty line and 35% of Afghan men do not have work. The UN calls the acute malnutrition of nearly one million children in the Afghan south ‘shocking’. Almost three quarters of all Afghans do not have access to safe drinking water.”

.....
Part of an imperial system

Given these appalling truths, I am not inclined to write off the immense suffering we have caused around the globe as a necessity or reframe it as victory, nor to join in the popular declarations that Mr. Romesha and Mr. Kyle were heroes. I don’t want to demonize them either. They are part of an imperial system to which many in the US are deeply tied and unquestioningly support with tax dollars.

Quite possibly Mr. Kyle was a “family man” to his circle and a loyal friend to his comrades. But can we really honor him as such when he was willing to rob Iraqi families of their fathers and sons?

The *New York Times* reported that Mr.

Kyle saw himself as “protecting American troops” and that his deadly skills were “payback for the 9/11 attacks.” Even as he may have initially been deceived into thinking Sadaam Hussein was responsible for 9/11, how could he extend payback to the entire Iraqi population and return for three additional tours without questioning this logic, which was so full of holes that even the Bush administration gave up on defending it? If you are going to take a life, wouldn’t you want to know with the highest certainty why you were doing so? No, this is not a hero. This is a “yes man” who was so callous to the effects of his violence that he intentionally took a veteran with combat PTSD to a shooting range as a form of therapy.

This type of high profile incident often eclipses the more prolonged tragedy within the military of rising PTSD rates and soldier suicide. In 2012, the number of suicides for US forces surpassed the deaths from combat operations reaching 177 precious lives lost. We owe it to these men and women to question and resist the policies which continually put them in patently immoral situations where they are faced with decisions that no human should face.

These policies are almost certain to cause many more disgruntled and violent veterans like Eddie Ray Routh, the man who shot Chris Kyle, to kill other people. We must help young people resist cultural elements and military propaganda to admire blind submission to orders, and seek to help them understand the importance of questioning authority and developing actions based on empathy and careful examination.

Private Bradley Manning should become a household name and honored as a whistleblower. Instead, the established elites in this country have imprisoned and persecuted him. Soldiers should be pointed toward organizations like Iraq Veterans Against the War and Afghan Veterans Against War. Members of these groups had the courage to return their war medals to generals during last year’s NATO summit and speak

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.....

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President Obama admits that many of these militant groups did not exist before 9/11 and have sprung up afterwards, but he does not make the correlation between our violent actions in the region and their ability to increase recruitment for armed groups
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honestly about the crimes being committed during these conflicts.

Gen. John Allen, who just stepped down this week from leading the US-led NATO occupation force in Afghanistan, said in his resignation speech, “Afghan forces defending Afghan people and enabling the government of this country to serve its citizens, this is victory. This is what winning looks like, and we should not shrink from using these words. I believe that Afghanistan will never again be a safe haven to terrorists that will oppress the precious people of this country and be the scourge and the plague of the world.”

As mentioned earlier, three quarters of all Afghans are living without access to safe drinking water. This is victory? I also wonder whether the outgoing Gen. Allen would like to comment on a recent NATO airstrike in Kunar, Afghanistan, which murdered ten civilians, five of them children.

Yes, “Afghan forces defending Afghan people.... This is what winning looks like.” We are fed the same lines until the point of exhaustion. And always when a Gen. Allen steps down or a Gen. Petraeus is forced to resign due to some scandal, the corporate media furiously reminds us that these noble men may have made a few mistakes, probably personal ones, but really their overall service to our country was impeccable and accountability is off the table.

This impunity is obviously granted to our Commander in Chief who assured us in his State of the Union speech, “Tonight, I can announce that over the next year, another 34,000 American troops will come home from Afghanistan. This drawdown will continue. And by the end of next year, our war in Afghanistan will be over.”

Any drawdown on this warfare is good news, but president Obama went on to add, “Beyond 2014, ...the nature of our commitment will change. We are negotiating an agreement with the Afghan government that focuses on two missions: training and equipping Afghan forces so that the country

does not again slip into chaos, and counter-terrorism efforts that allow us to pursue the remnants of al Qaeda and their affiliates.”

Aren’t these the same lines we have been hearing since the Bush administration? It’s always about our benevolent training and commitment, murky “remnants” and “shadows of Al-Qaeda.”

President Obama admits that many of these militant groups did not exist before 9/11 and have sprung up afterwards, but he does not make the correlation between our violent actions in the region and their ability to increase recruitment for armed groups.

Apparently this very tense negotiation between the US and Afghanistan will leave behind thousands of troops and contractors while seeking immunity for US soldiers from prosecution in Afghan courts. Meanwhile, Obama moves on in his speech to re-affirm his right to unilaterally “take direct action against those terrorists who pose the gravest threat to Americans” through increased drone strikes in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Libya, Somalia, Mali and potentially elsewhere.

As humans, we are all full of many contradictions. President Obama, the generals and soldiers are, of course, all complex individuals, and so is the world we live in. I recognize that as I yearn to be a better and more conscientious person, I often take three steps backwards before I have even made my first step forward.

However, if I want to continue to evolve as an individual, I strongly believe that my role models and mentors cannot be fictional characters of patriotic tall tales. There must be a refusal to stomach a narrative of history and current international affairs which whitewashes culpability for suffering caused by US wars of choice. To draw a line from the song *The Spy Hunter* which came out shortly after 9/11, “we don’t need no truthless heroes.” **CT**

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Joshua Brolier is an activist with *Voices for Creative Nonviolence* – <http://vcnv.org>

Saying ‘no’ to endless war

Norman Solomon on the need to change laws that underwrite the ‘war on terror’

Congress waited six years to repeal the Tonkin Gulf Resolution after it opened the bloody floodgates for the Vietnam War in August 1964.

If that seems slow, consider the continuing failure of Congress to repeal the “war on terror” resolution – the Authorization for Use of Military Force – that sailed through, with just one dissenting vote, three days after 9/11.

Prior to casting the only “no” vote, Congresswoman Barbara Lee spoke on the House floor. “As we act,” she said, “let us not become the evil that we deplore.”

We have. That’s why, more than 11 years later, Lee’s prophetic one-minute speech is so painful to watch. The “war on terror” has inflicted carnage in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen and elsewhere as a matter of routine. Targets change, but the assumed prerogative to kill with impunity remains.

Now, Rep. Lee has introduced H.R. 198, a measure to repeal the Authorization for Use of Military Force. Opposed to repeal, the Obama administration is pleased to keep claiming that the 137-month-old resolution justifies everything from on-the-ground troops in combat to drone strikes and kill lists to flagrant abrogation of civil liberties.

A steep uphill incline faces efforts to repeal the resolution that issued a blank political check for war in the early fall of 2001.

Struggling to revoke it is a valuable undertaking. Yet even repeal would be unlikely to end the “war on terror.”

At the start of 1971, President Nixon felt compelled to sign a bill that included repeal of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. By then, he had shifted his ostensible authority for continuing the war on Vietnam – asserting his prerogative as commander in chief. Leaders of the warfare state never lack for rationales when they want to keep making war.

In retrospect, the US “war on terror” has turned out to be even more tenacious than the US war that took several million lives in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia during the 1960s and early 1970s.

Some key similarities resonate with current circumstances. Year after year, in Congress, support for the Vietnam War was bipartisan. Presidents Johnson and Nixon preached against unauthorized violence in America’s cities while inflicting massive violence in Southeast Asia. Both presidents were fond of proclaiming fervent wishes for peace.

But unlike the horrific war in Southeast Asia, the ongoing and open-ended “war on terror” is not confined by geography or, apparently, by calendar. The search for enemies to smite (and create) is availing itself of a bottomless pit, while bottom-feeding military contractors keep making a killing.

Beyond the worthy goal of repealing the

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**Targets change,
 but the assumed
 prerogative to
 kill with impunity
 remains**

What may be even more difficult to rescind is the chronic disconnect between lofty oratory and policies digging the country deeper into endless war

Authorization for Use of Military Force is a need for Congress to cut off appropriations for the “war on terror.” A prerequisite: repudiating the lethal mythology of righteous war unbounded by national borders or conceivable duration.

What may be even more difficult to rescind is the chronic disconnect between lofty oratory and policies digging the country deeper into endless war.

“We, the people, still believe that enduring security and lasting peace do not require perpetual war,” President Obama said in his 2013 inaugural address, after four years of

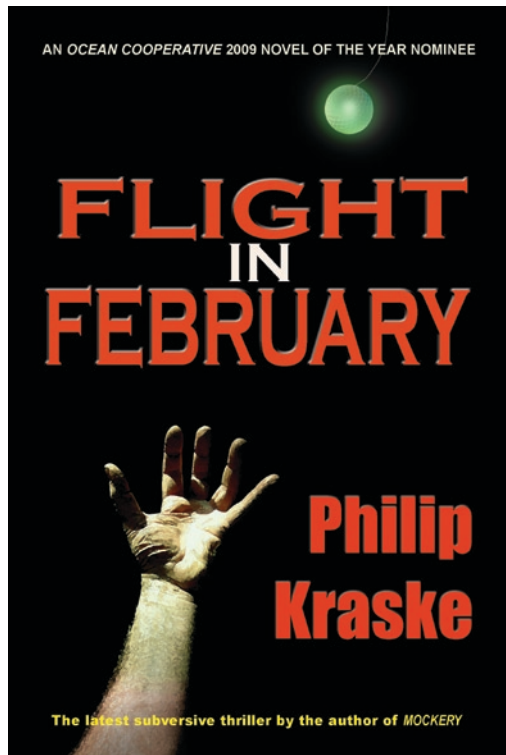
doing more than any other president in US history to normalize perpetual war as a bipartisan enterprise.

Repealing the Authorization for Use of Military Force will be very hard. Revoking the power to combine lovely rhetoric with pernicious militarism will be even more difficult.

CT

*Norman Solomon is co-founder of RootsAction.org and founding director of the Institute for Public Accuracy. His books include **War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death***

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The Foodopoly: Too big to eat

David Swanson on the need to ban genetic engineering from our food supply and take back control of what we eat

We've come to understand that the banks are too big to fail, too big to take to trial, too big not to let them write our public policy, too big not to reward them for ruining our economy.

Why have we come to understand that?

We've been told it by a mega media cartel that has itself been deemed too big to fail, too big not to subsidize with our airwaves, too big not to reward with political ads buying back our airwaves in little bits and pieces.

Speaking of which, the buying of elections is moving rapidly in the direction of monopoly ownership itself.

The concentration of wealth and power in the United States over the past half century is not a story of ineluctable forces of technology or progress. It's a story of orchestrated corruption. Some of its key players were born after it had begun. One of them, the man who was president when some of the worst of the deregulatory legislation was passed, was of course Bill Clinton – who ended welfare as we knew it and recreated it as we wish no one had ever imagined it. Giant corporations and banks are feeding at the public trough.

A big chunk of what they're feeding on is the feeding of the rest of us. This is the topic of Wenonah Hauter's new book, *Foodopoly: The Battle Over the Future of Food and Farm-*

ing in America. And she argues against simply cutting off the subsidies to agribusiness. The problem, Hauter explains, is that we do need to eat something, and if we're going to have a chance of eating something grown democratically, sustainably, and healthfully, we're going to have to take into account the fewer than a million small and medium farms left standing. Most of them barely survive each year. Lots of them don't survive each year. And most of them survive only with the help of public subsidies, subsidies they didn't need prior to an onslaught of federal legislation aimed intentionally at destroying farmers' livelihood. Midsize family farmers have an average income of \$19,277 including subsidies. If we turn them into corporate serfs or their land into McMansions and shopping malls and fracking areas, we'll have nothing to eat but what we can grow in the front yard or the flower box and what already makes up 90% of what we eat: processed corporate junk.

George Naylor, an Iowa farmer and former president of the National Family Farm Coalition who pushed back against President Ronald Reagan's assault on antitrust powers, remarked in 2012:

"No betrayal was more galling, or the effects more devastating for farmers and eaters, than Bill Clinton's single-minded pursuit of free trade and his support for the 1996 'Freedom to Farm' bill."

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We have to be political. We have to end corporate personhood and money as speech. We have to take over power for democratic demands
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Among the lies pushed since the 1940s to tear apart family farms has been the lie that exporting grain would be the way of the future. In 1980 the United States exported 45% of its corn, wheat, and soybeans. By 2009 that was down to 25%. Production has soared. Prices have plummeted. And the mega-farms that created the mess, just like the mega banks (and in fact the two share a lot of interchangeable human parts at the highest levels), have been bailed out, and bailed out, and bailed out, every year, just like the war machine only not so expensive and specializing more in sickness than in death. In fact, processed food has been linked convincingly to cancer.

Here in the greatest – WE'RE NUMBER ONE! – nation on earth we work longer hours than anybody else in wealthy countries, and we eat half our meals away from home, much of it sickening earth-poisoning carcinogenic crap. That's an accurate description of most of what we buy to cook at home too.

WalMart started selling food along with its other products in 1988, apparently by putting some of its other products through a blender and packaging the results in bright advertisements. Twelve years later WalMart was the biggest food seller. It now sucks down one-third of all US dollars spent on groceries in the land of the obese, home of the heart attack.

Organic food is an area of monopoly, manipulation, deception, and deceit. Meat and dairy are areas of the worst extremes: the greatest monopolization, the greatest health risks, the greatest certain health damage, the severest environmental destruction, and the most grotesque waste of resources that could have fed people.

Hauter's book, like most books with a title about the future, is monopolized by the damage of the past. We have to know the history in order to deal with the present. The last 30 pages, however, turn directly to the question of what to do. Here's my summary:

Think globally and act globally. Our own private efforts won't do it. We won't shop our way to a brighter future through "consumer activism." We won't build a local alternative that will take us off the corporate food grid – although we should certainly attempt it as part of what needs doing.

We have to be political. We have to end corporate personhood and money as speech. We have to take over power for democratic demands. We have to enact major legislation and regulations. We have to restore a safety net for small farmers before undoing their subsidies.

We have to not only undo the subsidies of the big farms, but we have to break them apart. We need antitrust enforcement and fair trade policies. President Obama is pushing to out-NAFTA Clinton with a Trans-Pacific Partnership and something like it for Europe. He has to be stopped.*

Congress needs to open a serious investigation into the state of competition, or the lack thereof, in agriculture markets.

Enforcement by the DOJ, FTC, and USDA needs to begin existing and then needs to be reorganized.

Farm bills need to level the playing field for independent farmers and ranchers and food processors, and redirect rural development funding to rebuild infrastructure for regional food systems, as well as investing more seriously in organic farming.

Genetic engineering needs to be banned from our food supply.

We need to educate, inspire, mobilize, file law suits, propose legislation, and non-violently take over the levers of power from the elephants and donkeys that are standing on our breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

**That bit's not in the book but from conversation with the author.*

CT

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David Swanson's books include *War Is A Lie*. He blogs at <http://davidswanson.org> and <http://warisacrime.org>, and works for <http://rootsaction.org>

We are all Bradley Manning

Chris Hedges hears the remarkable statement from the whistleblower who exposed the war crimes of the US military in the war on Iraq

I was in a military courtroom at Fort Meade in Maryland as Pfc. Bradley Manning admitted giving classified government documents to WikiLeaks. The hundreds of thousands of leaked documents exposed US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as government misconduct. A statement that Manning made to the court was a powerful and moving treatise on the importance of placing conscience above personal safety, the necessity of sacrificing careers and liberty for the public good, and the moral imperative of carrying out acts of defiance. Manning will surely pay with many years – perhaps his entire life – in prison. But we too will pay. The war against Bradley Manning is a war against us all.

This trial is not simply the prosecution of a 25-year-old soldier who had the temerity to report to the outside world the indiscriminate slaughter, war crimes, torture and abuse that are carried out by our government and our occupation forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is a concerted effort by the security and surveillance state to extinguish what is left of a free press, one that has the constitutional right to expose crimes by those in power. The lonely individuals who take personal risks so that the public can know the truth – the Daniel Ellsbergs, the Ron Ridenhours, the Deep Throats and the Bradley Mannings – are from now on to be charged with “aiding the enemy.” All those

within the system who publicly reveal facts that challenge the official narrative will be imprisoned, as was John Kiriakou, the former CIA analyst who for, exposing the US government’s use of torture, began serving a 30-month prison term the day Manning read his statement. There is a word for states that create these kinds of information vacuums: totalitarian.

The cowardice of the *New York Times*, *El Pais*, *Der Spiegel* and *Le Monde*, all of which used masses of the material Manning passed on to WikiLeaks and then callously turned their backs on him, is one of journalism’s greatest shames. These publications made little effort to cover Manning’s pretrial hearings, a failure that shows how bankrupt and anemic the commercial press has become. Rescuing what honor of our trade remains has been left to a handful of independent, often marginalized reporters and a small number of other individuals and groups – including Glenn Greenwald, Alexa O’Brien, Nathan Fuller, Kevin Gosztola (who writes for Firedog Lake), the Bradley Manning Support Network, political activist Kevin Zeese and the courtroom sketch artist Clark Stoeckley, along with the *Guardian*, which also published the WikiLeaks documents. But if our domesticated press institutions believe that by refusing to defend or report on Manning they will escape the wrath of the security and surveillance state, they are

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THE PRICE OF CONSCIENCE

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stunningly naive. This is a war that is being played for keeps. And the goal of the state is not simply to send Manning away for life. The state is also determined to extradite WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and try him in the United States on espionage or conspiracy charges. The state hopes to cement into place systems of information that will do little more than parrot official propaganda. This is why those with the computer skills to expose the power elite's secrets, such as Aaron Swartz, who committed suicide in January, and Jeremy Hammond, who is facing up to 30 years in prison for allegedly hacking into the corporate security firm Stratfor, have been or are being ruthlessly hunted down and persecuted. It is why Vice President Joe Biden labeled Assange a "high-tech terrorist," and it is why the Bradley Manning trial is one of the most important in American history.

The government has decided to press ahead with all 22 charges, including aiding the enemy (Article 104), stealing US government property (18 USC 641), espionage (18 USC 793(e)) and computer crimes (18 USC 1030(a)(1)) – the last notwithstanding the fact that Manning did not hack into government computers. The state will also prosecute him on charges of violating lawful general regulations (Article 92). The government has refused to settle for Manning's admission of guilt on nine lesser offenses. Among these lesser offenses are unauthorized possession and willful communication of the video known as "Collateral Murder"; the Iraq War Logs; the Afghan War Diary; two CIA Red Cell Memos, including one entitled "Afghanistan: Sustaining West European Support for the NATO-Led Mission – Why Counting on Apathy Might Not Be Enough"; Guantanamo files; documents of a so-called Article 15-6 investigation into the May 2009 Garani massacre in Afghanistan's Farah province; and a Department of Defense counterintelligence report, "WikiLeaks.org – An Online Reference to Foreign Intelligence Services, Insurgents, or

Terrorist Groups?" as well as one violation of a lawful general order by wrongfully storing information.

Manning's leaks, the government insists, are tantamount to support for al-Qaida and international terrorism. The government will attempt to prove this point by bringing into court an anonymous witness who most likely took part in the raid on Osama bin Laden's compound in Pakistan. This witness will reportedly tell the court that copies of the leaked documents were found on bin Laden's computer and assisted al-Qaida. This is an utterly spurious form of prosecution – as if any of us have control over the information we provide to the public and how it is used. Manning, for substantial amounts of money, could have sold the documents to governments or groups that are defined as the enemy. Instead he approached the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. When these newspapers rejected him, he sent the material anonymously to WikiLeaks.

The short, slightly built Manning told the military court Thursday about the emotional conflict he experienced when he matched what he knew about the war with the official version of the war. He said he became deeply disturbed while watching a video taken from an Apache helicopter as it and another such craft joined in an attack on civilians in Baghdad in 2007. The banter among the crew members, who treated the murder and wounding of the terrified human beings, including children, in the street below as sport, revolted him. Among the dead was Reuters photojournalist Namir Noor-Eldeen and his driver, Saeed Chmagh. Reuters had repeatedly asked to see the video, and the Army had repeatedly refused to release it.

"Using Google I searched for the event by its date and general location," Manning said in reading from a 35-page document that took nearly an hour to deliver. "I found several new accounts involving two Reuters employees who were killed during the aeri-

al weapon team engagement. Another story explained that Reuters had requested a copy of the video under the Freedom of Information Act, or FOIA. Reuters wanted to view the video in order to be able to understand what had happened and to improve their safety practices in combat zones. A spokesperson for Reuters was quoted saying that the video might help avoid the reoccurrence of the tragedy and believed there was compelling need for the immediate release of the video.

“Despite the submission of the FOIA request, the news account explained that CENTCOM [Central Command] replied to Reuters stating that they could not give a time frame for considering a FOIA request and that the video might no longer exist,” Manning said. “Another story I found written a year later said that even though Reuters was still pursuing their request [the news organization] still did not receive a formal response or written determination in accordance with FOIA. The fact neither CENTCOM or Multi National Forces Iraq, or MNF-I, would not voluntarily release the video troubled me further. It was clear to me that the event happened because the aerial weapons team mistakenly identified Reuters employees as a potential threat and that the people in the bongo truck [van] were merely attempting to assist the wounded. The people in the van were not a threat but merely ‘good Samaritans.’ The most alarming aspect of the video to me, however, was the seemingly delightful bloodlust they [the helicopter crew members] appeared to have.

“They dehumanized the individuals they were engaging and seemed to not value human life by referring to them as quote ‘dead bastards’ unquote and congratulating each other on the ability to kill in large numbers,” Manning said, speaking into a court microphone while seated at the defense table. “At one point in the video there is an individual on the ground attempting to crawl to safety. The individual is seriously wounded. In-

stead of calling for medical attention to the location, one of the aerial weapons team crew members verbally asks for the wounded person to pick up a weapon so that he can have a reason to engage. For me, this seems similar to a child torturing ants with a magnifying glass.

“While saddened by the aerial weapons team crew’s lack of concern about human life, I was disturbed by the response of the discovery of injured children at the scene. In the video, you can see the bongo truck driving up to assist the wounded individual. In response the aerial weapons team crew – as soon as the individuals are a threat, they repeatedly request authorization to fire on the bongo truck and once granted they engage the vehicle at least six times. Shortly after the second engagement, a mechanized infantry unit arrives at the scene. Within minutes, the aerial weapons team crew learns that children were in the van, and despite the injuries the crew exhibits no remorse. Instead, they downplay the significance of their actions, saying quote ‘Well, it’s their fault for bringing their kids into a battle’ unquote.

“The aerial weapons team crew members sound like they lack sympathy for the children or the parents. Later in a particularly disturbing manner, the aerial weapons team verbalizes enjoyment at the sight of one of the ground vehicles driving over a body – or one of the bodies. As I continued my research, I found an article discussing the book ‘The Good Soldiers,’ written by *Washington Post* writer David Finkel. In Mr. Finkel’s book, he writes about the aerial weapons team attack. As I read an online excerpt in Google Books, I followed Mr. Finkel’s account of the event belonging to the video. I quickly realize that Mr. Finkel was quoting, I feel in verbatim, the audio communications of the aerial weapons team crew. It is clear to me that Mr. Finkel obtained access and a copy of the video during his tenure as an embedded journalist. I was aghast at Mr. Finkel’s portrayal of the

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“The most alarming aspect of the video to me, however, was the seemingly delightful bloodlust they [the helicopter crew members] appeared to have”
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THE PRICE OF CONSCIENCE

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“I wanted the American public to know that not everyone in Iraq and Afghanistan are targets that needed to be neutralized, but rather people who were struggling to live in the pressure cooker environment of what we call asymmetric warfare”
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incident. Reading his account, one would believe the engagement was somehow justified as ‘payback’ for an earlier attack that led to the death of a soldier. Mr. Finkel ends his account of the engagement by discussing how a soldier finds an individual still alive from the attack. He writes that the soldier finds him and sees him gesture with his two forefingers together, a common method in the Middle East to communicate that they are friendly. However, instead of assisting him, the soldier makes an obscene gesture extending his middle finger. The individual apparently dies shortly thereafter. Reading this, I can only think of how this person was simply trying to help others, and then he quickly finds he needs help as well. To make matters worse, in the last moments of his life he continues to express his friendly gesture – his friendly intent – only to find himself receiving this well known gesture of unfriendliness. For me it’s all a big mess, and I am left wondering what these things mean, and how it all fits together. It burdens me emotionally. ...

“I hoped that the public would be as alarmed as me about the conduct of the aerial weapons team crew members. I wanted the American public to know that not everyone in Iraq and Afghanistan are targets that needed to be neutralized, but rather people who were struggling to live in the pressure cooker environment of what we call asymmetric warfare. After the release I was encouraged by the response in the media and general public who observed the aerial weapons team video. As I hoped, others were just as troubled – if not more troubled than me by what they saw.”

Manning provided to the public the most important window into the inner workings of imperial power since the release of the Pentagon Papers. The routine use of torture, the detention of Iraqis who were innocent, the inhuman conditions within our secret detention facilities, the use of State Department officials as spies in the United Nations, the collusion with corporations

to keep wages low in developing countries such as Haiti, and specific war crimes such as the missile strike on a house that killed seven children in Afghanistan would have remained hidden without Manning.

“I felt that we were risking so much for people that seemed unwilling to cooperate with us, leading to frustration and anger on both sides,” Manning said. “I began to become depressed with the situation that we found ourselves increasingly mired in year after year. The SigActs [significant-acts reports of the Army] documented this in great detail and provide a context of what we were seeing on the ground.

“In attempting to conduct counterterrorism, or CT, and counterinsurgency, COIN, operations we became obsessed with capturing and killing human targets on lists and not being suspicious of and avoiding cooperation with our host nation partners, and ignoring the second- and third-order effects of accomplishing short-term goals and missions. I believe that if the general public, especially the American public, had access to the information contained within the CIDNE-I and CIDNE-A tables [a reference to military information] this could spark a domestic debate on the role of the military and our foreign policy in general as it related to Iraq and Afghanistan.

“I also believed the detailed analysis of the data over a long period of time by different sectors of society might cause society to re-evaluate the need or even the desire to engage in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations that ignore the complex dynamics of the people living in the affected environment every day.”

It is certain that with this “naked” plea Manning will serve perhaps as much as 20 years in prison. The judge, Col. Denise Lind, who will determine Manning’s sentence, warned him that the government could use his admissions to build a case for the more serious charges. Manning faces 90 years if he is convicted on the greater charge of espionage, and he faces life if convicted of

aiding the enemy. Military prosecutors have made it clear they are out for blood. They said they will call 141 witnesses, including 15 who will charge that Manning caused harm to national interests; 33 witnesses, the government claims, will discuss information so sensitive or secret that it will require closed court sessions. Four witnesses – including, it appears, a Navy SEAL involved in the bin Laden raid – will give testimony anonymously. Army Maj. Ashden Fein, the lead prosecution attorney, has told the court that the government witnesses will discuss issues such as “injury and death to individuals” that resulted from the WikiLeaks disclosures, as well as how the “capability of the enemy increased in certain countries.” The government is preventing Manning’s defense team from interviewing some of the witnesses before the trial.

When he was secretary of defense, Robert Gates said a Defense Department review determined that the publication of the Iraq War Logs and the Afghan War Diary had “not revealed any sensitive intelligence sources and methods.” In the trial, however, the government must prove only that the “disclosure could be potentially damaging to the United States” and need only provide “independent proof of at least potential harm to the national security” beyond mere security classification, writes law professor Geoffrey Stone.

The government reviews determined that the release of Department of State “diplomatic cables caused only limited damage to US interests abroad despite the

Obama administration’s public statements to the contrary,” according to Reuters. “We were told the impact [of WikiLeaks revelations] was embarrassing but not damaging,” a congressional official, briefed by the State Department, told Reuters. The “Obama administration felt compelled to say publicly that the revelations had seriously damaged American interests in order to bolster legal efforts to shut down the WikiLeaks website and bring charges against the leakers,” the official told the news outlet. Government prosecutors, strengthening their case further, have succeeded in blocking Manning’s lawyers from presenting evidence about the lack of real damage caused to US interests by the leaks.

Manning has done what anyone with a conscience should have done. In the courtroom he exhibited – especially given the prolonged abuse he suffered during his thousand days inside the military prison system – poise, intelligence and dignity. He appealed to the best within us. And this is why the government fears him. America still produces heroes, some in uniform. But now we lock them up.

The court has not yet issued an official text of Bradley Manning’s statement.

Thanks to Alexa O’Brien for providing a transcript.

CT

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Chris Hedges’ latest book is *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt*, co-authored with artist and writer Joe Sacco.
This essay was originally published at <http://truthdig.org>

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The government is preventing Manning’s defense team from interviewing some of the witnesses before the trial
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The shameful smearing of Julian Assange

WikiLeaks is a rare example of a newsgathering organisation that exposes the truth. Julian Assange is not alone, writes John Pilger

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Khan's attack on Assange is specious and plays to a familiar gallery whose courage is tweeted from a smart-phone
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Last December, I stood with supporters of WikiLeaks and Julian Assange in the bitter cold outside the Ecuadorean embassy in London. Candles were lit; the faces were young and old and from all over the world. They were there to demonstrate their human solidarity with someone whose guts they admired. They were in no doubt about the importance of what Assange had revealed and achieved, and the grave dangers he now faced. Absent entirely were the lies, spite, jealousy, opportunism and pathetic animus of a few who claim the right to guard the limits of informed public debate.

These public displays of warmth for Assange are common and seldom reported. Several thousand people packed Sydney Town Hall, with hundreds spilling into the street. In New York recently, Assange was awarded the Yoko Ono Lennon Prize for Courage. In the audience was Daniel Ellsberg, who risked all to leak the truth about the barbarism of the Vietnam War.

Like the philanthropist Jemima Khan, the investigative journalist Phillip Knightley, the acclaimed film-maker Ken Loach and others lost bail money in standing up for Julian Assange. "The US is out to crush someone who has revealed its dirty secrets," Loach wrote to me. "Extradition via Sweden is more than likely... is it difficult to choose whom to support?"

No, it is not difficult.

In the *New Statesman* recently, Jemima Khan, a philanthropist, ended her support for an epic struggle for justice, truth and freedom with an article on WikiLeaks's founder. To Khan, the Ellsbergs and Yoko Onos, the Knightleys and Loaches, and the countless people they represent, have all been duped. We are all "blinkered". We are all mindlessly "devoted". We are all cultists.

In the final words of her *j'accuse*, Khan describes Assange as "an Australian L. Ron Hubbard". She must have known such gratuitous abuse would make a snappy headline – as indeed it did across the press in Australia.

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Specious attack

I respect Jemima Khan for backing humanitarian causes, such as the Palestinians. She supports for Martha Gellhorn Prize for Journalism, of which I am a judge, and my own film-making. But her attack on Assange is specious and plays to a familiar gallery whose courage is tweeted from a smart-phone. One of Khan's main complaints is that Assange refused to appear in a film about WikiLeaks by the American director Alex Gibney, which she "executive produced". Assange knew the film would be neither "nuanced" nor "fair" and "represent the truth", as Khan claimed, and that

its very title WikiLeaks, We Steal Secrets, was a gift to the fabricators of a bogus criminal indictment that could doom him to one of America's hell-holes. Having interviewed axe grinders and turncoats, Gibney abuses Assange as paranoid. DreamWorks is also making a film about the "paranoid" Assange. Oscars all round.

The sum of Khan's and Gibney's attacks is that Ecuador granted Assange asylum without evidence. The evidence is voluminous. Assange has been declared an official "enemy" of a torturing, assassinating, rapacious state. This is clear in official files, obtained under Freedom of Information, that betray Washington's "unprecedented" pursuit of him, together with the Australian government's abandonment of its citizen: a legal basis for granting asylum.

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Alienated allies?

Khan refers to a "long list" of Assange's "alienated and disaffected allies". Almost none was ever an ally. What is striking about most of these "allies" and Assange's haters is that they exhibit the very symptoms of arrested development they attribute to a man whose resilience and humour under extreme pressure are evident to those he trusts.

On her "long list" is London lawyer Mark Stephens, who charged him almost half a million pounds in fees and costs. This bill was paid from an advance on a book whose unauthorised manuscript was published by another "ally" without Assange's knowledge or permission. When Assange moved his legal defence to Gareth Peirce, Britain's leading human rights lawyer, he found a true ally. Khan makes no mention of the damning, irrefutable evidence that Peirce presented to the Australian government, warning how the US deliberately "synchro-

nised" its extradition demands with pending cases and that her client faced a grave miscarriage of justice and personal danger. Peirce told the Australian consul in London in person that she had known few cases as shocking as this.

It is a red herring whether Britain or Sweden holds the greatest danger of delivering Assange to the US. The Swedes have refused all requests for guarantees that he will not be dispatched under a secret arrangement with Washington; and it is the political executive in Stockholm, with its close ties to the extreme right in America, not the courts, that will make this decision.

Khan is rightly concerned about a "resolution" of the allegations of sexual misconduct in Sweden. Putting aside the tissue of falsehoods demonstrated in the evidence in this case, both women had consensual sex with Assange, and neither claimed otherwise; and the Stockholm prosecutor, Eva Finne, all but dismissed the case. As Katrin Axelsson and Lisa Longstaff of Women Against Rape wrote in the *Guardian* last August, "The allegations against [Assange] are a smokescreen behind which a number of governments are trying to clamp down on WikiLeaks for having audaciously revealed to the public their secret planning of wars and occupations with their attendant rape, murder and destruction... The authorities care so little about violence against women that they manipulate rape allegations at will. [Assange] has made it clear he is available for questioning by the Swedish authorities, in Britain or via Skype. Why are they refusing this essential step in their investigation? What are they afraid of?" **CT**

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John Pilger's documentaries have won academy awards in both the UK and the US. His website is <http://johnpilger.com>

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Assange has been declared an official "enemy" of a torturing, assassinating, rapacious state
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When TV news and the movies blur

Dramatic images, short attention spans and ignorant presenters. Must be TV news, where anything goes in the pursuit of ratings, writes **Ronan McSherry**

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A clear “us”
versus “them”
mentality is
established
where “they”
are portrayed as
murderous villains
while “we” do
what we need to in
order to keep the
world safe
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As Sky News broadcast footage of the Japanese Tsunami in 2011, my eight-year-old daughter jumped onto the sofa and exclaimed, “I love this!” All she needed was a box of popcorn and a pot of lemonade.

Cars bobbed on the waves, houses were shattered like matchstick models while the commentator relayed the latest estimated death toll. Murdoch’s team is in the business of boosting their viewing figures and while it may not be politically correct to say so, it was compulsive viewing. Out of the mouth of a child came the truth.

However in the demand for up to the minute, live dramatic coverage from across the globe, adults are now struggling to draw the line between a Hollywood blockbuster and reality. On St Stephen’s Day 2004, the Indian Ocean tsunami claimed 230,000 lives. Now audiences are heading to their local complex to see the movie version.

The Impossible, starring Ewan McGregor, is being hailed as a masterpiece for Spanish director Juan Antonio Bayona. We eat popcorn, drink from pots of lemonade, and as the incredible special effects unfold on the big screen exclaim, “I love this!” The short two-and-a-half minute trailer manages to pack a punch of emotions, as the characters experience fear, passion, anguish and relief. The drama in the clip is compounded by the vocals of Damien Rice, who breathlessly

covers U2’s song, *One*.

The news stations seek to close the gap between Hollywood and reality. Following the terrible events in Manhattan on September 11, 2001, or 9/11 as the Americans call it, a news station caused controversy when they played footage of the Twin Tower strikes in slow motion to music. Perhaps they were influenced by the underwater tuba player, Tommy Johnson in *Jaws*, adding to the tension as the rubber shark stalked its victim. The world looked on agog as the magnificent towers crashed and dust-covered New Yorkers ran for their lives. People commented later that they almost expected Bruce Willis to appear on their screens to save the day – Die Hard style.

Little wonder *Guardian* satirist Charlie Brooker slammed American current affairs programme Entertainment Tonight for its take on the Costa Concordia disaster. In January last year the Italian cruise ship ran aground with the loss of 32 lives. Seemingly oblivious that a real life Titanic sank in the North Atlantic Ocean in 1912, resulting in over 1,500 deaths, the US show made comparisons with James Cameron’s 1997 epic romantic blockbuster. Although *Titanic* the movie was a fictionalised version of the fateful events of a century ago, the news producers totally blurred the boundary between reality and fantasy. Either that or they believed Jack Dawson really did freeze

to death while the delightful Rose whistled her way to dry land.

They showed footage of the stricken cruiser interspersed with scenes from the *Titanic* movie. The dolly bird news presenter then rhetorically asked, “Was Celine Dion’s ‘My Heart Will Go On’ playing on board when the cruiser hit the rocks?” Her co-presenter finished the upbeat item comparing the temperature of the Mediterranean waters off Tuscany and the make believe North Atlantic movie. It was either sheer stupidity or crassly tasteless.

In 1979 as I left Omagh cinema after viewing *Escape from Alcatraz*, I remarked, “That’s based on a true story”, to which my buddy replied, “Aye but it wasn’t Clint Eastwood who escaped.” Indeed it wasn’t; nor did Tom Hanks form a relationship with a volleyball on a desert island, or Julie Andrews fly up chimneys.

The story goes that Omagh actor Gerard McSorley was introduced to a man in a local bar and was greeted with the terse comment, “I’m not talking to him after what he did to Gerry Conlon”. We can but hope he was speaking in jest.

The news stations are in the viewing numbers game and if that entails turning hard news into a movie thriller, so be it. It’s a competitive market and attention spans are short. Today the viewer expresses his dismay in a quick tweet; tomorrow he wants another story. Who remembers the name of the woman who died after being refused an abortion in a Galway hospital in

October? It was a story captivated the nation; and then the show moved on. (Her name was Savita Halappanavar.)

The human tragedies often get lost in the clamour for excitement. On the late news a huge flood in a far off continent sweeps all in its way before we settle down to ‘The Day after Tomorrow’ with its magnificent floods and carnage.

Poor Paul Gascoigne got completely mixed up in 2010 when he wanted to watch the live show. The former England soccer player arrived at the scene of police stand-off in Northumbria wanting to speak to fugitive Raoul Moat who had shot dead a police officer and hospitalised his ex-girlfriend and her new partner. Wor Gazza didn’t get to speak to ‘Moaty’ who subsequently put a gun to his own head. The Gascoigne episode became as big a news story as Moate’s shooting spree.

Nowadays major occurrences are instantaneously fired across the communications highway. There is an insatiable appetite for more. The images become more dramatic while reality becomes distorted. Sky News from war-torn Iran or *Argo*, the movie? Same difference.

CT

*Ronan McSherry is a journalist and columnist with the Tyrone Herald – <http://ulsterherald.com> – in Omagh, Northern Ireland, where this column was first published. His book of columns – **Ronan’s Rants** – is now available at Amazon*

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Zero Dark Thirty and the hijacking of history

‘Fact-based’ movies are becoming our ‘history books’, and that’s not a good thing, according to **Barry Lando**

.....
The film has been roundly criticized from Human Rights Watch, to prominent American Senators, for giving Americans the erroneous impression that torture played a key role in tracking down and killing Bin Laden
.....

What if a new film came out about 9/11, “based on a firsthand account of actual events,” that convincingly showed no Jews were in the World Trade Center that fateful morning. The fiery disaster, in fact, was a Zionist/CIA plot to justify launching “The War on Terror”?

Or what about another film “based on true historical events,” that Barack Obama is a closet Muslim, and the drive for gun control paves the way for a jihadist takeover of America?

Outrageous right?

What about a film leaving the impression that brutal methods of torture, though perhaps morally repugnant, led to the assassination of America’s number one enemy.

The first two claims, often backed up by amateurish photos, videos and ropey documentation, have been bandied about for years on the Internet.

The film about torture, however, is a sophisticated production, turned out by the Sony Corporation and a talented director, writer and cast, backed up by reams of expensive research, nominated for five Oscars, and reaping hundreds of millions of dollars in box offices around the world.

The movie, of course, is *Zero Dark Thirty* (ZDT). In a way, that film, and others like it, are hijacking our history. I’ll get back to that charge.

Some commentators like the *New York Times*’s Roger Cohen have praised ZDT “as a courageous work that is disturbing in the way that art should be.”

Indeed, as befits a work of art, much of the story-line in ZDT is unstated, diffuse. There are a lot of shadowy images, elliptical scenes, muttered exchanges. But it’s difficult to come away from the film without the perception that brutal torture, such as water boarding, played an important role in the CIA’s finding Usama Bin Laden’s personal courier, which in turn led them to the Al Qaeda leader himself.

The problem is, according to a lot of people who should know, that was not the case. The film has been roundly criticized from Human Rights Watch, to prominent American Senators, to a former agent in the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force, for giving Americans the erroneous impression that torture played a key role in tracking down and killing Bin Laden.

In fact, when challenged on the film’s accuracy, director Karen Bigelow claims a kind of artistic license – as if her critics really don’t get what her craft is all about. “What’s important to remember is it’s a movie and not a documentary... It’s a dramatization of a 10-year manhunt compressed into two-and-a-half hours... There’s a lot of composite characters and it’s an interpretation.”

OK, just an interpretation. But Bigelow

and her publicists try to have it both ways. The film's trailer breathlessly invites us to "Witness the Biggest Manhunt in History."

And, as the film begins, we are solemnly informed that it is "based on firsthand accounts of actual events."

But, "It does not say that it is a factual, unembroidered recounting of those events," explains Roger Cohen, sounding less like the gimlet-eyed columnist and more like attorney for the defense.

To bolster his case, Cohen quotes Israeli novelist Amos Oz's observation that "Facts at times become the dire enemies of truth."

"Or, put another way," Cohen explains, "while reality is the raw material journalism attempts to render with accuracy and fairness, it is the raw material that art must transform."

In other words, directors like Karen Bigelow must be given the license to shape and change the facts if necessary, so that her audience can benefit from the filmmaker's memorable take on history.

That's one argument.

But let's go back to Amos Oz's provocative statement that "facts at times become the dire enemies of truth."

Isn't it equally true that lies and distortions presented under the guise of facts also become the dire enemies of truth?

Are we really supposed to believe that the intent of the people who made this film was not to have the audience believe, one hundred percent, that, "yeah, wow, this is exactly how it went down in Pakistan."

So much money, time, and skill were spent creating believability – in the last half hour breathlessly following the second-by-second night-vision action of the Navy Seals as they closed in for the kill.

What we were witnessing was much more immediate and "real" than what Barack Obama must have been seen from the direct CIA feed to the Oval Office when the assassination of bin Laden took place thousands of miles away.

But such story-telling skill cannot erase

the fact that the film was also a gross distortion of reality. One that could make a difference: There's a national debate about torture going on. In fact, the T-word has become so sensitive that government officials and much of the media prefer the euphemism "enhanced interrogation techniques" There is no way that a powerful film like *Zero Dark Thirty* does not become an important part of that debate: "I know torture works, Hell, it helped us get Bin Laden. I saw the movie."

Indeed, at one part in the film, when CIA agents are discussing the fact that the new Obama administration had given a thumbs down to torture, you couldn't help feeling that Obama's edict was naïve, uninformed, and would only weaken the United States.

Of course, for thousands of years playwrights, from Sophocles to Shakespeare to have done their own riffs on history. The difference is that with the increasing sophistication of the media, film makers have the ability to create the impression that what we are seeing is God-given truth.

So we swallow the lies and distortions along with the facts.

There's just no way to tell the difference.

That point was driven home by a study done in 2009 by Andrew Butler, now at Duke, but then at the Department of Psychology of the Washington University of Saint Louis.

His researchers gave a group of about fifty students an accurate written account of an historical event to read. They also showed them an excerpt from a feature film about that same event, an excerpt that wrongly and blatantly contradicted the central fact of the printed text.

When they were later tested, 50% of the students recalled the misinformation portrayed in the film as being correct.

"This continued," Butler reported "even when people were reminded of the potentially inaccurate nature of popular films right before viewing the film."

Another fascinating result: "the students were highly confident of the accuracy of the misinformation" sometimes even attribut-

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in the film *U-571*
(2000), courageous
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code machine by
boarding a German
submarine in
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the code
.....

ing the false information from the film to the accurate text they had read.

Even when students were told that specific facts in the film were wrong, when they were tested days later, some still felt that what the vivid version the film presented was the truth. These days, playing to box-office needs, one of the most common film-making distortions is to give Americans credit for the courage and derring-do of others.

That's the case of the Oscar-winning movie *Argo*, which supposedly portrays the rescue of six American diplomats from Iran in 1979, by an intrepid CIA agent, who leads them out of Tehran disguised as members of a film production crew. The movie is like a recruiting ad for the CIA. Except for the fact that the idea for the escape, the false passports provided to the Americans, the reconnaissance of the Tehran airport etc. etc., came not from the real-life CIA character, but from plucky Canadian diplomats, led by their ambassador Ken Taylor.

Similarly in the *Last Samurai* (2003), America soldiers led by Tom Cruise save the day for Japan when they are brought in to train the Japanese Imperial army against a 19th century uprising. Problem is, it was the French who trained them.

Again, in the film *U-571* (2000), courageous American troops retrieve the Nazi Enigma code machine by boarding a German submarine in disguise. In fact it was the British who captured the Enigma and broke the code.

Then, there's Oliver Stone's *JFK*, which,

mixing documentary footage with new film, argued compellingly that a combination of sinister forces – the CIA, the Mafia, the Military industrial Complex – were behind Kennedy's assassination.

When one "fact" after another in the film was demolished by experts, Stone retreated to "Hey, Guys ...just my take on history." His fraudulent account, however, became "truth" to tens of millions of Americans and audiences across the globe.

One of the worst exploiters of the "just-my-take-on-history genre" is Mel Gibson, whose blood-spattered portrayal of the American Revolution, "The Patriot" was judged so misleading, that the Smithsonian Institute, which had initially provided support, withdrew its backing and disowned any association.

But the problem is that, for the great majority of people on our planet, historical films "based on fact" are becoming our history books. Whether it be Mel Gibson or Daniel Day Lewis in *Lincoln*, or Karen Biegelow's *Zero Dark Thirty*, taken together they substitute tedious print with a patchwork of spellbinding tales and dramatic images – a beguiling but often distorted or completely false vision of ourselves and our past.

Should we care?

What can we do?

CT

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Barry Lando is the author of *Web of Deceit, the History of Western Complicity in Iraq, from Churchill to Kennedy to George W. Bush*.

Check out our Photo essays at
<http://coldtype.net/reader.html>

Down the barrel of a gun

David Cromwell challenges the BBC on the export of democracy

It is a prerequisite for corporate journalists that they respect the ideological conventions of their paymasters and of state power – a vital source of ‘news’ and ‘informed’ comment, after all. At the same time, the corporate journalist likes to project a self-serving image as a valiant investigator, a champion of democracy, and a facilitator of fair and balanced debate. All too often, of course, the public can see through the charade.

Huw Edwards, the BBC newsreader, once related an anecdote about being accosted on a train by an ‘enraged’ man: ‘Shortly after my return from Lashkar Gah [a city in southern Afghanistan and the capital of Helmand Province] in 2008, I was confronted by a man on a train heading for London. In a blistering conversation that lasted no more than five minutes, he raised fundamental concerns about the BBC’s coverage of Afghanistan. They were all linked in some way to the nature of the British media’s relationship with the armed forces.

‘He had been enraged by our “twisted” reporting, our status as “prisoners” of the forces during our stay in Helmand, and our seemingly wilful refusal to report “the truth”. Ah, yes. The truth.’ (Richard Lance Keeble and John Mair, editors, *Afghanistan, War and the Media: Deadlines and Frontlines*, Arima Publishing, Bury St Edmunds, 2010, p. ix)

The BBC man’s airily dismissive response – ‘Ah yes. The truth’ – may play well on the page, in black and white. But he doesn’t tell the read-

er what he actually said to the challenger in the train, and how their exchange ended. After all, that would involve Edwards revealing his opinion, which BBC journalists are ostensibly not allowed to do!

Instead, he sighs philosophically and tells his readers that ‘the truth’ is the journalist’s ‘most elusive aspiration’, adding: ‘In war reporting, that elusiveness is taken to even more daunting levels.’

Huw Edwards makes accurate reporting sound like some abstruse problem in quantum gravity, something ‘elusive’ that will perhaps forever be out of reach. But his fellow train passenger was surely right. There are ‘fundamental concerns about the BBC’s coverage of Afghanistan’ – and Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Iran, Syria, poverty, global capitalism, impending climate chaos, and on and on. But Edwards – someone entrusted with reading the News at Ten and commenting on royal pageants, no less – is part of the exclusive inner BBC News circle characterised by institutional groupthink that permits no fundamental concerns about the broadcaster’s role.

As sociologist Stuart Hall correctly observes: ‘The media define for the majority of the population what significant events are taking place, but, also, they offer powerful interpretations of how to understand these events.’

And in any ‘responsible’ discussion of events and issues, the boundaries are set within manageable limits that preclude serious challenges

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Look at John Simpson's words in the cold light of common sense, stripped of the ponderous tone and stolid presentation, and they actually contain little of substance, far less anything that seriously challenges power
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to the establishment. As a prime example, historian Mark Curtis cites the BBC programme Question Time – chaired by David Dimbleby, another senior corporation man (and former Bullingdon Club member) entrusted with live commentary of state events – as ‘a microcosm of how the media works’: ‘rarely are critical voices invited. If they are, it is so rare that their views can end up sounding ridiculous in comparison with the “normal” and “balanced” views of the other panelists. It is acceptable for Question Time panelists to criticise each other from within the elite consensus but not for anyone to criticise all of them from outside that consensus.’ (*Web of Deceit*, Vintage, 2003, p. 378)

Curtis continues: ‘The evidence is overwhelming that BBC and commercial television news report on Britain’s foreign policy in ways that resemble straightforward state propaganda organs. Although by no means directed by the state, their output might as well be; it is not even subtle. BBC, ITV and Channel 5 news simply report nothing seriously critical on British foreign policy; the exception is the odd report on Channel 4 news. Television news – the source of most people’s information – provides the most extreme media distortion ... playing an even greater ideological function than the press.’ (*Ibid.*, p. 379)

.....
Crafty propaganda

This ideological function was clear in the BBC Newsnight ‘special’ edition on February 26, 2013, titled *Iraq: 10 Years On*. One of the guests on the platform in front of an invited audience was the grandly titled ‘World Affairs Editor’, John Simpson. The veteran journalist has an air of avuncular gravitas, like a political-reporting version of David Attenborough, which helps to promote the notion of BBC News as authoritative and insightful. But look at his words in the cold light of common sense, stripped of the ponderous tone and stolid presentation, and they actually contain little of substance, far less anything that seriously challenges power. Indeed, sometimes those words are simply de-

ceptive. For example, at one point in his Newsnight contribution Simpson really did say: ‘It came as a genuine shock to Blair and Bush to find that Saddam had craftily got rid of his weapons beforehand.’

What secret psychic powers could Simpson possibly possess to detect ‘genuine shock’ inside the brains of Blair and Bush? Rather than Saddam ‘craftily’ getting rid of his weapons, why didn’t Simpson report, as he should have done 10 years ago, that Iraq had been effectively disarmed of its WMD?

The BBC website itself still has a transcript of an interview with Saddam Hussein, conducted by Tony Benn in February 2003, in which Saddam says: ‘Iraq has no weapons of mass destruction whatsoever.’ Indeed, the Iraqi weapons chief General Hussein Kamal, who defected from the regime in 1995, told the CIA, British intelligence and UN inspectors that Iraq had got rid of its WMD following the 1990-91 Gulf War: ‘All weapons – biological, chemical, missile, nuclear, were destroyed.’

This was revealed in an issue of *Newsweek* magazine published in February 2003, before the invasion of Iraq. But it was to no avail in halting the predetermined course for war set by Bush, with Blair a willing accomplice. Indeed, the US media watchdog, FAIR, reported that ‘no major US newspapers or national television news shows’ touched the story; it was ignored. Craftily, or otherwise, the BBC’s John Simpson did not mention any of this on Newsnight.

Later, Newsnight presenter Kirsty Wark addressed Hans Blix via video link: ‘You were the senior weapons inspector. You were tasked with looking for and finding WMD. We’re in a position now where Iran may well be on its way to having WMD.’

This was outrageous bias by a high-profile, ‘impartial’ BBC journalist. It was positively Kafkaesque for a senior BBC journalist, in discussing the propaganda-led catastrophe of Iraq, to repeat the same invented WMD scare story in relation to Iran, apparently with complete unawareness!

There is no solid evidence at all, only suppo-

sition and fear-mongering by powerful Western countries and Israel, that Iran is developing WMD (see The Iran ‘Threat’ in a Kafkaesque World by Edward S. Herman and David Peterson). But the bias was persistent in Kirsty Wark’s approach throughout Newsnight as BBC ‘moderator’. In her interview with former prime minister Tony Blair, Wark even asked: ‘But isn’t terrible in a way that in this country now we cannot go to war on the basis of intelligence again, can we?’

Wark’s ignorance of the realpolitik of the motivation for war is unforgivable and all but inexplicable. The Iraq war was certainly not waged ‘on the basis of intelligence’. Instead, as the infamous Downing Street memos revealed, ‘the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy’. And the policy was to launch a war of aggression against Iraq.

Indeed, Washington and London conspired to lure Saddam into supposedly obstructing the UN, thus providing an insidious pretext for war. As we noted in 2005, the ‘real news in the Downing Street memos’ was spelled out by reporter Michael Smith in the *Los Angeles Times*: ‘Although Blair and Bush still insist the decision to go to the UN was about averting war, one memo states that it was, in fact, about “wrong-footing” Hussein into giving them a legal justification for war.

‘British officials hoped the ultimatum could be framed in words that would be so unacceptable to Hussein that he would reject it outright. But they were far from certain this would work, so there was also a Plan B... Put simply, US aircraft patrolling the southern no-fly zone were dropping a lot more bombs in the hope of provoking a reaction that would give the allies an excuse to carry out a full-scale bombing campaign, an air war, the first stage of the conflict.’

Smith’s insightful conclusion was that the ‘way in which the intelligence was “fixed” to justify war was old news.’ Instead: ‘The real news is the shady April 2002 deal [when Blair visited Bush in Crawford, Texas] to go to war, the cynical use of the UN to provide an excuse, and the secret, illegal air war without the back-

ing of Congress.’

Alan Greenspan, the long-serving chair of the Federal Reserve Board of Governors, famously wrote: ‘I am saddened that it is politically inconvenient to acknowledge what everyone knows: the Iraq war is largely about oil.’ (*The Age of Turbulence*, Penguin, New York, 2007, p. 463)

And Michael Klare, a professor of peace and world security studies and author of *Resource Wars*, observed that: ‘Controlling Iraq is about oil as power, rather than oil as fuel. Control over the Persian Gulf translates into control over Europe, Japan, and China. It’s having our hand on the spigot.’

.....
Exporting democracy down the barrel of a gun

But such realism is not ideologically acceptable, perhaps not even thinkable, to anyone with aspirations to be a safe pair of BBC hands; and it is seemingly not permitted to intrude into any prepared BBC script.

The author and political analyst Nafeez Ahmed was present at the recording of the Newsnight special and he was given a few seconds to speak from the audience. The very same day that the Newsnight special was broadcast, he published a piece that exposed and demolished the principal ‘seven myths’ underpinning the BBC’s limiting and distorted framing of debate. These included the mendacious claim that decision-making in Washington and London had been skewed by ‘wrong intelligence’, and that the Blair government’s decision to go to war was based on legitimate parliamentary process. In short, says Ahmed: ‘Newsnight ignored the now well-documented fact that the war was conceived for a set of narrow strategic goals which did not genuinely have the interests of the Iraqi people at heart.... Despite the facts being widely and easily available in the public record, Newsnight’s programme on the 10 year anniversary of the war obfuscated them to such an extent that the real, serious questions were largely overlooked.’

If one single, loaded question epitomised

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Other than the people taking in the profits, is there anyone who would not choose cheap energy and high employment over profitability?
.....

the BBC's service to state propaganda, it was when Kirsty Wark asked her colleague, BBC Newsnight diplomatic and defence editor Mark Urban: 'Do you think the idea of exporting democracy at the end of a barrel of a gun has gone?'

Media Lens reader Tony Shenton challenged Kirsty Wark on email (February 26, 2013): 'You clearly believe that Britain invades other countries to export democracy and freedom. Thus, please can you explain why Blair and Cameron et al continue to be friends with brutal dictators such as Saudi Arabia and Bahrain etc?'

'Isn't Noam Chomsky correct when he says Britain and the US will support the most brutal regimes as long [as] they remain subservient to Western elites?'

Wark responded (February 27, 2013): 'Thank you for your email. You are entitled to your opinion, but I don't know how you can presume to know what I think, I was simply framing a question.'

Shenton replied (February 28, 2013): 'As you know, how you frame a debate reveals a lot about your ideological beliefs.'

Wark's ideologically-loaded question about the West 'exporting democracy' recalls a bizarre email once sent to Media Lens by Helen Boaden, then BBC News director. She had attached six pages of quotes from Bush and Blair supposedly proving their benign intentions behind invading Iraq!

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**The function of BBC News?
Preserving the balance of power!**

Nick Robinson provides a succinct job description of his role as BBC political editor in the book *Live From Downing Street*: 'My job is to report on what those in power are thinking and doing and on those who attempt to hold them to account in Parliament.' (Bantam Books, 2012, foreword).

This notion of public service broadcasting has been around since the early days of the BBC, all the way back to the 1920s. Commercial stations followed suit. Stuart Hood, a former

Controller of BBC Television, once observed of both the BBC and commercial stations that they:

'interpreted impartiality as the acceptance of that segment of opinion which constitutes parliamentary consensus. Opinion that falls outside that consensus has difficulty in finding expression.' (James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: The press and broadcasting in Britain*, 5th edition, Routledge, London, 1997, p. 170)

Author Dan Hind notes correctly that when society is already dominated by corporate interests, corporate media 'balance and impartiality' heavily favour those who have already secured huge power, 'while making this bias seem both natural and just.' (*The Return of the Public*, Verso, 2007, p. 56).

Hind adds: '...the BBC's managers remain convinced that they can discern what the population needs to know and that they can frame political and economic controversies in a balanced and fair way. The notion of public service helps them to see themselves as high-minded professionals. Their right to decide what receives publicity derives from their technical accomplishments, their experience and their commitment to a quite specific ideology.' (*Ibid.*, p. 56)

This 'specific ideology' is, as we have elucidated in several books and numerous essays, the false assumption that 'our' government will act out of benign intent, even when inflicting humanitarian catastrophes on other countries; and that corporate-led capitalism is a natural – or, at least, unchallengeable – state of affairs.

BBC managers, senior editors and journalists have internalised this false notion, so that they are incapable of treating state propaganda and disinformation with the requisite scrutiny and scepticism. The results of this gross failure for democracy include Permanent War, rampant corporate capitalism and effectively zero government response to the threat of climate chaos. Is it not time, then, for a Gandhi-style campaign of peaceful disobedience towards the corporate media, not least the BBC? **CT**

.....
David Cromwell is co-editor of the *British media watchdog Medialens* at <http://medialens.org>

The disease of capitalism

John Kozy on the spreading of governmental tyranny and gun violence

When I grew up in semi-rural Pennsylvania, everybody had guns, and guns were never a concern. People had guns for hunting and for skeet and target shooting. I had a 0.22 long barreled Remington rifle for varmint hunting, mainly to keep from being inundated by migrating urban rats. My brother had a shotgun; I never knew what kind. My memory is that he used that shotgun only once. He had, at the time, a desire to be a pheasant hunter, and the first time he hunted, he came home with a bloodied carcass which he proudly presented to our mother. Never having dealt with a fully feathered bird full of buckshot before, she spent an agonizing afternoon trying to make it fit for cooking. By the time she finished, my poor brother's pride had been replaced by sorrow and chagrin. He never hunted again. Not another pheasant was ever killed by a member of my family.

But nobody had guns for protection. If guns are needed for protection, the society has already failed. The little community I grew up in had no police force; in the 18 years I lived there, it had not a single officer. It had no jail, no courthouse, and not a single lawyer. No house was ever broken into, and no one was ever assaulted. People rarely locked their doors. The people in that little community not only liked each other, they cared for one other. They were not only

pleased when the needy were helped, they eagerly took part in helping.

The government that existed was there when needed and invisible when not. People did not distrust their government, were not afraid of its becoming tyrannical, and trivial offenses were ignored. Although it was unlawful to sell alcoholic beverages on Sunday, the town had a speakeasy that was open seven days a week and no one ever cared. As a small child, I often accompanied my father when he went there. As he drank his tankard of beer, I sipped a modicum from a shot glass. And I did not become an alcoholic! A miracle, I'm sure! In the twelve years I attended public schools, no policeman or security guard was ever needed for any function, not even athletic events. (Good thing, since the community lacked one.)

That world is now gone. In less than a century, in a single lifetime! it vanished. Now many people refuse to help the needy and resent it when they are helped. A miasma of meanness now hovers over America. Although it does not afflict everyone, it afflicts enough to make meanness a dominant American attribute. It can be observed everywhere – in the halls of Congress and in our classrooms where students bully their classmates, in a college band whose members beat one of their own to death in an activity called hazing, in the killing

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that takes place on our streets and in our homes, schools, and places of work, in the dialogs spoken in movies and on television programs. No one likes or trusts anyone, especially the government. Americans are a poorly educated, uncouth, uncivil, uncaring people. (No, not everyone.) They have turned civil society into a mob.

I live in a sparsely populated, gated community that epitomizes this nation. With only a population of around 15,000, it boasts 021 churches. Four of these are affiliated with the same protestant theological denomination; yet their congregations do not like one another well enough to worship together in the same building. Americans don't live together; they merely live side by side. America's Christians not only dislike non-Christians, they dislike each other too. In general, we are a mean spirited and spiteful people.

Americans who oppose the legalization of abortion because they claim to believe that life is sacred stand by silently as people of all ages are gunned down in their communities every day. It's as though the births are needed to ensure that shooters will always have targets since no provision is ever made to care for the newly born. The hungry have to rely on intermittent charity, the homeless, cardboard boxes, and the sick, seemingly endless waits in emergency rooms. An asthmatic resident of my home state recently died in one while waiting to be examined. A simple injection would have saved her. Abandoned street children unite in street gangs which hunt one another. The unemployed become hunters of people and gatherers of their goods. People seethe with covert racial, religious, sexual, and other biases. Love thy neighbor as thy self has no practical meaning, no cash value, as William James would have put it.

So what has happened? Well, answer these questions and try to figure it out:

What difference is there between a President who has a kill list and squads of assassins called navy seals and a Cosa Nostra Don

who orders assassinations? Is the Director of the CIA whose agents assassinate people any better than a Mafia Godfather?

How can a government that boasts of killing people in faraway places seriously lament the killing that takes place in its own cities? Many more Americans were killed avenging 9-11 than were killed on that day. Revenge, a mean spirited activity, is more important than people's lives. Humane people never take pride in killing.

How can a nation that shrugs its shoulders over collateral killings in, say, Pakistan, bemoan the killings of bystanders in gangland crossfire or even those killed in their bedrooms during drive-by shootings?

How can a nation claim it values life while its police routinely get away with killing unarmed and often handicapped people by merely claiming a fear that their lives were in danger?

How can a government not be tyrannical when it consists of true ideological believers who seek to impose their beliefs on everyone else? Tyrannical governments are made up of tyrannical people. John Stuart Mill long ago proved in his pamphlet, *On Liberty*, that freedom is impossible without tolerance for differences. But even America's university graduates haven't read that little pamphlet. The expression "educated American" is for the most part an oxymoron.

Of course, there have always been two kinds of people – humanitarians and inhumanitarians. And a majority of the people in a mean society do not have to be mean. The amount of meanness perpetrated, not the number of people who perpetrate it, is the definitive element. The meanness evident in America is overwhelming. Civil behavior is almost entirely absent. Barbarians are at the helm of the ship of state and have been for a long time.

The meanness that has afflicted America is responsible for its domestic violence. It is also responsible for the violence Americans inflict internationally. Meanness cannot be compartmentalized. There is no such thing

as a nice, mean fellow. No mean person is nice; nice guys are never mean.

The germ that carries this affliction is the predominant political economy fostered by the commercial, political, and economic communities. Capitalism is an extractive activity that exploits workers and consumers and has never succeeded in serving the needs of any nation's entire population. Marketing is a universal lie. People always fall through the cracks in institutions and the institutional elite care nothing about those who drop. Capitalist societies always consist of first and second class citizens; they are characterized by people who agree with Henry Vanderbilt's statement, "The public be damned." And the public is and always has been. America's elite have never sacrificed anything for this people in general.

Commercial competition does not foster concern for others. Individualism fosters antagonism. Looking out for number one always ends up denying what is needed to number two. Charity is not a commercial virtue. Capitalism is institutionalized meanness. It is the primeval miasma manifested in greed. It is the disease that makes human

beings inhumane, and it is fatal.

Why then would those in other nations look up to America and want to emulate its culture of meanness? Why aren't they revolted by it? Why won't they simply stop being led by their noses?

There can only be one answer. The meanness has not only afflicted America, it has afflicted others too. The primeval miasma transcends national borders. That is the tragedy of being human.

Unless the meanness that pervades human societies can be ameliorated, no human society will ever be worthy of being called a force for good in the world. The violence in America, or anywhere else, will never be substantially reduced until the reduction of meanness itself, not its various means, becomes the object of human action. **CT**

John Kozy is a retired professor of philosophy and logic who writes on social, political, and economic issues. After serving in the US Army during the Korean War, he spent 20 years as a university professor and another 20 years working as a writer. His on-line pieces can be found at <http://www.jkozy.com>

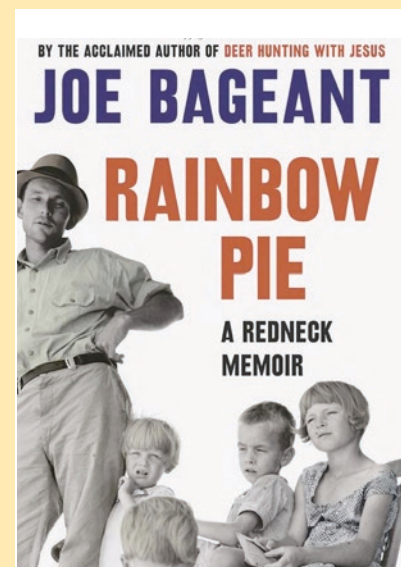
Capitalism is institutionalized meanness. It is the primeval miasma manifested in greed. It is the disease that makes human beings inhumane, and it is fatal

JOE BAGEANT

Rainbow Pie: A Redneck Memoir

Bageant writes about the rural white underclass, not as an anthropological study of an exotic tribe, but as his very own people. Set between 1950 and 1963, combining personal recollections, family stories, and historical analysis, this book leans on Maw, Pap, Ony Mae, and other members of this dirt poor Scots-Irish family to chronicle the often heartbreaking postwar journey of 22 million rural Americans moving from their small subsistence farms into the cities, where they became the foundation of a permanent white underclass.

\$11.51 Amazon.com



Corporate blowback

Companies like the French energy supplier EDF, seeking to terrify protesters, are likely to become victims of their own aggression, writes **George Monbiot**

.....
Prompted to act by altruism and empathy, one day they will be remembered as we remember suffragettes and anti-slavery campaigners
.....

Without public protest, democracy is dead. Every successful challenge to excessive power begins outside the political chamber. When protest stops, politics sclerotises: it becomes a conversation between different factions of the elite.

But protest is of no democratic value unless it is effective. It must disturb and challenge those at whom it is aimed. It must arouse and motivate those who watch. The climate change campaigners trying to prevent a new dash for gas wrote to their MPs, emailed the power companies, marched and lobbied. They were ignored. So last year 17 of them climbed the chimney of the West Burton power station and occupied it for a week. Theirs was a demonstration in two senses of the word: they presented an issue to the public which should be at the front of our minds. Prompted to act by altruism and empathy, one day they will be remembered as we remember suffragettes and anti-slavery campaigners.

Last month the operator of the power station – EDF, which is largely owned by the French government – announced that it is suing these people, and four others, for £5m. It must know that, if it wins, they have no hope of paying. It must know that they would lose everything they own, now and for the rest of their lives. For these and other reasons, EDF's action looks to me like a Stra-

tegic Lawsuit Against Public Participation: a SLAPP around the ear of democracy.

SLAPPs are attempts to bully people into political submission through inordinate demands. Their purpose is to terrify and enmesh. Even if they stand no chance of success, they ensure that campaigners who might otherwise have been trying to protect the environment or to defend workers' rights are instead snarled up in the courts. Often, whatever the merits of the case, people will agree to leave the company alone if it drops the suit.

Those who might have joined the campaign are frightened off. Those who might have become active in other campaigns avoid politics altogether for fear of the consequences. Their absence impoverishes democracy.

SLAPPs are used all over the world. Three people are currently being sued – each for over a million dollars – for protesting against an amusement park in Niagara Falls in Canada called Marineland. Two of them are former trainers from the park, who have alleged that the animals are being neglected and ill-treated. They claim that seals have gone blind as a result of dirty water, and dolphins' skin has been falling off in chunks. The company denies their allegations.

After they attended a peaceful demonstration, Marineland served them with writs containing a number of exotic claims. One

former trainer, Phil Demers, was accused of plotting to steal the park's half-tonne walrus. He says he doubts his "second floor apartment would hold a walrus. My hands are full enough with my cats." Daft as the suits appear, they have succeeded in tying the campaigners in legal knots.

Dale Askey, formerly a librarian at Kansas State University, is being sued for \$4.5m (alongside his current employer) by an academic publisher called Edwin Mellen Press. His offence was to challenge the quality and cost of the books the press produced: something librarians see as part of their job.

In Canto 21 of the *Inferno*, Dante watches lawyers who made a habit of bringing frivolous or oppressive suits being perpetually submerged in a lake of boiling tar by demons with boathooks. They get off quite lightly, in other words. But perhaps hell of a different kind awaits on earth. It's called the Streisand Effect.

In 2003 Barbra Streisand's lawyers launched an action to have an aerial photograph of her home in Malibu removed from a collection of 12,000 such shots, whose purpose was to document coastal erosion. They demanded \$50m in damages. Before they became involved, the photo was downloaded four times. In the month after they launched their stupid suit, it was downloaded 420,000 times. The Streisand Effect, in other words, is blowback: disastrous unintended consequences of an attempt at censorship.

The best-known example is Britain's fa-

mous McLibel case, in which McDonalds tried to sue two penniless activists. By 1997, when the longest civil case in British history concluded, McDonalds had suffered a devastating defeat in the court of public opinion.

In 2004, Gunns, a company turning ancient rainforests in Tasmania into pulp, sued 20 people who had been protesting against its plans to fell a forest containing some of the tallest trees on earth. It sought \$6.4m from them for attempting to disrupt its operations. The result was a global campaign against the company. Its customers fled, its share price collapsed and its chief executive was forced out. Gunns found itself obliged to settle the case by making massive payouts to the people it had sued.

EDF might find itself in similar trouble. The backlash against this arm of the French state, seeking to alter the course of British politics by ruining those who participate, is building rapidly. A petition asking the company to drop its suit, has already gathered 12,000 signatures. EDF may now find itself forever linked in the public mind with oppressive power, the stifling of dissent and climate breakdown.

While eternal submersion in a lake of boiling tar invokes, for a fossil fuel company, a certain symmetry, this self-inflicted public relations disaster may turn out to be almost as excruciating. **CT**

George Monbiot is a columnist for The Guardian. His website is <http://monbiot.com>

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The backlash against this arm of the French state, seeking to alter the course of British politics by ruining those who participate, is building rapidly

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No vacation from inequality

It's basketball for the owner, but rotten food and raw sewage for the passengers, writes **Sam Pizzigati**

.....
Passengers who waded through sewage on the Triumph for five days will get a refund, free rides home, a credit toward a future cruise, and \$500
.....

A million ways to have fun,' goes the cruise ship marketing slogan – but only, the fine print should read, if you have mega millions.

Just over a year ago, the Costa Concordia, an ocean liner that belongs to Carnival Cruise Lines, ran aground on an Italian sandbar. Thirty-two died.

“We expect to fully recover from the ship incident,” the subsequent Carnival 2012 annual report told shareholders.

Last month, Carnival suffered another “ship incident” when the Carnival Triumph, with over 4,200 passengers and crew onboard, lost all power after an engine fire. The ship drifted aimlessly in the Gulf of Mexico for days, with toilets overflowing and food rotting. Raw sewage spilled into cabins and passageways. Passengers would later describe “an overpowering stench.”

Carnival CEO Micky Arison never caught a whiff of this stench. He stayed far away. In fact, two days after the fire, with the Triumph still stinking, Arison showed up courtside in Miami to watch his beloved Miami Heat do basketball battle. Arison owns the Miami Heat.

Arison owns a great many things. This past September, the business magazine *Forbes* put his total personal fortune at a clean \$5 billion.

Last year, after the 32 tragic deaths about Carnival's ill-fated Costa Concordia, Arison

displayed a rather similar cavalier disregard for his passengers' welfare. He never showed up at the disaster scene in Italy either.

Carnival would go on to offer the 3,200 passengers who survived that disaster a refund, travel expenses, and a bit over \$14,000 each. Some perspective: The entire bill for the \$14,000 checks – about \$45 million – amounts to less than 1 percent of Carnival CEO Arison's personal net worth.

The Carnival passengers who experienced Last month's unpleasantness have received an offer that makes the Costa Concordia compensation seem downright generous. Passengers who waded through sewage on the Triumph for five days will get a refund, free rides home, a credit toward a future cruise, and \$500. They also get a complimentary bathrobe.

More perspective: Under US Department of Transportation airline regulations, passengers denied boarding on an oversold flight get up to \$1,300 if the delay to their final destination costs them more than four hours.

Cruise giants like Carnival essentially don't face many regulations with that sort of bite. In fact, they face relatively few regulations at all. In a US port, cruise ships do fall under US Coast Guard jurisdiction. But on the seas, as US Senator Jay Rockefeller noted after the Triumph episode, “the world is theirs.”

An international maritime organization does, to be sure, exist. But its guidelines don't carry the force of law. Corporations can violate these guidelines, points out maritime legal expert Jim Walker, and face no real consequences.

Cruise corporations have also made sure that any standards on the books only serve for show. All cruise ships, for instance, must now have auxiliary power systems to maintain propulsion and basic passenger services should a fire knock out the main power system, the fate that befell the Carnival Triumph. This standard, rather conveniently, only applies to ships built after July 1, 2010 and doesn't cover the Triumph, built in 1999, or just about every other cruise liner on the seven seas.

All these ships could, of course, retrofit to meet the new 2010 safety rule. But that retrofit would make a dent on their corporate profit margins.

And billionaire Carnival CEO Micky Arison doesn't like to see anything dent his profit. Especially taxes.

Over the previous five years, Senate Transportation Committee chair Jay Rockefeller revealed at a 2012 hearing, Arison's Carnival Corp. paid just 1.1 percent of its \$11.3 billion in profits in combined local, state, and federal taxes.

Dodging taxes and safety regulations certainly does help keep the dollars cascading into the pockets of top cruise industry execs. But you don't get to become a bil-

lionaire just by stiffing Uncle Sam and skirting safety regs. Execs like Arison also never miss an opportunity to nickel-and-dime at passenger expense.

Carnival and other cruise giants have been busily inventing new service fees to tack on passenger bills, \$50 charges, for instance, for early boarding. Passengers on cruise liners used to have access to any on-board restaurant without paying anything extra. Now they pay extra if they want anything besides a buffet.

All cruise ship passengers, of course, have at least a basic level of personal affluence. Whatever shipboard indignities they suffer, in the end, pale against the indignities so many millions of families suffer today, on a daily basis, in Great Recession America.

But symbols do matter – and what more vivid symbol of the indignity our contemporary corporate-driven inequality imposes than the Carnival Triumph. Thousands of people adrift, going nowhere in a nightmare of sewage and stench, while a billionaire chief exec sits far away in a courtside seat and cheers.

CT

*Sam Pizzigati, editor of the online weekly Too Much - <http://toomuchonline.org>, writes widely about inequality. An excerpt from his latest book, **The Rich Don't Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class**, has just been published by Seven Stories Press, was featured in issue 71 of ColdType.*

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All these ships could, of course, retrofit to meet the new 2010 safety rule. But that retrofit would make a dent on their corporate profit margins

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The assassination of Hugo Chavez

Worse than Castro, worse than Allende, saying the most forceful things about US imperialism and its cruelty, is it any wonder he's dead, says **William Blum**

.....
"Evo take care of yourself. Correa, be careful. We just don't know," Chávez said, referring to Bolivia's president, Evo Morales, and Rafael Correa, the president of Ecuador, both leading leftists
.....

.....
Lonce wrote about Chilean president Salvador Allende:

"Washington knows no heresy in the Third World but genuine independence. In the case of Salvador Allende independence came clothed in an especially provocative costume – a Marxist constitutionally elected who continued to honor the constitution. This would not do. It shook the very foundation stones upon which the anti-communist tower is built: the doctrine, painstakingly cultivated for decades, that "communists" can take power only through force and deception, that they can retain that power only through terrorizing and brainwashing the population. There could be only one thing worse than a Marxist in power – an elected Marxist in power."

There was no one in the entire universe that those who own and run "United States, Inc." wanted to see dead more than Hugo Chávez. He was worse than Allende. Worse than Fidel Castro. Worse than any world leader not in the American camp because he spoke out in the most forceful terms about US imperialism and its cruelty. Repeatedly. Constantly. Saying things that heads of state are not supposed to say. At the United Nations, on a shockingly personal level about George W. Bush. All over Latin America, as he organized the region into anti-US-Empire blocs.

Long-term readers of this report know that I'm not much of a knee-reflex conspiracy theo-

rist. But when someone like Chávez dies at the young age of 58 I have to wonder about the circumstances. Unremitting cancer, intractable respiratory infections, massive heart attack, one after the other ... It is well known that during the Cold War, the CIA worked diligently to develop substances that could kill without leaving a trace. I would like to see the Venezuelan government pursue every avenue of investigation in having an autopsy performed.

Back in December 2011, Chávez, already under treatment for cancer, wondered out loud: "Would it be so strange that they've invented the technology to spread cancer and we won't know about it for 50 years?" The Venezuelan president was speaking one day after Argentina's leftist president, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, announced she had been diagnosed with thyroid cancer. This was after three other prominent leftist Latin America leaders had been diagnosed with cancer: Brazil's president, Dilma Rousseff; Paraguay's Fernando Lugo; and the former Brazilian leader Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

"Evo take care of yourself. Correa, be careful. We just don't know," Chávez said, referring to Bolivia's president, Evo Morales, and Rafael Correa, the president of Ecuador, both leading leftists.

Chávez said he had received words of warning from Fidel Castro, himself the target of hundreds of failed and often bizarre CIA assassination plots. "Fidel always told me: 'Chávez take

care. These people have developed technology. You are very careless. Take care what you eat, what they give you to eat ... a little needle and they inject you with I don't know what."

When Vice President Nicolas Maduro suggested possible American involvement in Chávez's death, the US State Department called the allegation absurd.

Several progressive US organizations have filed a Freedom of Information Act request with the CIA, asking for "any information regarding or plans to poison or otherwise assassinate the President of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez, who has just died."

I personally believe that Hugo Chávez was murdered by the United States. If his illness and death were NOT induced, the CIA – which has attempted to assassinate more than 50 foreign leaders, many successfully – was not doing its job.

When Fidel Castro became ill several years ago, the American mainstream media was unrelenting in its conjecture about whether the Cuban socialist system could survive his death. The same speculation exists now in regard to Venezuela. The Yankee mind can't believe that large masses of people can turn away from capitalism when shown a good alternative. It could only be the result of a dictator manipulating the public; all resting on one man whose death would mark finis to the process.

It's the end of the world ... again

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) recent convention in Washington produced the usual Doomsday talk concerning Iran's imminent possession of nuclear weapons and with calls to bomb that country before they nuked Israel and/or the United States. So once again I have to remind everyone that these people – Israeli and American officials – are not really worried about an Iranian attack. Here are some of their many prior statements:

In 2007, in a closed discussion, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said that in her opinion "Iranian nuclear weapons do not pose an

existential threat to Israel." She "also criticized the exaggerated use that [Israeli] Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is making of the issue of the Iranian bomb, claiming that he is attempting to rally the public around him by playing on its most basic fears."

2009: "A senior Israeli official in Washington", reported the *Washington Post* (March 5), asserted that "Iran would be unlikely to use its missiles in an attack [against Israel] because of the certainty of retaliation."

In 2010 the *Sunday Times* of London (January 10) reported that Brigadier-General Uzi Eilam, war hero, pillar of the Israeli defense establishment, and former director-general of Israel's Atomic Energy Commission, "believes it will probably take Iran seven years to make nuclear weapons."

January 2012: US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta told a television audience: "Are they [Iran] trying to develop a nuclear weapon? No, but we know that they're trying to develop a nuclear capability."

Later that month we could read in the *New York Times* (January 15) that "three leading Israeli security experts – the Mossad chief, Tamir Pardo, a former Mossad chief, Efraim Halevy, and a former military chief of staff, Dan Halutz – all recently declared that a nuclear Iran would not pose an existential threat to Israel."

Then, a few days afterward, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak, in an interview with Israeli Army Radio (January 18), had this exchange:

"Question: Is it Israel's judgment that Iran has not yet decided to turn its nuclear potential into weapons of mass destruction?"

"Barak: People ask whether Iran is determined to break out from the control [inspection] regime right now ... in an attempt to obtain nuclear weapons or an operable installation as quickly as possible. Apparently that is not the case."

In an April 20, 2012 CNN interview Barak repeated this sentiment: "It's true that probably [Iranian leader] Khamenei has not given orders to start building a [nuclear] weapon."

And on several other occasions, Barak has stated: "Iran does not constitute an existential

The Yankee mind can't believe that large masses of people can turn away from capitalism when shown a good alternative

.....
So our splendid officials are considering putting Bradley Manning in prison forever simply because they're embarrassed. Hard to find much fault with that
.....

threat against Israel.” 7

Lastly, we have the US Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, in a January 2012 report to Congress: “We do not know, however, if Iran will eventually decide to build nuclear weapons.” ... There are “certain things [the Iranians] have not done” that would be necessary to build a warhead.

So why, then, do Israeli and American leaders, at most other times, maintain the Doomsday rhetoric? Partly for AIPAC to continue getting large donations. For Israel to get massive amounts of US aid. For Israeli leaders to win elections. To protect Israel’s treasured status as the Middle East’s sole nuclear power.

Listen to Danielle Pletka, vice president for foreign and defense policy studies at America’s most prominent neo-con think tank, American Enterprise Institute:

“The biggest problem for the United States is not Iran getting a nuclear weapon and testing it, it’s Iran getting a nuclear weapon and not using it. Because the second that they have one and they don’t do anything bad, all of the naysayers are going to come back and say, “See, we told you Iran is a responsible power. We told you Iran wasn’t getting nuclear weapons in order to use them immediately.” ... And they will eventually define Iran with nuclear weapons as not a problem.”

.....
Osama bin Laden, Bradley Manning, & William Blum

Bradley Manning has the charge of “Aiding the enemy” hanging over his head. This could lead to a sentence of life in prison. As far as can be deduced, the government believes that the documents and videos that Manning gave to Wikileaks, which Wikileaks then widely distributed to international media, aided the enemy because it put US foreign policy in a very bad light.

Manning’s attorneys have asked the prosecution more than once for specific examples of how “the enemy” (whoever that may refer to in a world full of people bitterly angry at the United States because of any of many

terrible acts carried out by the US government) has been “aided” by the Wikileaks disclosures. Just how has the enemy made use of the released material to harm the United States? The government has not provided any such examples, probably because what really bothers Washington officials is the embarrassment they have experienced before the world resulting from the documents and videos; which indeed are highly embarrassing even to genuine war criminals; filled with violations of international law, atrocities, multiple lies to everyone, revelations of gross hypocrisy, and much more.

So our splendid officials are considering putting Bradley Manning in prison forever simply because they’re embarrassed. Hard to find much fault with that.

But now the prosecutors have announced that a Navy Seal involved in the killing of Osama bin Laden is going to testify at the court martial that bin Laden possessed articles about the Wikileaks documents that Manning leaked. Well, there must be a hundred million other people in the world who have similar material on their computers. The question remains: What use did the enemy make of that?

The Iraqi government made use of the material, inducing them to refuse immunity to US troops for crimes committed in Iraq, such as the cold-blooded murders revealed by the Wikileaks videos; this in turn led the US to announce that it was ending its military engagement in Iraq. However, Manning was indicted in May 2010, well before the Iraqi decision to end the immunity.

In January, 2006 bin Laden, in an audio tape, declared: “If Bush decides to carry on with his lies and oppression, then it would be useful for you to read the book *Rogue State* [by William Blum], which states in its introduction ... ” He then went on to quote the opening of a paragraph I wrote (which appears actually in the Foreword of the British edition only, that was later translated to Arabic), which in full reads:

“If I were the president, I could stop terrorist attacks against the United States in a few days. Permanently. I would first apologize –

very publicly and very sincerely – to all the widows and the orphans, the impoverished and the tortured, and all the many millions of other victims of American imperialism. I would then announce that America’s global interventions – including the awful bombings – have come to an end. And I would inform Israel that it is no longer the 51st state of the union but – oddly enough – a foreign country. I would then reduce the military budget by at least 90% and use the savings to pay reparations to the victims and repair the damage from the many American bombings and invasions. There would be more than enough money. Do you know what one year of the US military budget is equal to? One year. It’s equal to more than \$20,000 per hour for every hour since Jesus Christ was born.

“That’s what I’d do on my first three days in the White House. On the fourth day, I’d be assassinated.”

Thus, Osama bin Laden was clearly making use of what I wrote, and the whole world heard it. And I was thus clearly “aiding the enemy”. But I was not prosecuted.

The United States would like to prove a direct use and benefit by “the enemy” of the material released by Wikileaks; but so far it appears that only possession might be proven. In my case the use, and presumed propaganda benefit, were demonstrated. The fact that I wrote the material, as opposed to “stealing” it, is irrelevant to the issue of aiding the enemy. I knew, or should have known, that my criticisms of US foreign policy could be used by the foes of those policies. Indeed, that’s why I write what I do. To provide ammunition to anti-war and other activists.

The Department of Justice and socialism

For many years when I’ve been asked to explain just what I mean by “socialism” I’ve usually replied simply: “Putting people before profits”. There are a thousand-and-one details that would have to be considered in a transformation from a capitalist society to a socialist society, but rather than going into all that it’s much simpler

to leave it with just that motto, which expresses the essence of my socialist society. In any event, in that glorious future world things will evolve in ways that could not be wholly predicted. The structure could take any one of many forms, but the essence must remain the same if it’s going to be called socialist.

Thus was I both surprised and amused in reading a news article about the current trial in New Orleans which is attempting to determine, amongst other things, the extent of blame of various companies, particularly BP, involved in the 2010 historic accident which took the lives of 11 workers and dumped an estimated 172 million gallons of crude oil in the Gulf of Mexico. The US Justice Department attorney declared in his opening statement: “The evidence will show that BP put profits before people, profits before safety and profits before the environment.”

Well, imagine that. The Justice Department certainly captured the essence of corporate behavior. The attorney chose such words because he knew that the sentiments expressed would appeal to the average American sitting on a jury. The members of the jury would understand that BP had blatantly ignored and violated certain cherished ideals like people, safety and the environment. Prosecuting the corporation would sound fair and just to them.

Yet, when someone like me expresses such sentiments – and I have used the exact same words on occasion – I run the risk of being written off as an “extremist”, a “radical”, and other bad-for-you labels; not long ago it was “commie”.

The irony runs even deeper. If a corporation flagrantly ignores putting profits before everything else, stockholders can sue the executives.

This just in! The real reason the Pope resigned!

He’s losing his mind. In January, US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta met with Pope Benedict XVI to receive his blessing. Afterward, Panetta said the pontiff told him, “Thank you for helping to keep the world safe.” **CT**

“The evidence will show that BP put profits before people, profits before safety and profits before the environment”

William Blum’s latest book is America’s Deadliest Export – Democracy: The Truth About US Foreign Policy and Everything Else

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