

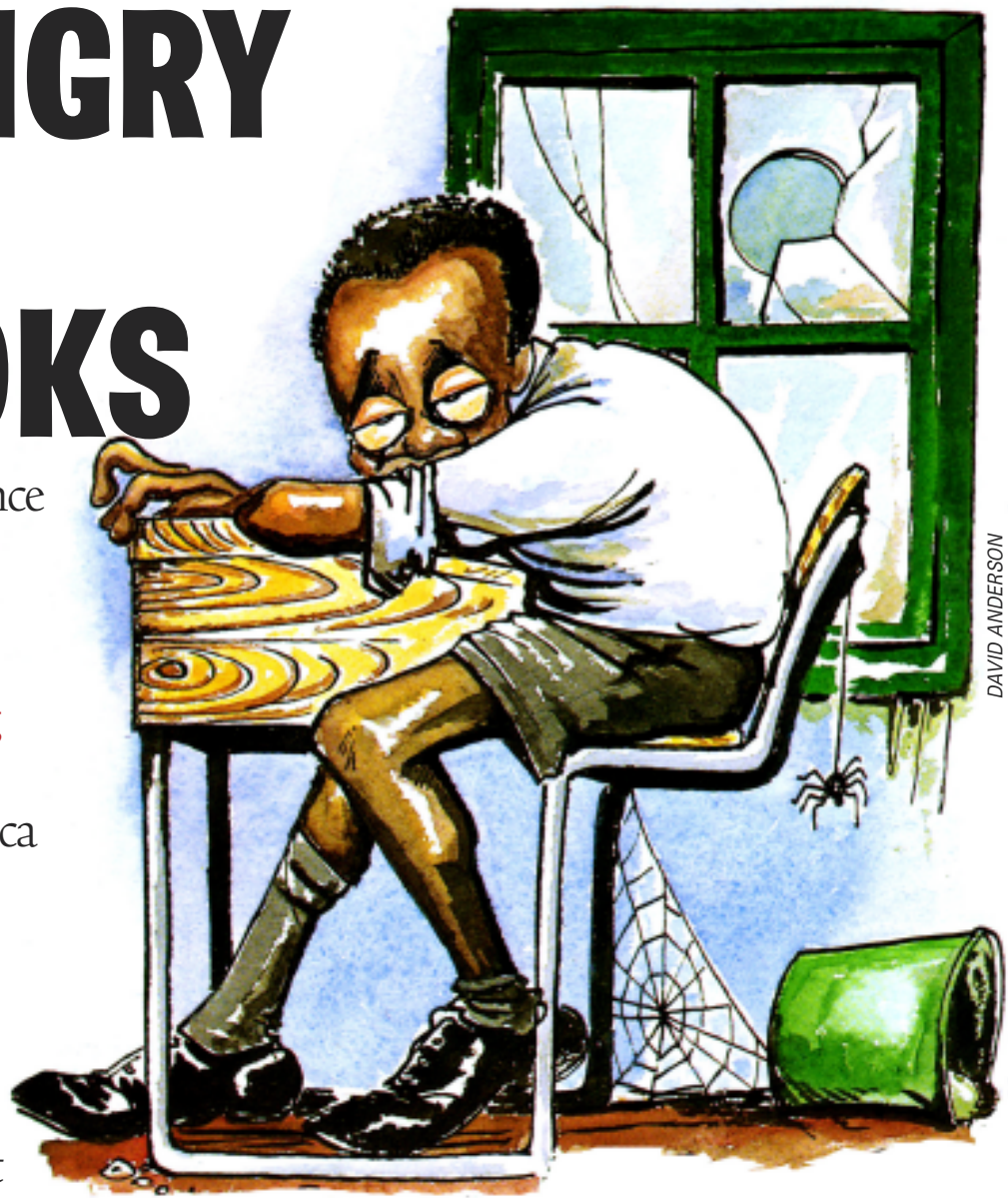
INSIDE: VIRGIN OR SLUT? ● JUST ANOTHER PEACE SCARE
● THE NIGHT I LEARNED WHOSE SIDE I'M ON ● THE
CITY THAT SAID 'NO' ● JUSTIFYING MURDER ● & MORE

The ^{ColdType} READER

WRITING WORTH READING ● ISSUE 22 ● JANUARY 2008

HUNGRY FOR BOOKS

In her acceptance
speech for the
Nobel Prize
in Literature,
Doris Lessing
laments that
children in Africa
are starved
of knowledge
while those
in the West
shun reading
for the Internet



The ^{ColdType} READER



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SORE LOSERMEN

David Michael Green on a party mired in failure

The last time the American public was so disenchanted with the state of national politics, there was a war going on and near civil war at home.

Indeed, so surly is the current public mood about the country being on the wrong track that you'd almost think there is a war going on now! But, of course, since there's no draft, no tax increase, and no pictures of battle, or of bodies coming back to Dover Air Force Base, I'm sure I must be mistaken about that.

So what gives? Why are people so dissatisfied, telling pollsters in record numbers that the country has gone astray?

There's a simple answer, but the regressive right is desperate that you not hear it or think about it. You see, there's been an ideological revolution going on in America. It began in the 1980s with Reagan kleptocracy (in that sense, it's been a bit of an evolutionary revolution – however oxymoronic (or just plain moronic) that idea may be – but has really hit stride in the seven tortuous years of

the Little Bush regime.

And the thing is, people don't like it.

Indeed, one could explain the public mood quite succinctly, as follows: The right sought power in America. They got it. They implemented their agenda. Unfettered. It sucked. People hate it.

That's really just about it.

And what kills me is how these guys are both such lousy winners and lousy losers. Maybe they're just lousy, period. All I know is that they had it all – Congress, the presidency and the Supreme Court. They had a national trauma which gave legitimacy to a stolen presidency and immediately jacked it up from its 50 percent approval rating and rapidly descending trajectory into stratospheric levels of support. They had the world loving America for the first time in a long time, and they had international support for attacking the country's purported enemies.

Now it's all gone. And, while you'll hear rumblings about Dan Rather this, and Tom Daschle that, the simple truth is that the policies of the regressive agenda failed precisely because of the

What kills me is how these guys are both such lousy winners and lousy losers. Maybe they're just lousy, period

POLITICAL SUICIDE

They attempt to destroy Social Security, one of the most successful government programs of all time, in order to further enrich the already fabulously wealthy, and can't imagine that we wouldn't be all over that

political success of the regressive movement.

That's right. (Very right, actually.) These folks are very good at campaigning and complaining, and especially so in an environment in which no one pushes back. They can demonize like nobody's business (except Wall Street's business, of course). They can fearmonger better than any dimestore preacher or fire-and-brimstone pope. They can bully just as Tailgunner Joe McCarthy taught them so well how to do. All of which means that if the press is too fearful to call them on it, and the 'opposition party' is hardly worthy of either word in that label, they can win elections. But when they transition from the disloyal opposition to actually governing, they run into a small problem, which is that people don't happen to like their policies.

Deceit, death, incompetence

I know, it's amazing isn't it? I mean, what's not to like about deceit, death and incompetence?

- They were (minimally) asleep at the wheel during America's most severe domestic military attack in history, and are surprised that we might find that troubling.

- They identify an enemy and claim that this person and his movement attacked the country, then they fail to come close to defeating this enemy in six years of war. Who's ready to sign-up for that?

- They bring us another war, based on lies, which turns into a quagmire based on lies, and which has nothing remotely to do with American security other than to radically diminish it. Then they belittle us as disloyal for opposing

the moral, fiscal and humanitarian disasters they've made.

- They polarize the country economically in the name of their radical (supposed) free market ideas, which turn out to have a lot more to do with privileging certain elites than with privileging nobody, as per the theory. Then, as we are being gouged paying for gas, food and mortgages, they are astonished that we don't give them credit for the wonderful state of the economy. Hey, the Dow's up! What's wrong with you people?

- They offer us record-setting deficits in place of record-setting surpluses, and are shocked that we aren't interested in such a golden opportunity to go broke.

- They create a giant new government benefit structured to enrich insurance and pharmaceutical industries, while maybe incidentally also helping seniors once in a while, and they wonder why we're not enthusiastic.

- They attempt to destroy Social Security, one of the most successful government programs of all time, in order to further enrich the already fabulously wealthy, and can't imagine that we wouldn't be all over that.

- They allow us to suffer and die from diseases which might well have been cured by now, were it not for the fact that the religious radicals to which they cater have imposed their extreme fundamentalist views on the entire country. Then they're astonished that we choose health and longevity over blastocysts in petri dishes.

- They legislate by an act of Congress intervention into a personal family tragedy, and are amazed that we aren't all clamoring to be treated like the Terri Schiavo family.

- They block health care for children while uninhibitedly enriching crony contractors in Iraq, and wonder why we don't celebrate their twisted values.

- They demonize gays and minorities and immigrants and liberals in order to divert attention from their real kleptocracy agenda, and we're supposed to feel good about how they've restored dignity to American politics.

- They imagine that good governance involves poor preparation before a natural disaster, criminal negligence during it, and shameful disinterest afterwards, and can't quite fathom why even an embarrassingly intimidated American press can no longer withhold its criticisms.

- They not only stand by and do nothing about the planet's most serious environmental crisis ever, but they actually block other countries from rescuing themselves, all in order to maintain fossil fuel industry profits. And they wonder why we don't beg for more of that.

- They turn our country into a hated international bully, proud to be an aggressor, a torturer and a hypocrite, and then they're shocked that we don't find that a compelling self-image.

- They trample the Constitution in every way imaginable, from checks and balances to separation of church and state to due process to illegal search and seizure to stealing elections. After constantly telling us how much we should revere the Founders, they are somehow surprised that we don't approve of seeing their creation being trashed.

And this is just for starters...

The only thing really surprising about any of this reaction is that anyone would be surprised about it at all.

Imagine if George W. Bush had campaigned on a platform of decreased national security, massive debt, environmental catastrophe, economic disparity, political polarization, national shame, Constitution shredding, withholding healthcare from children, killing Social Security, negligence in preventing a major attack, more negligence as a major city drowned, needless and endless wars based on lies, and massive human rights violations. A real winning agenda, eh? Who wouldn't want to vote for that?

This is why the success of the regressive movement has proved to be its undoing. They got control of every institution in American government (which is still mostly true, and will continue to be true of the Supreme Court regardless of what happens next November). They did everything they wanted to do to satisfy their kleptocratic little (stone) hearts. It hasn't exactly been popular, and they are thus being shown to the door.

And if Democrats could ever take the unimaginably courageous leap of actually standing for something on principle, regressives would not only be getting shown to the door, they'd be getting picked up by the scruff of their Brooks Brothers collars and tossed right through it. (For my money, the most shocking thing about the 2008 election is that Republicans have any reason to be even showing up. They can certainly thank the likes of Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid for that.)

Urgent crisis in Florida

In November and December of 2000, the right did something very clever, which undoubtedly resulted in them being able to shove their candidate across the finish

They imagine that good governance involves poor preparation before a natural disaster, criminal negligence during it, and shameful disinterest afterwards

POLITICAL SUICIDE

Virtually everyone, domestically and internationally, who associated themselves with this monster has paid for it in the form of political suicide

line in that (s)election. They got Bush to be declared the presumptive winner, then they made 'resolving' the Florida problem seem like an urgent crisis that needed quick attention. This turned the clock into their friend as the meter ran down, and it made the Gore-Lieberman campaign appear to be petulantly trying to undo valid election results. Among their ranks, a very clever, though disgustingly cynical sign appeared at that time, mimicking in language and design the Democratic election banner. It said "Sore Loserman", and it helped win the battle of perceptions that got Bush into the White House.

Cute, eh?

Ah, but now the tables have turned. The right won, but winning has turned into losing. And the depth of the political price ultimately to be paid for supporting eight years of Bushism is still unknown. Virtually everyone, domestically and internationally, who associated themselves with this monster has paid for it in the form of political suicide. It is

quite possible that the Republican Party itself could go down that same path, especially as the price and crimes of the administration become clearer over time, when they're more exposed, least protected from investigation and prosecution, and when long deferred costs come slamming upside the body politic with a real vengeance in the coming decade.

If regressives whine about their disintegration in the face of an angry public, I'll be there, big smile on my face, just silently waving a little sign in my hand.

Can you guess what it will say? **CT**

David Michael Green is a professor of political science at Hofstra University in New York. He is delighted to receive readers' reactions to his articles (<mailto:dmg@regressiveantidote.net>), but regrets that time constraints do not always allow him to respond. More of his work can be found at his website, <http://regressiveantidote.net> and at <http://www.coldtype.net/green.html>

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VIRGIN OR SLUT?

Courtney E. Martin ponders the pitfalls of being young

As the middle-aged gym teacher in a track suit stands in front of the class and reads a health book out loud in a monotone voice – “Intercourse can lead to unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, such as ...” – a couple of girls swap the latest issue of *US Weekly* and a *Gossip Girls* novel, all the juicy parts underlined in pink pen.

Welcome to contemporary American adolescence, where sexuality is either up for sale or moralized into nonexistence.

On the one hand we have a hypersexualized and pornified pop culture – thongs marketed to tweens, Victoria’s Secret ads with models who don’t look a day over 13, and reality shows like *A Shot at Love* on MTV, where both men and women will do anything – including jump in vats of chocolate and discuss their sexual histories on national television – all for instantaneous love with a petite model.

The message to young women is loud and clear: Your body is your power. Flaunt it. Use it. Get attention. The message to young men is also unmistakable:

Your gaze is your power. Your role is to judge and comment on women’s bodies. As a man, you are inevitably obsessed – sometimes stupidly so – with the female form.

On the other hand, we have a federally funded (over \$1 billion thus far) abstinence-only sex education program in this country.

According to the Guttmacher Institute, nearly half (46 percent) of all 15- to 19-year-olds in the United States have had sex at least once. According to the government’s most comprehensive survey of American sexual practices to date, more than half of all teenagers have engaged in oral sex – including nearly a quarter of those who have never had intercourse.

Regardless of this reality, health teachers from Nacogdoches, Texas, to Newark, N.J., are taught to emotionlessly repeat – as if pull dolls of the Bush administration – “The only guaranteed way to avoid pregnancy and STDs is abstinence. The only guaranteed way to avoid pregnancy and STDs is abstinence. The only guaranteed way to avoid preg-

The message to young women is loud and clear: Your body is your power. Flaunt it. Use it. Get attention. The message to young men is also unmistakable. Your gaze is your power

Teen girls are cast as asexual princesses happily trapped in towers, guarded by their Bible verse-spouting fathers. The message to young men is more subtle

nancy and STDs is abstinence.”

Here, the message to young women is also resolute: Your body is dangerous. Control it. Ignore it. Don't ask any questions. Teen girls are cast as asexual princesses happily trapped in towers, guarded by their Bible verse-spouting fathers. The message to young men is more subtle. In this fairy tale written, produced and directed by abstinence-only advocates, teenage guys are both potential villains – the oversexed, hormone-crazed young men who must be refused continuously by good girls – or potential knights in shining armor, saving enough money from their summer jobs to buy sparkling rings that will save their sweeties from the hell of slutdom.

In between pornified culture and purity balls, in between the slut and the virgin, the stupid, lascivious dude and the knight in shining armor, in between the messages directed at young women – your body is your power vs. your body is dangerous – and young men – your gaze is your power vs. your gaze is dangerous – are real young people trying to develop authentic identities and sexual practices. And they are struggling mightily.

Too many of them are diseased, disordered, and depressed – participating in inauthentic performances of sexual bravado, cut off from their bodies' true appetites and desires, and hurt because they can't seem to identify or communicate their own boundaries.

How could we be surprised? We've constructed a polarized culture that gives teenagers edifice, not education. We've sent them out into the wildly complex country of contemporary adolescence without the essential weapons – sexual

literacy, communication strategies, self-reflection exercises, and at the very least, accurate information about anatomy and contraception.

We've let the increasingly conglomerated raunchy mass media pollute the visual world with plastic, codified images of “sex” and the increasingly out-of-touch, religious and righteous federal government play Pollyanna – deaf, dumb and blind.

As the schools relinquish responsibility for educating American teens about sex, the advertisers and networks step in, providing an airbrushed, inauthentic, unrealistic view of sex and the bodies that are “doing it.”

They're happy to play sexy nanny while our government officials and educators are out to lunch; it guarantees ratings and the next generation eager to fork over cash on products marketed to their effectively socialized inadequacy.

Just saying no

And what kind of education do we provide to help negotiate this onslaught of messages? A curriculum based on three little empty words: “Just say no.” Even federally funded studies of abstinence-only sex education confirm that it is ineffective.

Half of those who have abstinence-only sex ed end up having sex by the time they're 15 years old.

Multiple peer-reviewed studies also confirm that purity pledges actually lead teenagers into having more oral, anal and unprotected sex. Another longitudinal study of 13,000 teenagers found that 53 percent of those who commit to purity until marriage have sex out of wedlock within the year.

The consequences are devastating, diverse and rampant. According to the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network, every two and a half minutes, somewhere in America, someone is sexually assaulted. About 44 percent of rape victims are under age 18, and 80 percent are under age 30.

According to the Guttmacher Institute, of the 18.9 million new cases of STDs each year, 9.1 million (48 percent) occur among 15- to 24-year-olds.

Seven million girls and women in this country have eating disorders; clinicians estimate that as many as 80 percent of those with anorexia, bulimia and binge-eating disorder are victims of sexual assault.

And harder to pin down with numbers, most college (and some high school) students experience campuses characterized by random, unsatisfying hookups, stunted emotional growth and the private hell of loneliness, guilt and shame. So many young adults don't know how to deal with the messiness of sex without being sloppy drunk.

We could make such a difference by doing so little. First and foremost, we must replace abstinence-only sexual education with comprehensive curriculum that teaches teenagers accurate, useful and wide-ranging information.

They are welcome to save intercourse for marriage, of course, and should certainly be taught that – indeed – it is one of only two ways to absolutely prevent pregnancy, though not STDs. (The method of sexual exploration that guarantees both no STDS and no pregnancy is, of course, masturbation!) But they must also be given the tools – informational, emotional, communicative – they

need should they choose otherwise. We need to teach both young women and men about sexual desire – that it varies widely and is not shameful but can be overwhelming.

We must also provide our kids with the media and consumer literacy needed to face the pornified culture that we live in and advocate – through letter writing, boycotts, and public pressure – that schools, playgrounds, and other public spaces remain advertising-free. As artists, filmmakers, writers, actors, producers etc., we must strive to provide a more enlightened and inspiring view of human sexuality, to create work that involves love and sex without codifying both into unreality. Think Jane Campion.

Dangerous or idiots?

And finally, we must stop treating teenagers as if they are either dangerous or idiots. When I was recently on the Fox News channel's O'Reilly Factor with conservative pundit Laura Ingraham, she shouted, in response to my apparently blasphemous idea that girls deserve to be educated about their bodies: "Twelve-year-olds can't even pick out what color shirt they want to wear in the morning!" It made me wonder if Laura had ever met a 12-year-old, ever had a real conversation with one about her dreams, her thoughts, her desires.

I've had the pleasure of interacting with many teenagers – 12 years old and older – and I'm continually amazed at their insight, maturity and earnest need for more information. They aren't adults yet – sure – but they are aching in that direction. They need those of us who are done with the journey to provide

So many young adults don't know how to deal with the messiness of sex without being sloppy drunk

GROWING UP

some fundamental tools on how to make it through. We need to ask them about what they're experiencing and how we can be helpful as they make their way. Instead of luring them in, selling them out, condemning or indoctrinating them, we need to meet them with compassion and information. **CT**

*Courtney E. Martin is the author of **Perfect Girls, Starving Daughters: The Frightening New Normalcy of Hating Your Body.***

You can read more about her work at www.courtneyemartin.com.

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RIGGED!

George Monbiot assesses the impact of action on climate change

Ladies and gentlemen, I have the answer! Incredible as it might seem, I have stumbled across the single technology which will save us from runaway climate change! From the goodness of my heart I offer it to you for free. No patents, no small print, no hidden clauses. Already this technology, a radical new kind of carbon capture and storage, is causing a stir among scientists. It is cheap, it is efficient and it can be deployed straight away. It is called ... leaving fossil fuels in the ground.

On a filthy day in December, as governments gathered in Bali to prevaricate about climate change, a group of us tried to put this policy into effect. We swarmed into the opencast coal mine being dug at Ffos-y-fran in South Wales and occupied the excavators, shutting down the works for the day. We were motivated by a fact which the wise heads in Bali have somehow missed: if fossil fuels are extracted, they will be used.

Most of the governments of the rich world now exhort their citizens to use less carbon. They encourage us to

change our lightbulbs, insulate our lofts, turn our TVs off at the wall. In other words, they have a demand-side policy for tackling climate change. But as far as I can determine not one of them has a supply-side policy. None seeks to reduce the supply of fossil fuel. So the demand-side policy will fail. Every barrel of oil and tonne of coal that comes to the surface will be burnt.

Or perhaps I should say that they do have a supply-side policy: to extract as much as they can. Since 2000 the British government has given coal firms £220m to help them open new mines or to keep existing mines working⁽¹⁾. According to the energy white paper, the government intends to “maximise economic recovery ... from remaining coal reserves.”⁽²⁾

The pit at Ffos-y-fran received planning permission after two ministers in the Westminster government jumped up and down on Rhodri Morgan, the First Minister in Wales. Stephen Timms at the department of trade and industry listed the benefits of the scheme and demanded that the application “is resolved with the minimum of further delay”⁽³⁾.

We swarmed into the opencast coal mine being dug at Ffos-y-fran in South Wales and occupied the excavators, shutting down the works for the day

The International Energy Agency's new outlook report warns that "urgent action is needed" to cut carbon emissions. The action it recommends is investing \$22 trillion in new energy infrastructure, most of which will be spent on extracting, transporting and burning fossil fuels

His successor, Mike O'Brien, warned of dire consequences if the pit was not granted permission⁽⁴⁾. The coal extracted from Ffos-y-fran alone will produce 29.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide: equivalent, according to the latest figures from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, to the sustainable emissions of 55m people for one year⁽⁵⁾.

Last year British planning authorities considered 12 new applications for open-cast coal mines. They approved all but two of them. Late last year Hazel Blears, the secretary of state in charge of planning, overruled Northumberland County Council to grant permission for an open-cast mine at Shotton, on the grounds that the scheme (which will produce 9.3m tonnes of CO₂⁽⁶⁾) is "environmentally acceptable"⁽⁷⁾.

The British government also has a policy of "maximising the UK's existing oil and gas reserves"⁽⁸⁾. To promote new production, it has granted companies a 90% discount on the licence fees they pay for prospecting the continental shelf⁽⁹⁾. It hopes the prospecting firms will open a new frontier in the seas to the west of the Shetland Isles⁽¹⁰⁾. The government also has two schemes for "forcing unworked blocks back into play"⁽¹¹⁾. If oil companies don't use their licences to the full, it revokes them and hands them to someone else. In other words it is prepared to be ruthlessly interventionist when promoting climate change, but not when preventing it: no minister talks of "forcing" companies to reduce their emissions. Ministers hope the industry will extract up to 28 billion barrels of oil and gas from the continental shelf⁽¹²⁾.

In mid-December the government an-

nounced a new tax break for the companies working in the North Sea. The Treasury minister Angela Eagle explained that its purpose is "to make sure we are not leaving any oil in the ground that could be recovered."⁽¹³⁾ The government's climate change policy works like this: extract every last drop of fossil fuel then pray to God that no one uses it.

The same wishful thinking is applied worldwide. The International Energy Agency's new outlook report warns that "urgent action is needed" to cut carbon emissions. The action it recommends is investing \$22 trillion in new energy infrastructure, most of which will be spent on extracting, transporting and burning fossil fuels⁽¹⁴⁾.

Carbon capture

Aha, you say, but what about carbon capture and storage? When governments use this term, they mean catching and burying the carbon dioxide produced by burning fossil fuels. It is feasible, but there are three problems. The first is that fossil fuels are being extracted and burnt today, and scarcely any carbon capture schemes yet exist. The second is that the technology works only for power stations and large industrial processes: there is no plausible means of catching and storing emissions from cars, planes and heating systems. The third, as Alistair Darling, then in charge of energy, admitted in the House of Commons in May, is that the technologies required for commercial carbon capture "might never become available"⁽¹⁵⁾. (The government is prepared to admit this when making the case – as Darling was – for nuclear power, but not when making the case for coal).

Almost every week I receive an email from someone asking what the heck I am talking about. Don't I realise that peak oil will solve this problem for us? Fossil fuels will run out, we'll go back to living in caves and no one will need to worry about climate change again. These correspondents make the mistake of conflating conventional oil supplies with all fossil fuels. Yes, at some point the production of petroleum will peak then go into decline. I don't know when this will happen, and I urge environmentalists to remember that while we have been proved right about most things we have been consistently wrong about the dates for mineral exhaustion. But before oil peaks, demand is likely to outstrip supply and the price will soar. The result is that the oil firms will have an even greater incentive to extract the stuff.

Already, encouraged by recent prices, the pollutocrats are pouring billions into unconventional oil. Last week BP announced a massive investment in Canadian tar sands. Oil produced from tar sands creates even more carbon emissions than the extraction of petroleum. There's enough tar and kerogen in North America to cook the planet several times over.

If that runs out they switch to coal, of which there is hundreds of years' supply. Sasol, the South African company founded during the apartheid period (when supplies of oil were blocked) to turn coal into liquid transport fuel, is conducting feasibility studies for new plants in India, China and the US⁽¹⁶⁾. Neither geology nor market forces is going to save us from climate change.

When you review the plans for fossil fuel extraction, the horrible truth dawns

that every carbon-cutting programme on earth is a con. Without supply-side policies, runaway climate change is inevitable, however hard we try to cut demand. The talks in Bali will be meaningless unless they produce a programme for leaving fossil fuels in the ground.**CT**

Notes:

1. Under two schemes: Coal Investment Aid and the UK Coal Operating Aid Scheme. See Department of Trade and Industry, 2006. Coal Industry in the UK. <http://www.dti.gov.uk/energy/sources/coal/industry/page13125.html> and DBERR, 2007. UK Coal Operating Aid Scheme: Coal Subsidy Programme/823100 Cops0010 – Expenditure Profile by Tranche. <http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file34209.xls>
2. Department of Trade and Industry, May 2007. Meeting the Energy Challenge: a white paper on energy. Para 4.07, page 107.
3. Stephen Timms MP, Department of Trade and Industry, 20th January 2004. Letter to Rhodri Morgan AM.
4. Mike O'Brien MP, Department of Trade and Industry, 14th December 2004. Letter to Rhodri Morgan AM.
5. The scheme will extract 10.8 million tonnes of coal. Average C/tonne of coal = 746kg (http://bioenergy.ornl.gov/papers/misc/energy_conv.html). CO2 is 3.667 times the weight of C. The figure for sustainable emissions – 0.537t/person/year – is explained in a recent column: <http://www.monbiot.com/archives/2007/12/04/what-is-progress/>
6. 3.4 million tonnes of coal.
7. Banks Developments, 29th November 2007. Banks Group's Shotton surface mine proposals approved. <http://www.banksdevelopments.com/news/153/>

Before oil peaks, demand is likely to outstrip supply and the price will soar. The result is that the oil firms will have an even greater incentive to extract the stuff

FOSSIL FOOLS

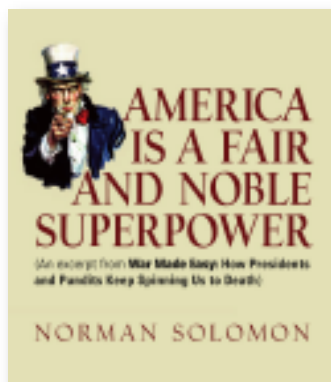
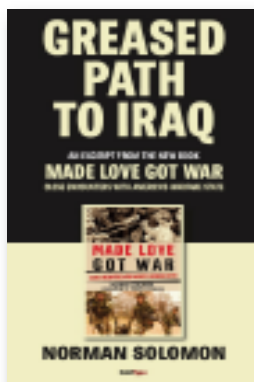
When you review the plans for fossil fuel extraction, the horrible truth dawns that every carbon-cutting programme on earth is a con

8. Department of Trade and Industry, 19th December 2006. West of Shetland task force forge ahead into new year.
<http://www.gnn.gov.uk/environment/fullDetail.asp?ReleaseID=251607&NewsAreaID=2&NavigatedFromDepartment=False>
9. Under the “Frontier” and “Promote” licences. Department of Trade and Industry, 16th March 2006. Shake-up Of Unused Blocks Keeps Pressure On North Sea Exploration.
<http://www.gnn.gov.uk/environment/fullDetail.asp?ReleaseID=191617&NewsAreaID=2&NavigatedFromDepartment=False>
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11. Department of Trade and Industry, 1st February 2007. Oil is well under the North Sea.
<http://www.gnn.gov.uk/environment/fullDetail.asp?ReleaseID=261127&NewsAreaID=2&NavigatedFromDepartment=False>
12. The formula they use is “oil equivalent”. Department of Trade and Industry, 6th

- September 2005. North Sea Licences Surge To All Time Record.
<http://www.gnn.gov.uk/content/detail.asp?ReleaseID=168865&NewsAreaID=2&NavigatedFromSearch=True>
13. Quoted by Ed Crooks, 7th December 2007. Boost for North Sea Companies. Financial Times.
 14. International Energy Agency, 2007. World Energy Outlook, 2007, Table 1.9, p95.
<http://www.worldenergyoutlook.org/>
 15. Alastair Darling, 23rd May 2007. Parliamentary answer. Column 1289.
<http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200607/cmhansrd/cm070523/debtext/70523-0005.htm>
 16. Ed Crooks, 9th November 2007. Pay-off time for Sasol pioneers? Financial Times. **CT**

*George Monbiot’s latest book is **Heat: How To Stop The Planet From Burning**. This column originally appeared in London’s Guardian newspaper*

THE BEST OF NORMAN SOLOMON



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GLOBALISATION: THEIRS OR OURS?

Susan Rosenthal on capitalism gone wild

A few months back, U.S. President George W. Bush, Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Mexico's President Felipe Calderón met to plan further integration of their three economies. Thousands of people protest these summit meetings, not because they oppose international cooperation but because they reject policies that benefit the rich and powerful at the expense of everyone else.

Globalisation could benefit us all. Telerad is a Singapore-based corporation that analyzes X-rays and medical scans for hospitals around the world. Currently, it can take weeks to get results from a CAT scan or an MRI. Telerad promises that an image from New York can be analyzed and a report returned in less than half an hour.

This looks like a win-win situation – improving the ability to provide timely treatment at a lower cost – until you consider that higher-priced American labor is being exchanged for lower-priced Asian labor.

Globalisation is being structured like automation was, to make the rich richer. By 2000, U.S. workers took half the time

to produce all the goods and services they produced in 1973.

If the benefits of this rise in productivity had been shared, most Americans could be enjoying a four-hour work day, or a six-month work year, or they could be taking off every other year from work with no loss of pay.

Needless to say, this is not the case. All the benefits of automation went to the capitalist class. By 2000, the average US worker was putting in 199 more hours on the job, five weeks more than in 1973.

Ordinary folks are working harder and longer so the capitalist class can haul in the dough. In the mid-1970's, average executive compensation was 35 times the average wage. By 1999, the average CEO of a major US corporation was taking home 330 times the average wage and 476 times the average blue-collar wage. By 2004, the portion of the economy going home with workers dropped to the lowest level ever recorded.

Governments and corporations are shaping globalisation the same way they shaped automation, to boost profits at workers' expense.

Cathleen Wedlake has worked in the

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THE GREAT DIVIDE

Dr. Rosenthal, a Senior Editor at *Cyrano's Journal Online*, has been practicing medicine for more than 30 years. She is the author of *Striking Flint: Genora (Johnson) Dollinger Remembers the 1936-1937 General Motors Sit-Down Strike (1996); Market Madness and Mental Illness: The Crisis in Mental Health Care (1999) and Power and Powerlessness*

newspaper trade for 38 years. She and 30 of her co-workers were laid off when the San Jose Mercury News outsourced their jobs to Asia via Express KCS, an India-based corporation that provides production services for more than 40 newspapers in northern California.

National borders exist to maximize profits. Jobs are allowed to migrate to cheaper locations, while the people who work those jobs are blocked from moving to higher-paying locations.

The same year that the U.S. and Mexico launched their free-trade agreement (NAFTA), the Clinton administration launched Operation Gatekeeper to block Mexican workers from entering the U.S. Both moves served the interests of capitalists on both sides of the border.

American goods entering Mexico put small Mexican producers out of business, creating a more desperate (and therefore cheaper) workforce for larger Mexican employers and an illegal (and therefore desperate and cheaper) workforce for American employers.

The solution to these problems is generally posed as a choice between free trade and protectionism. However, both of these policies benefit the capitalist class. Protectionist policies shield weaker industries from global competition, while free-trade policies enable stronger industries to penetrate foreign markets.

The American union movement has traditionally sided with the protectionist wing of capitalism. This strategy has failed to save jobs, as thousands of laid-off steel and autoworkers can attest. Furthermore, it has hamstrung the labor movement by pitting American workers

against their counter-parts in other lands. A more effective strategy would be to demand an end to national borders and for workers to defend their jobs as if these borders did not exist.

Wedlake and her co-workers at the San Jose Mercury News face the same challenge as any workforce threatened with replacement by lower-paid workers. The low-paid workers must be incorporated into the union and paid exactly the same. This is not a free-trade stance, but a pro-worker antidote to the divide-and-profit policies of employers.

While they promote free trade, not a single head of state supports opening borders to workers. On the contrary, capitalists go berserk at the thought of abolishing national boundaries because their system can function only by dividing workers and trapping them in low-waged areas. Of course, they would never admit to such selfish motives. Instead, they warn that open borders would cause a flood of impoverished people to drown America. This is absurd. If the benefits of global integration were shared, people would have no economic reason to move.

Globalisation has deepened the conflict over which class will shape the future. The capitalist class is planning more miseries for the majority. The alternative is for workers in North and South America, Europe, Asia and Africa to come together as one workforce to demand equal pay for equal work. We would then have the collective power to dispense with the master class and run the world for ourselves and each other, raising living standards for everyone. **CT**

Susan Rosenthal can be reached through her web site www.powerandpowerlessness.com or at susanrosenthal@bestcyrano.org

ARE AMERICANS 'BETTER THAN THAT?'

Ray McGovern on torture, interrogation and the Spanish Inquisition

A boyish, inquisitive face with an innocent look peered out from the Washington Post's lead story on torture. It was well groomed, pink-shirted John Kiriakou, a CIA interrogator who could just as easily pass for the local youth minister.

The Dec. 11 report by the Post's Joby Warrick and Dan Eggen, which describes Kiriakou's experience in interrogating suspected terrorists, raises in an unusually direct way an abiding question: Should the United States of America be using forms of torture dating back to the Spanish Inquisition?

Nowhere is the mood of that infamous period better portrayed than in the famous Grand Inquisitor chapter of Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*. Dostoyevsky was unusually gifted at plumbing the human heart.

While it has been 127 years since he wrote *Brothers Karamazov*, he nonetheless captures the trap into which so many Americans have fallen in forfeiting freedom through fear.

His portrayal of Inquisition reality brings us to the brink of the moral precipice on which our country teeters

today. It is as though he knew what would be in store for us as fear was artificially stoked after the attacks of 9/11.

In the story, Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor (the Cardinal of Seville) ridicules Christ for imposing on humans the heavy burden of freedom of conscience, and explains how it is far better, for all concerned, to dull that conscience and to rule by deceit, violence, and fear:

"Didst thou forget that man prefers peace, and even death, to freedom of choice in the knowledge of good and evil?... We teach them that it's not the free judgment of their hearts, but mystery which they must follow blindly, even against their conscience.... In the end they will lay their freedom at our feet [and] become obedient... We shall tell them that we are Thy servants and rule them in Thy name.... we shall be forced to lie.... We shall tell them that every sin will be expiated if it is done with our permission." – The Grand Inquisitor, in Brothers Karamazov

Abu Zubayda: Poster Child

Kiriakou was one of the first interrogators to interview suspected terrorist Abu

Should the United States of America be using forms of torture dating back to the Spanish Inquisition?

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES

Lacking cellophane, they inserted a cloth into the victim's mouth, forcing the victim to ingest water spilled from a jar starting the drowning process. Four centuries later, the Gestapo put out several technically improved releases of this operating system of torture, so to speak

Zubayda in a Pakistani military hospital, where Zubayda was recovering from wounds suffered during his capture in early 2002.

When he refused to provide information about al-Qaeda's infrastructure, he was flown to a secret CIA prison where, according to Kiriakou, the interrogation team strapped Abu Zubayda to a board, wrapped his nose and mouth in cellophane, and forced water into his throat.

In just 35 seconds, voila! Abu Zubayda starting talking. That is called waterboarding.

No squeamish

The 15th & 16th century Spanish inquisitors were not squeamish, and had little need for circumlocutions or euphemisms like "alternative set of procedures" that are part of President George W. Bush's lexicon.

The Spanish called this procedure, quite plainly, "tortura del agua."

Lacking cellophane, they inserted a cloth into the victim's mouth, forcing the victim to ingest water spilled from a jar, starting the drowning process. Four centuries later, the Gestapo put out several technically improved releases of this operating system of torture, so to speak.

Quick; someone please tell newly confirmed Attorney General Michael Mukasey, who told reporters on Dec. 11 that he still cannot decide whether waterboarding is torture.

The information from John Kiriakou confirms what has long been a no-brainer but not definitively established before; namely, that President George W. Bush's "alternative set of procedures" for interrogation by CIA includes waterboarding.

Zubayda was given pride of place in George W. Bush's remarkable speech of Sept. 6, 2006, in which he bragged about the effectiveness of such procedures and appealed successfully for passage of the Military Commissions Act.

That law allows a president to define what set of interrogation procedures can be used by the CIA This is Bush on Sept. 6, 2006:

"We believe that Zubayda was a senior terrorist leader and a trusted associate of Osama bin Laden...[and that] he had run a terrorist camp in Afghanistan where some of the 9/11 hijackers trained..."

"We knew that Zubayda had more information that could save innocent lives, but he stopped talking...And so the CIA used an alternative set of procedures...The Department of Justice reviewed the authorized methods extensively and determined them to be lawful.... But I can say the procedures were tough, and they were safe, and lawful, and necessary.

"Zubayda was questioned using these procedures, and soon he began to provide information on key al-Qaeda operatives, including information that helped us find and capture more of those responsible for the attacks on September the 11th.

"For example, Zubayda identified one of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed's accomplices in the 9/11 attacks — a terrorist named Ramzi bin al Shibh. The information Zubayda provided helped lead to the capture of bin al Shibh. And together these two terrorists provided information that helped in the planning and execution of the operation that captured Khalid Sheikh Mohammed."

Bush claimed that his interrogation program had saved lives, and Kiriakou says the use of waterboarding “probably saved lives.” We cannot know for sure if this is true.

Off-the-record interviews with intelligence officials strongly suggest that there is much prevarication and exaggeration in the president’s claims about lives saved and operations disrupted, and that his assertions merit no more credulity than other claims – for example, that Iran’s nuclear weapons program poses a threat to the US, even though it has been stopped for four years.

Other US intelligence officials take issue with the CIA’s version of the questioning of Zubayda. Some say that initially he was cooperating with F.B.I. interrogators using a non-confrontational approach, when CIA assumed control and opted for more aggressive tactics.

After that experience, the F.B.I. reportedly warned its agents to avoid interrogation sessions at which harsh methods were used.

As for credibility, never has a US president’s word been so cheapened as it is today.

In late July 2007, we Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity joined with Justin Frank, MD, psychiatrist, professor at George Washington University Hospital, and author of *Bush on the Couch*, to search for insight on how President Bush thinks. (See <http://www.consortiumnews.com/Print/2007/072707a.html> – “Dangers of a Cornered Bush,”) from which I excerpt the following:

“His pathology is a patchwork of false beliefs and incomplete information wo-

ven into what he asserts is the whole truth... He lies – not just to us, but to himself as well...What makes lying so easy for Bush is his contempt – for language, for law, and for anybody who dares question him.... So his words mean nothing. That is very important for people to understand.”

This Is oversight?

Conflicting claims

The past few weeks have witnessed an unseemly square dance in Congress, highlighting conflicting claims about what those who are supposed to be overseeing the intelligence community knew and when they knew it – about torture, about Iran, about many things.

It is nothing short of an insult to the Founders that members of the House and Senate can find nothing more useful to do than wring their hands over their largely self-inflicted powerlessness.

Lawmakers have been so thoroughly intimidated by the White House that I get physically ill watching the likes of Nancy Pelosi, Jane Harman, Bob Graham and Jay Rockefeller moan about how secretive and nasty the Bush administration has been.

Harman complained recently that when she was ranking Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, some of the material (on interrogations) was so highly classified that she had to take a “second oath” to protect it.

What about the solemn oath they all take to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic? Should not that oath transcend and govern others that an administration might require for access to secret materials?

Lawmakers have been so thoroughly intimidated by the White House that I get physically ill watching the likes of Nancy Pelosi, Jane Harman, Bob Graham and Jay Rockefeller moan about how secretive and nasty the Bush administration has been

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES

In a Washington Post op-ed of Jan. 15, 2006, Pelosi proudly advertised her uniquely long tenure on the Intelligence Committee and acknowledged that she was one of the privileged handful of lawmakers who were briefed

Senator Dick Durbin of the Senate Intelligence Committee has complained that he was aware that classified information did not justify the conclusion in 2002 that Iraq had unconventional weapons, but he could not say anything because it was classified! Durbin explained:

“We’re duty-bound once we enter that room to respect classified information. Everything you hear is supposed to stay in the room...I certainly had enough to know that the statements that were made about mushroom clouds were not the conclusions of someone in the administration who was really being honest about the full debate. But you really know, walking in the room, what the rules of the game will be.”

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has admitted knowing for several years about the Bush administration’s eavesdropping on Americans without a court warrant. She was briefed on it when she was ranking Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee when Bush and Cheney took office.

One key unanswered question is this: Was she told that within days of their taking office – that is, seven months before 9/11, the National Security Agency’s electronic vacuum cleaner had already begun to suck up information on Americans – the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, not to mention the Constitution, be damned?

In a Washington Post op-ed of Jan. 15, 2006, Pelosi proudly advertised her uniquely long tenure on the Intelligence Committee and acknowledged that she was one of the privileged handful of lawmakers who were briefed.

“This is how I came to be informed of

President Bush’s authorization for the NSA to conduct certain types of surveillance,” she wrote. Pelosi then proceeded to demonstrate the bowing and scraping characteristic of her subservient attitude toward the Executive Branch:

“But when the administration notifies Congress in this manner, it is not seeking approval. There is a clear expectation that the information will be shared by no one, including other members of the intelligence committees. As a result, only a few members of Congress were aware of the president’s surveillance program, and they were constrained from discussing it more widely.”

And so too, may we assume, with respect to torture? This is oversight?

Neutered watchdogs

What can we expect from the current Senate and House oversight chairmen regarding the recently disclosed, deliberate destruction of two tapes of harsh interrogations of Abu Zubayda and Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri? (Al-Nashiri is thought to have played a role in the attack on the USS Cole.)

On the Senate side, expect nothing of Mr. Milquetoast Jay Rockefeller, chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, who, it is said, is so afraid of his own shadow that he only ventures outdoors at night or in bad weather.

House Intelligence Committee Chairman Silvestre Reyes has a different kind of problem, and should recuse himself. He has been fawning all over José Rodríguez, the former CIA Deputy Director of Operations who ordered the tapes destroyed.

On August 16, 2007, Congressman Reyes told a conference in El Paso he

considered Rodriguez “an American hero,” proudly adding that, “with a few liberties that Hollywood takes, the exploits of José Rodriguez are documented in the Fox TV series ‘24.’”

I am told that almost every episode of “24” includes at least one scene glorifying torture, usually with lead man Jack Bauer playing a main role. Reyes made it clear he is a big fan of Bauer and “24.”

Were that not enough, after Rodriguez’s role in destroying the interrogation tapes became public, Reyes immediately cautioned against allowing investigations to find just one “scapegoat” (no secret to whom he was referring).

And so, unless Reyes does recuse himself, look for a “complete and thorough” investigation of the kind favored by the Nixon White House. (Just when you may have thought it could not get any worse!)

On Sept. 6, 2006, the very day Bush bragged about his “alternative set of procedures for interrogation” and appealed for legislation allowing the CIA to continue using them, the head of Army intelligence, Lt. Gen. John Kimmons, took a very different tack.

Conducting a Pentagon briefing shortly before the president gave his own speech, Kimmons underscored the fact that the revised Army manual for interrogation is in sync with the Geneva treaties. Then, conceding past “transgressions and mistakes,” Kimmons updated something I learned 45 years ago as a second lieutenant in Army intelligence:

“No good intelligence is going to come from abusive practices. I think history tells us that. I think the empirical evidence of the last five years, hard years,

tells us that.”

Grabbing the headlines the following day was Bush’s admission that the CIA has taken “high-value” captives to prisons abroad for interrogation using “tough” techniques prohibited by the revised Army field manual – and by Geneva, for that matter.

Gen. Kimmons displayed uncommon courage in facing into that wind.

Because it's wrong?

Have you noticed the shameful silence of our institutional churches, synagogues, and mosques?

True, on occasion a professor of moral theology will speak out.

Professor William Schweiker of the Chicago Divinity School, for example, has heaped scorn on the scenario of the lone knower of the facts whose torture is thought to be able to save millions of lives. He notes that such is “the stuff of bad spy movies and bad exam questions in ethics courses.” Schweiker warns Christians, in particular:

“Not to fall prey to fear and questionable reasoning and thus continue to support an unjust and vile practice that demeans the nation’s highest political and moral ideals, even as it desecrates one of the most important practices and symbols (Baptism) of the Christian faith.”

And, to its credit, the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, a coalition of 130 religious organizations from left to right on the political spectrum, issued a strong call for the appointment of a special counsel to investigate the CIA’s destruction of the videotapes of harsh interrogation techniques.

NRCAT’s founder, Princeton Theolog-

“No good intelligence is going to come from abusive practices. I think history tells us that. I think the empirical evidence of the last five years, hard years, tells us that”

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES

With very few exceptions, the institutional churches in Nazi Germany kept a shameful silence, denying believers the moral authority and leadership so needed to stand up to Gestapo torturers

ical Seminary professor George Hunsinger told the press that “to acknowledge that waterboarding is torture is like conceding that the sun rises in the east,” adding: “All the dissembling in high places that makes these shocking abuses possible must be brought to an end. But they will undoubtedly continue unless those responsible for them are held accountable. Clearly a joint probe by the Justice Department and the CIA – agencies that are both seriously compromised – is not enough. A special counsel is an essential first step.”

But where are the official voices of the institutional churches, synagogues, and mosques in this country. In effect, they are ordaining Jack Bauer with their silence.

This happened before

With very few exceptions, the institutional churches in Nazi Germany kept a shameful silence, denying believers the moral authority and leadership so needed to stand up to Gestapo torturers. Indeed, many of the bishops – like military leaders, and jurists – swore a personal oath to Hitler.

For his part, the Nazi leader moved quite quickly to ensure that there was a pastor – whether Evangelical or Catholic – in every parish in Germany. He saw this as a source of support and stability for his regime. And, sadly, it was.

While the Nazis were systematically

torturing and even murdering defenseless victims, they kept repeating assurances that not a single hair of anyone’s head would be harmed. (Shades of the familiar refrain “we do not torture.”)

And the propaganda machine under Joseph Goebbels made a fine art of what President Bush calls the need to “catapult the propaganda.”

Sebastian Haffner, a young German lawyer in Berlin during the Thirties, kept a journal that his children subsequently published in book form as *Defying Hitler*. His fascinating account of Germany in the Thirties provides many thoughtful insights into prevailing attitudes and the lack of moral leadership.

Haffner’s journal depicted the kind of ambiance in which the approach of the Grand Inquisitor would, and did, flourish – “in the end they will lay their freedom at our feet [and] become obedient:”

Haffner wrote: “The weather in March 1933 was glorious. Was it not wonderful to...merge with festive crowds and listen to speeches about freedom and homeland? (It was certainly better than having one’s belly pumped up with a water hose in some hidden secret police cellar.)”

Haffner closes his chapter on 1933 with observations that, in my view, apply much too aptly to America today:

“The sequence of events is, as you see, not so unnatural. It is wholly within

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the normal range of psychology, and it helps to explain the almost inexplicable. The only thing that is missing is what in animals is called 'breeding.'

"This is a solid inner kernel that cannot be shaken by external pressures and forces, something noble and steely, a reserve of pride, principle, and dignity to be drawn on in the hour of trial. It is missing in Germans.

"As a nation we are soft, unreliable, and without backbone. That was shown in March 1933. At the moment of truth, when other nations rise spontaneously to the occasion, the Germans collectively and limply collapsed. They yielded and capitulated, and suffered a nervous breakdown."

Are we better than that?

CIA's John Kiriakou says he is now convinced that waterboarding is torture and he is against it. He adds, "Americans are better than that."

Sadly, that remains to be seen. With virtually all religious institutions, politicians, and educators squandering what moral authority they have left, the Jack Bauer culture threatens to win out in the end. We cannot let that happen.

The upcoming duel on the missing in-

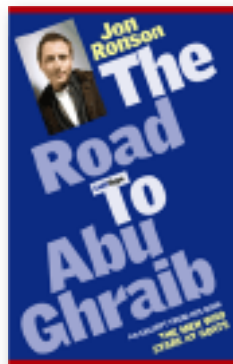
terrogation tapes will again bring the issue of torture front and center. And, strangely, waterboarding and other Jack Bauer tradecraft tools still enjoy a strong constituency.

Here's where we come in; for we are the ones we've been waiting for. As one of my intelligence alumni colleagues noted recently, this is about our country losing its soul. Let's rise to the occasion and stop unconscionable policies like torture. True patriotism goes well beyond a flag-on-the-lapel.

As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. noted, "Sometimes you have to put your body into it." Besides, we need to keep the water hose from pumping up our bellies and those of our loved ones. I only wish that were as remote a possibility as it was before President Bush and his associates came up with their "alternative set of procedures." **CT**

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, the publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in Washington, DC. He was an Army officer and then a CIA analyst for 27 years, and now serves on the Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

CIA's John Kiriakou says he is now convinced that waterboarding is torture and he is against it. He adds, "Americans are better than that."



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ABSOLVING BASEBALL'S OWNERS

Dave Zirin wonders why the drugs blame ends with the players

"One of the greatest pitchers of all time, his seven Cy Young's and 354 career victories lost to history under a pile of lies and syringes"

Ever had someone spit in your face and tell you it's raining? That's how it felt watching former Sen. George Mitchell's press conference on steroid use in Major League Baseball. The former Senate Majority Leader unleashed his "investigative findings" speaking with the somber, deliberate tones of an exhausted undertaker.

Mitchell strained to convey scorn upon both baseball owners and the union for being "slow to act." Yet beneath the surface, his report is an ugly sanctimonious fraud, meant to absolve those at the top and pin blame on a motley crew of retired players, trainers, and clubhouse attendants. This is truly the old saw of the magical fishing net that captures minnows but lets the whales swim free.

Sanctioned by Commissioner Bud Selig's office, the Mitchell Report was seen by some as an unprecedented act in sports: a 20 million dollar internal investigation aimed at rooting out "performance enhancing drugs and human growth hormones" in the game.

The Mitchell Report certainly contains a great deal of sexy sizzle. First and foremost, it names names: including MVPs Mo Vaughn, Miguel Tejada and Barry Bonds as well as former all stars like Eric Gagne and Lenny Dykstra.

It also names a man being called the Moby Dick to Mitchell's Ahab: seven time Cy Young award winner Roger Clemens. For some time, people in the game have whispered about Clemens being on the juice. And for some time, the 45-year-old Clemens denied all charges, as a compliant media lapped it up.

As Yahoo Sports' Dan Wetzel wrote, "Year after year he peddled the same garbage, Roger Clemens was so dominant for so long because he simply out-worked everyone. It played to the nation's Puritan roots, made Clemens out to be this everyman maximizing his skills through singular focus, dedication and a commitment to drinking carrot juice, or something. It's all gone now, the legend of Rocket Roger dead on arrival of the Mitchell Report; one of the greatest pitchers of all time, his seven Cy Young's and 354 career victories lost to history

under a pile of lies and syringes.”

The Mitchell Report confirms not only suspicions about Clemens, but also the existence of an outrageous media bias and double standard. While seven time MVP Barry Bonds was raked over the conjecture-coals for years, Clemens got a pass. Two players, both dominant into their 40s, one black and one white, with two entirely different ways of being treated. It doesn't take Al Sharpton to do the cultural calculus.

And yet, flaying Clemens shouldn't excuse the gross whitewash at work.

Three problems

There are three fundamental problems with the Mitchell report:

1 – Mitchell himself. George Mitchell, the former Senate Majority leader best known for helping negotiate the peace deal in Northern Ireland, has had a massive conflict of interest when it comes to baseball.

The man is on the boards of both the Boston Red Sox and also the Walt Disney Company. The Disney Company owns ESPN, baseball's number one broadcast partner. Joe Morgan has spoken out about how in the 1990s, ESPN execs encouraged him not to state his suspicions about steroid use on-air.

As Morgan said, “I would be broadcasting a game and there would be players hitting balls in a way that they had no business hitting them.”

2 – No testimony from players. The only active player to speak to Mitchell was New York Yankee Jason Giambi, and he spoke under threat of suspension.

Mitchell says he invited the accused to

come clear their names, but no one took him up on this generous offer. Yet if you are a MLB player, why would you come forward to legitimize a process in which you wouldn't even have the opportunity to face your accuser? This is a process where Mitchell was judge, jury, and executioner: Gitmo meets Skoal. Reputations have been ruined – and the essential “truth” of the report is still based on hearsay.

3 – Same old narrative. Mitchell paid lip service in his press conference to “slow acting” owners – calling it “a collective failure.” At one point, Mitchell said – without explanation – that baseball execs were slow due to “economic motives.” Yet the overarching narrative is that the owners and general managers were merely ignorant or obtuse, with a complete absence of malice. The real fault lied with players and independent acting clubhouse attendants, like the soon to be famous Mets worker Kirk Radomski, who says he secured the juice for players and named names. Radomski was described by former Mets GM Steve Phillips as “the guy who would pick up the towels or pick up a player's girlfriend from the airport.” Yes, Kirk Radomski, a regular Pablo Escobar.

Mitchell went on to say that players have actively and on their own made great efforts to foil the owners' poorly organized efforts to clean up the game. This is the same kind of political cover – as Naomi Klein has written so brilliantly – that the mainstream press gives the Bush administration on Iraq. Errors made are ones of people with good intentions who made terrible choices.

This is a process where Mitchell was judge, jury, and executioner: Gitmo meets Skoal. Reputations have been ruined – and the essential “truth” of the report is still based on hearsay

SPORTS PAGES

The idea that owners and GMs facilitated these measures while leaving the very conditioning of players to themselves simply strains belief

Those who suffered from these choices are blamed for their barbarism and self-interest. When Baghdad was looted and destroyed, Iraqis were pilloried for their greed. Rumsfeld, Bush, and Cheney were blamed for being “overly optimistic” and “trusting them too much.”

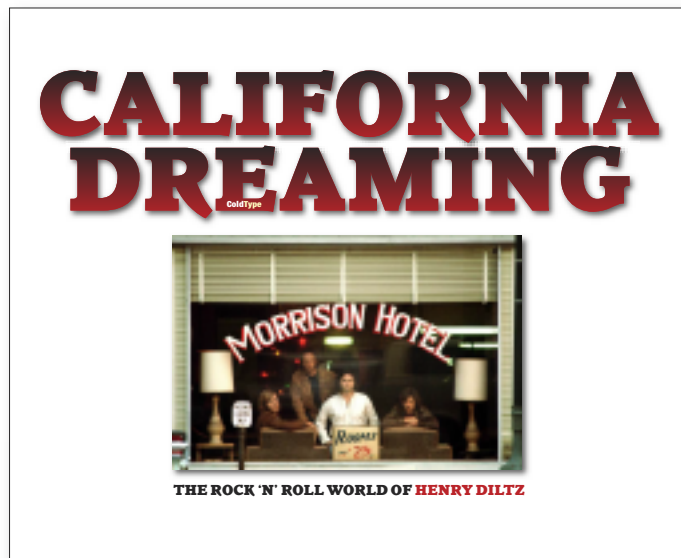
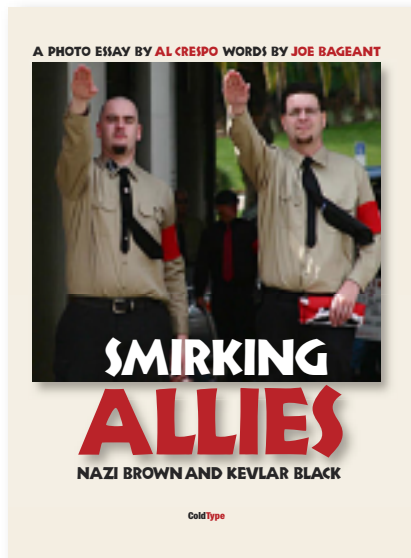
This is poppycock, whether we're talking about the Bush cabal, or Major League Owners. Performance enhancing drugs were funneled into the game along with smaller stadiums, harder bats, and incredible shrinking strike zones to boost power numbers and ratings after the 1994 strike. (Read Howard Bryant's excellent *Juicing the Game* for the full breakdown.)

The idea that owners and GMs facili-

tated these measures while leaving the very conditioning of players to themselves simply strains belief: this is George HW Bush saying he was “out of the loop” on Iran-Contra. This is Dubya saying, “I never read” the National Intelligence Estimate before claiming World War III is on the horizon. In other words, this is the way people in power stay in power during times of crisis: take some heat, blame the underlings, cry some tears, and call it a day. **CT**

*Dave Zirin's new book is **Welcome to the Terrordome**. His column **Edge of Sports**, is published every week at <http://zirin.com/edgeofsports/?p=subscribe&id=1>*

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A HUNGER FOR BOOKS

In her recent acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize in Literature, **Doris Lessing** laments that children in Zimbabwe are starved of knowledge while those in the West shun reading for the Internet

I am standing in a doorway looking through clouds of blowing dust to where I am told there is still uncut forest. Yesterday I drove through miles of stumps, and charred remains of fires where, in 1956, there was the most wonderful forest I have ever seen, all now destroyed. People have to eat. They have to get fuel for fires.

This is north-west Zimbabwe early in the 80s, and I am visiting a friend who was a teacher in a school in London. He is here “to help Africa”, as we put it. He is a gently idealistic soul and what he found in this school shocked him into a depression, from which it was hard to recover. This school is like every other built after Independence. It consists of four large brick rooms side by side, put straight into the dust, one two three four, with a half room at one end, which is the library. In these classrooms are blackboards, but my friend keeps the chalks in his pocket, as otherwise they would be stolen. There is no atlas or globe in the school, no textbooks, no exercise books or biros. In the library there are no books of the kind the pupils would like to read,

but only tomes from American universities, hard even to lift, rejects from white libraries, detective stories, or titles like *Weekend in Paris* and *Felicity Finds Love*.

There is a goat trying to find sustenance in some aged grass. The headmaster has embezzled the school funds and is suspended. My friend doesn't have any money because everyone, pupils and teachers, borrow from him when he is paid and will probably never pay it back. The pupils range from six to 26, because some who did not get schooling as children are here to make it up. Some pupils walk many miles every morning, rain or shine and across rivers. They cannot do homework because there is no electricity in the villages, and you can't study easily by the light of a burning log. The girls have to fetch water and cook before they set off for school and when they get back.

As I sit with my friend in his room, people shyly drop in, and everyone begs for books. “Please send us books when you get back to London,” one man says. “They taught us to read but we have no books.” Everybody I met, everyone,

In the library there are no books of the kind the pupils would like to read, but only tomes from American universities, hard even to lift, rejects from white libraries, detective stories, or titles like *Weekend in Paris* and *Felicity Finds Love*

Afterwards I ask the teachers how the library is, and if the pupils read. In this privileged school, I hear what I always hear when I go to such schools and even universities

begged for books.

I was there some days. The dust blew. The pumps had broken and the women were having to fetch water from the river. Another idealistic teacher from England was rather ill after seeing what this “school” was like.

On the last day they slaughtered the goat. They cut it into bits and cooked it in a great tin. This was the much anticipated end-of-term feast: boiled goat and porridge. I drove away while it was still going on, back through the charred remains and stumps of the forest.

I do not think many of the pupils of this school will get prizes.

Expectant English faces

The next day I am to give a talk at a school in North London, a very good school. It is a school for boys, with beautiful buildings and gardens. The children here have a visit from some well-known person every week: these may be fathers, relatives, even mothers of the pupils; a visit from a celebrity is not unusual for them.

As I talk to them, the school in the blowing dust of north-west Zimbabwe is in my mind, and I look at the mildly expectant English faces in front of me and try to tell them about what I have seen in the last week. Classrooms without books, without textbooks, or an atlas, or even a map pinned to a wall. A school where the teachers beg to be sent books to tell them how to teach, they being only 18 or 19 themselves. I tell these English boys how everybody begs for books: “Please send us books.” But there are no images in their minds to match what I am telling them: of a school standing in dust clouds, where water is short, and

where the end-of-term treat is a just-killed goat cooked in a great pot.

Is it really so impossible for these privileged students to imagine such bare poverty?

I do my best. They are polite.

I’m sure that some of them will one day win prizes.

Then the talk is over. Afterwards I ask the teachers how the library is, and if the pupils read. In this privileged school, I hear what I always hear when I go to such schools and even universities. “You know how it is,” one of the teachers says. “A lot of the boys have never read at all, and the library is only half used.”

Yes, indeed we do know how it is. All of us.

We are in a fragmenting culture, where our certainties of even a few decades ago are questioned and where it is common for young men and women, who have had years of education, to know nothing of the world, to have read nothing, knowing only some speciality or other, for instance, computers.

What has happened to us is an amazing invention – computers and the internet and TV. It is a revolution. This is not the first revolution the human race has dealt with. The printing revolution, which did not take place in a matter of a few decades, but took much longer, transformed our minds and ways of thinking. A foolhardy lot, we accepted it all, as we always do, never asked: “What is going to happen to us now, with this invention of print?” In the same way, we never thought to ask, “How will our lives, our way of thinking, be changed by the internet, which has seduced a whole generation with its inanities so that even quite reasonable people will confess

that, once they are hooked, it is hard to cut free, and they may find a whole day has passed in blogging etc?”

Very recently, anyone even mildly educated would respect learning, education and our great store of literature. Of course we all know that when this happy state was with us, people would pretend to read, would pretend respect for learning. But it is on record that working men and women longed for books, evidenced by the founding of working-men’s libraries, institutes, and the colleges of the 18th and 19th centuries. Reading, books, used to be part of a general education. Older people, talking to young ones, must understand just how much of an education reading was, because the young ones know so much less.

We all know this sad story. But we do not know the end of it. We think of the old adage, “Reading maketh a full man” – reading makes a woman and a man full of information, of history, of all kinds of knowledge.

Talking about books

Not long ago, a friend in Zimbabwe told me about a village where the people had not eaten for three days, but they were still talking about books and how to get them, about education.

I belong to an organisation which started out with the intention of getting books into the villages. There was a group of people who in another connection had travelled Zimbabwe at its grass-roots. They told me that the villages, unlike what is reported, are full of intelligent people, teachers retired, teachers on leave, children on holidays, old people. I myself paid for a little survey to dis-

cover what people in Zimbabwe wanted to read, and found the results were the same as those of a Swedish survey I had not known about. People want to read the same kind of books that people in Europe want to read – novels of all kinds, science fiction, poetry, detective stories, plays, and do-it-yourself books, like how to open a bank account. All of Shakespeare too. A problem with finding books for villagers is that they don’t know what is available, so a set book, like *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, becomes popular simply because it just happens to be there. *Animal Farm*, for obvious reasons, is the most popular of all novels.

Our organisation was helped from the very start by Norway, and then by Sweden. Without this kind of support our supplies of books would have dried up. We got books from wherever we could. Remember, a good paperback from England costs a month’s wages in Zimbabwe: that was before Mugabe’s reign of terror. Now, with inflation, it would cost several years’ wages. But having taken a box of books out to a village – and remember there is a terrible shortage of petrol – I can tell you that the box was greeted with tears. The library may be a plank on bricks under a tree. And within a week there will be literacy classes – people who can read teaching those who can’t, citizenship classes – and in one remote village, since there were no novels written in the Tonga language, a couple of lads sat down to write novels in Tonga. There are six or so main languages in Zimbabwe and there are novels in all of them: violent, incestuous, full of crime and murder.

It is said that a people gets the government it deserves, but I do not think it

A problem with finding books for villagers is that they don’t know what is available, so a set book, like *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, becomes popular simply because it just happens to be there. *Animal Farm*, for obvious reasons, is the most popular of all novels

Even today I get letters from people living in a village that might not have electricity or running water, just like our family in our elongated mud hut. "I shall be a writer too," they say, "because I've the same kind of house you were in"

is true of Zimbabwe. And we must remember that this respect and hunger for books comes, not from Mugabe's regime, but from the one before it, the whites. It is an astonishing phenomenon, this hunger for books, and it can be seen everywhere from Kenya down to the Cape of Good Hope.

This links up improbably with a fact: I was brought up in what was virtually a mud hut, thatched. This kind of house has been built always, everywhere where there are reeds or grass, suitable mud, poles for walls – Saxon England, for example. The one I was brought up in had four rooms, one beside another, and it was full of books. Not only did my parents take books from England to Africa, but my mother ordered books by post from England for her children. Books arrived in great brown paper parcels, and they were the joy of my young life. A mud hut, but full of books.

Even today I get letters from people living in a village that might not have electricity or running water, just like our family in our elongated mud hut. "I shall be a writer too," they say, "because I've the same kind of house you were in."

But here is the difficulty. Writing, writers, do not come out of houses without books.

I have been looking at the speeches by some of the recent Nobel prizewinners. Take last year's winner, the magnificent Orhan Pamuk. He said his father had 500 books. His talent did not come out of the air, he was connected with the great tradition. Take VS Naipaul. He mentions that the Indian Vedas were close behind the memory of his family. His father encouraged him to write, and when he got to England he would visit the British Li-

brary. So he was close to the great tradition. Let us take John Coetzee. He was not only close to the great tradition, he was the tradition: he taught literature in Cape Town. And how sorry I am that I was never in one of his classes; taught by that wonderfully brave, bold mind. In order to write, in order to make literature, there must be a close connection with libraries, books, the tradition.

Discarded encyclopaedia

I have a friend from Zimbabwe, a black writer. He taught himself to read from the labels on jam jars, the labels on preserved fruit cans. He was brought up in an area I have driven through, an area for rural blacks. The earth is grit and gravel, there are low sparse bushes. The huts are poor, nothing like the well-cared-for huts of the better off. There was a school, but like the one I have described. He found a discarded children's encyclopaedia on a rubbish heap and taught himself from that.

On Independence in 1980 there was a group of good writers in Zimbabwe, truly a nest of singing birds. They were bred in old Southern Rhodesia, under the whites – the mission schools, the better schools. Writers are not made in Zimbabwe, not easily, not under Mugabe.

All the writers travelled a difficult road to literacy, let alone to becoming writers. I would say learning to read from the printed labels on jam jars and discarded encyclopaedias was not uncommon. And we are talking about people hungering for standards of education beyond them, living in huts with many children – an overworked mother, a fight for food and clothing.

Yet despite these difficulties, writers came into being. And we should also remember that this was Zimbabwe, conquered less than 100 years before. The grandparents of these people might have been storytellers working in the oral tradition. In one or two generations, the transition was made from these stories remembered and passed on, to print, to books.

Books were literally wrested from rubbish heaps and the detritus of the white man's world. But a sheaf of paper is one thing, a published book quite another. I have had several accounts sent to me of the publishing scene in Africa. Even in more privileged places like North Africa, to talk of a publishing scene is a dream of possibilities.

Here I am talking about books never written, writers who could not make it because the publishers are not there. Voices unheard. It is not possible to estimate this great waste of talent, of potential. But even before that stage of a book's creation which demands a publisher, an advance, encouragement, there is something else lacking.

Writers are often asked: "How do you write? With a word processor? an electric typewriter? a quill? longhand?" But the essential question is: "Have you found a space, that empty space, which should surround you when you write? Into that space, which is like a form of listening, of attention, will come the words, the words your characters will speak, ideas – inspiration." If a writer cannot find this space, then poems and stories may be stillborn. When writers talk to each other, what they discuss is always to do with this imaginative space, this other time. "Have you found

it? Are you holding it fast?"

Let us now jump to an apparently very different scene. We are in London, one of the big cities. There is a new writer. We cynically enquire: "Is she good-looking?" If this is a man: "Charismatic? Handsome?" We joke, but it is not a joke.

This new find is acclaimed, possibly given a lot of money. The buzzing of hype begins in their poor ears. They are feted, lauded, whisked about the world. Us old ones, who have seen it all, are sorry for this neophyte, who has no idea of what is really happening. He, she, is flattered, pleased. But ask in a year's time what he or she is thinking: "This is the worst thing that could have happened to me."

Some much-publicised new writers haven't written again, or haven't written what they wanted to, meant to. And we, the old ones, want to whisper into those innocent ears: "Have you still got your space? Your soul, your own and necessary place where your own voices may speak to you, you alone, where you may dream. Oh, hold on to it, don't let it go."

Memories to be revived

My mind is full of splendid memories of Africa that I can revive and look at whenever I want. How about those sunsets, gold and purple and orange, spreading across the sky at evening? How about butterflies and moths and bees on the aromatic bushes of the Kalahari? Or, sitting on the pale grassy banks of the Zambesi, the water dark and glossy, with all the birds of Africa darting about? Yes, elephants, giraffes, lions and the rest, there were plenty of those, but how about the sky at night, still unpol-

Books were literally wrested from rubbish heaps and the detritus of the white man's world. But a sheaf of paper is one thing, a published book quite another

I have seen a teacher in a school where there were no textbooks, not even a chalk for the blackboard. He taught his class of six- to 18-year-olds by moving stones in the dust, chanting: "Two times two is ..." and so on

luted, black and wonderful, full of restless stars?

There are other memories too. A young African man, 18 perhaps, in tears, standing in what he hopes will be his "library". A visiting American, seeing that his library had no books, had sent a crate of them. The young man had taken each one out, reverently, and wrapped them in plastic. "But," we say, "these books were sent to be read, surely?" "No," he replies, "they will get dirty, and where will I get any more?"

I have seen a teacher in a school where there were no textbooks, not even a chalk for the blackboard. He taught his class of six- to 18-year-olds by moving stones in the dust, chanting: "Two times two is ..." and so on. I have seen a girl – perhaps not more than 20, also lacking textbooks, exercise books, biros – teach the ABC by scratching the letters in the dirt with a stick, while the sun beat down and the dust swirled.

Waiting for water

I would like you to imagine yourselves somewhere in Southern Africa, standing in an Indian store, in a poor area, in a time of bad drought. There is a line of people, mostly women, with every kind of container for water. This store gets a bowser of precious water every afternoon from the town, and here the people wait.

The Indian is standing with the heels of his hands pressed down on the counter, and he is watching a black woman, who is bending over a wadge of paper that looks as if it has been torn out of a book. She is reading *Anna Karenina*. She is reading slowly, mouthing the words. It looks a difficult book. This is a

young woman with two little children clutching at her legs. She is pregnant. The Indian is distressed, because the young woman's headscarf, which should be white, is yellow with dust. Dust lies between her breasts and on her arms. This man is distressed because of the lines of people, all thirsty, but he doesn't have enough water for them. He is angry because he knows there are people dying out there, beyond the dust clouds.

This man is curious. He says to the young woman: "What are you reading?"

"It is about Russia," says the girl.

"Do you know where Russia is?" He hardly knows himself.

The young woman looks straight at him, full of dignity, though her eyes are red from dust. "I was best in the class. My teacher said I was best."

The young woman resumes her reading: she wants to get to the end of the paragraph.

The Indian looks at the two little children and reaches for some Fanta, but the mother says: "Fanta makes them thirsty."

The Indian knows he shouldn't do this, but he reaches down to a great plastic container beside him, behind the counter, and pours out two plastic mugs of water, which he hands to the children. He watches while the girl looks at her children drinking, her mouth moving. He gives her a mug of water. It hurts him to see her drinking it, so painfully thirsty is she.

Now she hands over to him a plastic water container, which he fills. The young woman and the children watch him closely so that he doesn't spill any.

She is bending again over the book. She reads slowly but the paragraph fas-

cinates her and she reads it again.

“Varenka, with her white kerchief over her black hair, surrounded by the children and gaily and good-humouredly busy with them, and at the same time visibly excited at the possibility of an offer of marriage from a man she cared for, Varenka looked very attractive. Koznyshev walked by her side and kept casting admiring glances at her. Looking at her, he recalled all the delightful things he had heard from her lips, all the good he knew about her, and became more and more conscious that the feeling he had for her was something rare, something he had felt but once before, long, long ago, in his early youth. The joy of being near her increased step by step, and at last reached such a point that, as he put a huge birch mushroom with a slender stalk and up-curling top into her basket, he looked into her eyes and, noting the flush of glad and frightened agitation that suffused her face, he was confused himself, and in silence gave her a smile that said too much.”

This lump of print is lying on the counter, together with some old copies of magazines, some pages of newspapers, girls in bikinis.

It is time for her to leave the haven of the Indian store, and set off back along the four miles to her village. Outside, the lines of waiting women clamour and complain. But still the Indian lingers. He knows what it will cost this girl, going back home with the two clinging children. He would give her the piece of prose that so fascinates her, but he cannot really believe this splinter of a girl with her great belly can really understand it.

Why is perhaps a third of *Anna Karenina* stuck here on this counter in a re-

mote Indian store? It is like this.

A certain high official, United Nations, as it happens, bought a copy of this novel in the bookshop when he set out on his journeys to cross several oceans and seas. On the plane, settled in his business-class seat, he tore the book into three parts. He looked around at his fellow passengers as he did this, knowing he would see looks of shock, curiosity, but some of amusement. When he was settled, his seatbelt tight, he said aloud to whomever could hear: “I always do this when I’ve a long trip. You don’t want to have to hold up some heavy great book.” The novel was a paperback, but, true, it is a long book. This man was used to people listening when he spoke. When people looked his way, curiously or not, he confided in them. “No, it is really the only way to travel.”

When he reached the end of a section of the book, he called the airhostess, and sent it back to his secretary, who was travelling in the cheaper seats. This caused much interest, condemnation, certainly curiosity, every time a section of the great Russian novel arrived, mutilated, but readable, in the back part of the plane.

Meanwhile, down in the Indian store, the young woman is holding on to the counter, her little children clinging to her skirts. She wears jeans, since she is a modern woman, but over them she has put on the heavy woollen skirt, part of traditional garb of her people: her children can easily cling on to it, the thick folds.

She sends a thankful look at the Indian, who she knows likes her and is sorry for her, and she steps out into the blowing clouds. The children have gone

She is bending again over the book.

She reads slowly but the paragraph fascinates her and she reads it again

This is hard, oh yes, it is hard, this stepping, one foot after another, through the dust that lays in soft deceiving mounds under her feet. Hard, hard – but she is used to hardship, is she not?

past crying, and their throats are full of dust anyway.

This is hard, oh yes, it is hard, this stepping, one foot after another, through the dust that lays in soft deceiving mounds under her feet. Hard, hard – but she is used to hardship, is she not? Her mind is on the story she has been reading. She is thinking: “She is just like me, in her white headscarf, and she is looking after children, too. I could be her, that Russian girl. And the man there, he loves her and will ask her to marry him. (She has not finished more than that one paragraph). Yes, and a man will come for me, and take me away from all this, take me and the children, yes, he will love me and look after me.”

She thinks. My teacher said there was a library there, bigger than the supermarket, a big building, and it is full of books. The young woman is smiling as she moves on, the dust blowing in her face. I am clever, she thinks. Teacher said I am clever. The cleverest in the school. My children will be clever, like me. I will take them to the library, the place full of books, and they will go to school, and they will be teachers – my teacher told me I could be a teacher. They will live far from here, earning money. They will live near the big library and enjoy a good life.

You may ask how that piece of the Russian novel ever ended up on that counter in the Indian store?

It would make a pretty story. Perhaps someone will tell it.

On goes that poor girl, held upright by thoughts of the water she would give her children once home, and drink a little herself. On she goes, through the dreaded dusts of an African drought.

Literary treasure trove

We are a jaded lot, we in our world – our threatened world. We are good for irony and even cynicism. Some words and ideas we hardly use, so worn out have they become. But we may want to restore some words that have lost their potency.

We have a treasure-house of literature, going back to the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans. It is all there, this wealth of literature, to be discovered again and again by whoever is lucky enough to come up on it. Suppose it did not exist. How impoverished, how empty we would be.

We have a bequest of stories, tales from the old storytellers, some of whose names we know, but some not. The storytellers go back and back, to a clearing in the forest where a great fire burns, and the old shamans dance and sing, for our heritage of stories began in fire, magic, the spirit world. And that is where it is held, today.

Ask any modern storyteller and they will say there is always a moment when they are touched with fire, with what we like to call inspiration, and this goes back and back to the beginning of our race, to fire and ice and the great winds that shaped us and our world.

The storyteller is deep inside everyone of us. The story-maker is always with us. Let us suppose our world is attacked by war, by the horrors that we all of us easily imagine. Let us suppose floods wash through our cities, the seas rise . . . but the storyteller will be there, for it is our imaginations which shape us, keep us, create us – for good and for ill. It is our stories that will recreate us, when we are torn, hurt, even destroyed. It is the

storyteller, the dream-maker, the myth-maker, that is our phoenix, that represents us at our best, and at our most creative.

That poor girl trudging through the dust, dreaming of an education for her children, do we think that we are better than she is – we, stuffed full of food, our cupboards full of clothes, stifling in our

superfluities?

I think it is that girl and the women who were talking about books and an education when they had not eaten for three days, that may yet define us. **CT**

Doris Lessing won the 2007 Nobel Prize for Literature.

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It is the storyteller, the dream-maker, the myth-maker, that is our phoenix, that represents us at our best

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BURGER KING & THE TOMATO PICKERS

Sam Pizzigati tells why farm workers are not getting a pay rise

One fast-food giant – Burger King – has resisted the penny-per-pound wage increase, and that resistance, says food industry analyst Eric Schlosser, “has encouraged tomato growers to cancel the deals already struck with Taco Bell and McDonald’s”

Hundreds of migrant farmworkers marched through Miami at the beginning of December to protest a Florida tomato grower maneuver that will cut some tomato picker wages by 40 percent.

The growers are refusing to honor deals the state’s top farmworker group has cut with McDonald’s and Taco Bell to pay pickers a penny a pound more for the tomatoes they pick – over the course of workdays that often last 12 hours.

Fast-food chains just happen to be the biggest market for Florida’s tomatoes. But one fast-food giant – Burger King – has resisted the penny-per-pound wage increase, and that resistance, says food industry analyst Eric Schlosser, “has encouraged tomato growers to cancel the deals already struck with Taco Bell and McDonald’s.”

Why is Burger King so up in arms against upping farmworker wages a penny a pound?

Here’s a hint: The farmworkers started their nine-mile protest march Friday at the Miami office of Goldman

Sachs, the Wall Street investment banking colossus whose top power suits will shortly be divvying up somewhere between \$17 and \$22 billion in annual bonuses.

How are Wall Street’s power suits making all those billions? They certainly, of course, don’t pick tomatoes – or even flip burgers. They flip companies. And that flipping, maybe more than any other single factor, is driving the battle over pennies currently raging in Florida’s tomato fields.

Frenetic flipping

The flipping at Burger King, the nation’s second-largest fast-food chain, has been going on for some time now, ever since 1967 when Pillsbury bought the then 13-year-old Burger King from the company’s two founders.

But the Burger King flipping wouldn’t become particularly frenetic until nearly two dozen years later. In 1989, Grand Met, a British company, bought out Pillsbury. Just eight years later, Grand Met merged with the Guinness beverage company to create a totally new corpo-

ration that became known as Diageo.

This new company knew something about selling beer, but next to nothing about burgers. By 2002, Burger King had become a basket case, with central headquarters and the chain's franchisees at each others' throats.

That's when three American big-money powers – Wall Street's Goldman Sachs, the Boston-based Bain Capital Group, and the Fort Worth-based Texas Pacific Group – partnered to shell out \$1.5 billion to take the distressed Burger King off Diageo's hands.

Actually, the three partners did a good bit more borrowing than shelling. Only \$325 million of the Burger King sale price came from the partners' own pockets. They borrowed the rest. That's standard operating procedure in today's big-time private equity deals.

Firms like Goldman, Texas Pacific, and Bain, typically buy up a hurting corporate property with borrowed money, then tap the company's operating cash flow – fast food companies do generate plenty of cash – to pay off the resulting debt.

But, wait, if that cash is going to pay off the debt the new owners of a hurting company like Burger King ran up buy the company, how are those new owners going to make the investments in marketing or research or customer service needed to make their dysfunctional company functional?

No time to wait

Now firms like Goldman, Bain, and Texas Pacific could always borrow still more money to pay for these needed corporate improvements. But those improvements could take years to show

up in the bottom line of a company like Burger King.

Private equity wheeler-dealers don't have much interest in waiting years for results. But they have nothing against borrowing. So they do borrow – but not to make lasting improvements in the companies they buy. They borrow to line their own pockets.

Last year, for instance, Burger King borrowed \$350 million in February and then paid out \$367 million in dividends to the company's owners, the good people at Goldman, Bain, and Texas Pacific. Then those good people, who had been collecting a \$9 million annual fee for managing Burger King, collected another \$30 million for agreeing to cancel that “management” contract.

Four months later, Goldman, Bain, and Texas Pacific unloaded a quarter of their Burger King ownership stake in an initial public offering of company shares that brought in \$425 million. The three partners, once the dust settled, had nearly doubled their original out-of-pocket outlay for Burger King in just four years.

Meanwhile, Burger King remains a troubled company, deeply indebted, with per-restaurant revenues, notes Business Week, “just a little more than half the sales of a typical McDonald's.”

But Goldman, Bain, and Texas Pacific aren't finished yet. They began selling even more of their Burger King shares, with none of the proceeds going back into the company. To make these sales as lucrative as possible, Burger King, naturally, needs to showtop-notch, short-term profits. And that brings us back to Florida and Burger King's hard-line against a penny-a-pound pay increase

Firms like Goldman, Texas Pacific, and Bain, typically buy up a hurting corporate property with borrowed money, then tap the company's operating cash flow – fast food companies do generate plenty of cash – to pay off the resulting debt

IT'S A FLIP-OFF

The more pennies for those pickers, Burger King management clearly understands, the fewer millions for Goldman, Bain, and Texas Pacific

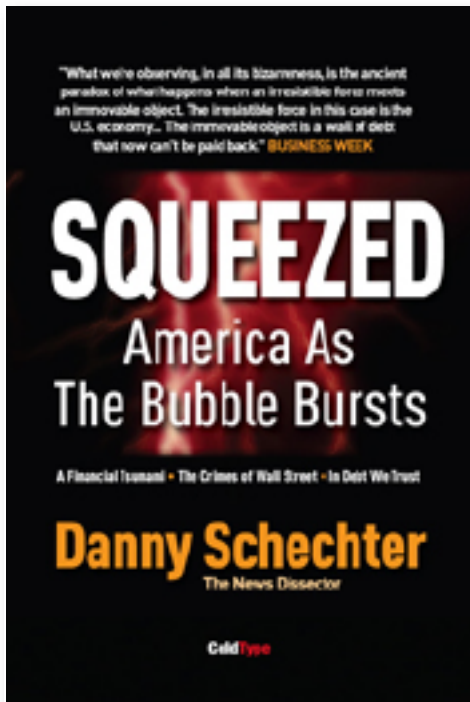
for the state's tomato pickers.

The more pennies for those pickers, Burger King management clearly understands, the fewer millions for Goldman, Bain, and Texas Pacific.

Last year, analyst Eric Schlosser points out, the over \$200 million in holiday bonuses that went to the top 12 executives at Goldman Sachs more than doubled the entire combined annual wages of southern Florida's 10,000 tomato pickers. This year, those top 12 Goldman ex-

ecutives will reportedly walk off with even more in their pay envelopes. Florida's tomato pickers, courtesy of Burger King, can now look forward to a future with even less. **CT**

*Labor journalist Sam Pizzigati edits Too Much, an online weekly available at www.toomuchonline.org His most recent book is **Greed and Good: Understanding and Overcoming the Inequality that Limits Our Lives***



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PASSING AROUND THE PAINTED PIG

Hal O'Boyle on bankers, politicians and the credit crisis

A recent front page article in the Wall Street Journal reported a meeting between a group of bankers from the world's biggest banks and representatives of the US Treasury Department. The meeting, we are told, is "in response to the world credit crisis." Its purpose is to "avert a crunch."

Mark Twain once noted that no man's property is safe when Congress is in session. A corollary to that rule can surely be found in what happens when supposedly competing bankers gather around a table with the people who are supposedly regulating their competition. The WSJ story is about just such a meeting. The reporters do their best to make it sound as if some good will come of it.

While it is possible that the participating bankers and government big wigs have the economic welfare of the American people foremost in their minds, there are other possibilities. The name of this game is "bailout." The "crunch" the meeting is designed to avoid is the deafening thunder of pink slips hitting fine walnut desktops and the crinkling sound

of personal portfolios approaching the value of the paper that supports them.

It brings to mind a meeting of really rich important bankers (RRIBs) back in 1912 at a place called Jekyll Island. The biggest names in banking, Rockefeller, Morgan, Rothschild, Warburg, and a few others were all there. In several days of hard negotiating the competitors came up with the plan for the private banking cartel that is at the heart of the "world credit crisis" today.

The RRIBs took their plan to Congress. The politicians loved it. They made it the law. The Federal Reserve Bank was born, neither federal nor having any reserves. It was a well disguised scam to give bankers access to unimaginable profit and politicians access to unlimited funds without the inconvenience of having to raise taxes. Everybody wins. Everybody, that is, but the suckers who will have to tote the load of real sweat and toil that the bankers and politicians can now buy with the stroke of a pen.

The "world credit crisis" today's bankers are worried about is of their own making. It started when they hit on

While it is possible that the participating bankers and government big wigs have the economic welfare of the American people foremost in their minds, there are other possibilities

It was a banker's dream come true. Create money out of thin air. Lend it at interest to anyone who could fog a mirror. Bundle the mortgages into CDOs and sell them. Repeat the process, making fat fees and big interest at every turn

the idea of bundling mortgages together into “collateralized debt obligations.” (I love that kind of talk.) CDO’s were essentially the application of lipstick to a pig. By moving shaky mortgage paper far from those who had to pay it and bundling it with other, similar paper, “sub-prime” mortgages miraculously morphed into AAA debt obligations.

Pigs with lipstick, false eyelashes, rouge and pearl earrings.

Bankers who sold these obligations to other grey-suited experts at pension funds, insurance companies and investment houses made scant mention of the folks of questionable means who had to keep up the payments. Neither did they talk much about the typical 50-year-old, termite infested bungalow that served as “collateral.”

Over time, peddling CDOs became so lucrative that banks spun off separate divisions called Structured Investment Vehicles (SIVs) to speculate in the interest rate arbitrage they could generate using their own phony credit ratings. It was a banker’s dream come true. Create money out of thin air. Lend it at interest to anyone who could fog a mirror. Bundle the mortgages into CDOs and sell them. Repeat the process, making fat fees and big interest at every turn.

SIVs issue their own short term debt on their AAA credit ratings and large holdings of CDOs. They use the money to buy higher interest debt on the open market from businesses looking to raise cash on receivables or mortgages.

This is where the full dress porkers live. It’s not just makeup. These little piggies are in full seduction regalia, fish net stockings, high heels, short shorts and

gel-filled, gravity defying foundation garments.

Citibank has SIVs valued at \$100 billion. Citibank’s problem is that investors are starting not to care how the porkers in the chorus line are dressed. You can bet there is a real crisis when bankers start meeting with competitors and bureaucrats.

There seems to be some question as to the market value of the CDOs. Usually market value can be determined by the most recent sale price of similar items. The problem? Nobody wants to buy the painted pigs. There are no recent prices because there are no sales. The price of something nobody wants is zero.

In that case the SIVs are worth a lot less than everyone thinks. They might actually be valueless themselves. When banks, bankers, bureaucrats and politicians get caught in their own scams and face a reckoning, they refer to it as a “credit crisis.” The pigs are not only naked, they’re dead.

Look for the dead pigs to be carefully groomed and propped up as if they were just as healthy and fetching as the day they were first decorated. Look for bankers to appeal to their friends at the US Treasury, the Federal Reserve and Congress for help in passing the painted pigs along to the dumbest guys in the room, the US taxpayers. Look for it to happen soon. **CT**

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JUST ANOTHER PEACE SCARE

William Blum on the chief warmonger and his pals

The US intelligence community's new National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) – “Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities” – makes a point of saying up front (in bold type): “This NIE does *not* (italics in original) assume that Iran intends to acquire nuclear weapons.” The report goes on to state: “We judge with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program.”

Isn't that good news, that Iran isn't about to attack the United States or Israel with nuclear weapons? Surely everyone is thrilled that the horror and suffering that such an attack – not to mention an American or Israeli retaliation or pre-emptive attack – would bring to this sad old world. Here are some of the happy reactions from American leaders:

- Senate Republicans are planning to call for a congressional commission to investigate the NIE's conclusion that Iran discontinued its nuclear weapons program in 2003.^[1]

- National Security Adviser, Stephen J. Hadley, said: The report “tells us that

the risk of Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon remains a very serious problem.”^[2]

- Defense Secretary Robert Gates “argued forcefully at a Persian Gulf security conference ... that US intelligence indicates Iran could restart its secret nuclear weapons program ‘at any time’ and remains a major threat to the region.”^[3]

- John R. Bolton, President Bush's former ambassador to the United Nations and pit bull of the neo-conservatives, dismissed the report with: “I've never based my view on this week's intelligence.”^[4]

- And Bush himself added: “Look, Iran was dangerous, Iran is dangerous, and Iran will be dangerous if they have the knowledge necessary to make a nuclear weapon. The NIE says that Iran had a hidden – a covert nuclear weapons program. That's what it said. What's to say they couldn't start another covert nuclear weapons program? ... Nothing has changed in this NIE that says, ‘Okay, why don't we just stop worrying about it?’ Quite the contrary. I think the NIE makes it clear that Iran needs to be taken seriously. My opinion hasn't changed.”^[5]

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The wicked Ahmadinejad can threaten us as much as he wants – he just has not got the means to harm us. Isn't that a reason for celebration? So why does this feel like a national disaster?

Hmmm. Well, maybe the reaction was more positive in Israel. Here's a report from Uri Avnery, a leading Israeli columnist: "The earth shook. Our political and military leaders were all in shock. The headlines screamed with rage. ... Shouldn't we be overjoyed? Shouldn't the masses in Israel be dancing in the streets? After all, we have been saved! ... Lo and behold – no bomb and no any-minute-now. The wicked Ahmadinejad can threaten us as much as he wants – he just has not got the means to harm us. Isn't that a reason for celebration? So why does this feel like a national disaster?"^[6]

We have to keep this in mind – America, like Israel, cherishes its enemies. Without enemies, the United States appears to be a nation without moral purpose and direction. The various managers of the National Security State need enemies to protect their jobs, to justify their swollen budgets, to aggrandize their work, to give themselves a mission, to send truckloads of taxpayer money to the corporations for whom the managers will go to work after leaving government service. And they understand the need for enemies only too well, even painfully. Here is US Col. Dennis Long, speaking in 1992, just after the end of the Cold War, when he was director of "total armor force readiness" at Fort Knox:

"For 50 years, we equipped our football team, practiced five days a week and never played a game. We had a clear enemy with demonstrable qualities, and we had scouted them out. [Now] we will have to practice day in and day out without knowing anything about the other team. We won't have his playbook, we won't know where the stadium is, or

how many guys he will have on the field. That is very distressing to the military establishment, especially when you are trying to justify the existence of your organization and your systems."^[7]

In any event, all of the above is completely irrelevant if Iran has no intention of attacking the United States or Israel, even if they currently possessed a large stockpile of nuclear weapons. As I've asked before: What possible reason would Iran have for attacking the United States or Israel other than an irresistible desire for mass national suicide?

The crime of GWS: Governing while socialist

In Chile, during the 1964 presidential election campaign, in which Salvador Allende, a Marxist, was running against two other major candidates much to his right, one radio spot featured the sound of a machine gun, followed by a woman's cry: "They have killed my child – the communists." The announcer then added in impassioned tones: "Communism offers only blood and pain. For this not to happen in Chile, we must elect Eduardo Frei president."^[8] Frei was the candidate of the Christian Democratic Party, the majority of whose campaign costs were underwritten by the CIA according to the US Senate.^[9] One anti-Allende campaign poster which appeared in the thousands showed children with a hammer and sickle stamped on their foreheads.^[10]

The scare campaign played up to the fact that women in Chile, as elsewhere in Latin America, are traditionally more religious than men, more susceptible to being alarmed by the specter of "godless, atheist communism".

Allende lost. He won the men's vote by 67,000 over Frei (in Chile men and women vote separately), but amongst the women Frei came out ahead by 469,000 ... testimony, once again, to the remarkable ease with which the minds of the masses of people can be manipulated, in any and all societies.

In Venezuela, during the recent campaign concerning the constitutional reforms put forth by Hugo Chávez, the opposition played to the same emotional themes of motherhood and "communist" oppression. (Quite possibly because of the same CIA advice.) "I voted for Chávez for President, but not now. Because they told me that if the reform passes, they're going to take my son, because he will belong to the state," said a woman, Gladys Castro, interviewed in Venezuela before the December 2 vote which rejected the reforms; this according to a report of Venezuelanalysis.com, an English-language news service published by Americans in Caracas. "Gladys is not the only one to believe the false rumors she's heard," the report added. "Thousands of Venezuelans, many of them Chávez supporters, have bought the exaggerations and lies about Venezuela's Constitutional Reform that have been circulating across the country for months. Just a few weeks ago, however, the disinformation campaign ratcheted up various notches as opposition groups and anti-reform coalitions placed large ads in major Venezuelan papers. The most scandalous was ... (a) two-page spread in the country's largest circulation newspaper, Últimas Noticias, which claimed about the Constitutional Reform: 'If you are a Mother, YOU LOSE! Because you will lose your house, your

family and your children. Children will belong to the state.'" This particular ad was placed by a Venezuelan business organization, Cámara Industrial de Carabobo, which has among its members dozens of subsidiaries of the largest US corporations operating in Venezuela.^[1]

Chávez lost the December 2 vote (in part, I believe, because of his unrelenting bravado, which turned off any number of his supporters) but he's still a marked man in Washington, which can not stomach the prospect of five more years of the man and his policies. It's not because the United States is looking to grab Venezuela's oil. It's because Chávez is completely independent of Washington and has used his oil wealth to become a powerful force in Latin America, inspiring and aiding other independent-minded governments in the region, like Cuba, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Ecuador, as well as carrying on close relations with the likes of China, Russia, and Iran. The man does not show proper understanding that he's living in the Yankee's back yard; indeed, in the Yankee's world. The Yankee empire grew to its present size and power precisely because it did not tolerate men like Salvador Allende and Hugo Chávez and their quaint socialist customs. Despite their best efforts, the CIA was unable to prevent Allende from becoming Chile's president in 1970. When subsequent parliamentary elections made it apparent to the Agency and their Chilean conservative allies that they would not be able to oust the left from power legally, they instigated a successful military coup, in 1973.

Here for the record is a brief summary of Washington's charming history

The Yankee empire grew to its present size and power precisely because it did not tolerate men like Salvador Allende and Hugo Chávez and their quaint socialist customs

Never mind that the war is totally and perfectly illegal. Not to mention totally and perfectly, even exquisitely, immoral. It's making progress. That's a good thing, is it not?

in relation to such men, their foreign ideas, and their dubious governments since the end of World War Two:

- Attempted to overthrow more than 50 foreign governments, most of which were democratically-elected; successful a majority of the time.
- Grossly interfered in democratic elections in at least 30 countries.
- Attempted to assassinate more than 50 foreign leaders.
- Dropped bombs on the people of some 30 countries.
- Helped to suppress dozens of populist/nationalist movements.^[12]

Although Chávez has spoken publicly about his being assassinated, and his government has several times uncovered what they perceived to be planned assassination attempts, from both domestic and foreign sources, the Venezuelan president has continued to take repeated flights and attend numerous conferences and meetings all over the world, exposing himself and his airplane again and again. The cases of Jaime Roldós, president of Ecuador, and Omar Torrijos, military leader of Panama, should perhaps be considered. Both were reformers who refused to allow their countries to become client states of Washington or American corporations. Both were firm supporters of the radical Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua; both banned an American missionary group, the Summer Institute of Linguistics – long suspected of CIA ties – because of suspicious political behavior; both died in mysterious plane disasters during the Reagan administration in 1981, Torrijos' plane exploding in mid-air.^[13] Torrijos had earlier been marked for assassina-

tion by Richard Nixon.^[14]

Who would have thought? Bush has been vindicated.

We're making progress in Iraq! The "surge" is working, we're told. Never mind that the war is totally and perfectly illegal. Not to mention totally and perfectly, even exquisitely, immoral. It's making progress. That's a good thing, is it not? Meanwhile, the al Qaeda types have greatly increased their number all over the Middle East and South Asia, so their surge is making progress too. Good for them. And speaking of progress in the War on Terror, is anyone progressing faster and better than the Taliban?

The American progress is measured by a decrease in violence, the White House has decided – a daily holocaust has been cut back to a daily multiple catastrophe. And who's keeping the count? Why, the same good people who have been regularly feeding us a lie for the past five years about the number of Iraqi deaths, completely ignoring the epidemiological studies. (Real Americans don't do Arab body counts.) A recent analysis by the Washington Post left the administration's claim pretty much in tatters. The article opened with: "The US military's claim that violence has decreased sharply in Iraq in recent months has come under scrutiny from many experts within and outside the government, who contend that some of the underlying statistics are questionable and selectively ignore negative trends." The article then continued in the same critical vein.^[15]

To the extent that there may have been a reduction in violence, we must also keep in mind that, thanks to this lovely little war, there are several million

Iraqis either dead or in exile abroad or in bursting American and Iraqi prisons; there must be as well a few million more wounded who are homebound or otherwise physically limited; so the number of potential victims and killers has been greatly reduced. Moreover, extensive ethnic cleansing has taken place in Iraq (another good indication of progress, n'est-ce pas? nicht wahr?) – Sunnis and Shiites are now living more in their own special enclaves than before, none of those stinking mixed communities with their unholy mixed marriages, so violence of the sectarian type has also gone down.^[16] On top of all this, US soldiers have been venturing out a lot less (for fear of things like ... well, dying), so the violence against our noble lads is also down. Remember that insurgent attacks on American forces is how the Iraqi violence all began in the first place.

Oh, did I mention that 2007 has been the deadliest year for US troops since the war began?^[17] It's been the same worst year for American forces in Afghanistan.

One of the signs of the reduction in violence in Iraq, the administration would like us to believe, is that many Iraqi families are returning from Syria, where they had fled because of the violence. The New York Times, however, reported that "Under intense pressure to show results after months of political stalemate, the [Iraqi] government has continued to publicize figures that exaggerate the movement back to Iraq"; as well as exaggerating "Iraqis' confidence that the current lull in violence can be sustained." The count, it turns out, included all Iraqis crossing the border, for whatever reason. A United Nations survey found that

46 percent were leaving Syria because they could not afford to stay; 25 percent said they fell victim to a stricter Syrian visa policy; and only 14 percent said they were returning because they had heard about improved security.^[18]

How long can it be before vacation trips to "Exotic Iraq" are flashed across our TVs? "Baghdad's Beautiful Beaches Beckon". Just step over the bodies. Indeed, the State Department has recently advertised for a "business development/tourism" expert to work in Baghdad, "with a particular focus on tourism and related services."^[19]

We've been told often by American leaders and media that the US forces can't leave because of the violence, because there would be a bloodbath. Now there's an alleged significant decrease in the violence. Is that being used as an argument to get out – a golden opportunity for the United States to leave, with head held high? Of course not.

I almost feel sorry for them. They're "can-do" Americans, accustomed to getting their way, accustomed to thinking of themselves as the best, and they're frustrated as hell, unable to figure out "why they hate us", why we can't win them over, why we can't at least wipe them out. Don't they want freedom and democracy? At one time or another the can-do boys have tried writing a comprehensive set of laws and regulations, even a constitution, for the country; setting up mini-bases in neighborhoods; building walls to block off areas; training and arming "former" Sunni insurgents to fight Shias and al Qaeda; enlisting Shias to help fight, against whomever; leaving weapons or bomb-making material in public view to see who picks it up, then

To the extent that there may have been a reduction in violence, we must also keep in mind that, thanks to this lovely little war, there are several million Iraqis either dead or in exile abroad or in bursting American and Iraqi prisons

ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

They're can-do Americans, using good ol' American know-how and Madison Avenue savvy, sales campaigns, public relations, advertising, selling the US brand, just like they do it back home ... and nothing helps

pouncing on them; futuristic vehicles and machines and electronic devices to destroy roadside bombs; setting up their own Arabic-language media, censoring other media; classes for detainees on anger control, an oath of peace, and the sacredness of life and property; regularly revising the official reason the United States is in the country in the first place ... one new tactic after another, and when all else fails they call it a “success” and give it a nice inspiring action name, like “surge” ... and nothing helps.

They're can-do Americans, using good ol' American know-how and Madison Avenue savvy, sales campaigns, public relations, advertising, selling the US brand, just like they do it back home ... and nothing helps. And how can it if the product you're selling is toxic, inherently, from birth, if you're totally ruining your customers' lives, with no regard for any kind of law or morality. They're can-do Americans, accustomed to playing by the rules – theirs; and they're frustrated as hell.

Once is an accident; twice is a coincidence; three times is a conspiracy.

All science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided. – Karl Marx [20]
I believe in conspiracies. So do all of you. American and world history are full of conspiracies. Watergate was a conspiracy. The cover-up of Watergate was a conspiracy. So was Enron. And Iran-Contra. The October Surprise really took place. For a full year, George W. Bush and Dick Cheney conspired to invade Iraq while continually denying that they

had made any such decision. The Japanese conspired to attack Pearl Harbor while negotiating with Washington to find peaceful solutions to the issues separating the two governments. There are many people sitting in prison at this very moment in the United States for having been convicted of “conspiracy” to commit this or that crime.

However, it doesn't follow that all conspiracy theories are created equal, all to be taken seriously. Many people send me emails which I'm unable to take seriously. Here are a few examples:

If they try to access my website a few times and keep getting an error message, they ask me if the FBI or Homeland Security or America Online has finally gotten around to shutting me down.

If they send me an email and it's returned to them, for whatever reason, they wonder if AOL is blocking their particular mail or perhaps blocking all my mail.

If they fail to receive a copy of this report, they wonder if AOL or some government agency is blocking it.

If they come upon a news item on the Internet which exposes really bad behavior of the powers-that-be, they point out how “the mainstream media is completely ignoring this”, even though I may already have read it in the Washington Post or the New York Times. To make the claim that the mainstream media is completely ignoring a particular news item, one would need to have access to the full version of a service like Lexis-Nexis and know how to use it expertly. Google often won't suffice if the news item has not appeared on the website of any mainstream media even

though it may be in print or have been broadcast, although the recent creation of Google News has improved chances of finding an item.

With every new audiotape or videotape from Osama bin Laden my correspondents are sure to inform me that the man is really dead and that the tape is a CIA fabrication. In January 2006, when bin Laden, on an audiotape, recommended that Americans read my book *Rogue State*, the mainstream media was eager to interview me. But a number of my correspondents were quick to inform me and the entire Internet that the tape was phony, implying that I was being naive to believe it; this continues to this day. When I ask them why the CIA would want to publicize and enrich a writer like myself, who has been exposing the intelligence agency's crimes his entire writing life, I get no answer that's worth remembering, often not even understandable.

"Why do you criticize Bush? He's not the real power. He's just a puppet," they ask me. The real power behind the throne, I'm told, is [Dick Cheney, David Rockefeller, the Federal Reserve, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Bilderberger Group, the Trilateral Commission, Bohemian Grove, et al.] Why, I wonder, are the annual meetings of the Bilderberger Group, et al., thought to be so vital to their members and so indicative of their power? To the extent that the Bilderbergerites have access to those in power and are able to influence them, they have this access and power all year long, whether or not they gather together in a once-a-year closed meeting. I think their meetings are primarily a social thing. Money and power likes to en-

joy cocktails with money and power. Of course many important political and historical events are indeed the result of certain people of money and power talking to each other and secretly deciding what course of action would be most advantageous to their collective interests, but it doesn't necessarily follow that those who hold public office are merely puppets of these interests. Bush displays his independence every day of the week – independence from Congress, the Constitution, the Republican Party, classic conservative economic policies, the American people, election results, the facts, logic, humanity. George W. is his own [sociopathic] man.

Finally, there's September 11, 2001. Amongst those in the "9/11 Truth Movement" I am a sinner because I don't champion the idea that it was an "inside job". I think it more likely that some individuals in the Bush administration knew that something was about to happen involving airplanes – perhaps an old fashioned hijacking with political demands – and they let it happen, to make use of it politically, as they certainly have. But I do wish you guys in the 9/11 Truth Movement luck; if you succeed in proving that it was an inside job, that would do more to topple the empire than anything I have ever written. **CT**

NOTES

- [1] Washington Post, December 7, 2007, p.8
- [2] New York Times, December 3, 2007
- [3] Washington Post, December 9, 2007, p.27
- [4] Washington Post, December 4, 2007, p.1
- [5] Washington Post, December 5, 2007,

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p.23

[6] “How they stole the bomb from us”, December 8, 2007, http://zope.gush-shalom.org/index_en.html

[7] New York Times, February 3, 1992, p.8

[8] Paul Sigmund, “The Overthrow of Allende and the Politics of Chile, 1964-1976 (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977) p.297

[9] “Covert Action in Chile, 1963-1973, a Staff Report of The Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities (US Senate)” 18 December 1975. p.4

[10] Sigmund, op. cit., p.34

[11] Venezuelanalysis.com, November 27, 2007, article by Michael Fox

[12] In sequence, details of the five items can be found in Blum’s books: “Freeing the World”, chapter 15; “Rogue State”, chapters 18, 3, 11, 17; see also “Killing Hope” for further details.

[13] For further information, see John Perkins, “Confessions of an Economic Hit Man” (2004), passim

[14] Newsweek magazine, June 18, 1973, p.22

[15] Washington Post, September 6, 2007, p.16

[16] For a good discussion of this see the Inter Press Service report of November 14, 2007 by Ali al-Fadhily

[17] Associated Press, November 6, 2007

[18] New York Times, November 26, 2007

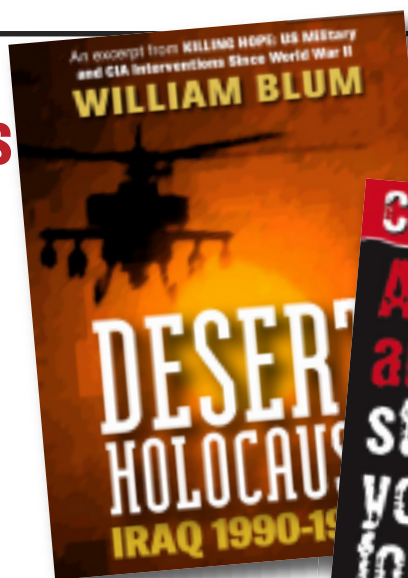
[19] Washington Post, December 5, 2007, p.27

[20] Capital, Vol. III

William Blum is author of Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War 2; Rogue State: A Guide to the World’s Only Superpower West-Bloc Dissident: A Cold War Memoir; and Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the

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THE CITY THAT SAID 'NO' TO AMERICA

David Swanson joins a protest by 80,000 Italians

The people of the northern Italian city of Vicenza, with help from activists around Italy, the rest of Europe, and even in the United States, are continuing to block the proposed construction of a new US military base on their soil.

When a company laid underground fiber-optic cables at the site of the proposed base, activists filled a junction box with cement. When another company tried to begin the work of removing World War II era US bombs from the site, activists camped out in the cold for three days and nights while allies in Florence and a small town near Naples conducted simultaneous protests in front of the company's offices. The company backed off and has suspended the work. And a small town outside Vicenza has now refused to allow the United States to construct a residential village for troops.

Recently, Italy's foreign minister assured Condoleezza Rice, and Italy's president assured George W. Bush – not for the first time – that the base will be built. And the US Congress, unbeknown

to the American people, has approved the funding. But there is a reason for these repeated public assertions that everything is on track. It isn't.

Saturday, December 15th, 2007, was predicted to be the coldest day Vicenza had seen. It snowed lightly in the morning. And even without the weather factor, organizers had hopes of only about 20,000 people turning out for a long march through the city and yet another rally against the construction of a base at a location called Dal Molin.

But as the march proceeded for hours through the streets of Vicenza, the sun melted the snow, and word came that the back end of the march had not yet left the starting place, it became clear that, without any advertising, and with negative or nonexistent media coverage, over 80,000 people had turned out in this conservative city with no university and no protest tradition. And there was no counter-protest whatsoever.

At the end of the march, the crowd poured into a piazza to hear speeches from playwright Dario Fo, Catholic priest Don Gallo, event organizer Cinzia Bot-

even without the weather factor, organizers had hopes of only about 20,000 people turning out for a long march through the city and yet another rally against the construction of a base at a location called Dal Molin

NOT WELCOME

Italian peace activists, just like American peace activists, are accused of being anti-American, and they reply that they want to be friends with Americans, but not slaves to Americans

tene, American Code Pink activist Desiree Fairouz (famous around the globe for holding blood-colored hands up to Condoleezza Rice) and others. Desiree was wonderful despite being moved to tears by the thought of whose fault it was that Italians and others around the world must hold these protests.

When it was my turn to speak, I described the situation in the United States, expressed solidarity with the Vicentini, and encouraged the American soldiers already stationed in and near Vicenza to refuse illegal orders to go to Iraq. I also noted that Edward Luttwak does not speak for the American people, despite appearing as an American military expert (and cheerleader) in every Italian television news story about the US military.

Naturally, I also mentioned the movement for impeachment, and it was nice to hear a crowd of Italians join in with a chant of “Impeach! Impeach! Impeach!” Someone later told me “You know, there are a lot more than 80,000 people who want Bush impeached.”

At a conference the next day in the “Presidio Permanente” (a major activist camp on property adjoining the base site) I asked the audience if they knew that the continuation of funding for the occupation of Iraq and the failure to begin impeachment were the work of a woman of Italian descent. Several people shouted “Nancy Pelosi!” I asked everyone to send her Emails.

“Yankee go Home”

Twenty years ago in Vicenza, if you said you were American it was a bit like saying you were a rock star. Now it’s like saying you’re Dick Cheney. “Yankee Go

Home” and “Americani A Casa” are popular chants and graffiti, although usually said only in reference to Americans in the military. The Vicentini call us their brothers, but don’t want us occupying their city. They sometimes shout “Fratelli Americani... A Casa.” In fact Italian peace activists, just like American peace activists, are accused of being anti-American, and they reply that they want to be friends with Americans, but not slaves to Americans.

They have a point. Before anyone in Italy was asked, the US military, and congressional committee staff, had laid out the plans for a major new base in the middle of a residential area on the edge of an historic city full of renaissance architecture. Agreeing to build the new base in a “palladian style” has appeased no one.

Instead, citizens maintain a 24-7 presence on the edge of the site in their “permanent” fort, consisting of large white tents and trailers. The tents have heat, electricity, light, a sound system, a kitchen, and a store selling every possible article with the anti-base label “No Dal Molin.” A trailer has a radio station. There are not, however, places for large numbers of activists from out of town to sleep. So, in addition to hosting guests in homes, the No Dal Molin movement, in preparation for Saturday’s march seized an abandoned Italian military barracks. Activists then contacted the police offering to pay the utility bills for three days and give the place a major cleaning. The police left them alone. Even during the march, the police stayed out of sight, having apparently decided that a visible police presence boosts the movement. When European activists – used to the

freedoms of speech and assembly – hear about Americans being arrested for non-violent civil disobedience, they sometimes assume we must have committed actual, you know, crimes.

But there are also civil disobedience actions in Europe that can lead to arrest. Some of them involve blocking the construction of bases or rail lines, or blocking the passage along rail lines of trains carrying military materials.

For three days, including the Saturday of the march, anti-bases activists from around the continent gathered in Vicenza to share their experiences and plan future joint efforts. There are anti-bases gatherings planned for Germany, Belgium, and the United States in the spring.

The invasion and occupation of Iraq might have been possible without the US bases that dot the face of Europe, but it would have been and would continue to be a very different operation, since so many soldiers are sent to Iraq from these bases and then return to them. These bases were also used to move prisoners to Guantanamo four years ago. And, as in 80 percent of the nations on earth, the presence of US military bases forms a large part of Europeans' perceptions of the United States. Meanwhile, many citizens of the United States have only the vaguest notion of the approximately 1,000 bases and 300,000 soldiers they pay taxes to maintain in other people's countries.

How many Americans have heard this story? Citizens of the Czech Republic learned that a base was being planned in their area. The absurd US line is that this base is needed to protect against attacks from North Korea and Iran. But, in

a public vote, 99 percent of residents of the area opposed the construction of a base. A group of town mayors in the area formed an alliance to speak out against the base. It has not been built.

Since the US military is constantly building new bases, when and if it decides to use a location other than one that is being protested, that victory may not be immediately apparent, the way it was in Vieques. And the organizers of the Vicenza protest will not consider that a complete victory. When I asked Cinzia what she would do if they chose to build the base in Romania, she replied "We'll go train the Romanians." But as long as the struggle against the base continues in Vicenza, victories will continue to pile up in the form of a growing Italian and European peace movement, and possibly in changes in Italy's government.

15 political parties, same problems

In America we sometimes like to imagine that a third political party would solve our problems, but Italy has some 15 significant political parties, and essentially the same problems we do. They're told that if they don't settle for the current government they'll end up with a worse one.

They're told that if they aren't happy with Prodi they can have Berlusconi back. They're told that if they can't be happy with a government that says it is for peace and progress while doing the exact same things the previous government did, well then they can have the previous government back again, or something even worse. And so, as change becomes possible, the activism that could force it is drained away by

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NOT WELCOME

The most prominent coverage of Saturday's march was of graffiti that one or more people had written on a wall near a new theater, even though No Dal Molin activists had cleaned it off by the next afternoon

partisanship and the sensation of being in power for power's sake. Italy even has a new party that goes by the name Partito Democratico.

Moratorium on bases

While our Democratic Party pretends it has to pass a bill in order to end the funding of an occupation that can be ended by refusing to pass any bills, Italy's leftists propose a doomed vote for a moratorium on bases rather than adding the measure to a larger bill and risking the collapse of the current coalitions. And the media, much of it owned by Berlusconi or controlled by Prodi's government, and most of the rest owned by other business interests, is on the side of US empire.

Italy's constitution prevents it from going to war, so the occupation of Iraq, and that of Afghanistan which Italy still supports, are called humanitarian missions. The most prominent coverage of Saturday's march was of graffiti that one or more people had written on a wall near a new theater, even though No Dal Molin activists had cleaned it off by the next afternoon.

But the Italian people are not fooled or silenced. They have some newspapers on their side. They have internet organizing. They have an active and aggressive labor movement. And their peace movement, unlike ours, does not directly confront their country's nationalism.

In fact, there are right-wing nationalists who oppose the construction of US bases. But, above all, there are many who oppose nationalism and militarism, proudly call themselves leftists, and have dedicated themselves to doing what is needed to achieve peace in the world.

Notes

- A lot more information on the anti-base struggle in Vicenza can be found at <http://afterdowningstreet.org/vicenza>
- A video that Howard Zinn recorded as a message to the people of Vicenza for the events of this past weekend is at http://492cafe.org/video/zincenza/2007_12_07-Zinn-v01-CD.mov
- A video of Cinzia confronting the prime minister of Italy last June is on the indispensable site of Stephanie Westbrook's group in Rome, US Citizens for Peace and Justice: <http://www.peaceandjustice.it/vicenza>
- Websites central to the anti-base movement in Vicenza are: <http://www.altravicenza.it> **CT**
<http://www.nodalmolin.it>

*This report was originally published at <http://www.afterdowningstreet.org>
David Swanson is the Washington Director of Democrats.com and of ImpeachPAC.org. He is creator of MeetWithCindy.org, and a board member of Progressive Democrats of America. His website is www.davidswanson.org*

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QADDAFI, PARIS AND HYPOCRITES

Barry Lando on the art of political expediency

The trip was notably sweetened by Qaddafi's signing agreements to purchase more than 14 billion dollars worth of products from the Airbus to a nuclear reactor (for water desalination) to advanced French fighters

France is seething over the official visit of Muammar el-Qaddafi to Paris – a landmark affair: President Nicolas Sarkozy's invitation was the first such offer from a Western leader since Qaddafi's notorious rupture with the West in the 1980's.

Unfortunately, the arrival of the Libyan tyrant also happened to coincide with World Human Rights Day (December 10). But the predictable political uproar in Paris raises as many questions about the hypocrisy of those who criticize Sarkozy for playing host to Qaddafi, as it does about the morality of the event itself. In fact, the issue resonates far beyond the borders of France.

Not only was Qaddafi received formally – if coolly – at the Elysees Palace, but the one-time international pariah, whose secret services blew a couple of packed airliners out of the skies, was invited to address the French National Assembly – an event which the majority of the deputies boycotted – he was even allowed to pitch his heated Bedouin tent in the garden of the mansion where foreign dignitaries are traditionally put up.

The French government was quick to

point out that Qaddafi is no longer the notorious revolutionary leader he once set out to be. He has renounced his nuclear weapons program, declared he no longer supports terrorism, and informed the French National Assembly that the violent era of national liberation movements was over.

“If we don't welcome countries that are starting to take the path of respectability, what can we say to those that leave that path?” explained Sarkozy prior to the visit.

The trip was notably sweetened by Qaddafi's signing agreements to purchase more than 14 billion dollars worth of products from the Airbus to a nuclear reactor (for water desalination) to advanced French fighters. Industrialists and oil companies here are salivating over further possibilities.

Just the same, many leading French – including some from Sarkozy's own government – were outraged. Bernard Kouchner, a long time defender of human rights, now Minister of Foreign Affairs, declared that “by happy coincidence”, he would be unable to attend the official dinner because of a prior diplomatic en-

HEROES & VILLAINS

Mao's China, for instance, was the empire of evil par excellence – until Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger traveled to Beijing and pronounced its leaders finally fit for international consumption

gagement.

France's Secretary of State for Human Rights, Rama Yade, declared, "Colonel Qaddafi must understand that our country is not a doormat on which a leader, terrorist or not, can come to wipe the blood of his crimes off his feet."

Such fire storms over the ethics of dealing with this or that head of state regularly flare up in the West. Just a few days earlier, for instance, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown raised African hackles by boycotting the summit of European and African leaders in Lisbon because of the presence of Zimbabwean tyrant Robert Mugabe.

Tough questions

But the issue begs a series of tough questions that cut to the heart of what international relations should be all about.

Which heads of state should be beyond the pale and why? Which tyrants' visits should we get upset about? Which should we accept? Which – if any – leaders should we spurn? Which should we talk with?

Mao's China, for instance, was the empire of evil par excellence – until Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger traveled to Beijing and pronounced its leaders finally fit for international consumption. Certainly China is not the repressive regime it was under Mao; on the other hand, does anyone claim that the country is a beacon of democracy? Either at home or abroad, witness its backing of Iran and Myanmar and Robert Mugabe.

In their dealings with the world, the Chinese tend to ignore the burning issues of morality and human rights that, in theory, influence the politics of the West. What counts is what leader has

the resources the Chinese need. Not the way he runs his country.

On the other hand, do Western leaders have such a different approach when vital national issues are concerned?

Qaddafi, for example, was excoriated by the West for his support of terrorism and his nuclear ambitions. For years, however, American leaders have exchanged warm red carpet visits with Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, whose secret police covertly backed Al Qaeda and the Taliban, and whose top scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan peddled nuclear technology to Libya, Iran and North Korea – almost certainly with the knowledge of leading Pakistani officials. Khan's clandestine network may have had dealings with other countries. We don't know: Musharraf continues to shield the scientist, still a national hero.

There's also no question about the extent to which the US, while quick to condemn Arab and Iranian extremists close their moral eyes to Israel's actions in the Middle East.

One gets the impression that many of the international pariahs tend to rule over smaller countries lacking huge resources.

The leaders of Myanmar, for instance, are considered untouchables here in France and certainly throughout most of the West. They run a corrupt, brutal regime, murdering or imprisoning hundreds of civilian opponents. By the same standards, when should Vladimir Putin be removed from the international A guest list?

Maybe we need some kind of score card, perhaps on a per capita basis. How many journalists or other opponents, for instance, have to be assassinated, how

many elections have to be trumped up, how much money has to be stolen, before it's considered immoral to deal with a head of state? .

North Korea's leader, Kim Jong Il with his strange despotic ways, sprawling prison camps, and starving population, was long considered the epitome of despotism. Definitely beyond the Pale: part of the "Axis of Evil" – a "pygmy", George H.W. Bush called him. The New York Philharmonic is on its way for a round of concerts in North Korea, with blessings from the White House.

Red carpets?

But let's get down to basics. If two leaders want to talk face to face, one of them has to travel. Perhaps an international body could prepare a sliding scale of formal honors that would or would not be permitted, depending on the moral rating of the visiting head of state. Are red carpets acceptable at the airport? Reviewing an honor guard? Are state dinners OK? How many courses? What about state dinners with entertainment? How about laying a wreath at the local war memorial? An invitation to address the National Assembly or Congress? A visit to the Crawford Ranch?

Of course, somewhere you have to draw the line, right? Another Hitler, for instance. Except that for most of the thirties, many of America's leading industrialists – and many political leaders – were among Hitler's admirers and supporters. For instance, in 1938 Henry Ford, on his 75th birthday, received one of Germany's highest decorations from the Fuehrer.

How about Joseph Stalin – a despicable tyrant who probably killed more of

his own people – twenty million it's estimated – than did Hitler. Back in 1943, Life Magazine dedicated an entire edition to the Soviet ruler. An in depth condemnation of his bloody regime? No way. The entire issue was a paean to the patriotism, the valor, the economic pioneering and planning of Stalin – the Father of the Russian People, America's great ally against Hitler. The photographs and articles, which included lengthy assurances of Stalin's benign post War intentions towards Europe, could have come straight from The Daily Worker.

A final question. Qaddafi claims to have turned his back on his violent past. But how to handle other controversial heads of state – despised in much of the world – yet show little inclination to change or remorse. A leader, for instance, who ordered his forces to invade another nation, causing the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people, the injury and exile of millions more; a leader who condones torture by his intelligence agencies and secretly dispatched prisoners to be brutalized by the secret services of other countries, at the same time locking up hundreds of others for years on end without any charge.

Do you invite him to the Elysees for dinner? Does he get to set up his heated tent in the garden of your official guest residence?

CT

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

This essay originally appeared at <http://truthdig.com>

Are state dinners OK? How many courses? What about state dinners with entertainment? How about laying a wreath at the local war memorial?

LIBERALISM TO MURDOCHRATY

John Pilger condemns the dismantling of civil rights in Britain

The “project” has completed the work of Thatcher and all but abolished the premises of tolerance and decency, however amorphous, on which much of British public life was based

The former Murdoch retainer Andrew Neil has described James Murdoch, the heir apparent, as a “social liberal”. What strikes me is his casual use of “liberal” for the new ruler of an empire devoted to the promotion of war, conquest and human division. Neil’s view is not unusual. In the murdochracy that Britain has largely become, once noble terms such as democracy, reform, even freedom itself, have long been emptied of their meaning.

In the years leading to Tony Blair’s election, liberal commentators vied in their Tonier-than-thou obeisance to such a paragon of “reborn liberalism”. Writing in the *New Statesman* in 1995, Henry Porter celebrated an almost mystical politician who “presents himself as a harmoniser for all the opposing interests in British life, a conciliator of class differences and tribal antipathies, a synthesiser of opposing beliefs”. Blair was, of course, the diametric opposite.

As events have demonstrated, Blair and the cult of New Labour have destroyed the very liberalism millions of

Britons thought they were voting for. This truth is like a taboo and was missing almost entirely from last week’s Guardian debate about civil liberties. Gone is the bourgeoisie that in good times would extend a few rungs of the ladder to those below.

From Blair’s pseudo-moralising assault on single parents a decade ago to Peter Hain’s recent attacks on the disabled, the “project” has completed the work of Thatcher and all but abolished the premises of tolerance and decency, however amorphous, on which much of British public life was based.

The trade-off has been mostly superficial “social liberalism” and the highest personal indebtedness on earth. In 2007, reported the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the United Kingdom faced the highest levels of inequality for 40 years, with the rich getting richer and the poor poorer and more and more segregated from society. The International Monetary Fund has designated Britain a tax haven, and corruption and fraud in British business are almost twice the global average, while Unicef reports that

British children are the most neglected and unhappiest in the “rich” world.

Abroad, behind a facade of liberal concern for the world’s “disadvantaged”, such as waffle about millennium goals and anti-poverty stunts with the likes of Google and Vodafone, the Brown government, together with its EU partners, is demanding vicious and punitive free-trade agreements that will devastate the economies of scores of impoverished African, Caribbean and Pacific nations.

In Iraq, the blood-letting of a “liberal intervention” may well have surpassed that of the Rwanda genocide, while the British occupiers have made no real attempt to help the victims of their lawlessness. And putting out more flags will not cover the shame. “The mortality of children in Basra has increased by nearly 30% compared to the Saddam Hussein era,” says Dr Haydar Salah, a paediatrician at Basra children’s hospital.

In January nearly 100 leading British doctors wrote to Hilary Benn, then international development secretary, describing how children were dying because Britain had not fulfilled its obligations under UN security resolution 1483. He refused to see them.

Assault on liberties

Even if a contortion of intellect and morality allows the interventionists to justify these actions, the same cannot be said for liberties eroded at home. These are too much part of the myth that individual freedom was handed down by eminent liberal gentlemen instead of being fought for at the bottom. Yet rights of habeas corpus, of free speech and assembly, and dissent and tolerance, are slipping away, undefended. Whole

British communities now live in fear of the police. The British are distinguished as one of the most spied upon people in the world. A grey surveillance van with satellite tracking sits outside my local Sainsbury’s. On the pop radio station Kiss 100, the security service MI5 advertises for ordinary people to spy on each other. These are normal now, along with the tracking of our intimate lives and a system of secretive justice that imposes 18-hour curfews on people who have not been charged with any crime and are denied the “evidence”.

Hundreds of terrified Iraqi refugees are sent back to the infinite dangers of the country “we” have destroyed.

Meanwhile, the cause of any real civil threat to Britons has been identified and confirmed repeatedly by the intelligence services. It is “our” continuing military presence in other people’s countries and collusion with a Washington cabal described by the late Norman Mailer as “pre-fascist”. When famous liberal columnists wring their hands about the domestic consequences, let them look to their own early support for such epic faraway crimes.

In broadcasting, a prime source of liberalism and most of our information, the unthinkable has been normalised. The murderous chaos in Iraq is merely internecine. Indeed, Bush’s “surge” is “working”. The holocaust there has nothing to do with “us”. There are honourable exceptions, of course, as there are in those great liberal storehouses of knowledge, Britain’s universities; but they, too, are normalised and left to natter about “failed states” and “crisis management” – when the cause of the crisis is on their doorstep.

The British are distinguished as one of the most spied upon people in the world. A grey surveillance van with satellite tracking sits outside my local Sainsbury's

Unlike Venezuela, critical issues such as the EU constitution or treaty are denied a referendum, regardless of Blair's "solemn pledge"

As Terry Eagleton has pointed out, for the first time in two centuries almost no eminent British poet, playwright or novelist is prepared to question the foundations of western actions, let alone interrupt, as DJ Taylor once put it, all those “demure ironies and mannered perceptions, their focus on the gyrations of a bunch of emotional poseurs ... to the reader infinitely reassuring ... and infinitely useless”. Harold Pinter and Roman Bennett are exceptions.

Effective as politburo

Britain is now a centralised single-ideology state, as secure in the grip of a superpower as any former eastern bloc country. The Whitehall executive has prerogative powers as effective as politburo decrees.

Unlike Venezuela, critical issues such as the EU constitution or treaty are denied a referendum, regardless of Blair's “solemn pledge”. Thanks largely to a parliament in which a majority of the members cannot bring themselves to denounce the crime in Iraq or even vote for an inquiry, New Labour has added to the statutes a record 3,000 criminal offences: an apparatus of control that undermines the Human Rights Act. In 1977, at the height of the cold war, I interviewed the Charter 77 dissidents in

Czechoslovakia.

They warned that complacency and silence could destroy liberty and democracy as effectively as tanks. “We're actually better off than you in the west,” said a writer, measuring his irony. “Unlike you, we have no illusions.”

For those people who still celebrate the virtues and triumphs of liberalism – anti-slavery, women's suffrage, the defence of individual conscience and the right to express it and act upon it – the time for direct action is now.

It is time to support those of courage who defy rotten laws to read out in Parliament Square the names of the current, mounting, war dead, and those who identify their government's complicity in “rendition” and its torture, and those who have followed the paper and blood trail of Britain's piratical arms companies.

It is time to support the NHS workers who up and down the country are trying to alert us to the destruction of a Labour government's greatest achievement. The list of people stirring is reassuring. The awakening of the rest of us is urgent. **CT**

*John Pilger's latest book, **Freedom Next Time**, has recently been published in paperback. This article was first published in the *New Statesman**

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IS BUSH STOPPED IN HIS TRACKS ON IRAN?

Chris Hedges finds hope in the NIE's nuke report

The release of the National Intelligence Estimate concerning Iran's nuclear status marks the latest in a series of assaults by the Pentagon and the intelligence community against the war posturing of the Bush administration.

President Bush, seven years after assuming power, may finally be halted in his tracks – not by a resurgent Democratic opposition, sagging opinion polls, or an organized antiwar movement, but by the entrenched power structure in Washington he set out to emasculate. The tug of war between those within the administration who advocate as many as 1,000 air strikes on suspected Iranian nuclear facilities and those who oppose an attack will be the most dramatic battle of the final Bush years.

Director of Central Intelligence Gen. Michael V. Hayden and Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates have turned out to be formidable foes of the Bush agenda of preemptive war in the Middle East. Gates, along with Adm. William Fallon, commander of US Central Command, and Gen. George Casey, the Army's new

chief of staff, are openly opposed to a war with Iran. And they will not, unlike their predecessors, permit the Bush White House to use cooked and fabricated intelligence to whip the country into war frenzy.

The effort by the vice president's office to change or suppress the NIE report, which was ready during the summer and stated that Iran had halted its attempt to develop nuclear weapons four years ago, has consumed the internal mechanisms of government for the last few weeks. The existence of the report did nothing to prevent either Bush or Vice President Cheney from asserting before it was made public that Iran was working to develop a nuclear weapon and could trigger, in the president's words, "World War III."

Bush called on Iran in mid-December to explain why it had a secretive nuclear-weapons program, and he warned that "for the sake of world peace," no such efforts should be allowed to flourish. "Iran is dangerous," Bush said after an Oval Office meeting with Italian President Giorgio Napolitano. "We believe

Director of Central Intelligence Gen. Michael V. Hayden and Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates have turned out to be formidable foes to the Bush agenda of preemptive war in the Middle East

THE ENEMY WITHIN

Repeatedly during Bush's presidency, the Israeli government, with strong backing from the White House, has turned to force rather than diplomacy to further Israeli interests in the Middle East

Iran had a secret military-weapons program, and Iran must explain to the world why they had such a program.”

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is also determined to prevent Iran from developing facilities that could produce a nuclear weapon. And Olmert insists Bush is on board, even if top US generals and intelligence officials are not.

Repeatedly during Bush's presidency, the Israeli government, with strong backing from the White House, has turned to force rather than diplomacy to further Israeli interests in the Middle East. Israel unleashed a disastrous bombing campaign against Lebanon last year. Last Sept. 6 it carried out air strikes against a Syrian facility that it said was meant to develop nuclear material. Israel has quarantined the 1.4 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and imposed draconian cuts in electricity and fuel. During the Bush years, the effort to negotiate a solution to the Palestinian conflict has never gone beyond the photo opportunities that characterized the charade in Annapolis, Md. Israel, like Washington, prefers to speak to its adversaries in the language of violence. A strike on Iran fits neatly into this pattern.

“At the beginning of the month, as you know, the National Intelligence Council of the United States published its updated estimation of Iran's intentions and capabilities in the nuclear field,” Olmert told the Israeli Institute for National Security Studies on Tuesday. “I attribute great importance to the declaration by the president of the United States, George Bush, that nothing has changed; Iran was and remains dangerous, and we must continue the international pressure with full force to dis-

suade Iran from its nuclear tendencies. I trust and am confident that the United States will continue to lead the international campaign to stop the development of a nuclear Iran.”

White House lawyers conceivably could use the 2001 congressional authorization to use military force against Afghanistan and the 2002 authorization to use force against Iraq to justify an attack on Iran without going back to Congress for approval. The 2001 resolution gave the president the right to use force against the perpetrators of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks and anyone who “harbored such organizations or persons.” The 2002 resolution handed the president the power to defend the country against “the continuing threat posed by Iraq.”

Legitimize air strikes

The allegations that Iran is involved in supporting and arming insurgents in Iraq, along with the designation of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard as a terrorist organization, could be twisted by White House lawyers to legitimize air strikes against Iran.

“This unexpected bump in the road has, in my opinion, stimulated the Bush administration to develop its own new rationale to justify what will in effect be a full-speed-ahead continuation of past and present policy toward Iran, almost as if the NIE issue had never intervened,” said Ray Close, a retired Middle East specialist for the CIA.

The Bush White House has tried to use the report to assert that Iran remains intent on acquiring nuclear weapons and is a threat.

“Convinced that they have been viciously sabotaged by a partisan anti-

Bush intelligence community, and desperate to justify the basic philosophy and doctrine that underlies their specific policies, these people are painfully wounded and thus in a dangerous frame of mind,” Close said.

“With hopes for a strengthened international sanctions regime fading, and no reasonable excuse available for launching an early preventive military attack, but with their pride deeply injured and their nerves sandpapered raw, I would not be surprised at all to see a heightened level of provocative and threatening rhetoric emanating from the White House in the months ahead.”

The covert operations taking place in Iran, if they are stepped up, could provoke retaliatory acts by Iran against US personnel or facilities in Iraq or the Gulf. Any action by Iran deemed by the Bush

White House to be hostile to the United States or Israel could, Close argues, be instantly seized upon by the president to carry out air strikes against Iran. This could ignite a deadly chain reaction.

“I think the publication of this NIE, rather than cooling the atmosphere, as many analysts predict,” Close warned, “is actually going to lead to a more dangerous and unstable situation in the region in the months and years ahead.”

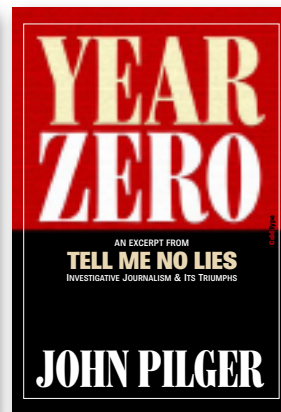
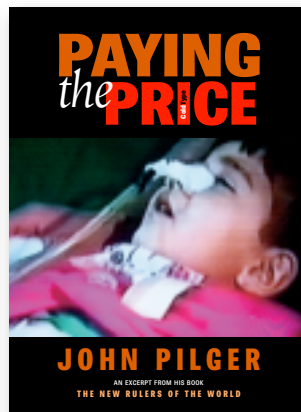
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Chris Hedges is the former Middle East bureau chief for The New York Times and the author of War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning. His latest book is American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America.

This essay was originally published by The Philadelphia Inquirer.

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THE NIGHT I LEARNED WHOSE SIDE I WAS ON

Michael Prysner reflects on the brutality of US occupation in Iraq

The lieutenant told us with a sadistic smile that this prisoner tried to flee a traffic checkpoint he was working that night, and he proudly proclaimed that he had filled the Iraqi man's car with bullets as he tried to drive away

On a cold night in Iraq, two fellow soldiers and I were awakened by our superiors and told to interrogate a prisoner who had just been arrested. Whoever brought in the detainee insisted that it could not wait until morning, so we irritably left the warmth of our sleeping bags and set off into the darkness.

When we arrived at the detention facility, there was a young lieutenant waiting for us. He brought the prisoner there. But the prisoner did not get to that facility the way most did – hands bound tightly behind the back with a sandbag over the head.

He arrived on a stretcher.

The lieutenant told us with a sadistic smile that this prisoner tried to flee a traffic checkpoint he was working that night, and he proudly proclaimed that he had filled the Iraqi man's car with bullets as he tried to drive away.

The traffic checkpoint was one of thousands that operate daily in Iraq. The road is blocked off, and anyone driving on the road is searched and questioned. We had gotten used to questioning pris-

oners who were arrested for the slightest suspicion at these checkpoints. Many were arrested for carrying a large amount of cash – a common practice for store owners and vendors.

According to the lieutenant, there was a long line of cars waiting to pass through his checkpoint. Towards the end of the line, a car that had been waiting pulled out and turned around, driving away from the checkpoint. This act was proof to the lieutenant that the driver of the vehicle must be guilty of something and trying to escape, so he raised his rifle and fired into the night.

Breathing heavily

When I walked into the cell where the prisoner was being kept, it was dark, and I couldn't see him but I could hear him breathing. He was breathing heavily, almost hyperventilating, and his breaths were interrupted by shaking and sobbing. As we followed the sounds, I was able to make out a figure lying on a stretcher against the wall.

We approached the man and clicked on our flashlights. The first thing I saw

was the gauze wrapped around his neck, caked in blood, where he had been shot.

My first thought was that he was lucky to be alive, but I could tell that he was not thinking the same thing.

I could see streams of tears along the sides of his face, leading to the stretcher that was too small for his large body. He was shaking furiously, his bare feet sticking out from under a thin blanket that was not large enough to cover him. I knew that he was not only shaking from the cold, but from the fear of death, torture or life in prison. Every Iraqi knows that people get snatched up in the middle of the night; some never seen again, some returning with stories of intense interrogation techniques.

Why did he run away?

We told our translator to ask him why he had run away. He responded, struggling through gasping breaths and flowing tears.

He said he was tired of waiting in the long line in the middle of the night, and decided to just go back home. Nothing suspicious was found in his car.

Instead of making it back home he ended up in that cell, alone in the dark with only blood-soaked bandages to keep him warm. This was the price he paid for being impatient, for just being an Iraqi.

He cried as he pleaded with us, repeating over and over that he had never done anything wrong. He said he was in pain and begged to be taken to a hospital. I have never seen a man so weakened, terrified and defeated.

When we left, the lieutenant was still proudly boasting about his accomplishment. I wondered how many more Iraqis would be wounded or killed by this man, or by the soldiers he commands. This was the example he set for his subordinates in the field.

As I tried to go back to sleep that night, I could think only of the man down the street in a cold cement room with a bullet wound in his neck. I tried to imagine what he felt, how he thought of the US occupation and how this mission could possibly be conceived of as “liberation” or maintaining “peace and security.” I’m sure we were both kept awake that night – me by confusion and frustration, and him by fear and desperation.

The next morning, I was instructed to go back to the detention facility for more interrogations. There was, as always, a constant flow of scared, shaking and sobbing prisoners. The man I had seen the previous night was a unique case only inasmuch as his wounds were visible.

Through his broken words, his convulsing body, his tears and his blood, the innocent Iraqi man on the stretcher showed me what every prisoner felt. That night he taught me what the Iraqi people already know; he taught me who the real enemy was. **CT**

Michael Prysner is a US army veteran and anti-war activist. This essay originally appeared in Liberation, the newspaper of the Party for Socialism and Liberation at <http://www.PSLweb.org>

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POLITICISING GAZA'S MISERY

Ramzy Baroud on the continuing hypocrisy in the Middle East

Hamas, a party representing the democratic institutions in the Occupied Territories, became the party that 'overthrew' Abbas' 'legitimate' democracy

The intense debate over Gaza is subsiding as the status quo is, predictably, delineated by those with the bigger guns. But to what extent can human suffering be politicized, turned into an intellectual polemic that fails to affect the simplest change in people's lives?

Hamas' political advent in January 2006 as the first 'opposition' movement in the Arab world to ascend to power using peaceful and democratic means was successfully thwarted in a brazen coup, engineered jointly by the United States, Israel and renegade Palestinians factionalists. Following this, history was, as usual, re-written by the victor. Thus Hamas, a party representing the democratic institutions in the Occupied Territories, became the party that 'overthrew' Abbas' 'legitimate' democracy. As strange a notion as that is – a government overthrowing itself – it went down in the annals of Western media as uncontested truth.

All parties involved, directly or otherwise, were expected to determine their position from this fallacious claim, and

they did so to meet their own interests. Some had little problem in disowning Palestinian democracy altogether. The United States government, Israel, the European Union, and various non-democratic Arab governments were delighted by the outcome of Palestinian infighting. They celebrated Abbas and his faction as the true and legitimate democrats, and chastised those who disagreed. Countries such as Russia, South Africa and some Arab Gulf states followed suit, with some hesitation and disgruntlement, but too weak or indecisive to confront the status quo.

On the Palestinian front, the choices were harder, but nonetheless those who were previously aligned neither to Fatah nor Hamas now positioned themselves quickly on the side that served them best. Renowned leftists, for example, who normally spoke as though they were representatives of the voice of reason, now couldn't risk losing what few ineffective NGOs they operated in a management style more reminiscent of 'grocery stores' (the actual name that many Palestinians use to mock many of

the NGOs in their midst).

Fear of losing freedom of movement and access to US and European financial institutions motivated many Palestinians to disown Gaza completely. The sympathy millions of people worldwide felt toward the perpetually suffering Gazans translated mostly in the realm of the intangible. Helplessness prevailed and quickly joined the prevalent sense of powerlessness and incapacity long affiliated with Palestine in general and Gaza in particular.

To distract from this issue, Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert were hurriedly rushed to Annapolis for a badly needed photo-op. Exalted by the self-proclaimed champion of democracy, President Bush, both leaders are on a new quest for peace.

The US-sponsored sideshow has achieved its aim. Dates such as January 2006 among others are now completely cast aside; new dates, new rhetoric and new promises are replacing the old ones; all eyes are now on Abbas and Olmert, Ramallah and Tel Aviv, with calls for future conferences and painful compromises. And Gaza is becoming a forgotten or irrelevant footnote.

Harsh siege

The strip is under a harsh and unprecedented siege, with people dying as a result of lack of medical aid. Israel has cut diesel supplies to 60,000 litres, when 350,000 litres are required daily.

How can an already underdeveloped economy run on such a meagre amount of energy, let alone hospitals and schools? Electricity is also being drastically cut, as per recommendations of Israel's High Court and unemployment is

at the highest it has ever been (past the 75 percent mark). 1.5 million inhabitants are literally trapped in a 365 square kilometre without any breathing room whatsoever, little food, little energy and, worse yet, are told, more or less, that they deserve their fate.

If the media mentions Gaza at all, it does so in a politicized context. For example: three militants killed by Israeli missiles; Israeli army says militants were on their way to fire rockets into Israel; Hamas leader remains defiant, and so on.

Much of the coverage is now focused only on augmenting the sins of Hamas, whereby every every single conduct or misconduct is blown out of proportion. The bottom line is that whatever suffering Gazans endure, it is caused by the Hamas militant menace and their 'forces of darkness'.

Whether Hamas' violations of human rights are at all related to the state of siege, murder and chaos created by the many circumstances that preceded it, remains completely irrelevant.

Gaza has become the needed leading precept for Palestinians, and others, reminding them of what they cannot dare do if they want to be spared the same fate. Palestinians in the West Bank are being asked to contrast the images of angry, bearded Hamas police officers cracking down on protestors with the soft-spoken bespectacled Abbas in international conferences brimming with healthy, overfed faces.

The true reasons behind Gaza's suffering are entirely omitted, except by a few Arab and progressive newspapers. The debate is now being moved from the immediate concern of media circles

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AN END TO INHUMANITY

I cannot think of any justification for apathy before a dying child, whether black, white, Arab, Jewish or any other

into academic conferences, books and long essays; parallels are abundantly invoked between Gaza and other spheres of US influence, notwithstanding Central America.

This is not to deny credit however to those who have had the courage to take the right stance on the dramatic events unfolding in Gaza.

Many possesses enough humanity to separate the politics that led to Gaza's complete isolation and the fact that real people with feelings and hopes and aspirations are suffering, enduring and dying unnecessarily before our very eyes.

Israel's camp is relentless in justifying Israel's racism and the brutality inflicted on Palestinians, using the same tired arguments, such as Israel's security and right to exist, and accusing their detrac-

tors of anti-Semitism at every turn.

But what argument could there be for those who are troubled by human suffering and yet losing sight of Gaza's misery? I cannot think of any justification for apathy before a dying child, whether black, white, Arab, Jewish or any other.

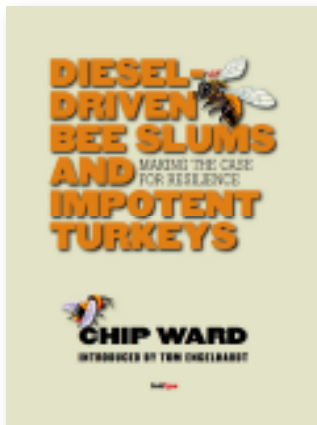
Let's not allow inhumanity to become the accepted norm. If we allowed it to triumph in Gaza, then we are deemed to repeat it elsewhere. **CT**

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JUSTIFYING MURDER

Eli Stephens on biased reporting

It happens so easily you hardly notice it happening. I know I don't. You read an article like this: *"About 30 Israeli tanks and armored vehicles pushed into the Hamas-run Gaza Strip on Tuesday, sparking clashes with Palestinians in which five militants were killed, medics and militant groups said."*

And you think, "well, it was just "militants" that were killed, I guess they deserved it, being "militants" after all. Later on, you read even more cover, this time courtesy of the news agency itself: *"The Israeli military often attacks militants in the coastal territory to try to stop them firing rockets and mortar bombs into southern Israel and has intensified the raids since last month's Annapolis peace conference."*

But wait a minute. It's true that some Palestinians are firing rockets at Israel, and you may or may not think that's legal or justifiable or defensible. But there isn't the slightest indication that any of these five "militants" were involved with that. What they were "militant" about was resisting an invasion of their "country" (territory, land, whatever you want to call it) by foreign or occupying troops.

Israeli tanks came bursting across their border and they fought back and paid the price. That makes them brave, or perhaps foolhardy, but certainly not deserving to die, and it makes their deaths ... murder.

In the old days, Israel used to try to justify such actions on the grounds that someone was "on the way to fire a missile." Now they don't bother. Just the fact that they might have been thinking about it, or might know someone who was thinking about it, or they might think about it in the future, is enough.

Update: Let's play "spot the bias" in this AP rendition of the news: *"Israeli tanks and bulldozers pushed into the southern Gaza Strip on Tuesday, killing five Islamic militants and trapping hundreds of people in their homes, while another extremist died from an airstrike elsewhere in the territory."*

Incidentally, the remainder of the article contains exactly zero information on that airstrike or on the identification of that "extremist." **CT**

Eli Stephens blogs at <http://www.lefti.blogspot.com>

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