

INSIDE: 25 YEARS A MUCKRAKER ● CHASING THE FINANCIAL PIRANHAS ● THE WORD WE DARE NOT SPEAK ● ROBOT WARS ● THE WORLD REMADE

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FIGHTING FOR OUR FUTURE

MADISON, WISCONSIN, FEBRUARY 2011

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Walker's war

What began as a trumped-up crisis has caused a real one, as Wisconsin's governor pits residents against each other, writes **Bill Lueders**, news editor of Madison weekly newspaper, *Isthmus*

Madison, Wisconsin, Feb. 25, 2011

For me and other journalists, the past two weeks have been riveting. I've interviewed dozens of protesters at Wisconsin's state Capitol in Madison, from schoolteachers to prison guards. I was there in the Senate chamber when it became clear that its 14 Democrats had left the state to prevent a vote on Gov. Scott Walker's "budget repair bill." I got to follow the Senate Sergeant at Arms on an office-by-office search, to see if any could be found. None were.

I've been at Walker's press conferences, hearing him tersely reiterate that he's taken the only possible path to balancing the budget, as the chants and jeers of thousands of demonstrators intrude into his conference room, begging to differ. I chatted it up with Tea Party activists who staged a relatively tiny pro-Walker rally – 3,000 to 5,000 people out of a crowd Madison police estimated at 68,000.

Historic and thrilling events are happening here. Even as I type these words I'm hearing music and cheers from the omnipresent throng gathered at the Capitol, across the street from my office.

But as a lifelong resident of Wisconsin, I'm saddened – truly and deeply saddened – by what Walker has set in motion. It will

change the state forever, causing profound and lasting damage, no matter how the budget stalemate plays out.

Scott Walker's declaration of war against Wisconsin's teachers, nurses, social workers, 911 operators, prison guards, park rangers, sanitation workers, snowplow operators, engineers, police officers and firefighters – and their inevitable decision to join the battle – could be for Wisconsin what the attacks of 9/11 were for the nation. It will create a deep before-and-after divide, between a time of

relative innocence and a time of perpetual conflict and insecurity.

The difference is that the attacks of 9/11 were external, and stirred a sense of national unity. What has been fomented in Wisconsin is a rupture among ourselves, one that will ensure acrimony and conten-

tion for many years, perhaps decades. The dispute will be not just between Walker and his tens of thousands of newly impassioned enemies, but between the state's citizens – worker against worker, neighbor against neighbor, family member against family member. (Personally, I think a colonoscopy without anesthesia might be less painful than the next get-together of my extended family.)

"Our state is ripped apart right now," fugitive Democratic state Sen. Jon Erpenbach told MSNBC's Rachel Maddow from

It will create a deep before-and-after divide, between a time of relative innocence and a time of perpetual conflict and insecurity



The budget repair bill is not about balancing the budget, it's about busting unions. You don't have to take my word for it. You can take Scott Walker's

his “undisclosed location” in mid-February. Get used to it. The animosity that has been unleashed here will not go away when some uneasy stasis is reached; it will become part of the fabric of life in Wisconsin.

None of this was necessary, none of it is justified, and none of it can ever be forgiven or forgotten.

Walker claims the state's budget crisis is so gaping and horrific he had no choice but to unilaterally extract benefit concessions from some public employees and minimize the collective bargaining rights of nearly all of them, at the state and local level. But Wisconsin's fiscal situation is not as grave as that of other states, nor is its current budget deficit as large as what Walker's predecessor was able to plug two years ago, without drastic measures.

Moreover, Walker's sense of urgency over reining in employee benefits has not prompted him to be otherwise tightfisted. In just the last several weeks, Walker and the state GOP have passed \$140 million in new tax breaks for businesses, with more to come. (As a candidate, he promised more than a billion dollars of givebacks to corporations and the state's wealthiest residents.)

And, as the *Wisconsin State Journal* reported, the largest share of savings in Walker's budget repair bill for the current fiscal year (\$165 million) will come from refinancing state debt, not new payments from public employees (\$30 million). And the elimination of most collective bargaining – which allows employee unions to negotiate everything from benefit levels to sick days – has no direct impact on the state's bottom line.

Walker says neutering collective bargaining is absolutely necessary because of the changes he'll announce in his first biennial budget. It will include “major cuts” in state funding to local governments and reportedly calls for slashing state aid to schools by \$900 million over the next two years.

The only way to ensure these cuts do not lead to “massive layoffs,” says Walker, is to give local governments and school boards the authority they've long sought to make

unilateral adjustments to pensions and other benefits. “To protect our schools, to protect our local governments, we need to give them the tools they've been asking for, not just for years but for decades.”

But as *Isthmus* has reported, this statewide and decades-long clamor from local officials has somehow escaped the attention of the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators, the Wisconsin Association of School Boards, the Wisconsin League of Municipalities and even the conservative-leaning Wisconsin Counties Association.

All of these groups say that while they've sought changes in the collective bargaining process, they have not asked for the virtual elimination of collective bargaining rights; many of their members don't think doing so is a good idea. Muses Dan Thompson, executive director of the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, “The governor gave us a great deal more flexibility than we asked for.”

National agenda

As has been said many thousands of times since Walker unveiled it on Feb. 11, the budget repair bill is not about balancing the budget, it's about busting unions.

You don't have to take my word for it. You can take Scott Walker's. He was asked by the *Wisconsin State Journal* whether the measures he's seeking “in more ways than one, if not killing the unions now, would lead to their ultimate irrelevance and probable [demise]” – because without collective bargaining their role would be so limited that employees would stop paying dues, as Walker's bill allows. The governor conceded the point, saying, “Presumably, that's why there's so many national union leaders here because, politically, they want the money.”

It's an admission that substantiates accusations from many quarters that Walker's real goal is to rob unions of their ability to operate politically. They are a major source of campaign contributions and volunteers to Democratic candidates, against the now-unlimited ability of corporations to pour money into elections. Get rid of unions and

you can start thinking seriously about getting rid of Democrats.

That's why the outcome of Walker's war has enormous stakes for the entire nation. He's part of a trio of GOP glory governors – along with Chris Christie of New Jersey and John Kasich of Ohio – at the vanguard of a movement to crush public employee unions.

But make no mistake: Walker has gone further than any of these other governors in his pursuit of this agenda. (A similar attack on collective bargaining in Indiana is being waged by GOP lawmakers but opposed by that state's Republican governor.) As I heard a reporter from Duluth tell a reporter from the *Washington Times*, before the start of Walker's Feb. 18 press conference, 'Christie is mostly just talk. He didn't do anything like this.'

Walker's kneecapping of public employee unions in Wisconsin would elevate his status among national Republican conservatives, – people who couldn't care less about workers in Wisconsin or what's best for the state, but who just want a model for how other states can enhance their party's electoral fortunes.

A secretly recorded phone conversation between Walker and a Buffalo-based weekly newspaper reporter pretending to be David Koch, the New York City right-wing oil billionaire and Walker backer, shows Walker relishing his role within this group. After Walker goes through what he says is "the list" of Republican governors who have launched or may be preparing attacks on public employee unions in their states, the reporter pretending to be Koch interjects, "You're the first domino."

Responds Walker: "Yep, this is our moment."

The only sticking point is that this is still a democracy, meaning Walker and the GOP cannot implement their agenda and get away with it without a modicum of public support. And there's just one way they can get it: by focusing resentment on public employees, to encourage other workers to see them as conniving, capricious and in need

of a sharp yank of the chain. That's exactly what Walker has set out to do, and it's why his war will devastate Wisconsin.

At every turn, Walker has sought to frame the issues of the moment in divisive ways. He says the rift in the Senate Dems is between "those who are ready to work and those who are not." He says the choice before him is whether to side with protesters or "the millions of hardworking taxpayers of Wisconsin," as though the two categories do not overlap.

Walker rages at the gall the unions showed last December, after he was elected but before he took office, when they tried to "cram through" overdue contracts. Meanwhile, he bristles at the suggestion that there was anything the least bit hasty about his wanting to pass his sweeping budget repair bill – which also includes restricting Medicaid eligibility and deepening his control over state agencies – within a week of its unveiling.

Devious unions

According to Walker, the unions are devious and untrustworthy, which is why he's made no effort to negotiate and why he's flatly rejected their offer to accept his pension and health care demands if only they can keep their ability to bargain collectively. He paints this across-the-board concession by every public employee union in the state as "a few people...suggesting they might be willing to come to the table...at the 11th hour."

In fact, other Wisconsin governors have successfully negotiated with the state's public employee unions, who've time and again made sacrifices to help the state balance its budget. (The proposed contracts killed prior to Walker taking office, for instance, included \$100 million in union concessions.) But Walker won't admit these unions can be worked with because he wants them dead.

In other ways, Walker is deeply invested in milking resentment toward public employees, to channel people's frustration over economic hard times into a backlash against anyone who is doing better than they are – except, of course, the actually wealthy.

According to Walker, the unions are devious and untrustworthy, which is why he's made no effort to negotiate and why he's flatly rejected their offer to accept his pension and health care demands if only they can keep their ability to bargain collectively

It is possible for Walker to survive. But the only way that can happen is if he succeeds in his vile politics of division, turning citizen against citizen, neighbor against neighbor, worker against worker

Bill Lueders is news editor of *Isthmus* – www.thedailypage.com – and author, mostly recently, of *“Watchdog: 25 Years of Muckraking and Rabbleroxing”* (Jones Books). Read excerpts from the book on pages 44 to 49 of this issue

How ugly can it get? It’s almost hard to believe.

The other day Rush Limbaugh played a clip of a Wisconsin schoolteacher explaining why she’s protesting Walker’s anti-union agenda: “I think we’ve lost the sense of democracy. I feel like what people in Egypt are fighting for right now, that’s exactly what I feel like I’m fighting for right now.”

This is what Limbaugh said in response: “What an absolute idiot. It’s a crying shame that this glittering jewel of colossal ignorance is teaching students. Comparing this to Egypt? ...Most of us have more class, most of us have more understanding, most of us are more mature than to run around whining [mock sobbing], ‘This is what we want! [more sobbing] I want my dignity! I want my respect, and I want my benefits [sniffle], I want my health care!’ Well, go earn it! It’s not about what you want. In your case, it’s about what can be afforded. They’re trying to make themselves out to be oppressed. You’re not in Egypt. You’re a bunch of people who feel entitled to be freeloaders.”

Forget for a moment the offensiveness of a drug addict who makes more than \$30 million a year lambasting schoolteachers and other public employees as “freeloaders.” Just consider what it says about Scott Walker – who appeared as a guest on Limbaugh’s show the same day and undoubtedly is aware of his well-publicized rant – that he would let one of his state’s teachers, or any public employee, be denigrated like this, without offering the slightest murmur of dissent.

Now consider why Walker does not object; it’s because he wants such sentiments to take root, and spread. That’s also why people who have spent years of their lives serving Wisconsin, and who feel they deserve some respect, will fight him to their dying breath.

In a sense, the greatest casualty of Walker’s war will almost certainly be Scott Walker himself. Obviously, Walker knew his budget bill would prompt protests, and probably thought these would add luster to his image

among the national GOP leaders he’s trying to please. But there is no way he could have anticipated what has actually occurred – crowds of more than 60,000 people and Democratic lawmakers on the lam. There’s also no sign he’s grasped what these historic developments will mean for his future.

Bitter enmity

The opportunity Walker inherited from Republican predecessors Warren Knowles, Lee Dreyfus and Tommy Thompson – to be a governor who has the grudging admiration even of people who disagree with him politically – is forever lost. The actions he’s taken and the reactions they’ve sparked ensure that, for the rest of his term, Walker will be regarded with bitter enmity by hundreds of thousands of resourceful people who hold positions of influence within their communities.

From now on, the overriding issue of Gov. Scott Walker’s tenure will not be the state’s business climate, or balanced budgets, or education, or public safety. It will be Scott Walker. The effort to recall him will be launched Jan. 3, 2012, the first day this becomes an option. (All it takes is 540,208 signatures; people have already crunched the numbers.) That Walker was not more mindful of this possibility is perplexing, given that he was elected Milwaukee County executive on the heels of a successful recall effort there.

Of course it is possible for Walker to survive. But the only way that can happen is if he succeeds in his vile politics of division, turning citizen against citizen, neighbor against neighbor, worker against worker. He must continue to encourage people to resent the teachers who teach their children, the nurses who care for their loved ones, the social workers who offer them help in times of need, the prosecutors who seek justice when they become victims of crime, the police who protect their communities and the firefighters who are prepared to die to save their lives.

It is a war that will have no winners. **CT**

I am NOT the enemy

Wisconsin teacher **Vikki Kratz** considers Governor Scott Walker's plans to cut the salaries of teachers and other public service workers

I'm not sure how Wisconsin governor Scott Walker thinks reducing the salaries of thousands of workers like me is going to save the economy.

I don't normally like to talk about my private life, but I'm going to, because I want people to understand why Gov. Scott Walker's budget proposal is truly an attack on working-class Americans.

I am a second-year teacher. I work in a rural school district in Wisconsin. Many of my students come from poor families. Some of them live in the trailer park near our school or down the street in the subsidized apartments. A significant percentage get free or reduced lunch. This winter, we provided snow pants and coats to children whose families couldn't afford them.

The people who live here are hard workers and proud. But they can't afford the cost of educating their children. My school district has relied extensively on state aid to fund the schools. Unfortunately, the state has dramatically reduced the amount of funding it gives to schools like mine. As a result, our district has faced huge deficits. Last year, the district laid off teachers, which forced it to increase class sizes and reduce special ed services. This year, we are looking at more staff reductions and a salary freeze.

And now we come to Walker. His pro-

posal to have public workers pay more than 5% of their salary into the state pension and double their share of health care costs will not save my district any money.

Our schools superintendent rather bluntly told us that the state was going to keep the money to cover its own deficit, not provide more state aid to schools. So the working families who send their children to us will still see increased class sizes and fewer educational opportunities, despite these "savings."

Our school could also begin to lose its highly trained, professional teachers, because they will no longer be able to afford to stay in education with the salary and benefits cut Walker is rushing through the state Legislature.

My district has never required us to pay anything into the pension or for health care. We took those benefits in exchange for a lower salary. People accuse state workers of having cushy jobs, with exorbitant benefits, job security and fantastic salaries.

So while admitting this makes me uncomfortable, I'm going to do it so you can see just how ridiculous that accusation is: My salary as a second-year teacher, with a Bachelor's degree and one class short of a Master's degree, is....\$36,000.

Most of my friends in the private sector

My district has never required us to pay anything into the pension or for health care. We took those benefits in exchange for a lower salary



Do I stay in education and try to make it on \$5,000 a year less? Or do I leave and try to find one of those cushy private sector jobs, where you have to pay for health care, but at least you get a decent salary?

had starting salaries of much more than that. I know people who have less education than I do, who made \$50,000-\$60,000 in their first year.

It will take me about 15 years on the salary scale before I make that kind of money.

Walker's proposal would cost me about \$400 a month. Frankly, I won't be able to survive. Because not only do I have the usual debt – mortgage, car payments – I owe tens of thousands of dollars in student loans. Getting a Master's degree is actually kind of pricey, but I assume you want a highly educated teacher in the classroom, right?

I'm not sure how Walker thinks reducing the salaries of thousands of workers like me is going to save the economy. With that kind of wage reduction, I won't be able to buy new clothes, go to movies, go out to eat, go to happy hour, buy Christmas presents, buy birthday presents, get haircuts or buy pet food. I won't be able to replace my 20-year-old furnace or my 20-year-old kitchen cabinets. I already gave up cable and I drive a used car with more than 140,000 miles on it. So it's clear I won't be buying any iPods or iPhones or anything else shiny any time soon.

Hell, with that kind of cut, I won't be buying food or gas, either.

Second job?

I suppose I could get a second job to supplement my reduced income. But let me clear up a few misconceptions about teachers: I'm not a babysitter. I don't color all day. I don't get to leave at 2:00 every afternoon. I don't sit on the beach all summer.

I get to school by 7:45 a.m. and I work until 4:30 or 5:00. At least one night a week, I stay later than 5. I'm supposed to get a half hour of "duty free" lunch every day, but I usually spend that time helping students or

prepping for a lesson. There are some days when I don't eat lunch at all.

I won't get into how hard it is to find five minutes to go to the bathroom when you have a classroom of 20 kids who demand your constant attention.

By the time I make it home, I am so exhausted, I usually drop on the couch and fall asleep by 9 p.m. I can't even stay awake to watch the news to see what Walker is going to do to us next. Getting a second job? It would probably kill me.

And I already spend my summer working. In my district, many families send their children to summer school. It's free daycare. I don't mind. I'd rather my students spend their summer reading books and playing math games, than sitting zoned out in front of the TV or computer for two months.

So now I have to make a choice. Do I stay in education and try to make it on \$5,000 a year less? Or do I leave and try to find one of those cushy private sector jobs, where you have to pay for health care, but at least you get a decent salary?

Um, are there even any private sector jobs left?

I don't want to leave my students. Because the truth is, teaching kids is a fantastic job. This past week, I taught a four-year-old how to spell his name. I taught another child how to sound out words, so he could start reading a Dr. Seuss book on his own. And I took my class to the planetarium, where they got to gaze in awe at the planets, moon and stars. The universe, they decided, was a pretty special place. Watching them, for a little while I felt it was.

Who knows? One of them might grow up to be governor one day. No doubt they'd do a better job of it. **CT**

Vikki Kratz, a former staff writer for Isthmus, is a pre-kindergarten teacher in Madison, Wisconsin

I AM the enemy

According to right wing commentators, university professor **Michael I. Niman** is one of those public employees responsible for the coming downfall of Western civilisation

If you listen to any Wall Street banker, right-wing talk radio host, or Republican politician, I am the enemy. I am a public employee. Along with snow plow operators in Wisconsin, meat inspectors in Iowa, welfare fraud investigators in California, transit workers in Chicago, life guards in Florida, air traffic controllers in Kansas, workplace safety inspectors in Kentucky, child abuse investigators in Oregon, teachers in North Carolina, highway engineers in Pennsylvania, park rangers in New York, and every other civil servant who doesn't commute to work in an armored personnel carrier, I am responsible for the downfall of Western civilisation.

My first job after leaving college was doing public relations work for a not-for-profit human services agency. The pay was low for a PR wonk, barely lifting me above the poverty line, but the work was rewarding. I'd like to think that the work I performed for my employer made the world a better place to live, at least for those folks who relied on our services to make it through the day, for their families, for their neighbors, and for the businesses that profited from their survival.

I also worked as a park ranger, primarily taking inner city children on boat tours of a wildlife refuge. I'd like to think this glimpse

into another world informed their perception of the possibilities that the world offered, and an appreciation for our place in the natural order.

I later worked supervising a tutoring program in a housing project. Again, the pay was low, but life made sense. It was good. I hoped that I was making the world a better place, as my religious education taught me to do, and I was earning a living, which is something my parents were happy to see me do



Given my educational background, which incidentally was primarily paid for by "big government," I could have earned more money, say, marketing sugary beverages to children or bloated SUVs to insecure and financially indebted drivers.

Drinking students

Eventually I did leave the public sector, taking a job in advertising, designing campaigns to, among other things, encourage college-aged folks to spend more time and money drinking. I was good at this, filling night clubs beyond their capacities with young drunks eager to empty their wallets into my client's coffers. In today's political zeitgeist, I had finally become a productive member of society.

This article's not really about me, how-

Eventually I did leave the public sector, taking a job in advertising, designing campaigns to, among other things, encourage college-aged folks to spend more time and money drinking

Most of our good-paying, unionized industrial jobs in the private sector have been lost to foreign sweatshops, often financed with the booty from the Reagan-era tax cuts

ever. I just mention this early snippet of my employment history because the public service positions which I occupied were all subsequently defunded and eliminated by budget cuts in the wake of the Reagan revolution. These jobs, and more importantly, the services these and countless other professionals provided, were cut in order to finance tax cuts for the richest Americans, who at the same time began investing that money overseas in the “emerging markets” that later went on to drive many of our own industries out of business using our money and technology. As this was happening, our media reassured us that these newly minted titans were our heroes and our public servants were bums.

This story is repeated so much as to appear as obvious as the sky: Public workers are overpaid and their jobs are expendable. But let’s look a bit closer at this big lie. The reality is that public employees, and this still includes me, now a state university college professor actually earn less than our counterparts in the private sector. Yes, I understand that overall state workers seem well off. But if you look at the jobs they perform, which tend to be credentialed professional positions, they are paid less than workers with similar credentials in the private sector.

The real salary gap

Of course this is not the story you’ll see when you do a simple Google search on public versus private pay. That query will turn up a plethora of corporate media and right-wing think tank articles and studies citing that government workers earn more than those in the private sector. This is technically true in some areas if you only look at the raw data, but unfortunately that’s because most of our good-paying, unionized industrial jobs in the private sector have been lost to foreign sweatshops, often financed with the booty from the Reagan-era tax cuts. Rich investors make out quite well from this shift, but American workers have been forced into low-paying service sector

jobs. The result skews against private sector per capita income since most of these new jobs are low wage and low skilled as opposed to government positions.

The government, by contrast, still employs teachers, engineers, social workers, auditors, accountants, computer programmers, doctors, lawyers, administrators, chemists, and so on. At these skill levels, where the government does most of its hiring, private sector salaries have traditionally trended higher than public ones. Take college professors, for instance. The American Association of University Professors, an organization that represents faculty at both private and public institutions, reports that in 2009, faculty at private institutions earned 20 percent more than their colleagues at public institutions. This gap has made it difficult for public institutions to recruit and retain qualified faculty members.

Let’s look at public school teachers, who have somehow become public enemy number one. Most public teaching positions require advanced degrees. Someone with an advanced degree in, for example, chemistry, physics, law, or math can earn considerably more money working in the private sector, and they won’t have to schedule their bathroom breaks, police cafeterias, or buy their own work supplies.

Now apply this same math to the auditor working at your village office, the doctor working in a public health clinic, the computer systems administrator running your local 911 system, a conservation department biologist, and so on. The pay isn’t competitive. This gap is only to grow with corporations now flush with cash and still hiring for professional non-manufacturing positions while governments are broke. This is good news for the private sector as it continues its long tradition of sniping public employees, but bad for we the people, as we lose some of our best civil servants to the private sector.

The pension trap

Despite the pay gap, public sector recruit-

ers had something going for them that they learned from the private sector back in the heyday of the middle class when good jobs were plentiful and employers regularly sniped workers from each other: To hook workers with a non-transferable pension. Once Ford workers were vested in Ford's pension system, they'd be remiss to move over to a job at General Electric, even if the pay was better. That's why it was industry, and not unions, that birthed the idea of a strong pension that would be tied to the employer rather than the employee or her union. Governments followed in the footsteps of private industry, using pensions to tie their workers to their jobs. Over the years, the idea of a government-guaranteed pension emerged as an attractive alternative to earning a higher private sector salary. These pensions are not giveaways. They are part of a competitive pay package that still often lags behind the private sector.

In non-professional areas, unionized public employees have won contracts that put their pay ahead of non-unionized workers in the private sector. The key word here, more than "public" or "private," is "union." Unionized workers have usually been more successful than their non-unionized counterparts in retaining a greater share of the fruits from their increased productivity. Rather than being a reason for non-unionized workers to resent unionized workers, it should instead serve as an incentive to either organize a union or strive to find a unionized position.

This, by the way, is straight-up conservative free market economics. If unionized positions are more attractive, as the anti-union forces argue, then free market principles dictate that these position will attract a better, more productive workforce, which should be what we-the-public demand. And we've seen this as public employees have stepped up to the plate, maintaining public services despite years of budget cuts.

The war on the middle class

If you break the public employee unions,

you'll drive away many of these professionals, and you'll break the government. This might be what our moneyed corporate plutocracy ultimately wants since unionized government workers are charged with policing corporate malfeasance and enforcing the environmental and workers rights laws that corporations so despise.

There's another way of looking at the "union workers get paid too much" argument. Yes, unionized public sector sanitation workers usually make more than their private sector counterparts. But the fact is, the job sucks and workers who do it should receive adequate compensation.

Rather than begrudge a living wage to a unionized sanitation worker, an exploited non-union worker should focus his own energy on organizing to improve his own working conditions or salary. Ultimately, the unionized worker's better salary, assuming he or she has one, raises the bar for everyone, and we're all in this together.

What we're seeing in this year's Republican assault on public employee unions is not really about balancing budgets. That's the cover, the smokescreen. The real war is being waged by the corporate sponsors who, through their newly legalized unlimited political contributions, have bought and paid for a new wave of legislators to do their bidding.

Look at Wisconsin's radical right-wing governor, Scott Walker, for example. He's the man who inadvertently turned his own statehouse into an American Tahrir Square by attempting to legislate away workers rights to form a union and bargain for a contract in direct violation of Article 23 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was codified into international law in 1948 with the strong support of the United States. Walker's recent electoral rise to the statehouse was underwritten by, among others, those billionaire energy titans, the Koch brothers, who also fund Tea Party organizations and events, and by Fox News Network owner, Rupert Murdoch, whose network regularly packages its owner's re-

Rather than begrudge a living wage to a unionized sanitation worker, an exploited non-union worker should focus his own energy on organizing to improve his own working conditions or salary

The corporate aim in destroying the middle class is to collapse the wage floor under the American workforce, and being well on their way to doing that, they're now going in for the kill before a backlash unseats their cronies

actionary plutocratic agenda as “populist.”

Their aim is nothing less than destroying the American middle class, which right now is being politically buoyed by strong public sector unions. Destroy the unions, and there is no organized force to stand up for the middle class and for the American dream of working a job, earning a comfortable salary and a secure pension, and retiring, all while serving the public good.

Of course destroying your middle class consumer/debtor base seems a bit insane, but unfettered greed is a pathological condition. The corporate aim in destroying the middle class is to collapse the wage floor under the American workforce, and being well on their way to doing that, they're now going in for the kill before a backlash unseats their cronies.

Unions also represent the only econom-

ic force large enough to counter corporate money in elections. Kill unions and you rid the nation of rhetorically competitive elections. This is your fight whether or not you belong to a union. The public sector contains the bulk of this nation's unionized professionals. Breaking their unions will be the deathblow to the union movement, which ironically, would come at a time when unions are rising as the backbones in democracy movements across the world. But this is also part of the corporate endgame strategy. Democracy is nothing more than an impedance to an unfettered corporate agenda. Break the unions and you break the most powerful supporters of democracy. **CT**

Dr. Michael I. Niman is a professor of Journalism and Media Studies at Buffalo (NY) State College

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Cairo in Wisconsin

Andy Kroll joins thousands of demonstrators eating Egyptian pizza in downtown Madison

The call reportedly arrived from Cairo. Pizza for the protesters, the voice said. It was Saturday, February 20th, and by then Ian's Pizza on State Street in Madison, Wisconsin, was overwhelmed. One employee had been assigned the sole task of answering the phone and taking down orders. And in they came, from all 50 states and the District of Columbia, from Morocco, Haiti, Turkey, Belgium, Uganda, China, New Zealand, and even a research station in Antarctica. More than 50 countries around the globe. Ian's couldn't make pizza fast enough, and the generosity of distant strangers with credit cards was paying for it all.

Those pizzas, of course, were heading for the Wisconsin state capitol, an elegant domed structure at the heart of this Midwestern college town. For nearly two weeks, tens of thousands of raucous, sleepless, grizzled, energized protesters have called the stately capitol building their home. As the police moved in to clear it out on Sunday, Feb 27, afternoon, it was still the pulsing heart of the largest labor protest in my lifetime, the focal point of rallies and concerts against a politically-charged piece of legislation proposed by Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, a hard-right Republican. That bill, officially known as the Special Session Senate Bill 11,

would, among other things, eliminate collective bargaining rights for most of the state's public-sector unions, in effect eviscerating the unions themselves.

"Kill the bill!" the protesters chant en masse, day after day, while the drums pound and cowbells clang. "What's disgusting? Union busting!"

One World, One Pain

The spark for Wisconsin's protests came on February 11th. That was the day the Associated Press published a brief story quoting Walker as saying he would call in the National Guard to crack down on unruly workers upset that their bargaining rights were being stripped away. Labor and other left-leaning groups seized on Walker's incendiary threat, and within a week there were close to 70,000 protesters filling the streets of Madison.

Six thousand miles away, February 11th was an even more momentous day. Weary but jubilant protesters on the streets of Cairo, Alexandria, and other Egyptian cities celebrated the toppling of Hosni Mubarak, the autocrat who had ruled over them for more than 30 years and amassed billions in wealth at their expense. "We have brought down the regime," cheered the protesters in Cairo's Tahrir Square, the center of the Egyptian uprising. In calendar terms, the

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BATTLE FOR WISCONSIN

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demonstrations in Wisconsin, you could say, picked up right where the Egyptians left off.

I arrived in Madison several days into the protests. I've watched the crowds swell, nearly all of those arriving – and some just not leaving – united against Governor Walker's "budget repair bill." I've interviewed protesters young and old, union members and grassroots organizers, students and teachers, children and retirees. I've huddled with labor leaders in their Madison "war rooms," and sat through the governor's press conferences. I've slept on the cold, stone floor of the Wisconsin state capitol (twice). Believe me, the spirit of Cairo is here. The air is charged with it.

It was strongest inside the Capitol. A previously seldom-visited building had been miraculously transformed into a genuine living, breathing community. There was a medic station, child day care, a food court, sleeping quarters, hundreds of signs and banners, live music, and a sense of camaraderie and purpose you'd struggle to find in most American cities, possibly anywhere else in this country. Like Cairo's Tahrir Square in the weeks of the Egyptian uprising, most of what happens inside the Capitol's walls is protest.

Egypt is a presence here in all sorts of obvious ways, as well as ways harder to put your finger on. The walls of the capital, to take one example, offer regular reminders of Egypt's feat. I saw, for instance, multiple copies of that famous photo on Facebook of an Egyptian man, his face half-obsured, holding a sign that reads: "EGYPT Supports Wisconsin Workers: One World, One Pain." The picture is all the more striking for what's going on around the man with the sign: a sea of cheering demonstrators are waving Egyptian flags, hands held aloft. The man, however, faces in the opposite direction, as if showing support for brethren halfway around the world was important enough to break away from the historic celebrations erupting around him.

Similarly, I've seen multiple copies of a

statement by Kamal Abbas, the general coordinator for Egypt's Center for Trade Unions and Workers Services, taped to the walls of the state capitol. Not long after Egypt's January Revolution triumphed and Wisconsin's protests began, Abbas announced his group's support for the Wisconsin labor protesters in a page-long declaration that said in part: "We want you to know that we stand on your side. Stand firm and don't waiver. Don't give up on your rights. Victory always belongs to the people who stand firm and demand their just rights."

Then there's the role of organized labor more generally. After all, widespread strikes coordinated by labor unions shut down Egyptian government agencies and increased the pressure on Mubarak to relinquish power. While we haven't seen similar strikes yet here in Madison – though there's talk of a general strike if Walker's bill somehow passes – there's no underestimating the role of labor unions like the AFL-CIO, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, and the American Federation of Teachers in organizing the events of the past two weeks.

Faced with a bill that could all but wipe out unions in historically labor-friendly states across the Midwest, labor leaders knew they had to act – and quickly. "Our very labor movement is at stake," Stephanie Bloomingdale, secretary-treasurer of Wisconsin's AFL-CIO branch, told me. "And when that's at stake, the economic security of Americans is at stake."

"The Mubarak of the Midwest"

On the Sunday after I arrived, I was wandering the halls of the Capitol when I met Scott Graham, a third-grade teacher who lives in Lacrosse, Wisconsin. Over the cheers of the crowd, I asked Graham whether he saw a connection between the events in Egypt and those here in Wisconsin. His response caught the mood of the moment. "Watching Egypt's story for a week or two very intently, I was inspired by the Egyptian people, you

know, striving for their own self-determination and democracy in their country,” Graham told me. “I was very inspired by that. And when I got here I sensed that everyone’s in it together. The sense of solidarity is just amazing.”

A few days later, I stood outside the capitol building in the frigid cold and talked about Egypt with two local teachers. The most obvious connection between Egypt and Wisconsin was the role and power of young people, said Ann Wachter, a federal employee who joined our conversation when she overheard me mention Egypt. There, it was tech-savvy young people who helped keep the protests alive and the same, she said, applied in Madison. “You go in there everyday and it’s the youth that carries it throughout hours that we’re working, or we’re running our errands, whatever we do. They do whatever they do as young people to keep it alive. After all, I’m at the end of my working career; it’s their future.”

And of course, let’s not forget those almost omnipresent signs that link the young governor of Wisconsin to the aging Hosni Mubarak. They typically label Walker the “Mubarak of the Midwest” or “Mini-Mubarak,” or demand the recall of “Scott ‘Mubarak.’” In a public talk, journalist Amy Goodman quipped, “Walker would be wise to negotiate. It’s not a good season for tyrants.”

One protester I saw on Thursday hoisted aloft a “No Union Busting!” sign with a black shoe perched atop it, the heel facing forward – a severe sign of disrespect that Egyptian protesters directed at Mubarak and a symbol that, before the recent American TV blitz of “rage and revolution” in the Middle East, would have had little meaning here.

Which isn’t to say that the Egypt-Wisconsin comparison is a perfect one. Hardly. After all, the Egyptian demonstrators massed in hopes of a new and quite different world; the American ones, no matter the celebratory and energized air in Madison, are essentially negotiating loss (of pensions and health-care benefits, if not collective bargaining rights). The historic demonstrations

in Madison have been nothing if not peaceful. On Saturday, Feb 19, when as many as 100,000 people descended on Madison to protest Walker’s bill, the largest turnout so far, not a single arrest was made. In Egypt, by contrast, the protests were plenty bloody, with more than 300 deaths during the 29-day uprising.

Not that some observers didn’t see the need for violence in Madison. Last Saturday, Jeff Cox, a deputy attorney general in Indiana, suggested on his Twitter account that police “use live ammunition” on the protesters occupying the state Capitol. That sentiment, discovered by a colleague of mine, led to an outcry. The story broke on the Wednesday morning; by Wednesday afternoon Cox had been fired.

New York Times columnist David Brooks was typical of mainstream coverage and punditry in quickly dismissing any connection between Egypt (or Tunisia) and Wisconsin. On the Daily Show, Jon Stewart spoofed and rejected the notion that the Wisconsin protests had any meaningful connection to Egypt. He called the people gathered here “the bizarro Tea Party.” Stewart’s crew even brought in a camel as a prop. Those of us in Madison watched as Stewart’s skit went horribly wrong when the camel got entangled in a barricade and fell to the ground.

As far as I know, neither Brooks nor Stewart spent time here. Still, you can count on one thing: if the demonstrators in Tahrir Square had been enthusiastically citing Americans as models for their protest, nobody here would have been in such a dismissive or mocking mood. In other parts of this country, perhaps it still feels less than comfortable to credit Egyptians or Arabs with inspiring an American movement for justice. If you had been here in Madison, you might have felt differently.

Pizza Town protest

Obviously, the outcomes in Egypt and Wisconsin won’t be comparable. Egypt toppled a dictator; Wisconsin has a democratically elected governor who, at the very earliest,

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For this brief moment at least, people here in Madison are bound together by a single cause, as other protesters were not so long ago, and may be again, in the ancient cities of Egypt

can't be recalled until 2012. And so the protests in Wisconsin are unlikely to transform the world around us. Still, there can be no question, as they spread elsewhere in the Midwest, that they have reenergized the country's stagnant labor movement, a once-powerful player in American politics and business that's now a shell of its former self. "There's such energy right now," one SEIU staffer told me a few nights ago. "This is a magic moment."

Not long after talking with her, I trudged back to Ian's Pizza, the icy snow crunching under my feet. At the door stood an employee with tired eyes, a distinct five o'clock shadow, and a beanie on his head.

I wanted to ask him, I said, about that reported call from Cairo. "You know," he responded, "I really don't remember it." I waited while he politely rebuffed several approaching customers, telling them how Ian's had run out of dough and how, in any case, all the store's existing orders were bound for the capitol. When he finally had a free moment, he returned to the Cairo order. There had, he said, been questions about whether

it was authentic or not, and then he added, "I'm pretty sure it was from Cairo, but it's not like I can guarantee it." By then, another wave of soon-to-be disappointed customers was upon us, and so I headed back to the capitol and another semi-sleepless night.

The building, as I approached in the darkness, was brightly lit, reaching high over the city. Protestors were still filing inside with all the usual signs. In the rotunda, drums pounded and people chanted and the sound swirled into a massive roar. For this brief moment at least, people here in Madison are bound together by a single cause, as other protesters were not so long ago, and may be again, in the ancient cities of Egypt.

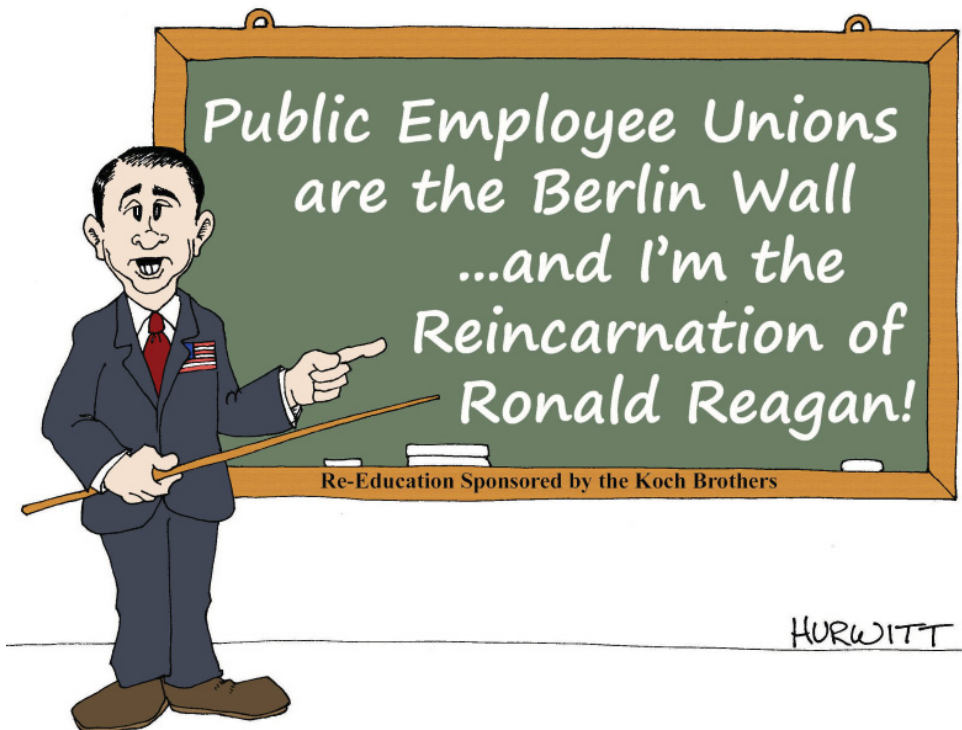
Right then, the distance separating Cairo and Wisconsin couldn't have felt smaller. But maybe you had to be there. **CT**

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HURWITT'S EYE

Mark Hurwitt

Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, having decided teachers are too much trouble, teaches his own version of a history lesson





Madison says No!

Photojournalist **Dana O'Shea** covered the Madison protests against Governor Walker's attack on public sector unions during February. Here are some of her pictures, accompanied by a few words of inspiration



*“Let the workers organize.
Let the toilers assemble.
Let their crystallized
voice proclaim their
injustices and demand
their privileges. Let all
thoughtful citizens sustain
them, for the future of
Labor is the future of
America”*

John L. Lewis



"It was the labor movement that helped secure so much of what we take for granted today. The 40-hour work week, the minimum wage, family leave, health insurance, Social Security, Medicare, retirement plans. The cornerstones of the middle-class security all bear the union label"

Barack Obama





“If I went to work in a factory the first thing I’d do is join a union”

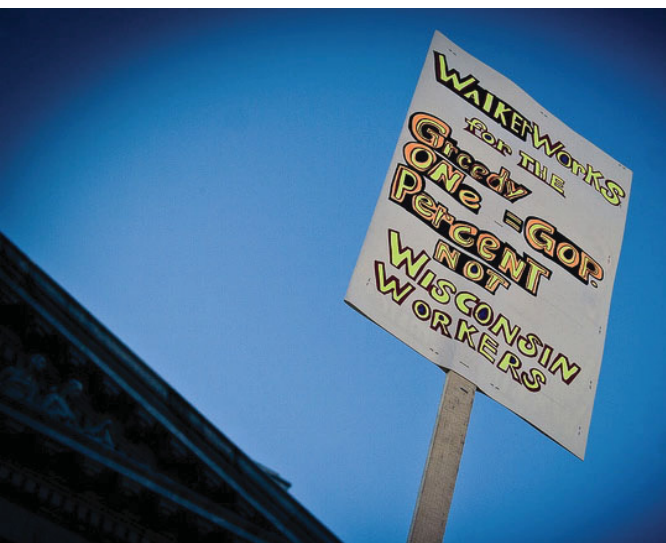
Franklin D. Roosevelt





“Capital is dead labor, which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks”

Karl Marx





“Power goes to two poles – to those who’ve got the money and those who’ve got the people”

Saul Alinsky





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Standing up to war – and Hillary Clinton

Ray McGovern tells how he was assaulted as he waged a silent and solitary protest during Clinton's speech against violence

With the others at Clinton's talk, I stood. I even clapped politely. But as the applause dragged on, I began to feel like a real phony

It was not until Secretary of State Hillary Clinton walked to the George Washington University podium to enthusiastic applause that I decided I had to dissociate myself from the obsequious adulation of a person responsible for so much death, suffering and destruction.

I was reminded of a spring day in Atlanta almost five years earlier when then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld strutted onto a similar stage to loud acclaim from another enraptured audience.

Introducing Rumsfeld on May 4, 2006, the president of the Southern Center for International Policy in Atlanta highlighted his "honesty." I had just reviewed my notes for an address I was scheduled to give that evening in Atlanta and, alas, the notes demonstrated his dishonesty.

I thought to myself, if there's an opportunity for Q & A after his speech I might try to stand and ask a question, which is what happened. I engaged in a four-minute impromptu debate with Rumsfeld on Iraq War lies, an exchange that was carried on live TV.

That experience leaped to mind on Feb. 15, as Secretary Clinton strode onstage amid similar adulation.

The fulsome praise for Clinton from GW's president and the loud, sustained applause also brought to mind a phrase that – as a former Soviet analyst at CIA – I often read in

Pravda. When reprinting the text of speeches by high Soviet officials, the Communist Party newspaper would regularly insert, in italicized parentheses: "*Burniye applaudismenti; vce stoyat*" – Stormy applause; all rise.

With the others at Clinton's talk, I stood. I even clapped politely. But as the applause dragged on, I began to feel like a real phony. So, when the others finally sat down, I remained standing silently, motionless, wearing my "Veterans for Peace" T-shirt, with my eyes fixed narrowly on the rear of the auditorium and my back to the Secretary.

I did not expect what followed: a violent assault in full view of madam secretary by what we Soviet analysts used to call the "organs of state security." The rest is history, as they say.

Callous aplomb

As the video of the event shows, Secretary Clinton did not miss a beat in her speech as she called for authoritarian government to show respect for dissent and to refrain from violence. She spoke with what seemed to be an especially chilly sang froid, as she ignored my silent protest and the violent assault which took place right in front of her.

The experience gave me personal confirmation of the impression that I reluctantly had drawn from watching her behavior and its consequences over the past decade.

The incident was a kind of metaphor of the much worse violence that Secretary Clinton has coolly countenanced against others.

Again and again, Hillary Clinton – both as a US senator and as Secretary of State – has demonstrated a nonchalant readiness to unleash the vast destructiveness of American military power. The charitable explanation, I suppose, is that she knows nothing of war from direct personal experience.

And that is also true of her husband, her colleague Robert Gates at the Defense Department, President Barack Obama, and most of the White House functionaries blithely making decisions to squander the lives and limbs of young soldiers in foreign adventures – conflicts that even the top brass admit cannot be won with weapons.

The analogy to Vietnam is inescapable. As White House tapes from the 1960s show, President Lyndon Johnson knew that the Vietnam War could not be “won” in any meaningful way.

Nonetheless, Johnson kept throwing hundreds of thousands into the battle lest someone accuse him of being soft on communism. I had an inside seat watching Johnson do that. And I did nothing.

Now, with an even more jittery president, a hawkish Secretary of State, the much-acclaimed field marshal David Petraeus, and various Republican presidential hopefuls – all jockeying for political position as the 2012 election draws near – the country is in even deeper trouble today.

No one on this political merry-go-round can afford to appear weak on terrorism. So, they all have covered their bets. And we all know who pays the price for these political calculations.

This time, I would NOT do nothing.

My colleagues in Veterans for Peace and I have known far too many comrades-in-arms and their families whose lives have been shattered or ended as a result of such crass political maneuvering.

Many of us veterans know more than we wish to know about war and killing. But – try as we may with letters and other appeals –

we cannot get through to President Obama. And Secretary Clinton turns her own deaf ear to our entreaties and those from others who oppose unnecessary warfare, a pattern that she also followed in her days as a US senator from New York.

See No Evil

In the summer of 2002, as the Senate was preparing to conduct hearings about alleged weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq and the possibility of war, former Chief Weapons Inspector in Iraq and US Marine Major, Scott Ritter, came down to Washington from his home in upstate New York to share his first-hand knowledge with as many senators as possible.

To those that let him in the door, he showed that the “intelligence” adduced to support US claims that Iraq still had WMD was fatally flawed. This was the same “intelligence” that Senate Intelligence Committee chair Jay Rockefeller later branded “unsubstantiated, contradicted, or even non-existent.”

Sen. Hillary Clinton would not let Ritter in her door. Despite his unique insights as a UN inspector and his status as a constituent, Sen. Clinton gave him the royal run-around. Her message was clear: “Don’t bother me with the facts.” She had already made up her mind. I had a direct line into her inner circle at the time, and was assured that several of my op-eds and other commentaries skeptical of George W. Bush’s planned invasion were given to Clinton, but no matter.

Sen. Clinton reportedly was not among the handful of legislators who took the trouble to read the National Intelligence Estimate on WMD in Iraq that was issued on Oct. 1, 2002, just ten days before she voted to authorize war.

In short, she chose not to perform the due diligence required prior to making a decision having life-or-death consequences for thousands of Americans and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis. She knew whom she needed to cater to, and what she felt she had to do.

Again and again, Hillary Clinton – both as a US senator and as Secretary of State – has demonstrated a nonchalant readiness to unleash the vast destructiveness of American military power

RESPECTING DISSENT!

If the Iraq War does end up making the region more dangerous for Israel, the fault will lie with Israel's hard-line leaders, as well as with those American officials (and media pundits) who so eagerly clambered onboard for the attack on Iraq

But, bright as she is, Hillary Clinton is prone to huge mistakes – political, as well as strategic. In dissing those of us who were trying to warn her that an attack on Iraq would have catastrophic consequences, she simply willed us to be wrong.

Clearly, her calculation was that she had to appear super-strong on defense in order to win the Democratic nomination and then the presidency in 2008. Just as clearly, courting Israel and the Likud Lobby was also important to her political ambitions.

Blair admits Israeli role

Any lingering doubt that Israel played a major role in the US-UK decision to attack Iraq was dispelled a year ago when former Prime Minister Tony Blair spoke publicly about the Israeli input into the all-important Bush-Blair deliberations on Iraq in Crawford, Texas, in April 2002.

Inexplicably, Blair forgot his usual discretion when it comes to disclosing important facts to the public and blurted out some truth at the Chilcot hearings in London regarding the origins of the Iraq War:

“As I recall that [April 2002] discussion, it was less to do with specifics about what we were going to do on Iraq or, indeed, the Middle East, because the Israel issue was a big, big issue at the time. I think, in fact, I remember, actually, there may have been conversations that we had even with Israelis, the two of us [Bush and Blair], whilst we were there. So that was a major part of all this.”

According to Philip Zelikow – a former member of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, the executive director of the 9/11 Commission, and later counselor to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice – the “real threat” from Iraq was not to the United States.

Zelikow told an audience at the University of Virginia in September 2002, the “unstated threat” from Iraq was the “threat against Israel.” He added, “The American government doesn't want to lean too hard on it rhetorically, because it is not a popular sell.”

But it wasn't as though leading Israelis were disguising their war aims. The current Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu published a pre-invasion piece titled “The case for Toppling Saddam” in the *Wall Street Journal*.

“Today nothing less than dismantling his regime will do,” Netanyahu declared. “I believe I speak for the overwhelming majority of Israelis in supporting a pre-emptive strike against Saddam's regime.”

The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* reported in February 2003, “the military and political leadership yearns for war in Iraq.”

As a retired Israeli general later put it, “Israeli intelligence was a full partner to the picture presented by American and British intelligence regarding Iraq's non-conventional [WMD] capabilities.”

In the United States, neoconservatives also pushed for war thinking that taking out Saddam Hussein would make Israel more secure.

These Israeli leaders and their neocon allies got their wish on March 19, 2003, with the US-UK invasion.

Of course, pressure from Israel and its Lobby was not the only factor behind the invasion of Iraq – think also oil, military bases, various political ambitions, revenge, etc. – but the Israeli factor was critical.

I'm afraid, though, that these calculations aimed at enhancing Israeli security may ultimately have the opposite effect. The Iraq War and the anti-Americanism that it has engendered across the Middle East seem sure to make Israel's position in the region even more precarious.

If the Iraq War does end up making the region more dangerous for Israel, the fault will lie with Israel's hard-line leaders, as well as with those American officials (and media pundits) who so eagerly clambered onboard for the attack on Iraq.

One of those US officials was the calculating senator from New York.

In a kind of poetic justice, Clinton's politically motivated warmongering became a key factor in her losing the Democratic pres-

idential nomination to Barack Obama, who as a young state senator in Illinois spoke out against the war.

Though she bet wrong in 2002-03, Clinton keeps doubling down in her apparent belief that her greater political vulnerability comes from being perceived as “weak” against US adversaries. So, she’s emerged as one of the Obama administration’s leading hawks on Afghanistan and Iran.

I suspect she still has her eye on what she considers the crucial centers of financial, media and other power that could support a possible future run for president, whether in 2012 if the Obama administration unravels or in 2016.

Another explanation, I suppose, could be that the Secretary of State genuinely believes that the United States should fight wars favored by right-wing Israelis and their influential supporters in the US

Whichever interpretation you prefer, there’s no doubt that she has put herself in the forefront of American leaders threatening Iran over its alleged “nuclear weapons” program, a “weapons” program that Iran denies exists and for which the US intelligence community has found little or no evidence.

Bête noire Iran

As a former CIA analyst myself, it strikes me as odd that Clinton’s speeches never reflect the consistent, unanimous judgment of the 16 US intelligence agencies, issued formally (and with “high confidence”) in November 2007 that Iran stopped working on a nuclear weapon in the fall of 2003 and had not yet decided whether or not to resume that work.

On Feb. 10, in a formal appearance before the House Intelligence Committee, National Intelligence Director James Clapper testified: “We continue to assess Iran is keeping open the option to develop nuclear weapons in part by developing various nuclear capabilities that better position it to produce such weapons, should it choose to do so. We do not know, however, if Iran will eventually

decide to build nuclear weapons....

“We continue to judge Iran’s nuclear decisionmaking is guided by a cost-benefit approach, which offers the international community opportunities to influence Tehran.”

Yet, in her determination to come across as hard-line, Clinton has undercut promising initiatives that might have constrained Iran from having enough low-enriched uranium to even be tempted to build a nuclear arsenal.

Last year, when – at the urging of President Obama – the leaders of Turkey and Brazil worked out an agreement with Iran, under which Iran agreed to ship about half of its low-enriched uranium (LEU) out of country, Clinton immediately rejected it in favor of more severe economic sanctions.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva were left wondering who exactly was in charge in Washington – Hillary and her pro-Israeli friends, or Obama.

Brazil released a three-page letter that Obama had sent to Lula da Silva a month earlier in which Obama said the proposed uranium transfer “would build confidence and reduce regional tensions by substantially reducing Iran’s” stockpile of low-enriched uranium.

The contrast between Obama’s support for the initiative and the opposition from various hardliners (including Clinton) caused “some puzzlement,” one senior Brazilian official told the *New York Times*. After all, this official said, the supportive “letter came from the highest authority and was very clear.”

It was a particularly telling episode. Clinton basked in the applause of Israeli leaders and neocon pundits for blocking the uranium transfer and securing more restrictive UN sanctions on Iran – and since then Iran appears to have dug in its heels on additional negotiations over its nuclear program.

Secretary Clinton is almost as assiduous as Netanyahu in never missing a chance to paint the Iranians in the darkest colors – even if that ends up painting the entire

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RESPECTING DISSENT!

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region into a more dangerous corner.

On Feb. 15, Clinton continued giving hypocrisy a bad name, with her GW speech regarding the importance of governments respecting peaceful dissent.

Five short paragraphs after she watched me snatched out of the audience Blackwater-style, she said, “Iran is awful because it is a government that routinely violates the rights of its people.” It was like something straight out of Franz Kafka.

Today, given the growing instability in the Middle East – and Netanyahu’s strident talk about Iran’s dangerous influence – it may take yet another Herculean effort by Joint Chiefs Chairman Mike Mullen to disabuse Netanyahu of the notion that Israel can somehow provoke the kind of confrontation with Iran that would suck Obama into the conflict on Israel’s side.

At each such turning point, Secretary Clinton predictably sides with the hard-line Israeli position and shows remarkably little sympathy for the Palestinians or any other group that finds itself in Israel’s way.

It is now clear, not only from the WikiLeaks documents, but even more so from the “Palestine Papers” disclosed by Al Jazeera, that Washington has long been playing a thoroughly dishonest “honest-broker” role between Israel and the Palestinians.

But those documents don’t stand alone. Clinton also rejected the Goldstone Report’s criticism of Israel’s bloody attack on Gaza in 2008-09; she waffled on Israel’s fatal commando raid on a Turkish relief flotilla on its way to Gaza in 2010; and she rallied to the defense of Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak last month when Israeli leaders raised alarms about what might follow him.

Last month, Clinton also oversaw the casting of the US veto to kill a UN Security Council resolution calling on Israel to stop colonizing territories it occupied in 1967. That vote was 14 to 1, marking the first such veto by the Obama administration. Netanyahu was quick to state that he “deeply appreciated” the US stance

Silent Witness

In the face of such callous disregard for what the Founders called “a decent respect for the opinions of mankind,” words failed me – literally – on Feb. 15.

The op-eds, the speeches, the interviews that I and others have done about needless war and feckless politicians may have done some good but, surely, they have not done enough. And America’s Fawning Corporate Media (FCM) is the embodiment of a Fourth Estate that is dead in the water.

I counted about 20 TV cameras at the Clinton speech and reporters galore. Not one thought to come outside to watch what was happening to me, and zero reporting on the incident has found its way into the FCM, save a couple of brief and misleading accounts.

A Fox News story claimed that “a heckler interrupted” Clinton’s speech and then “was escorted from the room.” Fox News added that I “was, perhaps, trying to hold up a sign.” CNN posted a brief clip with a similar insistence that I had “interrupted” Clinton’s speech, though the video shows me saying nothing until after I’m dragged away (or “escorted”) when I say, “So this is America.” There also was no sign.

Disappointing, but not surprising. I guess I really do believe that the good is worth doing because it is good. It shouldn’t matter that there is little or no guarantee of success – or even a truthful recounting of what happened.

One of my friends, in a good-natured attempt to make light of my arrest and brief imprisonment, commented that I must be used to it by now.

I thought of how anti-war prophet, Fr. Dan Berrigan, responded to that kind of observation in his testimony at the Plowshares Eight trial 31 years ago. I feel blessed by his witness and fully identify with what he said about “the push of conscience”:

“With every cowardly bone in my body, I wished I hadn’t had to do it. That has been true every time I have been arrested. My stomach turns over. I feel sick. I feel afraid. I

hate jail. I don't do well there physically.

"But I have read that we must not kill. I have read that children, above all, are threatened by this. I have read that Christ our Lord underwent death rather than inflict it. And I'm supposed to be a disciple.

"The push of conscience is a terrible thing."

As Fr. Berrigan clearly understood, the suffering of the victims of war is so much worse than the shock and discomfort of arrest.

For her part, Sen. and/or Secretary Clinton seems never to have encountered a war that she didn't immediately embrace on behalf of some geopolitical justification, apparently following Henry Kissinger's dictum that soldiers are "just dumb stupid animals to be used as pawns in foreign policy."

And beyond even the human suffering of those caught up in war, there's what's in store for the rest of us. As recent rhetoric and disclosures of leaked documents have made clear, what lies ahead is a permanent warfare state, including occupation of foreign lands and new military bases around

the globe – unless we have the courage to stand up this time.

Also to be expected will be the curtailment of our rights at home. "A state of war only serves as an excuse for domestic tyranny," wrote Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn – one who knew.

Perhaps we need to bear in mind that we are part of a long line of those who have taken a stand on these issues.

As for those of us who have served abroad to protect the rights of US citizens – well, maybe we have a particular mandate to do what we can to keep protecting them. For us Veterans for Peace, we've been there, done that. And so, enough already! **CT**

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing ministry of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He was an Army infantry/intelligence officer in the early Sixties and then served as a CIA analyst for 27 years. He is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

For her part, Sen. and/or Secretary Clinton seems never to have encountered a war that she didn't immediately embrace on behalf of some geopolitical justification

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The enduring mystique of the Marshall Plan

William Blum points out a few facts that have been forgotten about the American race for world supremacy after World War II

As a spectacle of imperial power on the decline, we haven't seen anything like it since 1989 when the Berlin Wall came down. Then, too, people power stunned the world

Amidst all the stirring political upheavals in North Africa and the Middle East the name “Marshall Plan” keeps being repeated by political figures and media around the world as the key to rebuilding the economies of those societies to complement the political advances, which hopefully will be somewhat progressive. But caveat emptor. Let the buyer beware.

During my years of writing and speaking about the harm and injustice inflicted upon the world by unending United States interventions, I've often been met with resentment from those who accuse me of chronicling only the negative side of US foreign policy and ignoring the many positive sides. When I ask the person to give me some examples of what s/he thinks show the virtuous face of America's dealings with the world in modern times, one of the things mentioned – almost without exception – is The Marshall Plan.

This is usually described along the lines of: “After World War II, the United States unselfishly built up Europe economically, including our wartime enemies, and allowed them to compete with us.” Even those today who are very cynical about US foreign policy, who are quick to question the White House's motives in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere, have little problem in accepting this picture of an altruistic America of the period 1948-

1952. But let's have a look at the Marshall Plan outside the official and popular versions.

After World War II, the United States, triumphant abroad and undamaged at home, saw a door wide open for world supremacy. Only the thing called “communism” stood in the way, politically, militarily, and ideologically. The entire US foreign policy establishment was mobilized to confront this “enemy”, and the Marshall Plan was an integral part of this campaign. How could it be otherwise? Anti-communism had been the principal pillar of US foreign policy from the Russian Revolution up to World War II, pausing for the war until the closing months of the Pacific campaign, when Washington put challenging communism ahead of fighting the Japanese. This return to anti-communism included the dropping of the atom bomb on Japan as a warning to the Soviets.

After the war, anti-communism continued as the leitmotif of American foreign policy as naturally as if World War II and the alliance with the Soviet Union had not happened. Along with the CIA, the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, the Council on Foreign Relations, certain corporations, and a few other private institutions, the Marshall Plan was one more arrow in the quiver of those striving to remake Europe to suit Washington's desires:

1. Spreading the capitalist gospel – to

counter strong postwar tendencies towards socialism.

2. Opening markets to provide new customers for US corporations – a major reason for helping to rebuild the European economies; e.g., a billion dollars of tobacco at today’s prices, spurred by US tobacco interests.

3. Pushing for the creation of the Common Market and NATO as integral parts of the West European bulwark against the alleged Soviet threat.

4. Suppressing the left all over Western Europe, most notably sabotaging the Communist Parties in France and Italy in their bids for legal, non-violent, electoral victory. Marshall Plan funds were secretly siphoned off to finance this endeavor, and the promise of aid to a country, or the threat of its cutoff, was used as a bullying club; indeed, France and Italy would certainly have been exempted from receiving aid if they had not gone along with the plots to exclude the communists from any kind of influential role.

The CIA also skimmed large amounts of Marshall Plan funds to covertly maintain cultural institutions, journalists, and publishers, at home and abroad, for the heated and omnipresent propaganda of the Cold War; the selling of the Marshall Plan to the American public and elsewhere was entwined with fighting “the red menace”. Moreover, in its covert operations, CIA personnel at times used the Marshall Plan as cover, and one of the Plan’s chief architects, Richard Bissell, then moved to the CIA, stopping off briefly at the Ford Foundation, a long time conduit for CIA covert funds. One big happy family.

The Marshall Plan imposed all kinds of restrictions on the recipient countries, all manner of economic and fiscal criteria which had to be met, designed for a wide open return to free enterprise. The US had the right to control not only how Marshall Plan dollars were spent, but also to approve the expenditure of an equivalent amount of the local currency, giving Washington substantial power over the internal plans and programs of the European states; welfare programs for the needy survivors of the war were looked upon with

disfavor by the United States; even rationing smelled too much like socialism and had to go or be scaled down; nationalization of industry was even more vehemently opposed by Washington. The great bulk of Marshall Plan funds returned to the United States, or never left, to purchase American goods, making American corporations among the chief beneficiaries.

The program could be seen as more a joint business operation between governments than an American “handout”; often it was a business arrangement between American and European ruling classes, many of the latter fresh from their service to the Third Reich, some of the former as well; or it was an arrangement between Congressmen and their favorite corporations to export certain commodities, including a lot of military goods. Thus did the Marshall Plan help lay the foundation for the military industrial complex as a permanent feature of American life.

It is very difficult to find, or put together, a clear, credible description of how the Marshall Plan played a pivotal or indispensable role in the recovery in each of the 16 recipient nations. The opposing view, at least as clear, is that the Europeans – highly educated, skilled and experienced – could have recovered from the war on their own without an extensive master plan and aid program from abroad, and indeed had already made significant strides in this direction before the Plan’s funds began flowing. Marshall Plan funds were not directed primarily toward the urgently needed feeding of individuals or rebuilding their homes, schools, or factories, but at strengthening the economic superstructure, particularly the iron, steel and power industries. The period was in fact marked by deflationary policies, unemployment and recession. The one unambiguous outcome was the full restoration of the propertied class.

The rising up of the people ... and the conservative mind

James Baker served as the Chief of Staff in

It didn’t take long for terms like “sole superpower” and “hyperpower” to crop up, or for dreams of a global Pax Americana to take shape amid talk about how our power and glory would outshine even the Roman and British empires

ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

When he was Secretary of State, on an occasion when the Middle East was being discussed at a government meeting, and Jewish-American influence was mentioned, Baker was reported to have said “Fuck the Jews! They don’t vote for us anyway”

President Ronald Reagan’s first administration and in the final year of the administration of President George H.W. Bush. He was also Secretary of the Treasury under Reagan and Secretary of State under Bush. Thus, by establishment standards and values, inside marble-columned institutions, Baker is a man to be taken seriously when it comes to affairs of state. Here he is on February 3, during an interview by our favorite TV station, our very own shining beacon of truth, Fox News: “We want to see the people in the Middle East have a chance at democracy and free markets ... I’m sorry, democracy and human rights.”

Baker has a record of speaking his mind, whether Freudian-slip-like or not. When he was Secretary of State, on an occasion when the Middle East was being discussed at a government meeting, and Jewish-American influence was mentioned, Baker was reported to have said “Fuck the Jews! They don’t vote for us anyway.”

They couldn’t resist, could they?

News flash: “Judge Mustafa Abdel Jallil, the Libyan justice minister who resigned last week in protest over the use of force against unarmed civilians, said he has proof that Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi ordered the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland on Dec. 21, 1988. He would not disclose details of the alleged evidence.”

Hmmm, let me guess now why he wouldn’t disclose details of the alleged evidence ... hmmm ... Ah, I know – because it doesn’t exist! How could Gadhafi’s many enemies in Libya resist kicking him like this when he’s down? Or perhaps the honorable judge is simply protecting himself from a future international criminal tribunal for his years of service to the Libyan state? If you read any more of such nonsense – and you

will – reach for some of the antidote I’ve been providing for more than 20 years.

The empire’s deep dark secret

“In my opinion, any future defense secretary who advises the president to again send a big American land army into Asia or into the Middle East or Africa should have his head examined,” declared US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates on February 25.

Remarkable. Every one of the many wars the United States has engaged in since the end of World War II has been presented to the American people, explicitly or implicitly, as a war of necessity, not a war of choice; a war urgently needed to protect American citizens, American allies, vital American “interests”, freedom, or democracy. Here is President Obama speaking of Afghanistan: “But we must never forget this is not a war of choice. This is a war of necessity.” 7

This being the case, how can a future administration say it will not go to war if any of these noble causes is seriously threatened? The answer is that these noble causes are irrelevant. The United States goes to war where and when it wants, and if a noble cause is not self-evident, the government, with indispensable help from the American media, will manufacture it. Secretary Gates is now admitting that there is choice involved. Well, Bob, thanks for telling us. You were Bush’s Secretary of Defense as well, and before that 26 years in the CIA and the National Security Council. You sure know how to keep a secret. **CT**

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

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Humanitarian war v. humanity

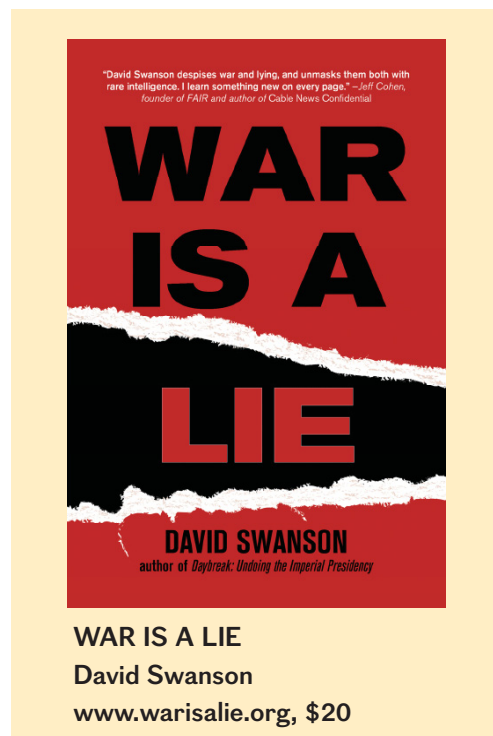
David Swanson questions the need to destroy other nations and kill their citizens in the name of liberation

The idea that wars are waged out of humanitarian concern may not at first appear even worthy of response. Wars kill humans. What can be humanitarian about that? But look at the sort of rhetoric that successfully sells new wars:

“This conflict started Aug. 2, when the dictator of Iraq invaded a small and helpless neighbor. Kuwait, a member of the Arab League and a member of the United Nations, was crushed, its people brutalized. Five months ago, Saddam Hussein started this cruel war against Kuwait; tonight, the battle has been joined.”

Thus spoke President Bush the Elder upon launching the Gulf War in 1991. He didn’t say he wanted to kill people. He said he wanted to liberate helpless victims from their oppressors, an idea that would be considered leftist in domestic politics, but an idea that seems to create genuine support for wars. And here’s President Clinton speaking about Yugoslavia eight years later:

“When I ordered our armed forces into combat, we had three clear goals: to enable the Kosovar people, the victims of some of the most vicious atrocities in Europe since the Second World War, to return to their homes with safety and self-government; to require Serbian forces responsible for those atrocities to leave Kosovo; and to deploy



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an international security force, with NATO at its core, to protect all the people of that troubled land, Serbs and Albanians alike.” Look also at the rhetoric that is used to successfully keep wars going for years:

“We will not abandon the Iraqi people.” – Secretary of State Colin Powell, August 13, 2003.

“The United States will not abandon Iraq.” – President George W. Bush, March, 21, 2006.

If I break into your house, smash the windows, bust up the furniture, and kill half your family, do I have a moral obligation to stay and spend the night?

If I break into your house, smash the windows, bust up the furniture, and kill half your family, do I have a moral obligation to stay and spend the night? Would it be cruel and irresponsible for me to “abandon” you, even when you encourage me to leave? Or is it my duty, on the contrary, to depart immediately and turn myself in at the nearest police station? Once the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq had begun, a debate began that resembled this one. As you can see, these two approaches are many miles apart, despite both being framed as humanitarian. One says that we have to stay out of generosity, the other that we have to leave out of shame and respect. Which is right?

Prior to the invasion of Iraq, Secretary of State Colin Powell reportedly told President Bush, “You are going to be the proud owner of 25 million people. You will own all their hopes, aspirations, and problems. You’ll own it all.” According to Bob Woodward, “Powell and Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage called this the Pottery Barn rule: You break it, you own it.” Senator John Kerry cited the rule when running for president, and it was and is widely accepted as legitimate by Republican and Democratic politicians in Washington, D.C.

The Pottery Barn is a store that has no such rule, at least not for accidents. It’s illegal in many states in our country to have such a rule, except for cases of gross negligence and willful destruction. That description, of course, fits the invasion of Iraq to a T. The doctrine of “shock and awe,” of imposing such massive destruction that the enemy is paralyzed with fear and helplessness had long since been proven as hopeless and nonsensical as it sounds. It hadn’t worked in World War II or since. Americans parachuting into Japan following the nuclear bombs were not bowed down to; they were lynched. People have always fought back and always will, just as you probably would. But shock and awe is designed to include the complete destruction of infrastructure, communication, transportation, food production and supply, water supply, and so

forth. In other words: the illegal imposition of great suffering on an entire population. If that’s not willful destruction, I don’t know what is.

The invasion of Iraq was also intended as a “decapitation,” a “regime change.” The dictator was removed from the scene, eventually captured, and later executed following a deeply flawed trial that avoided evidence of US complicity in his crimes. Many Iraqis were delighted with the removal of Saddam Hussein, but quickly began to demand the withdrawal of the United States military from their country. Was this ingratitude? “Thank you for deposing our tyrant. Don’t let the doorknob hit you in the ass on your way out!” Hmm. That makes it sound as if the United States wanted to stay, and as if the Iraqis owed us the favor of letting us stay. That’s quite different from staying reluctantly to fulfill our moral duty of ownership. Which is it?

Owning people

How does one manage to own people? It’s striking that Powell, an African American, some of whose ancestors were owned as slaves in Jamaica, told the president he would own people, dark skinned people against whom many Americans held some degree of prejudice. Powell was arguing against the invasion, or at least warning of what would be involved. But did owning people necessarily have to be involved? If the United States and its fig-leaf “coalition” of minor contingents from other nations had pulled out of Iraq when George W. Bush declared “mission accomplished” in a flight suit on an aircraft carrier in San Diego Harbor on May 1, 2003, and not disbanded the Iraqi military, and not laid siege to towns and neighborhoods, not inflamed ethnic tensions, not prevented Iraqis from working to repair the damage, and not driven millions of Iraqis out of their homes, then the result might not have been ideal, but it almost certainly would have involved less misery than what was actually done, following the Pottery Barn rule.

Or what if the United States had congratulated Iraq on its disarmament, of which the US government was fully apprised? What if we had removed our military from the area, eliminated the no-fly zones, and ended the economic sanctions, the sanctions Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had been discussing in 1996 in this exchange on the television program 60 Minutes:

LESLEY STAHL: "We have heard that a half million children have died. I mean, that's more children than died in Hiroshima. And, you know, is the price worth it?"

ALBRIGHT: "I think this is a very hard choice, but the price – we think the price is worth it."

Was it? So much was accomplished that a war was still needed in 2003? Those children couldn't have been spared for seven more years and identical political results? What if the United States had worked with the demilitarized Iraq to encourage a demilitarized Middle East, including all its nations in a nuclear-free zone, encouraging Israel to dismantle its nuclear stockpile instead of encouraging Iran to try to acquire one? George W. Bush had lumped Iran, Iraq, and North Korea into "an axis of evil," attacked unarmed Iraq, ignored nuclear-armed North Korea, and begun threatening Iran. If you were Iran, what would you have wanted?

What if the United States had provided economic aid to Iraq, Iran, and other nations in the region, and led an effort to provide them with (or at least lifted sanctions that are preventing the construction of) windmills, solar panels, and a sustainable energy infrastructure, thus bringing electricity to more rather than fewer people? Such a project could not possibly have cost anything like the trillions of dollars wasted on war between 2003 and 2010. For an additional relatively tiny expense, we could have created a major program of student exchange between Iraqi, Iranian, and US schools. Nothing discourages war like bonds of friendship and family. Why wouldn't such an approach have been at least as respon-

sible and serious and moral as announcing our ownership of somebody else's country just because we'd bombed it?

Part of the disagreement, I think, arises over a failure to imagine what the bombing looked like. If we think of it as a clean and harmless series of blips on a video game, during which "smart bombs" improve Baghdad by "surgically" removing its evildoers, then moving on to the next step of fulfilling our duties as the new landlords is easier. If, instead, we imagine the actual and horrific mass-murder and maiming of children and adults that went on when Baghdad was bombed, then our thoughts turn to apologies and reparations as our first priority, and we begin to question whether we have the right or the standing to behave as owners of what remains. In fact, smashing a pot at the Pottery Barn would result in our paying for the damage and apologizing, not overseeing the smashing of more pots.

Racist generosity

Another major source of the disagreement between pro- and anti-potterybarners, I think, comes down to a powerful and insidious force known as racism. Remember President McKinley's proposing to govern the Philippines because the poor Filipinos couldn't possibly do it themselves? William Howard Taft, the first American Governor-General of the Philippines, called the Filipinos "our little brown brothers." In Vietnam, when the Vietcong appeared willing to sacrifice a great many of their lives without surrendering, that became evidence that they placed little value on life, which became evidence of their evil nature, which became grounds for killing even more of them.

If we set aside the Pottery Barn rule for a moment and think, instead, of the golden rule, we get a very different sort of guidance. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." If another nation invaded our country, and the result was immediately chaos; if it was unclear what form of government, if any, would emerge; if the nation was in danger of breaking into pieces;

If we imagine the actual and horrific mass-murder and maiming of children and adults that went on when Baghdad was bombed, then our thoughts turn to apologies and reparations as our first priority, and we begin to question whether we have the right or the standing to behave as owners of what remains

Civilizing the heathen was always viewed as a generous mission (except by the heathen). Manifest destiny was believed to be an expression of God's love

if there might be civil war or anarchy; and if nothing was certain, what is the very first thing we would want the invading military to do? That's right: get the hell out of our country! And in fact that's what the majority of Iraqis in numerous polls have told the United States to do for years. George McGovern and William Polk wrote in 2006:

“Not surprisingly, most Iraqis think that the United States will never withdraw unless forced to do so. This feeling perhaps explains why a USA Today/CNN/Gallup poll showed that eight out of every ten Iraqis regarded America not as a ‘liberator’ but as an occupier, and 88 percent of the Sunni Muslim Arabs favored violent attacks on American troops.”

Of course, those puppets and politicians benefitting from an occupation prefer to see it continue. But even within the puppet government, the Iraqi Parliament refused to approve the treaty that Presidents Bush and Maliki drew up in 2008 to extend the occupation for three years, unless the people were given a chance to vote it up or down in a referendum. That vote was later repeatedly denied precisely because everyone knew what the outcome would have been. Owning people out of the kindness of our hearts is one thing, I believe, but doing it against their will is quite another. And who has ever willfully chosen to be owned?

Are we generous?

Is generosity really a motivator behind our wars, whether the launching of them or the prolonging of them? If a nation is generous toward other nations, it seems likely it would be so in more than one way. Yet, if you examine a list of nations ranked by the charity they give to others and a list of nations ranked by their military expenditures, there's no correlation. In a list of the wealthiest two-dozen countries, ranked in terms of foreign giving, the United States is near the bottom, and a significant chunk of the “aid” we give to other countries is actually weaponry. If private giving is factored in with public giving, the United States moves only

slightly higher in the list. If the money that recent immigrants send to their own families were included, the United States might move up a bit more, although that seems like a very different kind of giving.

When you look at the top nations in terms of military spending per-capita, none of the wealthy nations from Europe, Asia, or North America make it anywhere near the top of the list, with the single exception of the United States. Our country comes in eleventh, with the 10 nations above it in military spending per capita all from the Middle East, North Africa, or central Asia. Greece comes in 23rd, South Korea 36th, and the United Kingdom 42nd, with all other European and Asian nations further down the list. In addition, the United States is the top exporter of private arms sales, with Russia the only other country in the world that comes even remotely close to it.

More importantly, of the 22 major wealthy countries, most of which give more to foreign charity than do we in the United States, 20 haven't started any wars in generations, if ever, and at most have taken small roles in US-dominated war coalitions; one of the other two countries, South Korea, only engages in hostilities with North Korea with US approval; and the last country, the United Kingdom, primarily follows the US lead.

Civilizing the heathen was always viewed as a generous mission (except by the heathen). Manifest destiny was believed to be an expression of God's love. According to anthropologist Clark Wissler, “when a group comes into a new solution to one of its important cultural problems, it becomes zealous to spread that idea abroad, and is moved to embark upon an era of conquest to force the recognition of its merits.” Spread? Spread? Where have we heard something about spreading an important solution? Oh, yes, I remember:

“And the second way to defeat the terrorists is to spread freedom. You see, the best way to defeat a society that is – doesn't have hope, a society where people become so an-

gry they're willing to become suiciders, is to spread freedom, is to spread democracy." – President George W. Bush, June 8, 2005.

This isn't a stupid idea because Bush speaks hesitantly and invents the word "suiciders." It's a stupid idea because freedom and democracy cannot be imposed at gunpoint by a foreign force that thinks so little of the newly free people that it is willing to recklessly murder them. A democracy that is required beforehand to remain loyal to the United States is not a representative government, but rather some sort of strange hybrid with dictatorship. A democracy imposed in order to demonstrate to the world that our way is the best way is unlikely to create a government of, by, and for the people.

US commander Stanley McChrystal described a planned but failed attempt to create a government in Marja, Afghanistan, in 2010; he said he would bring in a hand-picked puppet and a set of foreign handlers as "a government in a box." Wouldn't you want a foreign army to bring one of those to your town?

With 86 percent of Americans in a February 2010 CNN poll saying our own government is broken, do we have the know-how, never mind the authority, to impose a model of government on someone else? And if we did, would the military be the tool with which to do it?

What do you mean, you already had a nation?

Judging from past experience, creating a new nation by force usually fails. We generally call this activity "nation-building" even though it usually does not build a nation. In May 2003, two scholars at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace released a study of past US attempts at nation building, examining in chronological order – Cuba, Panama, Cuba again, Nicaragua, Haiti, Cuba yet again, the Dominican Republic, West Germany, Japan, the Dominican Republic again, South Vietnam, Cambodia, Grenada, Panama again, Haiti again, and Afghanistan.

Of these 16 attempts at nation building, in only four, the authors concluded, was a democracy sustained as long as 10 years after the departure of US forces.

By "departure" of US forces, the authors of the above study clearly meant reduction, since US forces have never actually departed. Two of the four countries were the completely destroyed and defeated Japan and Germany. The other two were US neighbors – tiny Grenada and Panama. The so-called nation building in Panama is considered to have taken 23 years. That same length of time would carry the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq to 2024 and 2026 respectively.

Never, the authors found, has a surrogate regime supported by the United States, such as those in Afghanistan and Iraq, made the transition to democracy. The authors of this study, Minxin Pei and Sara Kasper, also found that creating lasting democracies had never been the primary goal:

"The primary goal of early US nation-building efforts was in most cases strategic. In its first efforts, Washington decided to replace or support a regime in a foreign land to defend its core security and economic interests, not to build a democracy. Only later did America's political ideals and its need to sustain domestic support for nation building impel it to try to establish democratic rule in target nations."

Do you think an endowment for peace might be biased against war? Surely the Pentagon-created RAND Corporation must be biased in favor of war. And yet a RAND study of occupations and insurgencies in 2010, a study produced for the US Marine Corps, found that 90 percent of insurgencies against weak governments, like Afghanistan's, succeed. In other words, the nation-building, whether or not imposed from abroad, fails.

In fact, even as war supporters were telling us to escalate and "stay the course" in Afghanistan in 2009 and 2010, experts from across the political spectrum were in agreement that doing so couldn't accom-

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hy not provide funding for children's health and schools, instead of melting the skin off children with white phosphorous?

plish anything, much less bestow generous benefits on Afghans. Our ambassador, Karl Eikenberry, opposed an escalation in leaked cables. Numerous former officials in the military and the CIA favored withdrawal. Matthew Hoh, a senior US civilian diplomat in Zabul Province and former marine captain, resigned and backed withdrawal. So did former diplomat Ann Wright who had helped reopen the embassy in Afghanistan in 2001. The National Security Advisor thought more troops would “just be swallowed up.” A majority of the US public opposed the war, and the opposition was even stronger among the Afghan people, especially in Kandahar, where a US Army-funded survey found that 94 percent of Kandaharis wanted negotiations, not assault, and 85 percent said they viewed the Taliban as “our Afghan brothers.”

Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and funder of the escalation, John Kerry noted that an assault on Marja that had been a test run for a larger assault on Kandahar had failed miserably. Kerry also noted that Taliban assassinations in Kandahar had begun when the United States announced a coming assault there. How then, he asked, could the assault stop the killings? Kerry and his colleagues, just before dumping another \$33.5 billion into the Afghanistan escalation in 2010, pointed out that terrorism had been increasing globally during the “Global War on Terror.” The 2009 escalation in Afghanistan had been followed by an 87 percent increase in violence, according to the Pentagon.

The military had developed, or rather revived from Vietnam days, a strategy for Iraq four years into that war that was also applied to Afghanistan, a kind-hearted strategy known as Counter-Insurgency. On paper, this required an 80 percent investment in civilian efforts at “winning hearts and minds” and 20 percent in military operations. But in both countries, this strategy was only applied to rhetoric, not reality. Actual investment in non-military operations in Afghanistan never topped 5 percent, and

the man in charge of it, Richard Holbrooke, described the civilian mission as “supporting the military.”

Rather than “spreading freedom” with bombs and guns, what would have been wrong with spreading knowledge? If learning leads to the development of democracy, why not spread education? Why not provide funding for children's health and schools, instead of melting the skin off children with white phosphorous? Nobel Peace Laureate Shirin Ebadi proposed, following the September 11, 2001, terrorism, that instead of bombing Afghanistan, the United States could build schools in Afghanistan, each named for and honoring someone killed in the World Trade Center, thus building appreciation for generous aid and understanding of the damage done by violence. Whatever you think of such an approach, it's hard to argue it wouldn't have been generous and perhaps even in line with the principle of loving one's enemies.

Let me help you out of that

The hypocrisy of generously imposed occupations is perhaps most apparent when done in the name of uprooting previous occupations. When Japan kicked European colonialists out of Asian nations only to occupy them itself, or when the United States liberated Cuba or the Philippines in order to dominate those countries itself, the contrast between word and deed jumped out at you. In both of these examples, Japan and the United States offered civilisation, culture, modernization, leadership, and mentoring, but they offered them at the barrel of a gun whether anyone wanted them or not. And if anyone did, well, their story got top play back home. When Americans were hearing tales of German barbarity in Belgium and France during World War I, Germans were reading accounts of how dearly the occupied French loved their benevolent German occupiers. And when can you not count on the *New York Times* to locate an Iraqi or an Afghan who's worried that the Americans might leave too soon?

Any occupation must work with some elite group of natives, who in turn will of course support the occupation. But the occupier should not mistake such support for majority opinion, as the United States has been in the habit of doing since at least 1899. Nor should a “native face” on a foreign occupation be expected to fool people:

“The British, like the Americans,...believed that native troops would be less unpopular than foreigners. That proposition is...dubious: if native troops are perceived to be puppets of foreigners, they may be even more violently opposed than the foreigners themselves.” Native troops may also be less loyal to the occupier’s mission and less trained in the ways of the occupying army. This soon leads to blaming the same deserving people on whose behalf we’ve attacked their country for our inability to leave it. They are now “violent, incompetent, and untrustworthy,” as the McKinley White House portrayed the Filipinos, and as the Bush and Obama White Houses portrayed Iraqis and Afghans.

In an occupied nation with its own internal divisions, minority groups may truly fear mistreatment at the hands of the majority should the foreign occupation end. That problem is a reason for future Bushes to heed the advice of future Powells and not invade in the first place. It’s a reason not to inflame internal divisions, as occupiers tend to do, much preferring that the people kill each other than that they unite against foreign forces. And it’s a reason to encourage international diplomacy and positive influence on the nation while withdrawing and paying reparations.

The feared post-occupation violence is not, however, usually a persuasive argument for extending the occupation. For one thing, it’s an argument for permanent occupation. For another, the bulk of the violence that is depicted back in the imperial nation as a civil war is still usually violence directed against the occupiers and their collaborators. When the occupation ends, so does much of the violence. This has been dem-

onstrated in Iraq as troops have reduced their presence; the violence has decreased accordingly.

Most of the violence in Basra ended when the British troops there ceased patrolling to control the violence. The plan for withdrawal from Iraq that George McGovern and William Polk (the former senator and a descendant of former President Polk, respectively) published in 2006 proposed a temporary bridge to complete independence, advice that went unheeded:

“The Iraqi government would be wise to request the short-term services of an international force to police the country during and immediately after the period of American withdrawal. Such a force should be on only temporary duty, with a firm date fixed in advance for withdrawal. Our estimate is that Iraq would need it for about two years after the American withdrawal is complete. During this period, the force probably could be slowly but steadily cut back, both in personnel and in deployment. Its activities would be limited to enhancing public security...It would have no need for tanks or artillery or offensive aircraftIt would not attempt...to battle the insurgents. Indeed, after the withdrawal of American and British regular troops and the roughly 25,000 foreign mercenaries, the insurgency, which was aimed at achieving that objective, would lose public support....Then gunmen would either put down their weapons or become publicly identified as outlaws. This outcome has been the experience of insurgencies in Algeria, Kenya, Ireland (Eire), and elsewhere.”

Cops of the world benevolence society

It’s not just the continuation of wars that is justified as generosity. Initiating fights with evil forces in defense of justice, even while it inspires less than angelic sentiments in some war supporters, is generally also presented as pure selflessness and benevolence. “He is keeping the World safe for Democracy. Enlist and Help Him,” read a US World War I poster, fulfilling President

Most of the violence in Basra ended when the British troops there ceased patrolling to control the violence

The Korean War, as a UN-sanctioned “police action,” was described not only as charity, but also as the world community’s hiring a sheriff to enforce the peace, just as good Americans would have done in a Western town

Wilson’s directive that the Committee on Public Information present the “absolute justice of America’s cause,” and the “absolute selflessness of America’s aims.” When President Franklin Roosevelt persuaded Congress to create a military draft and to allow the “lending” of weaponry to Britain before the United States entered World War II, he compared his Lend-Lease program to loaning a hose to a neighbor whose house was on fire. Then, in the summer of 1941, Roosevelt pretended to go fishing and actually met with Prime Minister Churchill off the coast of Newfoundland. FDR came back to Washington, D.C., describing a moving ceremony during which he and Churchill had sung “Onward Christian Soldiers.” FDR and Churchill released a joint statement created without the peoples or legislatures of either country that laid out the principles by which the two leaders’ nations would fight the war and shape the world afterwards, despite the fact that the United States was still not in the war. This statement, which came to be called the Atlantic Charter, made clear that Britain and the United States favored peace, freedom, justice, and harmony and had no interest whatsoever in building empires. These were noble sentiments on behalf of which millions could engage in horrible violence.

Until it entered World War II, the United States generously provided the machinery of death to Britain. Following this model, both weapons and soldiers sent to Korea and subsequent actions have for decades been described as “military aid.”

Thus the idea that war is doing someone a favor was built into the very language used to name it. The Korean War, as a UN-sanctioned “police action,” was described not only as charity, but also as the world community’s hiring a sheriff to enforce the peace, just as good Americans would have done in a Western town. But being the world’s policeman never won over those who believed it was well intentioned but didn’t think the world deserved the favor. Nor did it win over those who saw it as just

the latest excuse for war. A generation after the Korean War, Phil Ochs was singing:

*Come, get out of the way, boys
Quick, get out of the way
You’d better watch what you say, boys
Better watch what you say
We’ve rammed in your harbor and tied
– to your port
And our pistols are hungry and our
– tempers are short
So bring your daughters around to the
– port
‘Cause we’re the Cops of the World,
– boys
We’re the Cops of the World*

By 1961, the cops of the world were in Vietnam, but President Kennedy’s representatives there thought a lot more cops were needed and knew the public and the president would be resistant to sending them. For one thing, you couldn’t keep up your image as the cops of the world if you sent in a big force to prop up an unpopular regime. What to do? What to do? Ralph Stavins, coauthor of an extensive account of Vietnam War planning, recounts that General Maxwell Taylor and Walt W. Rostow, “. . . wondered how the United States could go to war while appearing to preserve the peace. While they were pondering this question, Vietnam was suddenly struck by a deluge. It was as if God had wrought a miracle. American soldiers, acting on humanitarian impulses, could be dispatched to save Vietnam not from the Viet Cong, but from the floods.”

For the same reason that Smedley Butler suggested restricting US military ships to within 200 miles of the United States, one might suggest restricting the US military to fighting wars. Troops sent for disaster relief have a way of creating new disasters. US aid is often suspect, even if well-intended by US citizens, because it comes in the form of a fighting force ill equipped and ill prepared to provide aid. Whenever there’s a hurricane in Haiti, nobody can tell whether the United States has provided aid workers or imposed martial law. In many disasters around the

world the cops of the world don't come at all, suggesting that where they do arrive the purpose may not be entirely pure.

In 1995 the cops of the world stumbled into Yugoslavia out of the goodness of their hearts. President Clinton explained:

“America’s role will not be about fighting a war. It will be about helping the people of Bosnia to secure their own peace agreement...In fulfilling this mission, we will have the chance to help stop the killing of innocent civilians, especially children...”

Fifteen years later, it’s hard to see how Bosnians have secured their own peace. US and other foreign troops have never left, and the place is governed by a European-backed Office of High Representative.

Dying for women’s rights

Women gained rights in Afghanistan in the 1970s, before the United States intentionally provoked the Soviet Union to invade and armed the likes of Osama bin Laden to fight back. There has been little good news for women since. The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) was established in 1977 as an independent political/ social organization of Afghan women in support of human rights and social justice. In 2010, RAWA released a statement commenting on the American pretense of occupying Afghanistan for the sake of its women:

“[The United States and its allies] empowered the most brutal terrorists of the Northern Alliance and the former Russian puppets – the Khalqis and Parchamis – and by relying on them, the US imposed a puppet government on Afghan people. And instead of uprooting its Taliban and Al-Qaeda creations, the United States and NATO continue to kill our innocent and poor civilians, mostly women and children, in their vicious air raids.”

In the view of many women leaders in Afghanistan, the invasion and occupation have done no good for women’s rights, and have achieved that result at the cost of bombing, shooting, and traumatizing thou-

sands of women. That’s not an unfortunate and unexpected side effect. That is the essence of war, and it was perfectly predictable. The Taliban’s tiny force succeeds in Afghanistan because people support it. This results in the United States indirectly supporting it as well.

At the time of this writing, for many months and likely for years, at least the second largest and probably the largest source of revenue for the Taliban has been US taxpayers. We lock people away for giving a pair of socks to the enemy, while our own government serves as chief financial sponsor. WARLORD, INC.: Extortion and Corruption Along the US Supply Chain in Afghanistan, is a 2010 report from the Majority Staff of the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs in the US House of Representatives. The report documents payoffs to the Taliban for safe passage of US goods, payoffs very likely greater than the Taliban’s profits from opium, its other big money maker. This has long been known by top US officials, who also know that Afghans, including those fighting for the Taliban, often sign up to receive training and pay from the US military and then depart, and in some cases sign up again and again.

This must be unknown to Americans supporting the war. You can’t support a war in which you’re funding both sides, including the side against which you are supposedly defending Afghanistan’s women.

Senator Barack Obama campaigned for the presidency in 2007 and 2008 on a platform that called for escalating the war in Afghanistan. He did just that shortly after taking office, even before devising any plan for what to do in Afghanistan. Just sending more troops was an end in itself. But candidate Obama focused on opposing the other war – the War on Iraq – and promising to end it. He won the Democratic primary largely because he was lucky enough not to have been in Congress in time to vote for the initial authorization of the Iraq war. That he voted over and over again to fund it was never mentioned in the media, as

You can’t support a war in which you’re funding both sides, including the side against which you are supposedly defending Afghanistan’s women

When the largest crime we know of is underway, we do not need to be as slow about ending it as possible. We need to end it immediately

senators are simply expected to fund wars whether they approve of them or not.

Obama did not promise a speedy withdrawal of all troops from Iraq. In fact, there was a period in which he never let a campaign stop go by without declaring “We have to be as careful getting out as we were careless getting in.” He must have mumbled this phrase even in his sleep. During the same election a group of Democratic candidates for Congress published what they titled “A Responsible Plan to End the War in Iraq.” The need to be responsible and careful was premised on the idea that ending a war quickly would be irresponsible and careless. This notion had served to keep the Afghanistan and Iraq wars going for years already and would help keep them going for years to come.

But ending wars and occupations is necessary and just, not reckless and cruel. And it need not amount to “abandonment” of the world. Our elected officials find it hard to believe, but there are ways other than war of relating to people and governments. When a petty crime is underway, our top priority is to stop it, after which we look into ways of setting things right, including deterring future crimes of the same sort and repairing the damage. When the largest crime we know of is underway, we do not need to be as slow about ending it as possible. We need to end it immediately. That is the kindest thing we can do for the people of the country we are at war with. We owe them that favor above all others. We know their nation may have problems when our soldiers leave, and that we are to blame for some of those problems. But we also know that they will have no hope of good lives as long as the occupation continues.

RAWA’s position on the occupation of Afghanistan is that the post-occupation period will be worse the longer the occupation continues. So, the first priority is to immediately end the war. War kills people, and there is nothing worse. As we will see in chapter eight, war primarily kills civilians, although the value of the military-civilian

distinction seems limited. If another nation occupied the United States, surely we would not approve of killing those Americans who fought back and thereby lost their status as civilians. War kills children, above all, and horrifically traumatizes many of the children it does not kill or maim. This is not exactly news, yet it must be constantly re-learned as a corrective to frequent claims that wars have been sanitized and bombs made “smart” enough to kill only the people who really need killing.

In 1890 a US veteran told his children about a war he’d been part of in 1838, the forced relocation of Cherokee Indians:

“In another home was a frail Mother, apparently a widow and three small children, one just a baby. When told that she must go, the Mother gathered the children at her feet, prayed a humble prayer in her native tongue, patted the old family dog on the head, told the faithful creature goodbye, with a baby strapped on her back and leading a child with each hand started on her exile. But the task was too great for that frail Mother. A stroke of heart failure relieved her suffering. She sunk and died with her baby on her back, and her other two children clinging to her hands.

“Chief Junaluska who had saved President [Andrew] Jackson’s life at the battle of Horse Shoe witnessed this scene, the tears gushing down his cheeks and lifting his cap he turned his face toward the heavens and said, ‘Oh my God, if I had known at the battle of the Horse Shoe what I know now, American history would have been differently written.’”

In a video produced in 2010 by Rethink Afghanistan, Zaitullah Ghiasi Wardak describes a night raid in Afghanistan. Here’s the English translation: “I am the son of Abdul Ghani Khan. I am from the Wardak Province, Chak District, Khan Khail Village. At approximately 3:00 a.m. the Americans besieged our home, climbed on top of the roof by ladders.... They took the three youngsters outside, tied their hands, put black bags over their heads. They treated

them cruelly and kicked them, told them to sit there and not move.

“At this time, one group knocked on the guest room. My nephew said: ‘When I heard the knock I begged the Americans: ‘My grandfather is old and hard of hearing. I will go with you and get him out for you.’” He was kicked and told not to move. Then they broke the door of the guest room. My father was asleep but he was shot 25 times in his bed....Now I don’t know, what was my father’s crime? And what was the danger from him? He was 92 years old.”

War would be the greatest evil on earth even if it cost no money, used up no resources, left no environmental damage, expanded rather than curtailed the rights of citizens back home, and even if it accomplished something worthwhile. Of course, none of those conditions are possible.

The problem with wars is not that soldiers aren’t brave or well intentioned, or that their parents didn’t raise them well. Ambrose Bierce, who survived the US Civil War to write about it decades later with a brutal honesty and lack of romanticism that was new to war stories, defined “Generous” as follows: “Originally this word meant noble

by birth and was rightly applied to a great multitude of persons. It now means noble by nature and is taking a bit of a rest.”

Cynicism is funny, but not accurate. Generosity is very real, which is of course why war propagandists falsely appeal to it on behalf of their wars. Many young Americans actually signed up to risk their lives in the “Global War on Terror” believing they would be defending their nation from a hideous fate. That takes determination, bravery, and generosity.

Those badly deceived young people, as well as those less befuddled who nonetheless enlisted for the latest wars, were not sent off as traditional cannon fodder to fight an army in a field. They were sent to occupy countries in which their supposed enemies looked just like everyone else. They were sent into the land of SNAFU, from which many never return in one piece.

SNAFU is, of course, the army acronym for the state of war: Situation Normal: All Fucked Up. **CT**

David Swanson is the author of “War Is A Lie” from which this is excerpted: <http://WarIsALie.org>

Many young Americans actually signed up to risk their lives in the “Global War on Terror” believing they would be defending their nation from a hideous fate



“David Swanson writes in the tradition of Howard Zinn. War Is A Lie is as clear as the title. Wars are all based on lies, could not be fought without lies, and would not be fought at all if people held their governments to any reasonable standard of honesty.” – **Charles M. Young.**

“David Swanson is an antidote to the toxins of complacency and evasion. He insists on rousing the sleepwalkers, confronting the deadly prevaricators and shining a bright light on possibilities for a truly better world.” – **Norman Solomon**, author of *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*

WAR IS A LIE
DAVID SWANSON

Available now at www.warislalie.org

25 years a muckraker

Four excerpts from his new book highlight the work of **Bill Lueders**, one of the leading campaigning journalists of the alterative media

Recently Wisconsin has been breaking bravenew ground in cruelty toward people on welfare

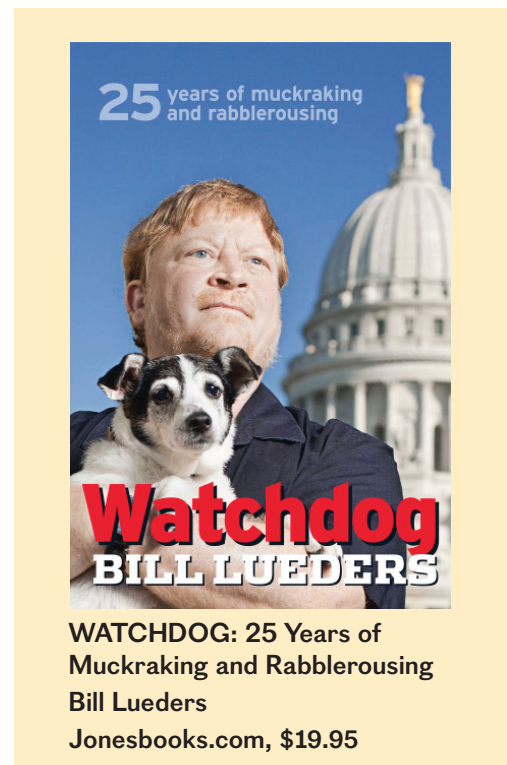
Kill the Poor

Isthmus, November 3, 1989

Here in Wisconsin, we treat poor people like the miserable scum they really are. Not long ago, for instance, the Dane County Department of Social Services illegally denied General Assistance to a man so wracked with pain he filled out his application while lying on the Social Services floor. Apparently, one of the nine digits on his Social Security card (not a required form of ID) was illegible.

Recently Wisconsin has been breaking brave new ground in this kind of cruelty toward people on welfare. Gov. Tommy Thompson and the Democrat-controlled Legislature have slashed AFDC benefits by 6 percent (which, counting the loss due to inflation, makes for a total cut of 29 percent since 1980) and started withholding benefits from from teen parents and the parents of teens who miss too much school.

Thompson reckons these measures have already saved \$5 million that otherwise would have gone to people in desperate need. The state also has one of the nation's toughest workfare programs, aimed at getting these loafers away from the TV set and into low-paying jobs. And, just to ensure that these people don't get jobs and like it, the Thompson team torpedoed funds for a pilot program advanced by Assembly



Speaker Tom Loftus that would have removed some of the disincentives for people who leave the welfare rolls to go to work.

Now Thompson and state Senate Majority Leader Joe Strohl are pushing another excellent idea: a “two-tiered” welfare system, which would keep new arrivals at their former state’s aid levels for six months.

Damn straight. If these cashless cretins come from a state like Illinois that pays

\$386 per month for a family of four, then by God they deserve \$386 per month. What family of four needs more than \$4,632 per year to live on, anyway?

Wisconsin's rush to a two-tier system was prompted by a study earlier this year by the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute – a think tank headed by men who realize, for instance, that opposition to the Nicaraguan Contras is “objectively anti-American.” The group found that a whopping 29 percent of new welfare applicants were from states other than Wisconsin. Furthermore, 40 percent of these new arrivals were on the welfare rolls within 90 days.

That means a mere 88 percent of new welfare cases were either Wisconsin residents or people who did not immediately seek aid. But some of the remaining 12 percent, damn them, may have been attracted by the higher benefits.

Last week Thompson mined the whole ugly truth, telling Vice President Dan Quayle, “Because Wisconsin is so generous, we have attracted several people from other states.” Whoa. Several. Talk about your welfare magnet.

Even one tired, poor Illinois family is one too many. Wisconsin has a hard enough time abusing its own poor people without having to abuse poor people from all over the country.

For a while, the Strohl-Thompson plan seemed to be the perfect solution. It was cruel, discriminatory, probably even unconstitutional. Leave it to Tom Still to find a dark cloud.

In his column on Oct. 22, the *Wisconsin State Journal* associate editor questioned the effectiveness – not the goal – of the two-tiered scheme. He noted that welfare mothers from other states who make the move to Wisconsin can still enjoy better schools, less crime, more affordable housing and the promise of higher benefits six months down the line.

Citing a Washington, D.C., group's study showing that urban rental housing for welfare recipients is more affordable in Wisconsin

than anywhere in the continental United States, Still mused, “If someone knows that she can rent an apartment for less money in Wisconsin, why is a six-month wait for higher welfare benefits going to stop her?” (He immediately added, quite unnecessarily, “Please don't think I've given up welfare-bashing in my old age.”)

Still neglected to mention one startling detail in the Washington group's study: The reason Wisconsin ranked so high for urban welfare dwellers is that here the average three-person family on AFDC must apply only 85 percent of its \$517 monthly check to the cost of rent. Can you imagine? Being able to pay the rent and still have \$77 per month for all other living expenses? No wonder poor people are flocking here in several.

Clearly, Tom Still is on to something. Getting rid of welfare migration is going to take more than token gestures. If we truly are going to keep the welfare rats out, Wisconsin needs worse schools, more crime, higher rents and lower welfare payments for everyone, not just new arrivals.

Wisconsin's generosity has to have limits. For the good of all, we must pursue even harsher, crueler methods of punishing those who have the audacity to lack money. How about the death penalty?

This column won the Golden Quill, the top annual award for editorial writing from the International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors.

High Pressure, Low Pay

July 6, 1990

I HAVE NEVER, to my credit, encouraged anyone to become a newspaper writer. But I confess to having aided and abetted young people en route to careers in the field.

Among such souls are my editorial interns – students trying to snag a few bylines

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Like meat-packing plants with workers missing parts of fingers, newspapers are notorious for people who have lost their spark – not just for writing, but for living as well. Sometimes these people are shunted aside to attend to menial tasks. More often they are made editors

to show they've learned, despite their university studies, how to write for publication. Working with them on stories, I feel like a bartender serving drinks to a drunk. All the usual arguments parade past my aching conscience: It's their choice, not mine. If I don't serve them, somebody else will. It's better that they get it from me than from the dailies.

But the bitter truth is that I need what they give me. I can't keep my business open without them. And the best customers of all are the ones who are the most addicted.

I once had an intern who drove to Iowa to cover the presidential primary for the campus *Daily Cardinal*, where he also worked. He transmitted his story by midnight, and then wrote another story for *Isthmus* on a laptop computer on his way back to town (someone else drove). He was at *Isthmus* in the early morn – eyes bloodshot, computer in hand. We tried to transfer the story and the whole thing got lost. It took several hours to rewrite the piece, just in time for him to go to class.

This sort of thing, mind you, was not an aberration. It was his lifestyle.

The students who write for me are the hardest-working people I know. They have to be if they want to get a real job in the field. Every opening draws dozens of applicants. Every paper is in a position to demand that minimal 110 percent.

Of course, there are lazy journalists, but chances are they have simply burned out. Like meat-packing plants with workers missing parts of fingers, newspapers are notorious for people who have lost their spark – not just for writing, but for living as well. Sometimes these people are shunted aside to attend to menial tasks. More often they are made editors.

Newspaper writing is grueling work. Meeting deadlines on a regular basis has a similar effect on one's innards as drinking Drano now and then.

What's more, it's a ridiculously low-paying profession, considering the level of skill and commitment. I've seen bright-star for-

mer interns hired into full-time reporting jobs that paid \$15,000 a year.

According to a 1987 survey by the Wisconsin Newspaper Association, the pay for reporters at weekly papers ranged from an average low of \$5.41 per hour to an average high of \$7.17. Only five of 36 papers surveyed paid reporters anything for overtime; three others gave comp time.

More telling still, the pay rates had little to do with the paper's revenues (and presumed profitability). One example: A paper with gross annual sales of \$400,000 had a salary range for reporters of \$5.63 to \$8.75 per hour, while a paper with sales of \$16 million paid \$5.63 to \$6.88. What does that add up to weekly? A lot of Hamburger Helper.

While the people who own newspapers rake in the dough, the people who write them are treated like barrels of ink – mere costs to be contained. George Hesselberg of the *Wisconsin State Journal* says that, in “a majority of cases” involving reporters at Madison Newspapers, Inc., “raises do not equal or exceed the cost of living.”

As best as I can determine, MNI's profits totaled about \$11.5 million in 1989. Profit, honestly defined, is the difference between what workers earn and what they get paid. That means the company's 530 employees earned an average of \$21,698 more than they were paid last year.

There are other crosses to bear. Newspaper writers, myself included, generally may not write for other area outlets even if it's only to offer an opinion on the issues of the day.

The *State Journal* prohibits even its part-time reporters from contributing to “competing” publications. Such a deal: First the paper decides it will exploit the hell out of these people (low wages, no benefits), then it prevents them from making money elsewhere in the local market. Don't like it? Don't work here.

Still, addiction is a powerful thing; it allows us to tolerate things we otherwise would not. The thrill of a story – and the occasional feeling that what we write matters.

A Nation of Cowards

August 23, 1991

NOT LONG AGO I got a call from a woman worried about her new furnace, which due to a design flaw leaked fumes into her home. The woman thought someone ought to raise a fuss about this public health hazard, but said it couldn't be her. Why not? "My son works for the state."

Can't you just hear it? "Sorry, Tom, your work here has been outstanding, but we just have to let you go now that your mother has gone public with this furnace thing..."

Then there's the guy who wanted to make an issue out of the state's ruthless exploitation of limited-term employees, but backed down so as not to risk offending his ruthless exploiters. And tenants afraid to take on landlords who rip off their security deposits. And workers who obligingly pee into bottles or otherwise let their bosses abuse them, all the while turning pale at the mention of the word "union."

The system has created real dangers – unemployment, ostracism, imprisonment – for people who step out of line. And most people, predictably, have inflated their fears about these dangers into credos of craven conduct.

We proclaim ourselves to be the land of the free and the home of the brave, but in truth we have become a nation of cowards, the land of the meek and the home of the 'fraid. We pledge allegiance not to freedom but to a flag, and rush on cue to join the patriotic mobs.

Perhaps the greatest threat to our liberty comes not from a Supreme Court stacked with reactionaries but from people who have freedom, and consciences, but lack the courage to use them.

Where is the leadership that doesn't put caution before candor? How our leaders' backbones bend when the pull of con-

science meets the push for consensus; it's a wonder they can even walk upright!

Years from now, when it has become even more apparent that the Gulf War was a terrible failure, I bet our local politicians claim they were against it all along. Yet in every way that mattered they supported it – from the yellow ribbon state Rep. David Clarenbach hung from his home to the cheerful presence of Mayor Paul Soglin and Dane County Executive Rick Phelps at last month's gala pro-war parade.

"The mass of men [P.C. interruptus: and women] serve the state ... not as men mainly, but as machines," wrote Henry David Thoreau in *Civil Disobedience*. "In most cases there is no free exercise whatever of the judgment or of the moral sense; but they put themselves on a level with wood and earth and stones; and wooden men can perhaps be manufactured that will serve the purpose as well."

But there were, Thoreau continued, a very few heroes, patriots, martyrs and reformers who "serve the state with their consciences also, and so necessarily resist it for the most part; and they are commonly treated as enemies by it."

Thoreau, who wrote these words after being jailed for refusing to pay taxes supporting the Mexican-American War, goes on to say that men (and women) of conscience "cannot without disgrace be associated with" the US government, which at that time (1849) sanctioned slavery.

Our government and institutions have not become more moral since. Slavery has merely diversified: People still feel bound by shackles on what they do and think. Meanwhile, Uncle Sam's global behavior has grown steadily more depraved. Ecological catastrophe and economic collapse seem inevitable. Americans are living in bus shelters and dying for want of medical care.

Now is not the time to let fear oppress us. Now is the time to serve the state with our conscience – that is, to become its enemy.

Years from now, when it has become even more apparent that the Gulf War was a terrible failure, I bet our local politicians claim they were against it all along

The truth is that newspapers get an amazing number of things right. Figures, dates, names, context, nuance. We publish corrections when we're wrong. How many doctors or lawyers or politicians do that?

For the Love of Newspapers

July 18, 2008

I DON'T RECALL seeing either of my parents ever reading a book. I'm pretty sure they didn't even own any, except for a Bible, which, bless their hearts, they also didn't read. But every morning my father would buy a *Milwaukee Sentinel* (he always left for work at 5 a.m., before the paper would have been delivered) and every afternoon the *Milwaukee Journal* arrived at our door. They read those papers front to back. I grew up reading them, too.

At 13, I got my first paper route, one of several. Through college and afterward, I worked for the Milwaukee Journal's circulation department, delivering papers to carriers and vendors, collecting money, keeping the books.

In 1982 I co-founded a Milwaukee newspaper called *The Crazy Shepherd*, now the weekly *Shepherd Express*. Four years later I landed my first and only fulltime job, here at *Isthmus*.

Newspapers are a huge part of my life, part of who I am. I've always considered them essential. The idea of not reading a daily newspaper strikes me as a dereliction of one's duty to be an informed citizen.

A few months ago, on the final season of HBO's "The Wire," a character recalls being a kid watching his dad peruse the paper each morning. That's why he became a journalist: He wanted to be part of something that important.

The fictional newsroom in the show is, like most real newsrooms these days, in crisis. The industry is reeling from drops in circulation, revenue, investor confidence and public regard.

Papers from the *New York Times* to *Isthmus* are cutting staff. The *Wall Street Journal* was sold to Rupert Murdoch. The *Capital Times* and now the *Daily Telegram* of Superior have ceased daily print publication. The price of stock in Lee Enterprises, half-owner

of the *Cap Times* and *Wisconsin State Journal*, has fallen from nearly \$50 a share in 2004 to barely more than \$3 a share today.

As Mia Farrow says in *Rosemary's Baby*, when she wakes up and realizes she's being raped by the Devil: "This is not a dream. This is really happening!"

That many newspaper companies remain highly profitable seems not to matter. They are seen as anachronistic, a throwback to an earlier age, unsustainable.

But what most galls me is the public's increasingly supercilious attitude. It's become fashionable to bash the print media as unreliable, at a time when newspapers are a beacon of credibility compared to the blowhards on cable TV and the bloviators of the blogosphere.

The other day I gave a talk to a local rotary chapter. I made some point about excessive government secrecy, and one of the gentlemen in attendance opined that it was perfectly understandable, given the media's predilection to get things wrong.

I was of course gracious and politic in my response, but I think this fellow is full of it. Of course the media make mistakes, and I would never defend everything my colleagues do, especially at the national level.

But the truth is that newspapers get an amazing number of things right. Figures, dates, names, context, nuance – we check and double-check. We don't go all viral spreading ridiculous lies, like that Barack Obama is a Muslim. We publish corrections when we're wrong. How many doctors or lawyers or politicians do that?

I once had an editorial intern break into tears over an error so inconsequential I can no longer recall it. He hated getting something wrong, as does every reporter I know. (Again, I flash to "The Wire," where a reporter makes an early-morning call to the copy desk to make sure he hadn't misstated a statistic. Waking up in cold sweats is part of this job.)

As I told the Rotarians, there's a simple way to educate yourself about what it takes to be a reporter: Go to any event

in your community that you know will be covered in the local paper. It can be a debate, a day of court testimony, a press conference, an appearance by a visiting newsmaker, even a baseball game. Pay close attention and take copious notes. Then go home and write up a story about what you've just seen. The next day, compare what you've written to the story that appears in print. I guarantee you won't look down your nose at newspaper reporters ever again.

And covering events is just a small part of what newspapers do. The job gets a lot tougher. Enterprise stories, analytical stories, stories that require special expertise. Long hours. Low pay. And for what? So people can cluck about how irrelevant newspapers have become?

If it sounds like I'm angry, I guess I am. I'm angry that newspapers are falling into disrepute. I'm angry that people don't respect the quality control that goes into news reporting; they seem to think any idiot with Internet access is worth listening to. I'm angry that some young people feel they don't

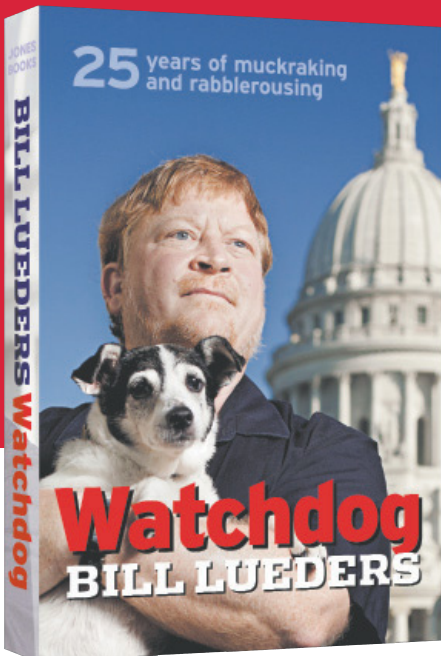
need newspapers – or, apparently, anything else in the way of information about their community.

I submit that those of us who care about newspapers and the quality information they provide ought to help ensure their continued existence. That may mean subscribing instead of reading them free at work or online. It may mean placing ads in papers instead of some online service. It certainly should mean recognizing that ads are what make papers possible, and that newspaper advertisers deserve support.

It's not enough to hope that newspapers stick around. We need to fight for them. **CT**


Bill Lueders is the news editor of Isthmus, Madison's alternative weekly newspaper, and president of the Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council, a group that works to protect public access to government meetings and records. Lueders (pronounced "leaders") is the author of "An Enemy of the State: The Life of Erwin Knoll" and "Cry Rape: The True Story of One Woman's Harrowing Quest for Justice."

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The word we dare not speak

John Pilger applauds the courageous revolts against imperial economic tyranny that has turned nations into sweatshops

Outraged, he rose from his chair and silently turned his back on Clinton. He was immediately seized by police and a security goon and beaten to the floor, dragged out and thrown into jail, bleeding

Shortly after the invasion of Iraq in 2003, I interviewed Ray McGovern, one of an elite group of CIA officers who prepared the President's daily intelligence brief. McGovern was at the apex of the "national security" monolith that is American power and had retired with presidential plaudits. On the eve of the invasion, he and 45 other senior officers of the CIA and other intelligence agencies wrote to President George W. Bush that the "drumbeat for war" was based not on intelligence, but lies.

"It was 95 per cent charade," McGovern told me.

"How did they get away with it?"

"The press allowed the crazies to get away with it."

"Who are the crazies?"

"The people running the [Bush] administration have a set of beliefs a lot like those expressed in *Mein Kampf*... these are the same people who were referred to in the circles in which I moved, at the top, as 'the crazies'."

I said, "Norman Mailer has written that he believes America has entered a pre-fascist state. What's your view of that?"

"Well... I hope he's right, because there are others saying we are already in a fascist mode."

On 22 January, Ray McGovern emailed me to express his disgust at the Obama

administration's barbaric treatment of the alleged whistleblower Bradley Manning and its pursuit of WikiLeaks founder, Julian Assange. "Way back when George and Tony decided it might be fun to attack Iraq," he wrote, "I said something to the effect that fascism had already begun here. I have to admit I did not think it would get this bad this quickly."

Spectacular hypocrisy

On 16 February, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton gave a speech at George Washington University in which she condemned governments that arrested protestors and crushed free expression. She lauded the liberating power of the internet while failing to mention that her government was planning to close down those parts of the internet that encouraged dissent and truth-telling. It was a speech of spectacular hypocrisy, and Ray McGovern was in the audience.

Outraged, he rose from his chair and silently turned his back on Clinton. He was immediately seized by police and a security goon and beaten to the floor, dragged out and thrown into jail, bleeding. He has sent me photographs of his injuries. He is 71. During the assault, which was clearly visible to Clinton, she did not pause in her remarks (*read McGovern's account of the attack on Page 24 of this issue*).

Fascism is a difficult word, because it comes with an iconography that touches the Nazi nerve and is abused as propaganda against America's official enemies and to promote the West's foreign adventures with a moral vocabulary written in the struggle against Hitler. And yet fascism and imperialism are twins. In the aftermath of world war two, those in the imperial states who had made respectable the racial and cultural superiority of "western civilisation", found that Hitler and fascism had claimed the same, employing strikingly similar methods.

Thereafter, the very notion of American imperialism was swept from the textbooks and popular culture of an imperial nation forged on the genocidal conquest of its native people. And a war on social justice and democracy became "US foreign policy".

As the Washington historian William Blum has documented, since 1945, the US has destroyed or subverted more than 50 governments, many of them democracies, and used mass murderers like Suharto, Mobutu and Pinochet to dominate by proxy.

Installed by America

In the Middle East, every dictatorship and pseudo-monarchy has been sustained by America. In "Operation Cyclone", the CIA and MI6 secretly fostered and bankrolled Islamic extremism. The object was to smash or deter nationalism and democracy. The victims of this western state terrorism have been mostly Muslims.

The courageous people gunned down last month in Bahrain and Libya, the latter a "priority UK market", according to Britain's official arms "procurers", join those children blown to bits in Gaza by the latest American F-16 aircraft.

The revolt in the Arab world is not merely against a resident dictator but a worldwide economic tyranny designed by

the US Treasury and imposed by the US Agency for International Development, the IMF and World Bank, which have ensured that rich countries like Egypt are reduced to vast sweatshops, with half the population earning less than \$2 a day.

The people's triumph in Cairo was the first blow against what Benito Mussolini called corporatism, a word that appears in his definition of fascism.

How did such extremism take hold in the liberal West? "It is necessary to destroy hope, idealism, solidarity, and concern for the poor and oppressed," observed Noam Chomsky a generation ago, "[and] to replace these dangerous feelings with self-centred egoism, a pervasive cynicism that holds that [an order of] inequities and oppression is the best that can be achieved. In fact, a great international propaganda campaign is under way to convince people – particularly young people – that this not only is what they should feel but that it's what they do feel."

Like the European revolutions of 1848 and the uprising against Stalinism in 1989, the Arab revolt has rejected fear. An insurrection of suppressed ideas, hope and solidarity has begun.

In the United States, where 45 per cent of young African-Americans have no jobs and the top hedge fund managers are paid, on average, a billion dollars a year, mass protests against cuts in services and jobs have spread to heartland states like Wisconsin.

In Britain, the fastest-growing modern protest movement, UK Uncut, is about to take direct action against tax avoiders and rapacious banks. Something has changed that cannot be unchanged. The enemy has a name now. **CT**

John Pilger's latest film, "The War You Don't See", is now available on DVD at Amazon.co.uk. His web site is www.johnpilger.com

The people's triumph in Cairo was the first blow against what Benito Mussolini called corporatism, a word that appears in his definition of fascism

The world remade

Richard Pithouse points out that current revolts in the Middle East are a direct challenge to Western values

There are beatings, rapes and extortion. Suicides are a common response as are mass jailbreaks in which many migrants have been killed by the Libyan police

As the first unconfirmed reports of airborne attacks on Libyan protestors in Tripoli and Benghazi reached Al Jazeera the station crossed to a spokesperson for the European Union. There was talk of the need to affirm 'European values'. Moments later the programme cut away to the story of the two Libyan fighter pilots who had landed in Malta and sought political asylum rather than obey orders to attack protestors in Benghazi.

Those pilots are not the first people to have arrived in Malta after crossing the Mediterranean from Libya. But most people who make that journey don't arrive in Mirage F1s. Migrants take many routes into Europe. Some people cross into Greece from Turkey, others from Algeria into Spain. For many, the way into Europe is through the Sahara into Libya, across the ocean and into Malta and Italy. The migrants come from Somalia, from Chad, from Senegal, from Nigeria and from all over North and West Africa.

The journey across the Mediterranean in small and usually overcrowded boats is perilous and many have sunk. If they are intercepted by the Italian navy the migrants are forced off the boats, often with clubs and batons that dispense electric shocks, and taken to prisons in Tripoli. In crass violation of international law no attempt is made to

ascertain whether or not the migrants are political refugees or to enquire into their health or where the parents of children may be.

From Tripoli they are taken to European funded migrant detention centres in places like the tiny village of Al Qatran out in the desert near the border with Chad and Niger. Al Qatran is 1,000 kilometres from Tripoli and it may take three days for captured migrants to be moved across that distance in trucks. In the detention centres there may be more than fifty people in a room. They sleep on the floor. The routine sadism that always occurs in any situation in which some people are given absolute power over others is endemic. There are beatings, rapes and extortion. Suicides are a common response as are mass jailbreaks in which many migrants have been killed by the Libyan police. But some have escaped out into the vastness of the Sahara to make what they can of sudden freedom without papers or money in a desert.

Blair's plan

It was in the early days of the 2003 Iraq war that Tony Blair first proposed the idea that migrants trying to enter Europe should be sent to 'transit processing centres' outside of Europe. There is a similar logic here to the way in which the United States has outsourced torture to countries like Egypt.

Muammar Gaddafi's early attempts to show that he would be able to take on the policing of Europe's borders were not a huge success. In August 2004 a plane was chartered to deport 75 captured Eritrean migrants from Tripoli but the passengers seized control of the plane in mid flight and diverted it to Khartoum where the UNHCR recognised 60 of them as legitimate political refugees.

But on the same day that the European union lifted its economic sanctions and arms embargo on Libya in October 2004 it was agreed to engage with Libya on 'immigration matters' and a technical team was sent to Libya the following month. The United Kingdom and France both moved quickly to sell weapons to Libya and in 2008 Italy and Libya signed The Treaty of Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation between the Italian Republic and Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya in which Italy agreed to invest five billion dollars in Libya in exchange for, amongst other things, a Libyan agreement to undertake to police migration into Europe via Libya. Silvio Berlusconi declared that closer relations with Libya are about "fewer illegal immigrants and more oil." Since then Berlusconi and Gaddafi have, through the investment arms of their respective family trusts, become co-owners of a major communications company.

This sort of personal connection between an elected politician in the West and a despot elsewhere is hardly unique. The French Foreign Minister Michele Alliot-Marie spent her Christmas holiday in Tunisia as a guest of a businessman with close ties to Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali as the protests against Ben Ali were gathering strength. The first response of the French state to the protests in Tunisia was to send arms to Ben Ali. The French Prime Minister Francois Fillon spent his Christmas holiday on the Nile as a guest of the Egyptian state. In March 2009 US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, commented, in a discussion about severe and routine human rights violations by

the Mubarak regime, that "I really consider President and Mrs. Mubarak to be friends of my family."

In recent years all sorts of European institutions beyond oil companies and security agencies made their own deals with the dictatorship in Tripoli. The London School of Economics accepted a £1.5m grant from the Gaddafi International Charity and Development Foundation for a 'virtual democracy centre'. The Foundation is headed by the same Saif al-Islam Gaddafi who recently went on to Libyan television to tell protesters that his father's government would 'fight to the last minute, until the last bullet'.

Moral leadership

The Europe of colonialism, slavery and genocide has no claim to moral leadership in this world. The Europe that backed the Mubarak dictatorship for thirty years and the Ben Ali dictatorship for twenty-three years has no claim to moral leadership in this world. The Europe that helped to smash Iraq in the invasion of 2003 has no claim to moral leadership in this world. The Europe that refused to allow the Haitian people to elect a leadership of its choosing by supporting a coup against that leadership in 2004 has no claim to moral leadership in this world. The Europe that has been directly responsible for the documented deaths of almost 14,000 migrants since 1993 has no claim to moral leadership in this world.

It is true enough that the modern form of democracy began in Europe with the French Revolution of 1789. But when African slaves in Haiti took the ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity seriously and won their own revolution in 1804 it immediately became clear that the French did not intend democracy to be for everyone. That has been the European position ever since.

To choose democracy is not to choose Europe and it is certainly not to choose the United States of America, which has overthrown democratically elected governments around the world when electorates

The Europe that backed the Mubarak dictatorship for thirty years and the Ben Ali dictatorship for twenty-three years has no claim to moral leadership in this world

Whatever pompous claims to the contrary come out of Washington and Brussels, these are not revolts for American or European values. On the contrary they are a direct challenge to those values

have had the temerity to elect the ‘wrong’ leaders. In fact, any serious commitment to democracy has to reject the moral and political authority of Europe and the United States of America. Any commitment to democracy has to assert, very clearly, that all people everywhere have the right to govern themselves according to their own will.

We cannot know the trajectories of the uprisings that have swept North Africa and the Middle East. But one thing is for sure. Whatever pompous claims to the contrary come out of Washington and Brussels, these are not revolts for American or European values. On the contrary they are a direct challenge to those values. They are revolts against a global power structure that is formed by an international alliance of elites with one of its key principles being the idea, the racist idea, that Arabs are ‘not yet ready’

for democracy. This, of course, is an echo of one of the common justifications for apartheid. But the plain fact of the matter is that anyone who says that anyone else isn’t yet ready for democracy is no democrat.

Ben Ali and Mubarak were little more than co-opted Bantustan leaders in a system of global apartheid. Gadaffi’s oil funded cruelty, megalomania and opportunism has taken him in many directions in his 42-year reign but have, in recent years, been leading him in the same direction. Democratising a Bantustan is progress. But democratising a Bantustan is not enough. The whole global system needs to be democratised. **CT**

Richard Pithouse teaches politics at Rhodes University. This article first appeared at the web site of the South African Civil Society Information Service – www.sacsis.org.za



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Call me if you want to save the planet

Fred Reed insists he is the answer to his country's problems

Hillary Billary Dock

The wench should watch the clock

The times they are a'changin'

The Pentagon runs amok

I fear that I shall have to take the helm of the nation, to see that the ship of state founders not on vast shoals of idiots. (This is a full-service column.) You may ask, "Fred, why do you think yourself competent to do this?" To which I reply, Consider what we have. Do you prefer assured disaster to a gleam of hope?

Now, to work.

The military: My first step will be to discard strategic imbecility as national policy, thus unemploying a great many strategic imbeciles. Henceforth the armed forces will concern themselves with defending the United States not Korea, Japan, Afghanistan-freaking-stan for god's sake, nor Europe nor the back side of the moon nor the nether reaches of the Crab Nebula. Just America. You know, that place between Canada and Mexico.

Now, how much military to we need to defend America, as distinct from remote galaxies and places no one in his right mind can spell? Very little. To invade the US properly, you need a border with it, which means Canada, which doesn't want the US, and Mexico, which doesn't need an army to get it. The other way to invade is with a Shores of Iwo

Jima fleet with some manner of John Wayne on it, being fiercely inarticulate and photogenic. No other country has, is building, or wants such a fleet and, if they, did land-based aircraft would make a gorgeous barbecue out of it way the hell and gone out to sea. We don't really need a navy at all, actually, navies being at best obsolescent and, in our case, usually getting us in trouble. These days, the fleet chiefly looks ridiculous threatening places that pay no attention to it.

Afghanistan: I would apply the exit strategy enunciated by the great James P. Coyne, who taught Clausewitz everything the old Kraut knew. The strategy is, "OK, on the plane. Now." The simplicity is breathtaking, its effectiveness certain. We've got no business being there, we're killing people who don't need killing, and nothing good can come of it.

Iraq: See above. Further, I will withdraw from South Korea, Japan, and NATO, on the grounds that they either have no enemies or can defend themselves perfectly well. NATO in particular only involves us in disaster, or we involve it in disaster, and I see no point in continuing to breastfeed it.

Next, I will give the navy three months to get anything it profoundly values out of Guantanamo, where we have no business being, and then lift the embargo, which is an expression of adolescent temper. I will then treat Cuba as what it is, an island of people

To invade the US properly, you need a border with it, which means Canada, which doesn't want the US, and Mexico, which doesn't need an army to get it

OUR SAVIOR

The principle here is that we don't need to be enemies with most of the people we are enemies with, but if we didn't have enemies we wouldn't know who we were or what to do in the morning

no worse than any other, who do not need stupid mistreatment by a large bratty neighbor. This would improve relations with Latin America, a good idea since we are decreasingly able to behave with normal meddlesomeness.

Next, I will essay the unthinkable for American diplomacy, namely cultivating some slight understanding of how others see things instead of always sending the Marines. I know, I know: I risk being called a commie homo prevert, and accused of hating America, and not being brainlessly truculent in the name of endocrine patriotism. But I will make this sacrifice for my country.

For example, Iran, which mysteriously seems not to like us. Why might Iranians not appreciate our enthusiasms for democracy and human rights? In 1953 the wretched CIA, always making trouble for us, overthrew the elected ruler and installed the Shah, a brutal bastard. What did we care? We were surfing at Malibu.

Then we supported our good ally Saddam Hussein against Iran in a bloody war started for us by Saddam, and now we freeze Iran's assets and threaten to bomb it, and we wreck its perfectly legal atomic program with funny viruses. How could that upset them? Baffling.

So I'll invite their Maximum Leader Ahmadinnerjacket to the fuehrerbunker on Pennsylvania Avenue. He is a murdering, repressive thug, like most of our allies, and deserves the same courtesies. I will say, "Listen...Shall I call you Ahma, or do you prefer Mr. Dinnerjacket?...anyway, I can't see any reason in all sprawling creation why Iran needs to be our enemy. Let's stop. It's stupid and, worse, boring. So we'll drop these dumb-ass sanctions and quit threatening you, and if you are doing something bad, stop, and you mind your business and we'll mind ours I know this part is inconceivable, but we'll do it. Is that a concept, or what?"

The principle here is that we don't need to be enemies with most of the people we are enemies with, but if we didn't have enemies we wouldn't know who we were or what to

do in the morning. Or how to get funding for the Five-Sided War Box.

Latin America: Here I will adopt another revolutionary principle, namely, don't get in their faces if you don't have to. More bluntly, under my rule we will keep our long intrusive noses out of other people's shorts. Stop telling Bolivians they can't chew coca leaves, which they have done forever, since it's none of our damn business what Bolivians chew. Rocks, grass, hog entrails, it's their call.

Now, I don't want to go too deeply into theoretical physics here but recently a couple of supposed American agents of ICE, the immigration blackguards, were ambushed deep in Mexico, and one killed. Hooha erupted, and the FBI is going to investigate. The Mexican press asked the obvious question, which is Why is Mexico afflicted by so many meddlesome gringo goofballs? It's our country, they say.

Anyway, MIT recently published an extensive peer-reviewed paper establishing that if you aren't in Mexico, or Iraq, you can't get killed there. It's physics. Show me one person killed in Mexico who was somewhere else at the time. Under my rule, we will stay where we belong. Which is to say, very few places.

Finally, I will adopt the realpolitik notion of backing the right horse. American policy to date has been to support the most sordid torturing dictator it can find, while singing America the Beautiful and Koom Bah Yah and We Shall Overcome. What if, instead of engaging in almost carnal intercourse with every godawful Central American general, whose hobby is pulling fingernails off Indians for the benefit of American corporations. we insisted that the United Fruits of the world (in the botanical sense) pay a decent wage, absorbed the additional twelve cents a pound for mangos, and had the Guats or whatever love us? Smart, yes. Happen? Not under that daffy blonde and her rat pack of Neoconservative dwarves. Under my administration, watch.

I'll take my rightful power soon. As soon as I finish this bottle of Padre Kino. **CT**

Fred Reed's
web site is
fredoneverything.net

Robot wars

Online astroturfing is more advanced and more automated than we'd imagined, says **George Monbiot**

Every month more evidence piles up, suggesting that online comment threads and forums are being hijacked by people who aren't what they seem to be. The anonymity of the web gives companies and governments golden opportunities to run astroturf operations: fake grassroots campaigns, which create the impression that large numbers of people are demanding or opposing particular policies.

This deception is most likely to occur where the interests of companies or governments come into conflict with the interests of the public. For example, there's a long history of tobacco companies creating astroturf groups to fight attempts to regulate them.

After I last wrote about online astroturfing, in December, I was contacted by a whistleblower. He was part of a commercial team employed to infest internet forums and comment threads on behalf of corporate clients, promoting their causes and arguing with anyone who opposed them.

Like the other members of the team, he posed as a disinterested member of the public. Or, to be more accurate, as a crowd of disinterested members of the public: he used 70 personas, both to avoid detection and to create the impression that there was widespread support for his pro-corporate arguments.

I'll reveal more about what he told me when I've finished the investigation I'm working on.

But it now seems that these operations are more widespread, more sophisticated and more automated than most of us had guessed. Emails obtained by political hackers from a US cyber-security firm called HB Gary Federal suggest that a remarkable technological armoury is being deployed to drown out the voices of real people.

As the *Daily Kos* has reported, the emails show that:

- companies now use “persona management software”, which multiplies the efforts of the astroturfers working for them, creating the impression that there's major support for what a corporation or government is trying to do.
- this software creates all the online furniture a real person would possess: a name, email accounts, web pages and social media. In other words, it automatically generates what look like authentic profiles, making it hard to tell the difference between a virtual robot and a real commentator.
- fake accounts can be kept updated by automatically re-posting or linking to content generated elsewhere, reinforcing the impression that the account holders are real and active.
- human astroturfers can then be assigned these “pre-aged” accounts to create

Emails obtained by political hackers from a US cyber-security firm called HB Gary Federal suggest that a remarkable technological armoury is being deployed to drown out the voices of real people

INTERNET PROPAGANDA

Software like this has the potential to destroy the internet as a forum for constructive debate. It makes a mockery of online democracy

a back story, suggesting that they've been busy linking and re-tweeting for months. No one would suspect that they came onto the scene for the first time a moment ago, for the sole purpose of attacking an article on climate science or arguing against new controls on salt in junk food.

- with some clever use of social media, astroturfers can, in the security firm's words, "make it appear as if a persona was actually at a conference and introduce himself/herself to key individuals as part of the exercise ... There are a variety of social media tricks we can use to add a level of realness to all fictitious personas"

But perhaps the most disturbing revelation is this. The US Air Force has been tendering for companies to supply it with persona management software, which will perform the following tasks:

- Create "10 personas per user, replete with background, history, supporting details, and cyber presences that are technically, culturally and geographically consistent. ... Personas must be able to appear to originate in nearly any part of the world and can interact through conventional online services and social media platforms."

- Automatically provide its astroturfers with "randomly selected IP addresses through which they can access the internet." [An IP address is the number which identifies someone's computer]. These

are to be changed every day, "hiding the existence of the operation." The software should also mix up the astroturfers' web traffic with "traffic from multitudes of users from outside the organization. This traffic blending provides excellent cover and powerful deniability."

- Create "static IP addresses" for each persona, enabling different astroturfers "to look like the same person over time." It should also allow "organizations that frequent same site/service often to easily switch IP addresses to look like ordinary users as opposed to one organization."

Software like this has the potential to destroy the internet as a forum for constructive debate. It makes a mockery of online democracy. Comment threads on issues with major commercial implications are already being wrecked by what look like armies of organised trollsw. The internet is a wonderful gift, but it's also a bonanza for corporate lobbyists, viral marketers and government spin doctors, who can operate in cyberspace without regulation, accountability or fear of detection. So let me repeat the question I've put in previous articles, and which has yet to be satisfactorily answered: what should we do to fight these tactics? **CT**

George Monbiot's latest book is "Bring On The Apocalypse"

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Chasing the financial piranhas

Why no jailings after Wall Street plunged the world into financial crisis? Blame the system, says **Danny Schechter**

Hats off to writer Matt Taibbi for staying on the Wall Street crime beat, asking in his most recent report in *Rolling Stone*: “Why Isn’t Wall Street in Jail?”

“Financial crooks,” he argues, “brought down the world’s economy – but the feds are doing more to protect them than to prosecute them.”

True enough, but that’s only part of the story. The *Daily Kos* called his investigation a “depressing read” perhaps because it suggests that the Obama Administration is not doing what it should to rein in financial crime.

Many of the lawyers he calls on to act come from big corporate law firms and buy into their worldview. They have no appetite to go after executives they know and naively hope will help speed our economic “recovery.”

The *DailyKos* should be more depressed by the failure of the progressive community – its own readers – to focus on these issues, and for not pressing the government to do the right thing. Without pressure from below, there is often little action from above.

There is no doubt that Administration policy gave crooks great latitude, as financial journalist Yves Smith explains, “The overly generous terms of the TARP, and the failure of Team Obama to force management changes on the industry in early 2009

was a fatal error. It has embedded and emboldened a deeply corrupt plutocracy.”

There is, however, much more to this story. It’s also more about institutions than individuals, more about a captured system that enables and covers up crime and, then, deflects attention away from the deeper problem.

Ten problems

You could see that when television host Bill Mahr pressed Taibbi to name the biggest Wall Street crooks, on his weekly political comedy show, he didn’t fully understand what we are really up against.

Here are ten factors that help explain the procrastination and rationalization for inaction. The government is not just to blame either. Several industries working together, through their firms and associations, associates, and well-paid operatives, collaborated over years to financialize the economy to their own benefit.

Personalizing bad guys makes for good TV without offering a real explanation.

When financial institutions and services became the dominant economic sector, they, effectively, took over the political system to fortify their power. It was a done incrementally, over years, with savvy, foresight and malice.

First, many of those who might later be

When financial institutions and services became the dominant economic sector, they, effectively, took over the political system to fortify their power. It was a done incrementally, over years, with savvy, foresight and malice

WHEN CRIME PAYS

Alan Greenspan and Ben Bernanke were repeatedly warned by underlings at the Federal Reserve Bank about pervasive predatory practices in the mortgage and Subprime markets and they chose to do nothing

charged with financial crimes and criminal fraud invested in lobbying and generous political donations to insure that tough regulations and enforcement were neutered before the housing bubble they promoted took off.

They did so in the aftermath of the jailing of hundreds of bankers after the S&L crisis, to guarantee that could never happen again when the next crisis hit.

In effect, their deregulation strategy also deliberately “decriminalized” the environment to make sure that practices that led to high profits and low accountability would be permissible and permitted.

Presto: The once illegal soon became “legal.”

The cops and watchdogs were taken off the beat. Anticipating and restraints, they engineered a low-risk crime scene in the way the Pentagon systematically prepares its battlefields. This permitted illicit practices, to be encouraged by CEOs in a variety of control frauds to keep profits up so that the executives could extract more revenue with obscene bonuses and compensation schemes.

Today’s proposed Republican cutbacks for the funding of regulatory bodies aims to undercut recently passed financial reforms. Warns one Commissioner of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, if the budget is slashed, “there would essentially be no cop on the beat...we could once again risk another calamitous disintegration.” He added, according to a *New York Times* report, “the process will mean nothing, squat, diddley ... if we get cut we’re going to be in a world of hurt.” The GOP knows exactly what the intended consequences of its plans are.

Second, the industry invented, advertised and rationalized exotic financial instruments as forward looking “innovation” and “modernization” to disguise their intent while enhancing their field or maneuver. This was part of creating a shadow banking system operating below the radar of effective monitoring and regulation. There was

no focus on controlling the out-of-control power of the leverage-hungry gamblers at unregulated hedge funds.

B, the industry promulgated economic theories and ideologies that won the backing of the economics profession which largely did not see the crisis coming, making those who favored a crackdown on fraud appear unfashionable and out of date. As economist James Galbraith testified to Congress:

“...The study of financial fraud received little attention. Practically no research institutes exist; collaboration between economists and criminologists is rare; in the leading departments there are few specialists and very few students. Economists have soft-pedaled the role of fraud in every crisis they examined, including the Savings & Loan debacle, the Russian transition, the Asian meltdown and the dot.com bubble. They continue to do so now.”

Foxes guarding the chicken coop

Fourth, prominent members of the financial services industry were appointed to top positions in the government agencies that should have cracked down on financial crime, but instead looked the other way. The foxes were indeed guarding the chicken coop guiding institutions that tolerated, if not enabled, an environment of criminality.

Alan Greenspan and Ben Bernanke were repeatedly warned by underlings at the Federal Reserve Bank about pervasive predatory practices in the mortgage and Subprime markets and they chose to do nothing. Now Greenspan acknowledges pervasive fraud but decries the lack of enforcement while Bernanke wants to run a Consumer Protection Agency after ignoring consumer complaints for years. Even as the FBI denounced “an epidemic of mortgage fraud” in 2004, their white-collar crime units were downsized.

Fifth, the media was complicit, seduced, bought off and compromised. As the hous-

ing bubble mushroomed in the very period that the media was forced to downsize, dodgy lenders and credit card companies pumped billions into advertising in radio, television and the internet almost insuring that there would be no undue media investigations. Financial journalists increasingly embedded themselves in the culture and narrative of Wall Street by hyping stocks and CEOs.

The “guests” routinely chosen by media outlets to explain the crisis were often part of it, charges Jim Hightower, “Many of the ‘experts’ whom I read or see on TV seem clueless, full of hot air. Many of their predictions turn out wrong even when they seem so self-assured and well-informed in making them.”

His advice: “Don’t be deterred by the finance industry’s jargon (which is intended to numb your brain and keep regular folks from even trying to figure out what’s going on.”

Sixth, politicians and corporate lawyers fashioned settlements of abuses that were exposed rather than prosecutions.

The government benefited by getting large fines while businessmen avoided jail. When exposed, this led to practices such as the deliberate engineering of mortgages to fail” being written off as a cost of doing business.

Financial executives were often rewarded with bonuses and huge compensation for practices that skirted or crossed the line of criminality.

Intentional violations of the spirit and letter of laws were justified because “everyone does it” by high priced legal firms that often doubled as lobbyists. Conflicts of interest were sneered at. Judges, dependent on industry donations for reelection looked the other way.

Seventh, as the economy changed and industries that were once separated began working together, regulations were not changed. Financial institutions worked

closely with Insurance companies and real estate firms. Yet law enforcement did not recognize this new reality.

Financial crime was still seen almost entirely under the framework of securities laws that are designed to protect investors, not workers or homeowners who suffered far more in the collapse. Cases are framed against individuals with a high standard of proving intent, not under RICO laws used to prosecute organized crime and conspiracies.

By defining crimes narrowly, prosecutions became few and far between, reports Reuters:

“Cases against Wall Street executives can be difficult to prove to the satisfaction of a jury because of the mind-numbing volume of emails, prospectuses, and memos involved in documenting a case.”

Criminal minds

Convicted financial criminal Sam Antar who appears in my film *Plunder* is contemptuous of how government tends to proceed in these cases, in part because they don’t seem to understand how calculated these crimes and their cover-ups are. He told me. “Our laws – innocent until proven guilty, the codes of ethics that journalists like you abide by – limit your behavior and give the white-collar criminal freedom to commit their crimes, and also to cover up their crimes.

“We have no respect for the laws. We consider your codes of ethics, and your laws, weaknesses to be exploited in the execution of our crimes. So the prosecutors, hopefully most prosecutors, are honest if they’re playing by the set of the rules; they’re hampered by the illegal constraints. The white-collar criminal has no legal constraints. You subpoena documents, we destroy documents; you subpoena witnesses, we lie. So you are at a disadvantage when it comes to the white-collared criminal. In effect, we’re economic predators. We’re serial economic predators; we impose a collective harm on society; time is always on our side,

Financial executives were often rewarded with bonuses and huge compensation for practices that skirted or crossed the line of criminality

WHEN CRIME PAYS

Why have the unions and left groups been mostly silent on this key issue?

not on the side of justice, unfortunately.”

Eighth, even as the economy globalized, and US financial firms spread their footprint worldwide, there was little internationalization of financial rules and regulations. Today, even as the French and the Germans propose such rules, Washington still opposes a tough and coordinated global regime of enforceable codes of conduct to insure ethical standards.

Overseas, in Greece and England, and other parts of Europe, there's been an indictment of American corporate predators, especially Goldman Sachs. They are being denounced as “financial terrorists” and discussed in terms of their links to various elite business formations like the Bilderberg Group.

Ninth, with the exception of a few polite inquiries by a softball Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission, there has been no hard-hitting intensive investigation in the United States of these crimes. While Senator Levin of Michigan did spend a day aggressively grilling Goldman Sachs on one deceptive practice, their defense was more telling about the real nature of the problem: “Everyone did it.” (Almost ten times as much money was spent investigating Bill Clinton's sex scandal.)

The case for criminality has still not achieved critical mass as an issue or become a dominant explanation for why the economy collapsed.

In fact, the “crime narrative” is still being sneered at or ignored even as the public in many surveys feel they have been robbed.

Tenth, a big disappointment in my count-down, is the role of the progressive critics of the crisis who also largely ignore criminality as a key factor and possible focus for a populist organizing effort.

They treat the crisis as if they are at a financial seminar at Harvard, focusing on the complexities of derivatives; credit default swaps and structured financial prod-

ucts in language that ordinary people rarely can penetrate. They argue that banks that should not be too big to fail, but rarely they are not too big to jail.

Few of the progressive activist groups stress the immorality of these practices, much less its criminality after all these years! There is little active solidarity even in the progressive community with the newly homeless or jobless.

Where are the active empathy, compassion and the caring for the many victims of financial crimes?

Muted response

The response to the crisis has been muted. There is little pressure from below in part because unions stress their own issues and tail after the Administration. The talk about the American dream, not Wall Street's scheme. The financial crimes task force that the Administration set up seems to mostly go after small fry

It is as if this crime crisis within the financial crisis does not exist.

Curiously, even as most media outlets and politicians refuse to discuss the pervasive fraud that did occur, the Administration is using the threat of prosecutions as a way of pushing a “global settlement” of all housing fraud to get the issue off the table. They are proposing a \$20 billion dollar deal to bury the problem.

The banks are saying this will hurt their investors and not bring relief to those facing the highest foreclosure rate in recent history. At the same time, as a quid pro-quo, there will be no major trials.

What should be done? By all means, workers should rally to protect their rights to have unions as they have in Wisconsin, but they should also realize that it is the banks that are ultimately to blame for the financial pressures behind the attacks they face. Pension funds have lost billions because of Wall Street scams. State governments have taken a big hit. The unions didn't cause the problem.

At the same time, why have the unions

and left groups been mostly silent on this key issue? Perhaps it is because they are fighting to keep what they have. The failure to press for economic justice for everyone makes their claims seem to be one only of self-interest. They need a broader view.

Ironically, the economic justice issues appeals to the anger in many diverse constituencies and could enlarge a real movement for financial accountability.

Even after the markets melted down, even after Wall Street bonus scandals and bailout disgraces, Wall Street has hardly been humbled. It is still spending a fortune on PR and political gun slinging with 25 lobbyists shadowing every member of Congress to scuttle real reform. Its arrogance is evident in an email the *Financial Times* reported was “pinging around” trading desks. It reads in part:

“We are Wall Street: It’s our job to make money. Whether it’s a commodity, stock, bond, or some hypothetical piece of fake paper, it doesn’t matter. We would trade baseball cards if it were profitable... Go ahead and continue to take us down, but you’re

only going to hurt yourselves. What’s going to happen when we can’t find jobs on the Street anymore? Guess what: We’re going to take yours.

“We aren’t dinosaurs. We are smarter and more vicious than that, and we are going to survive.”

Perhaps it’s not surprising, that in an act of preemptive anticipation, some years ago, Wall Street firms began financing companies that built and ran privatized prisons. As long as they can avoid incarceration, they can profit from the mass jailing of the poor.

When will we call a crime a crime? When will we demand jail-out, not just more bail-outs? Unless we do, and until we do, the people who created the worst crisis in our time will, in effect, get away with the biggest plunder in history. **CT**

Danny Schechter made the film Plunder The Crime of our Time. (Plunderthecrimeofourtime.com) Parts of this essay appear in his companion book The Crime of Our Time (Disinfo Books)

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