

JOE BAGEANT

1946-2011



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Marc Campbell, Tony Sutton

ColdType
The READER

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**STOP ARMING
DICTATORS.**

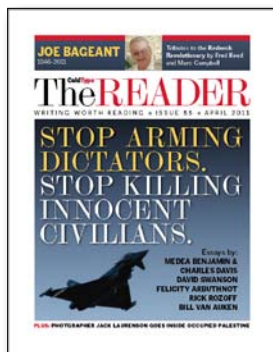
**STOP KILLING
INNOCENT
CIVILIANS.**



Essays by:
**MEDEA BENJAMIN &
CHARLES DAVIS
DAVID SWANSON
FELICITY ARBUTHNOT
RICK ROZOFF
BILL VAN AUKEN**

PLUS: PHOTOGRAPHER JACK LAURENSEN GOES INSIDE OCCUPIED PALESTINE

The ^{ColdType} READER



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Cover Photo:
RAF Typhoon takes off at RAF Coningsby, England.
Photo: Tony Sutton

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ISSUE 55

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COVER STORY: WAR ON LIBYA

- 3. STOP ARMING DICTATORS. STOP KILLING CIVILIANS
Medea Benjamin & Charles Davis
- 5. OUR TRILLION DOLLAR TURD SANDWICH
David Swanson
- 7. OIL, BANKS, THE UN AND TROUBLED WATERS
Felicity Arbuthnot
- 11. WAR IN LIBYA, CONTROL OF THE MEDITERRANEAN
Rick Rozoff
- 15. OBAMA ON LIBYA: A WAR FOR US INTERESTS
Bill van Auken
- 18. HURWITT'S EYE
Mark Hurwitt



TRIBUTE TO JOE BAGEANT

- 19. MY BROTHER JOE
Tony Sutton
- 20. MAN WHO CARED ABOUT PEOPLE
Fred Reed
- 22. POET AND REDNECK REVOLUTIONARY
Marc Campbell

- 29. THE GOLD AND THE STONE
Uri Avnery
- 32. NOT WAR, NOT PEACE
Jack Laurenson
- 40. VICTIM OF THE MILITARY EMPIRE
John W. Whitehead
- 43. IT'S STILL THEIR FAULT
Bernard Porter
- 47. BAIT AND SWITCH
Sam Pizzigati
- 49. LIBYA AND THE HOLY TRIUMVIRATE
William Blum
- 54. BENDIB'S WORLD
Khalil Bendib
- 55. A TALE OF TWO COUNTRIES
David Michael Green
- 60. NOT YOUR FATHER'S CULTURE WAR
Bill Berkowitz
- 62. SO THIS IS HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES
Damian Bathersby

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Stop arming dictators. Stop killing civilians

Don't we have more to offer the people of Libya than bombs and slaughter?, ask **Medea Benzamin** and **Charles Davis**

When all you have is bombs, everything starts to look like a target. And so after years of providing Libya's dictator with the weapons he's been using against the people, all the international community – France, Britain and the United States – has to offer the people of Libya is more bombs, this time dropped from the sky rather than delivered in a box to Muammar Gaddafi's palace.

If the bitter lesson of Iraq and Afghanistan has taught us anything, though, it's that wars of liberation exact a deadly toll on those they purportedly liberate – and that democracy doesn't come on the back of a Tomahawk missile.

President Barack Obama announced his latest peace-through-bombs initiative – joining ongoing US conflicts and proxy wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia – by declaring he could not “stand idly by when a tyrant tells his people that there will be no mercy, and... where innocent men and women face brutality and death at the hands of their own government.”

Within 24 hours of the announcement, more than 110 US Tomahawk cruise missiles were fired into Libya, including the capital Tripoli, reportedly killing dozens of innocent civilians – as missiles, even the “smart”

kind, are wont to do. According to the *New York Times*, allied warplanes with “brutal efficiency” bombed “tanks, missile launches and civilian cars, leaving a smoldering trail of wreckage that stretched for miles.”

“[M]any of the tanks seemed to have been retreating,” the paper reported. That's the reality of the no-fly zone and the mission creep that started the moment it was enacted: bombing civilians and massacring retreating troops. And like any other war, it's not pretty.

While much of the media presents an unquestioning, sanitized version of the war – cable news hosts more focused on interviewing retired generals about America's fancy killing machines than the actual, bloody facts on the ground – the truth is that wars, even liberal-minded “humanitarian” ones,

entail destroying people and places. Though cloaked in altruism that would be more believable were we dealing with monasteries, not nation-states, the war in Libya is no different. And innocents pay the price.

Easier, safer way

If protecting civilians from evil dictators were the goal, though – as opposed to, say, safeguarding natural resources and the investments of major oil companies – there's an easier, safer way than aerial bombard-

While much of the media presents an unquestioning, sanitized version of the war the truth is that wars, even liberal-minded “humanitarian” ones, entail destroying people and places



**THE WAR
ON LIBYA**

In 2009 alone, European governments – including Britain and France – sold Libya more than \$470 million worth of weapons, including fighter jets, guns and bombs

ment for the US and its allies to consider: Simply stop arming and propping up evil dictators. After all, Libya's Muammar Gaddafi reaped the benefits from Western nations all too eager to cozy up to and rehabilitate the image of a dictator with oil, with those denouncing him today as a murderous tyrant just a matter of weeks ago selling him the very arms his regime has been using to suppress the rebellion against it.

In 2009 alone, European governments – including Britain and France – sold Libya more than \$470 million worth of weapons, including fighter jets, guns and bombs. And before it started calling for regime change, the Obama administration was working to provide the Libyan dictator another \$77 million in weapons, on top of the \$17 million it provided in 2009 and the \$46 million the Bush administration provided in 2008.

Meanwhile, for dictatorial regimes in Yemen, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, US support continues to this day. On Saturday, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton even gave the US stamp of approval to the brutal crackdown on protesters in Bahrain, saying the country's authoritarian rulers "obviously" had the "sovereign right" to invite troops from Saudi Arabia to occupy their country and carry out human rights abuses, which included attacks on injured protesters as they lay in their hospital beds.

Corrupt tug

In Yemen, which has received more than \$300 million in military aid from the US over the last five years, the Obama administration continues to support corrupt thug and president-for-life Ali Abdullah Saleh, who recently ordered a massacre of more than 50 of his own citizens who dared protest his rule. And this support has allowed the US can carry out its own massacres under the auspices of the war on terror, with one American bombing raid last year taking out 41 Yemeni civilians, including 14 women and 21 children, according to Amnesty International.

Rather than engage in cruise missile liberalism, Obama could save lives by immediately ending support for these brutal regimes. But for US administrations, both Democratic and Republican, arms sales appear to trump liberation. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute documented that Washington accounted for 54 percent of arms sales to Persian Gulf states between 2005 and 2009.

Last September, the *Financial Times* reported that the US had struck deals to provide Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Oman with \$123 billion worth of arms. The repressive monarchy of Saudi Arabia accounts for over half that figure, with it set to receive \$67 billion worth of weapons, including 84 F-15 jets, 70 Apache gunships, 72 Black Hawk helicopters, 36 light helicopters and thousands of laser-guided smart bombs – the largest weapons deal in US history.

Instead of forking over \$150 million a day to the weapons industry to attack Libya or selling \$67 billion in weapons to the Saudis so they can repress not just their own people, but those of Bahrain, we – the ones being asked to forgo Social Security to help pay for empire – should demand those who purport to represent us in Washington stop arming dictators in our name. That might drain some bucks from the merchants of death, but it would give nonviolent protesters throughout the Middle East a fighting chance to liberate themselves.

The US government need not drop a single bomb in the Middle East to help liberate oppressed people. All it need do is stop selling bombs to their oppressors. **CT**

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Our billion dollar turd sandwich

David Swanson on the madness of militarism

So President Obama has been quoted calling his war in Libya a turd sandwich, while Juan Cole calls it philanthropy, and Ed Schultz praises it as vengeance against this month's Adolf Hitler. The last time we bombed this particular Hitler we took out his daughter, among other people.

How is Schultz's spitting mad hatred as war justification squared with Cole's humanitarian generosity? The answer is easy. They prefer different condiments on their turd sandwiches. Which is why wars are always packaged in multiple and mutually contradictory propaganda campaigns.

Obama's advisors are almost certainly telling him that LBJ and Nixon were right to be terrified of "losing" a war. Of course refusing to "lose" a war cost both of them the presidency. Bush refused to "lose" in Iraq for years, handed that function to Obama, and credit for it is about all Obama has to ride on now. Two-thirds of Americans are demanding that we hurry up and "lose" in Afghanistan. Pollsters say Americans have turned against the Libya war faster than any previous war. And all Obama wants to know is whether he can supersize his turd sandwich.

This is the madness of militarism of which that gentleman spoke whom Obama told us had been wrong back in Oslo when the

2009 Nobel Peace Prize was being pissed on – to continue the theme of human waste. "I never intend to adjust myself to the madness of militarism," said King. That's OK, though, because it adjusted to him. A gun took him out, and a whitewashed history erased his opposition to wars and plutocracies.

That's the logic to be found here: might makes right. War is peace. Non-combat troops do battle with armed civilians. Military aid is our leading charitable organization.

Disregarding Congress

A UN resolution means we can disregard Congress. You go on recess, you lose. The war's already started now. In fact, we've already declared mission accomplished. So, like Guantanamo and Iraq and investment scams and health insurance abuses, it's "over." So, don't try to stop it! And if you do, warns Hillary, we'll ignore you, just like my husband did a dozen years back. Then you'll be as irrelevant as the UN in 2003, until we have a use for you.

Congress isn't even needed for funding. The Pentagon has paused in its eternal screeching lamentations of poverty and near financial collapse to launch a billion dollar turd sandwich with its pocket change, in the same moment as the GAO spots another \$70 billion the military has flushed away. And

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Demonizing one bad dude is wonderful propaganda for yahoos, but one bad dude only controls people who are willing to be controlled, and there are good chances they have motivations other than personal devotion

Obama has secretly directed the CIA to feel free to secretly arm the Contras – I mean the Rebels. Times might be tough, but an “intelligence” operation has enough spare cash lying around to arm an army sufficient to take out another army that we helped arm in the past (the past being a couple of months ago).

So the UN gets us around Congress, and the CIA gets us around the UN. But how is it still “us”? Isn’t it just Captain Peace Prize and Ed “I just swallowed a turd sandwich” Schultz? Or won’t it be soon? If we put the top guy at the CIA in charge of the military and the military’s star spokesgeneral in charge of the CIA, who’ll remember they aren’t the same thing? Probably the same 0.01% of Americans who notice that the War Powers Act doesn’t let presidents have wars for 60 days no matter how many times that horseshit is stuck between two slices of wheat bread. Or at least the 0.01% of THAT crowd who notice that the same bans on warfare apply even when it’s merely a kinetic military activity in support of an overseas contingency operation.

When it comes to believing your own

overpriced lunch doesn’t smell, probably nothing tops the process through which war propagandists come to believe that taking out a single person will establish peace. How’d that work in Iraq? Demonizing one bad dude is wonderful propaganda for yahoos, but one bad dude only controls people who are willing to be controlled, and there are good chances they have motivations other than personal devotion.

Gaddafi’s strength is his nonsensical claim to opposing empire. Attacking him with imperial weapons is the ideal way to empower him to the greatest extent possible, and to empower any movement that survives his martyrdom.

Investment in weapons and bad governments is destroying the US economy, and the US government claims to be broke. Dumping more dollars into the same hole is the ideal way to further the collapse. We call the result winning the future. **CT**

David Swanson is the author of a book that was written with the purpose of avoiding having to explain any more war lies:
<http://warisalie.org>

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Oil, banks, the UN and troubled waters

Felicity Arbuthnot finds dark forces at work in the UN ‘crusade’ against Gaddafi

“America is not – and never will be – at war with Islam.” (President Barack Hussein Obama, Al-Azar University, Cairo, 4th June 2009.)

George W. Bush embarked on the casual snuffing out of uncounted, unique, human lives in majority Muslim populations, chillingly called it a “Crusade.” President Barack Hussein Nobel Obama did not go that far, he left that to the French Foreign Minister, Claude Gueant who, on 21st March, praised President Nicholas Sarkozy for having: “headed the Crusade ...”

For the “change we can believe in” President, reducing another ancient land of eye watering archaeological gems, massive oil and water resources and a population of six million – little more than Scotland – it is, reportedly, a “turd sandwich.”

Humanity is not “at the crossroads.” It is on the Cross, scourged, nailed (in all senses) and utterly inconsequential, in face of murdering, marauding, looting Empire.

When President Obama: “updated the American people on the international effort we have led in Libya”, on 29th March, he stated that: “we are naturally reluctant to use force to solve the world’s many challenges” and referred to: “our interests ...” be-

ing: “at stake.” Reluctance would be a first. America’s bombing for “interests” would be an encyclopaedia.

Colonel Gaddafi, had, of course, stated the President: “denied his people freedom, exploited their wealth, murdered opponents at home and abroad, and terrorized innocent people around the world ...” busy man. Heaven forbid “NATO’s” blitzkrieg should send the occasional shiver down a spine.

However, interestingly, at the end of March, a report was due to be presented by the UN Human Rights Council leading to a resolution commending Libya’s progress in

a wide aspect of human rights. Numerous quotes from UN diplomatic delegations of many countries commented. Citations included “... achieving a high school enrolment rate and improvements in the education of women”, Libya’s “ ... serious commitment to, and

interaction with, the Human Rights Council ... enhanced development of human rights ... while respecting cultural and religious traditions.”

Also mentioned was “ ... establishment of the national independent institution entrusted with promoting human rights, which had many of the competencies set out in the Paris Principles.” The country had “become party to many human rights conventions and had equipped itself with a number of in-

Interestingly, at the end of March, a report was due to be presented by the UN Human Rights Council leading to a resolution commending Libya’s progress in a wide aspect of human rights



While many respected oil experts have argued that since so many western energy companies operate in Libya, this is not about oil, there are some points worth pondering

stitutions, national, governmental and non governmental tasked with promoting human rights ...”

The country was commended “for the progress made in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, namely universal primary education (and) firm commitment (to) health care.” There was “praise” for “cooperation with international organizations in combating human trafficking and corruption ..” and for cooperation with “the International Organization for Migration.”

“Progress in enjoyment of economic and social rights, including in the areas of education, health care, poverty reduction and social welfare” with “measures taken to promote transparency”, were also cited. Malaysia “Commended the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya for being party to a significant number of international and regional human rights instruments.” Promotion “of the rights of persons with disabilities” and praise for “measures taken with regard to low income families”, were cited.

In May 2010, Libya had also been voted on to the UN Human Rights Council by a veritable landslide, 155 of 192 UN General Assembly votes. As noted previously Pratt Pro¹ Libya comes top in Africa on the Human Development Index, which measures longevity (the longest) infant mortality (the lowest) education, health services, well being.³

All that said, before this publication is flooded with complaints about the writer’s naivety, “propagandist flights of fancy” (an orchestrated old favourite) or whatever, some of the countries making positive recommendations regarding Libya did not have the most shining human rights records. But then the US, UK, and NATO member countries pontificate from the high moral molehills of the mass graves of the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, overtly, and Yemen, Somalia and other countries, covertly. And of course there is Guantanamo, Bagram, Abu Ghraib, rendition flights and secret torture programmes and prisons across the globe for US., UK., convenience.³

Further, in a train wreck of factual inaccuracies in President Obama’s speech, a (possibly) Freudian slip crept in. “Benghazi”, he said, was: “a city nearly the size of Charlotte” in danger of suffering “a massacre (staining) the conscience of the world.”

A quick check shows that Charlotte, North Carolina: ‘has a major base of energy orientated organisations and has become known as “Charlotte, USA – The New energy Capital.” In the region there are 240+ companies directly tied to the energy sector ... Major players are AREVA, Babcock and Wilcox, Duke Energy, Electric Power Research Institute, Fluor, Metso Power, Piedmont Natural Gas, Siemens Energy, Shaw Group, Toshiba, URS Corp., and Westinghouse. The University of North Carolina at Charlotte has a reputation in energy education and research and its “Energy Production and Infrastructure Center” trains energy engineers and conducts research.” (Wikipedia.)

While many respected oil experts have argued that since so many western energy companies operate in Libya, this is not about oil, there are some points worth pondering. All companies operating in Libya must have Libyan partners, entitled to 35% of profits.⁴ Trading is via the Libyan Central Bank, in the Libyan Dinar, not US\$. The Libyan Central Bank is also independently outside the IMF and the World Bank.

There are only five nations without a Rothschild model central bank: North Korea, Iran, Sudan, Cuba and Libya.

There were two others: Afghanistan and Iraq, but they were gobbled up by the international banking system within a heartbeat of the invasions.

“It has always been about gaining control of the central banking system in Libya. Oil is just a profitable side issue like every other state asset that is waiting in Libya to be privatized and sold off to multinational corporations like Bechtel, GE, and Goldman Sachs. Oil is important and it is certainly a target but it isn’t the driving force behind these global wars for profit. Banking is.”⁵

That said, as President Obama was busy

being inaugurated, Colonel Gaddafi (January 2009) was considering nationalizing “US oil companies, as well of those of UK, Germany, Spain, Norway Canada and Italy. “Oil should be owned by the State at this time, so we could better control prices by the increase or decrease in production”, stated the Colonel. ⁶

So how does the all tie together? Libya, in March being praised by the majority of the UN for human rights progress across the board, to being the latest, bombarded international pariah? A nation’s destruction enshrined in a UN Resolution?

The answer lies in part with the Geneva based UN Watch.⁷ UN Watch is : “a non-governmental organization whose mandate is to monitor the performance of the United Nations.” With Consultative Status to the UN Economic and Social Council, with ties to the UN Department of Public Information, “UN Watch is affiliated with the American Jewish Committee.” (AJC.)

Among those involved in UN Watch are Co-Chair, AJC’s David A. Harris. Core values: “AJC has long believed that the development of a comprehensive US, energy program is essential to the economic and social well-being of our country.” Their website is an exceptionally instructive listen and read.⁸

Ambassador Alfred Moses, former US Ambassador to Romania, Heads UN Watch. His company, Secure Energy’s Mission: “Improving US., Energy security”, “Securing America’s Energy Future.”⁹

Board Member Ruth Wedgwood is : “an international law expert ... at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) a former member of Donald Rumsfeld’s Defence Policy Board (formerly headed by Richard Perle.) Closely associated with “a number of neo-conservative and rightist pro-Israeli groups – including Freedom House, UN Watch and Benador Associates – a neo-con dominated public relations firm.” She “has been a vocal advocate of the war on terror ... strong defender of the Patriot Act and decision to invade Iraq.”¹⁰

Executive Director Hillel Neuer, has served

as law clerk to the Supreme Court of Israel, is a Graduate Fellow at the Shalem Center think tank and holds a host of law degrees. In addition to extensive human rights legal Advocacies and Testimonies, as associate in the international law firm of Paul Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton and Garrison llp., (New York) ,“He was associate in the legal team that successfully represented Raytheon Company in various claims against Hughes Electronics Corporation.” Neuer was also instrumental in achieving victory for the California Public Utilities Commission in: “various disputes with Pacific Gas and Electric Company ...”¹¹

Speakers at events hosted by the company have included Hillary “I met the rebel leader in Paris” Clinton¹³ and Vernon Jordan, former political advisor to Bill “I would be inclined to arm the rebels” Clinton.¹³

The UN Watch’s relentless campaign to remove Libya from the Human Rights Council began in May 2010: “.. working closely with Libyan dissident Mohamed Eljahmi.”(see 7) Mr Eljahmi is: “... a Libyan/American human rights activist. He is a co-founder and former Communication Officer of American Libyan Freedom Alliance. ALFA was founded 2003 to help educate and inform US government and media about Libya. Mr. Eljahmi actively educates and informs US government, national and international media and NGOs about Libyan affairs.”¹⁴

An aspect of especial ire for UN Watch has been Libya’s place on the five member investigation by the Human Rights Council on the use of mercenaries. Given their woeful excesses from Blackwater’s (now Xe) shoot ups to CACI’s man-management at Abu Ghraib (then there’s Paravant, an Xe subsidiary at Bagram; Guantanamo and KBR) it is a supreme irony that UN Watch’s cry of “foul” over Libya has won out, as the US place on the Council is unsullied. (Libya was suspended from the Human Rights Council on 25th February this year.) And did Libya employ “black African mercenaries”, to fight the rebels? In the fog of disinformation, certainties are scarce, but it is a story which would seem to be unravelling.

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Looking at it all, it is impossible not to think the truth of an attack of over thirty nations on a country of six million is buried deeper than Libya's aquifers

Then there is the water. Gaddafi's project to make Libya's vast desert bloom, has been dubbed by some "The eighth wonder of the world." A succinct overview cites "... the large quantities of water in Libya deep beneath the desert ... Libya's Great Man-Made River Project. A project worth 33 billion dollars. The value of the small reservoirs is about 70,000,000,000,000 dollars."¹⁵ When the project was announced in September 1991, London and Washington were reported to be "ballistic." At a ceremony attended by Arab and African heads of state, foreign diplomats and delegations, including President Mubarak of Egypt, King Hassan of Morocco, Gaddafi called it a gift to the Third World. He also said: "American threats against Libya will double."¹⁶

Libya also has \$6 billion in gold reserves, thought to be held within Libya.

Looking at it all, it is impossible not to think the truth of an attack of over thirty nations on a country of six million is buried deeper than Libya's aquifers. "Operation Odyssey Dawn", was well named. An odyssey indeed. Odysseus's tortured journey lasted ten years.

End Note

Libyan rebels in Benghazi said they have created a new national oil company to replace the corporation controlled by leader Muammar Qaddafi whose assets were frozen by the United Nations Security Council.

The Transitional National Council released a statement announcing the decision made at a March 19 meeting to establish the "Libyan Oil Company as supervisory authority on oil production and policies in the country, based temporarily in Benghazi, and the appointment of an interim director general" of the company.

The Council also said it "designated the Central Bank of Benghazi as a monetary authority competent in monetary policies in Libya and the appointment of a governor to the Central Bank of Libya, with a temporary headquarters in Benghazi.

And of course, given Israel's chronic water shortage, Libya's abundant underground blessings, and the close geographical proximity of the two countries, there might be other regional advantages mooted in regime change. **CT**

Notes

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Felicity Arbuthnot was also senior researcher for John Pilger's award-winning documentary, "Paying the Price: Killing the Children of Iraq" and author, with Nikki van der Gaag, of "Baghdad" in the "Great Cities" series, for World Almanac Books (2006)

War on Libya, control of the Mediterranean

Rick Rozoff looks for reasons behind NATO's war on Libya

A year after assuming the post of president of the French Republic in 2007, and while his nation held the rotating European Union presidency, Nicolas Sarkozy invited the heads of state of the EU's 27 members and those of 17 non-EU Mediterranean countries to attend a conference in Paris to launch a Mediterranean Union.

In the words of Britain's *Daily Telegraph* regarding the subsequent summit held for the purpose on July 13, 2008, "Sarkozy's big idea is to use imperial Rome's centre of the world as a unifying factor linking 44 countries that are home to 800 million people."

Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, however, announced that his nation would boycott the gathering, denouncing the initiative as one aimed at dividing both Africa and the Arab world, and stating:

"We shall have another Roman empire and imperialist design. There are imperialist maps and designs that we have already rolled up. We should not have them again."¹

Shifting focus

The unprecedented summit was held with the intention of "shift[ing] Europe's strategic focus towards the Middle East, North Africa and the Balkans."²

Less than three years later Sarkozy's Mirage and Rafale warplanes were bombing Libyan government targets, initiating an ongoing war being waged by France, the United States, Britain and what the world news media refer to as an international coalition – 12 members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the emirate of Qatar – to overthrow the Gaddafi government and implant a more pliant replacement.

The Mediterranean Sea is the main battle front in the world currently, superseding the Afghanistan-Pakistan war theater, and the empire of the new third millennium – that of the US, the world's sole military superpower in the words of President Barack Obama in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, and its NATO partners – is completing the transformation of the Mediterranean into its mare nostrum.

The attack on Libya followed by slightly more than three weeks a move in the parliament of the Eastern Mediterranean island nation of Cyprus to drag that state into NATO's Partnership for Peace program³, which if ultimately successful would leave only three of twenty nations (excluding microstate Monaco) on or in the Mediterranean Sea not full members of NATO or beholden to it through partnership entanglements, including those of the Medi-

Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, however, announced that his nation would boycott the gathering, denouncing the initiative as one aimed at dividing both Africa and the Arab world



The Mediterranean has been history's most strategically important sea and is the only one whose waves lap the shores of three continents

terranean Dialogue (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia): Libya, Lebanon and Syria.

NATO membership and partnerships obligate the affected governments to open their countries to the US military. For example, less than a year after becoming independent Montenegro had already joined the Partnership for Peace and was visited by then-commander of US Naval Forces Europe Admiral Harry Ulrich and the submarine tender Emory S. Land in an effort "to provide training and assistance for the Montenegrin Navy and to strengthen the relationship between the two navies."⁴ The next month four NATO warships, including the USS Roosevelt guided missile destroyer, docked in Montenegro's Tivat harbor.

If the current Libyan model is duplicated in Syria as increasingly seems to be the case, and with Lebanon already blockaded by warships from NATO nations since 2006 in what is the prototype for what NATO will soon replicate off the coast of Libya, the Mediterranean Sea will be entirely under the control of NATO and its leading member, the US

Cyprus in the only European Union member and indeed the only European nation (except for microstates) that is – for the time being – not a NATO member or partner, and Libya is the only African nation bordering the Mediterranean not a member of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue partnership program.

Libya is also one of only five of Africa's 54 countries that have not been integrated into, which is to say subordinated to, the new US Africa Command (AFRICOM).

The others are:

- Sudan, which is being balkanized as Libya may also soon be.

- Ivory Coast, now embroiled in what is for all intents a civil war with the West backing the armed groups of Alassane Ouattara against standing president Laurent Gbagbo and under the threat of foreign military intervention, likely by the

AFRICOM- and NATO-supported West African Standby Force and possibly with direct Western involvement.⁵

- Eritrea, which borders Djibouti where some 5,000 US and French troops are based and which was involved in an armed border conflict with its neighbor three years ago in which French military forces intervened on behalf of Djibouti.

- Zimbabwe, which is among likely candidates for the next US-NATO Operation Odyssey Dawn-type military intervention.

The Mediterranean has been history's most strategically important sea and is the only one whose waves lap the shores of three continents.

Control of the sea has been fought over by the Persian, Alexandrian, Carthaginian, Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, Spanish, British and Napoleonic empires, in part or in whole, and by Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany.

Sixth Fleet in Naples

Since the end of World War Two the major military power in the sea has been the US. In 1946 Washington established Naval Forces Mediterranean, which in 1950 became the US Sixth Fleet and has its headquarters in the Mediterranean port city of Naples.

In fact the genesis of the US Navy was the Naval Act of 1794, passed in response to the capture of American merchant vessels off the coast of North Africa. The Mediterranean Squadron (also Station) was created in reaction to the first Barbary War of 1801-1805, also known as the Tripolitan War after what is now northwestern Libya. The US fought its first naval battle outside the Western Hemisphere against Tripolitania in 1801.

US Naval Forces Europe-Africa, also based in Naples, is assigned to the Sixth Fleet and provides forces for both US European Command and US Africa Command. Its commander is Admiral Samuel Locklear III, who is also commander of NATO's

Allied Joint Force Command Naples.

He has been coordinating US and NATO air and missile strikes against Libya from USS Mount Whitney, the flagship of the Sixth Fleet, as commander of Joint Task Force Odyssey Dawn, the US Africa Command operation in charge of US guided missile destroyers, submarines and stealth bombers conducting attacks inside Libya.

Admiral Gary Roughead, Chief of Naval Operations (the highest-ranking officer in the US Navy), recently stated that the permanent US military presence in the Mediterranean allowed the Pentagon, which “already was positioned for operations over Libya,” to launch Odyssey Dawn on March 19. “The need, for example in the opening rounds, for the Tomahawk strikes, the shooters were already in place. They were already loaded, and that went off as we expected it would.”

“That’s what you get when you have a global Navy that’s forward all the time... We’re there, and when the guns go off, we’re ready to conduct combat operations...”⁶

On March 22 General Carter Ham, the new chief of US Africa Command, visited the US air base in Ramstein, Germany and met with British, French and Italian air force leaders to evaluate the bombing campaign in Libya. He praised cooperation with NATO partners before the war began, stating, “You can’t bring 14 different nations together without ever having prepared for this before.”⁷

As the AFRICOM commander was in Germany, Defense Secretary Robert Gates was in Egypt to meet with Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, commander in chief of the Egyptian armed forces and chairman of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, to coordinate the campaign against Libya.

The Pentagon’s website reported on March 23 that forces attached to AFRICOM’s Task Force Odyssey Dawn had flown 336 air sorties, 108 of them launching strikes and 212 conducted by the US The

operations included 162 Tomahawk cruise missile attacks.

Admiral Roughead stated that he envisioned “no problem in keeping operations going,” as the Tomahawks will be replaced from the existing inventory of 3,200. Enough to level Libya and still have plenty left over for the next war.⁶

The defeat and conquest, directly or by proxy, of Libya would secure a key outpost for the Pentagon and NATO on the Mediterranean Sea.

The consolidation of US control over North Africa would have more than just regional repercussions, important as they are.

Network of bases

Shortly after the inauguration of US Africa Command, Lin Zhiyuan, deputy director of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army Academy of Military Sciences, wrote the following:

“By building a dozen forward bases or establishments in Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria and other African nations, the US will gradually establish a network of military bases to cover the entire continent and make essential preparations for docking an aircraft carrier fleet in the region.”

“The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) with the US at the head had [in 2006] carried out a large-scale military exercise in Cape Verde, a western African island nation, with the sole purpose of controlling the sea and air corridors of crude oil extracting zones and monitoring how the situation is with oil pipelines operating there.”

“[A]frica Command represents a vital, crucial link for the US adjustment of its global military deployment. At present, it is moving the gravity of its forces in Europe eastward and opening new bases in Eastern Europe.”

“The present US global military redeployment centers mainly on an ‘arc of instability’ from the Caucasus, Central and Southern Asia down to the Korean Penin-

Far more is at stake in the war with Libya than control of Africa’s largest proven oil reserves and subjugating the last North African nation not yet under the thumb of the US and NATO

Far more is at stake in the war with Libya than control of Africa's largest proven oil reserves

Rick Rozoff has been involved in anti-war and anti-interventionist work in various capacities for forty years. He is the manager of the Stop NATO international email list at: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/stopnato>

sula, and so the African continent is taken as a strong point to prop up the US global strategy.

"Therefore, AFRICOM facilitates the United States advancing on the African continent, taking control of the Eurasian continent and proceeding to take the helm of the entire globe."⁹

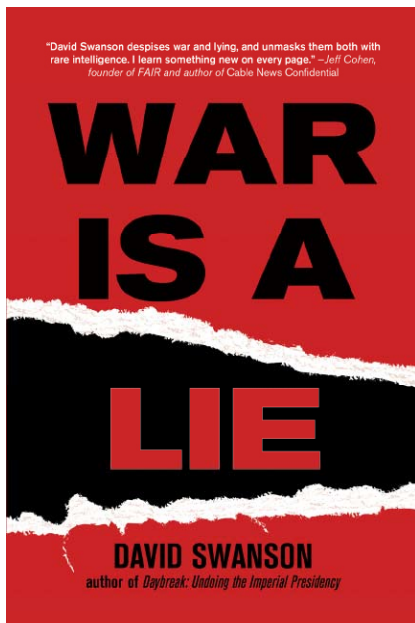
Far more is at stake in the war with Libya than control of Africa's largest proven oil reserves and subjugating the last North African nation not yet under the thumb of the US and NATO. Even more than domination of the Mediterranean Sea region.

CT

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"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

Obama on Libya: A war for US interests

Bill van Auken analyses the transformation of Gaddafi from friend of the West into a mad tyrant in a few months

In his first speech to the American public on the war against Libya, President Barack Obama Monday night made a case for US imperialism's right to carry out military aggression anywhere in the world where it sees its "interests and values" at stake.

Riddled with contradictions, evasions and lies, Obama's speech failed to enunciate in any comprehensible form what these "interests and values" are. Nor did it explain to the American people why and how he had arrogated to himself the right to launch a war without first explaining its causes and aims, much less seeking a vote of authorization from the US Congress.

Obama put forward a narrative of the events leading up to the Libyan intervention that was false from start to finish.

"For more than four decades," he said, "the Libyan people have been ruled by a tyrant – Muammar Gaddafi." Last month, he continued, "Libyans took to the streets to claim their basic rights," but Gaddafi began "attacking his own people." While Obama decreed that Gaddafi had lost "the legitimacy to lead," the Libyan leader refused to listen, prompting Washington to go the UN Security Council to obtain a resolution authorizing "all necessary measures to protect the Libyan people."

In the face of an imminent massacre in the

eastern Libyan city of Benghazi, Obama continued, he found himself compelled to authorize military force because "It was not in our national interest to let that happen."

First of all, this potted history fails to explain why it is that over the past decade successive US administrations established ever closer – and more lucrative – relations with the Libyan "tyrant." In the wake of September 11, 2001, his secret service became one of the most important regional allies of the CIA in the so-called "global war on terrorism." Bush's national security advisor, Condoleezza Rice, flew to Tripoli to cement the US-Libyan alliance.

Under Obama, relations became even more cordial. In April 2009, Hillary Clinton welcomed Gaddafi's son – and national security minister – to the State Department, proclaiming the administration's desire to "deepen and broaden our cooperation" and "build on this relationship."

Only last month, another of the dictator's sons, Khamis, spent four weeks in the US on a tour overseen by the State Department of US military installations. He was compelled to cancel a scheduled visit to the West Point military academy at the last minute in order to return to Libya to fight the so-called "rebels." Presumably, American "values" were placed on hold during the decade in which Clinton and her predecessors concentrated on

In the wake of September 11, 2001, his secret service became one of the most important regional allies of the CIA in the so-called "global war on terrorism"



The US Air Force along with smaller numbers of warplanes provided by Washington's NATO allies has functioned as the air force of the rebels, obliterating from the air troops loyal to the government in Tripoli, thereby clearing the way for the US-backed forces on the ground

currying favor – and signing oil deals – with Gaddafi.

The violence that erupted in Libya was not merely a matter of peaceful Libyan citizens taking to the streets for democracy and then being attacked by the regime. The country fractured along regional and tribal lines, with Western powers and intelligence agencies stoking an insurgency that developed along the lines of a civil war.

The claim that the regime was on the verge of launching a massacre of near genocidal proportions in the city of Benghazi is presented as fact, though there is no evidence that killing on any similar scale took place in other cities that had fallen to the rebels but were retaken by forces loyal to Gaddafi.

Obama claimed that the US military action had been carried out “to stop the killing” and had successfully “stopped Gaddafi’s deadly advance.” In reality, Washington has intervened in a civil war that it played no small role in fomenting. The US Air Force along with smaller numbers of warplanes provided by Washington’s NATO allies has functioned as the air force of the rebels, obliterating from the air troops loyal to the government in Tripoli, thereby clearing the way for the US-backed forces on the ground.

Having presented a false justification for the action, Obama went on to suggest that the US role was largely over, with his administration acting to “transfer responsibilities to our allies and partners,” namely NATO.

The patent aim of the speech was to present the Libyan intervention as something other than a US war. Even the staging of the address – held at the National Defense University before a captive audience of military officers, rather than in the White House Oval Office, and scheduled early so as not to interrupt prime time television – was meant to suggest that this was not something comparable to the US wars in Iraq or Afghanistan.

This is another deception. Placing military operations in Libya under formal NATO command no more removes the US from playing the decisive role than the formal command of NATO in Afghanistan makes the war there

any less of a US operation.

NATO is dominated by the US military, which will continue to play the decisive role in the attack on Libya. Even as the Obama administration was talking about the winding down of US military operations, the Washington Post reported Monday that the Pentagon has deployed AC-130 and A-10 attack planes. These are aerial gunships that are used to massacre ground troops with heavy machine guns and cannons. As the Post noted, the deployment was an indication that the US military has “been drawn deeper into the chaotic fight in Libya.”

Obama half-heartedly and dishonestly addressed some of the arguments made by opponents of the war. “They argue that there are many places in the world where innocent civilians face brutal violence at the hands of their government, and America should not be expected to police the world.”

While accepting that Washington cannot intervene “wherever repression occurs,” Obama insisted that “we must always measure our interests against the need for action.”

Presumably this explains why he sees no need to intervene against the brutal crackdown by the dictatorial monarchy in Bahrain, a US ally and host of the American Fifth Fleet, but instead supports it. Or why his administration takes a similar attitude toward the bloody repression unleashed by the Yemeni dictator, Ali Abdullah Saleh, who has given the CIA and US Special Forces permission to hunt down and kill alleged Islamist militants in his country.

Speaking to the media hours before the speech, Obama’s deputy national security adviser, Denis McDonough, made the same basic point a bit more bluntly: “I think it’s very important that we see each of these instances...in the region as unique. We don’t get very hung up on the question of precedent... because we don’t make decisions about questions like intervention based on consistency or precedent. We make them based on how we can best advance our interests in the region.”

In other words, when the US president

starts talking about “American values” and “principles of justice and human dignity,” hold on to your wallet. Such values and principles are invoked only when it provides a useful pretext for the pursuit of US interests.

And what are these interests in the case of Libya? While Washington had sought and to a large extent secured a profitable relationship with the Gaddafi regime, it had always viewed the Libyan leader – by dint of his anti-imperialist posturing and historical association with the struggle against colonialism – as an unreliable ally.

Moreover, the US ruling elite viewed with increasing alarm the signs that both Russia and China were establishing connections with Libya, in terms of oil deals, infrastructure projects and arms contracts, which threatened US interests in the Mediterranean and North Africa.

The aim of the military action is to install a more pliant regime – an out-and-out US puppet – in Tripoli.

Obama’s speech points to another reason why “American values” and US “humanitarianism” were triggered by the events in Libya. He suggested a key concern was that the supposedly imminent massacre in the country would have “driven thousands of additional refugees across Libya’s borders, putting enormous strains on the peaceful – yet fragile – transitions in Egypt and Tunisia.”

“The democratic impulses that are dawning across the region would be eclipsed by the darkest form of dictatorship, as repressive leaders concluded that violence is the best strategy to cling to power,” he said.

What hypocrisy! First, it must be recalled, the Obama administration opposed the uprisings of the people of Tunisia and Egypt, supporting Washington’s longtime allies, the dictators Ben Ali and Mubarak, until the last possible moment.

Second, eclipsing the struggles of the peoples of the region for their rights is precisely what the launching of a war by the US, in alliance with the former colonial powers in North Africa – Britain, France, Italy, Spain – is designed to do. It reaffirms imperialist he-

gemony in opposition to the revolutionary struggles of the working class and the oppressed masses.

As for other repressive rulers concluding that “violence is the best strategy to cling to power,” they only have to look to US allies like Bahrain, Yemen and Saudi Arabia to learn that lesson.

Much of Obama’s justification for the war was based on an invocation of Washington’s supposed unique role as the world’s guardian of moral values. “Some nations may be able to turn a blind eye to atrocities in other countries,” he said. “The United States is different. And as President, I refused to wait for the images of slaughter and mass graves before taking action.”

Who does he think he’s kidding? Just two days before his speech, US forces committed yet another atrocity in Afghanistan as its warplanes attacked a car and killed the two men, two women and three children riding in it.

As for “images of slaughter,” his administration and the Pentagon have gone to extraordinary lengths to suppress just such images now coming into public view and revealing the wanton killing of unarmed Afghans by a US Army unit that treated their dead bodies like trophies.

Obama tried to make an appeal to his supporters among Democratic liberals and the pseudo-left by contrasting the intervention in Libya – the first war begun under his administration – with the Iraq war launched by the Bush administration, which he is continuing.

First, he claimed that it was sanctified by the UN resolution and by “international support,” and second he insisted that it was not meant “to overthrow Gaddafi by force.” Instead, he said, US forces had been assigned merely “to protect the Libyan people from immediate danger, and to establish a no-fly zone.”

The second part of this claim is a patent lie. The US military has played the decisive role in clearing a path for the US-backed armed opposition to advance against Gaddafi’s forces. It has worked systematically to degrade the regime’s military forces and infrastructure, with

Just two days before his speech, US forces committed yet another atrocity in Afghanistan as its warplanes attacked a car and killed the two men, two women and three children riding in it

Obama is arguing for a rationale for US military aggression whenever and wherever it can serve to further the interests of America's ruling elite

the aim of promoting regime change.

As for the UN resolution, it itself is a violation of the most fundamental tenets of the UN Charter, which rules out intervention in the internal affairs and conflicts of member nations. The message is, war is just whenever such a resolution can be rammed through and other imperialist powers can be brought onboard.

In conclusion, Obama drew attention to “what this action says about the use of America’s military power, and America’s broader leadership in the world, under my presidency.” He noted that he would “never hesitate to use our military swiftly, decisively and unilaterally when necessary to defend our people, our homeland, our allies and our core interests.”

But, he added, military force was also justified in situations in which “our safety is not directly threatened, but our interests and values are.” He said that in circumstances ranging from “genocide” to “keeping the peace,

ensuring regional security, and maintaining the flow of commerce,” the US “should not be afraid to act.”

This represents a far more expansive assertion of the right to wage war than was made even under the Bush administration, which claimed, based upon lies, that its wars were necessitated by an imminent threat from terrorism and weapons of mass destruction.

Obama insists that no such threat is needed, merely a challenge to US “interests and values.”

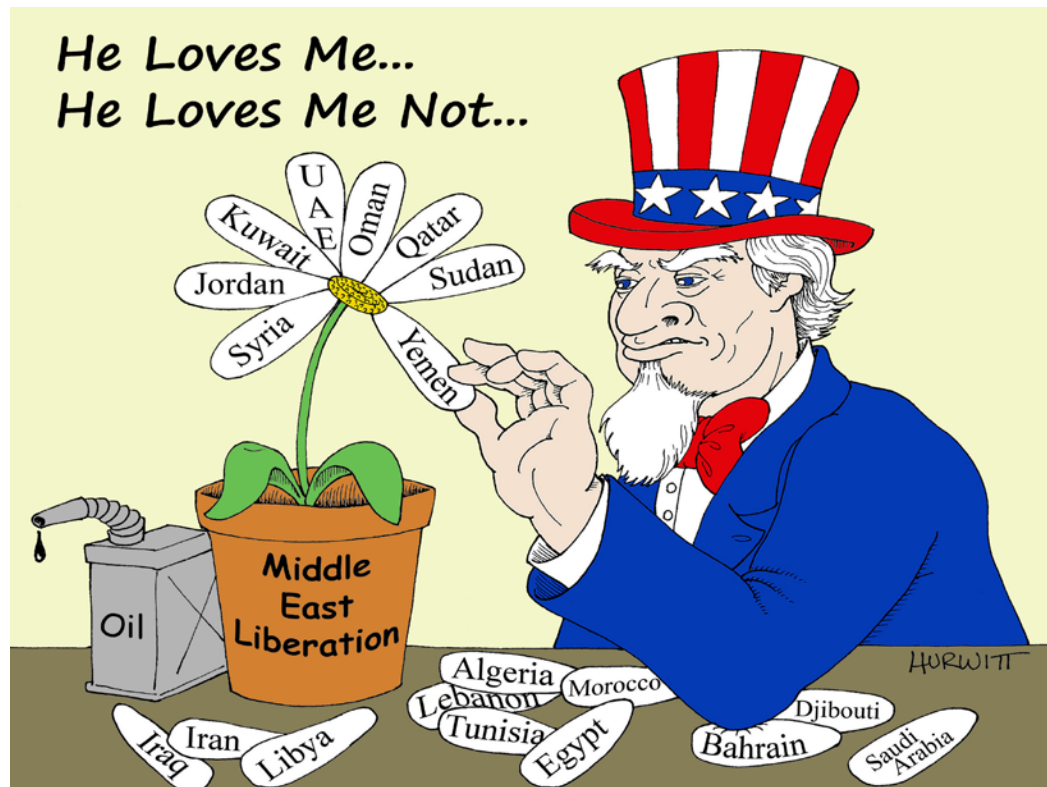
Is there any corner of the world where the US-based transnational banks and corporations do not have at stake such “interests and values” – up to and including the “flow of commerce?” Obama is arguing for a rationale for US military aggression whenever and wherever it can serve to further the interests of America’s ruling elite.

CT

Bill Van Auken is editor of the World Socialist Web Site at www.wsws.com

HURWITT'S EYE

Mark Hurwitt



My brother Joe

By **Tony Sutton**



JOE BAGEANT was my brother. Not in a literal sense, of course: we came from different countries, although with similar rural backgrounds, he from Virginia, I from Lincolnshire in England.

Not that I have any need for a surrogate brother, having five real ones, including a twin. Joe was my intellectual brother: we cared about the same things, shared the same, socialist, dreams and loved to articulate the thoughts that most men keep to themselves. The rhetoric did, occasionally, drift into the fanciful, such as the time he confided his plans for the future to Jools and I over a well-liquored dinner at his home in Winchester, Virginia. At the time Joe was splitting his life between there and Belize, but the latter haven was becoming too small for him. “I’m off to India,” he said, “to talk to the wise and holy men in the mountains and on the plains. And, in a few years, when I die, I’m going to be cremated in a blazing barge on the Ganges.” Me? I’d be happy for my remains to be packed in a refuse bag and dumped on a wooded slope back home in England, I replied.

Joe was immensely conscious of his mortality. Had been since the day we first communicated seven years ago this month, when

ColdType published *Covert Kingdom*, his first essay. “I have to do this stuff now,” he told me during the first of what became regular hours-long Skype conversations, “because I won’t be alive in two years.” A lifetime of smoking, boozing and ingesting exotic substances had left their marks on his lungs and the daily trip to his magazine job in Washington DC was compounding his woes.

Moving South, first to Belize and then Mexico – “Come and join me, there’s an empty apartment next door; we can booze all day and write away the remaining hours before oblivion strikes” – gave him a new lease on life, but our conversations always hit the forthcoming darkness. Fortunately Joe survived longer than he forecast and wrote a pair of epic books that will cement his name in the generations ahead; unfortunately he won’t be around to see the HBO TV adaptation of *Deer Hunting For Jesus*, of which he spoke so proudly a couple of years ago when the deal was announced. But he’d probably have hated it anyway.

And, unfortunately for editors and readers, there won’t be any more of his stupendous and monumentally-sensible essays landing in our email-boxes each month. Joe’s writing will probably never be matched, but somewhere there are other voices waiting to take over his mantle. If we can find them.

Goodbye brother, you left too soon. I’ll miss you, your words and your wisdom. **CT**

Joe was my intellectual brother: we cared about the same things, shared the same, socialist, dreams and loved to articulate the thoughts that most men keep to themselves

Tony Sutton
is editor of *The ColdType Reader*

JOE BAGEANT (1946-2011)

A man who cared about people, not money

By Fred Reed



JOE BAGEANT lived awhile down the lake here at Jocotepec, Mexico. We would visit him of an afternoon, my wife Vi and I, and find him, a bear of a man, a bearded mountain Buddha, writing on the porch of his one-room place in Ajijic. Always he wore his old fishing vest, in which I suspect he was born, and sometimes he carried a small laptop in one of its pockets. Usually we adjourned to the living room, which was also the bedroom, dining room, and salon. He would fetch bottles of local red, or make the jalapeño martinis he invented – there was a bit of mad chemist in him – and we would talk for hours of art, music, the news, politics, and people. Especially people. Sometimes he grabbed one of the guitars from the wall and sang blues songs. I guess growing up dirt poor in West Virginia puts that kind of music in you.

Joe could fool you. He talked slow and Southern, lacked pretensions, and you could talk to him for weeks without realizing how very damned smart he was.

One day we dropped in and he said he had just found that he had cancer. It went fast. He died on March 26.

Most who have heard of him have done so through his books, *Deer Hunting with Jesus* and *Rainbow Pie*. *Deer Hunting* is a curious work, a sleeper, that you can read the

first time without noticing that it deserves a high place in American letters. He tells of that huge class of unnoticed people in America, the white underclass of a thousand small towns and countryscapes, of Winchester, Virginia, where he lived and by implication to Waldorf, Maryland, and King George, Virginia, and, well, all over the Carolinas and the Cumberland Plateau and... everywhere. America thinks it is a middle-class country. It isn't. Joe knew.

Sociology and Twain

You wouldn't see it at first as sociology. Sociology is supposed to be written in drab, repetitive, half-literate, numbingly narcotic prose that would make an anvil beg for mercy. Joe was more Twain. Never eat cocktail weenies out of the urinal, he said, no matter how high the betting gets, while talking of people working whole lives in jobs without benefits or retirement and generally getting screwed. He had no patience for smug commentators in Washington who talked at half a million bucks a year of how America was a land of opportunity if only you worked hard. It isn't. He knew it. So did I, having grown up in rural King George County, Virginia, where the same people lived. He was exactly right.

He lived largely, coming out of the mountains and spending a year at the Corcoran School of Art, and drifting west where his

immense talent had him spending a lot of time with Hunter Thompson and the giants of the era and writing for all manner of publications. He believed deeply in booze and recreational drugs, which in those years was perhaps not a view unique to him. Shortly before his death he told Vi and me about having met some local Mexican folk here of Indian antecedents and going up in the hills one night to do mushrooms, and lying out half the night watching the stars swirl and dance.

He lived for years on an Indian reservation without electricity, worked as an editor for *Military History* magazine, likewise for an agribusiness magazine flogging pesticides, and told horrendous stories about what we actually eat. He was miserable at *Military History*, but needed to live.

He went to the internet, driven to write for whatever reasons drive people to write, and was 'found' by Dan Greenberg, the literary agent. Agents, and publishing houses in New York, are generally characterized by a lack of knowledge of writing, writers, America, and books, but Greenberg was lax in observing the traditions of his trade. He asked Joe to write a book. Which Joe did.

Popular in Australia

The consequences were odd. *Deer Hunting* became immensely popular in... Australia. It sold well in... England. It was translated into Spanish, twice, in Spain and...Argentina. Argentina? Joe was invited to 10 Downing Street, did countless radio interviews in Australia, a book tour in Italy. *Rainbow Pie* would go into German and Italian. It was by comparison ignored in America. Something is very wrong somewhere. I'm not sure what.

Maybe New York just doesn't like rural people, or doesn't know that there are any. And there was certainly a rural flavor to the man. Seeing a young woman with piercings in her nose and ears and God knows where-all, he commented that she seemed to have fallen face-first into a tackle box. His politics may have confused the chattering classes. Joe was the least racist guy who ever lived,

but he wrote about the white poor, whose very existence runs against hallowed doctrine. He was also explicitly in favor of the Second Amendment, noting that ninety pounds of dressed venison matters a whole lot to many families. These are families that reviewers of books have never heard of.

Joe described himself as a redneck socialist, and was. He was profoundly concerned with the fate of the people he wrote about, those who worked hard all their lives and ended up with nothing. Funny: I've never met a socialist who didn't care about others, or a capitalist who did. The truth is that a great many decent people are on the wrong side of the intelligence curve, don't come from families that send their young to university, and can't protect themselves from the corporate lawyers and bought legislatures. It wasn't a pose. He really and truly, honestly, demonstrably and implausibly, had no interest in money. He lived for some time in Hopkins Village in Belize, a seaside community of black, downscale garifuna and, when some money began to come in from *Deer Hunting*, regularly gave it away to help the locals. He didn't have a sainthood complex. He just didn't care. He wanted books, a guitar, friends, internet, wine, and occasional substances not approved of by DEA. No pretenses. Drop acid, not names.

When he had to choose between horrible surgery of dubious prospect, and just saying, "Nah," he said "Nah."

Joe was going to start Spanish lessons with Vi once he got past the paperwork of *Rainbow Pie*, but I guess that's not going to happen. We'll miss the throaty blues and mountain ballads, the discovery that Edward Hopper was our favorite painter, the jalapeño martinis barely drinkable though they were, and swapping tales of wild times and odd places. And the sheer good-hearted intelligence of the man.

It was great, brother. Hope to see you again in a few years. **CT**

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

He really and truly, honestly, demonstrably and implausibly, had no interest in money

JOE BAGEANT (1946-2011)

Poet and redneck revolutionary

By Marc Campbell



JOE BAGEANT was an extraordinarily gifted writer and thinker. Author of *Deer Hunting with Jesus* and countless essays and editorials on politics and society, Joe was a champion of human rights and a fearless critic of our government's mistreatment of its working class. His writing is imbued with compassion but also a caustic wit that laid bare the working class's tendency to do what is in their own worst interests. Watching Joe tear into the Teabaggers was like watching an extremely large feral cat play with its food. His death comes at a time when his voice is needed more than ever. I'm not sure there's anyone out there that can fill the void.

This is not an obituary. I'm not trying to give the reader an overview of Joe's life in a few paragraphs. I am sharing a few of my memories of Joe as a friend and writer.

The last time I saw Joe Bageant was in February of 2009. He helped save my life. I was in the middle of an agonizing divorce, a divorce I didn't want. I was struggling with the most profound despair I'd ever experienced, barely hanging on, trying to keep my business, my home and my marriage together. I could see the marriage part was doomed but I held on, pretending to the people who worked for me and my customers that everything was okay. It was a pathetic charade and one that was exhausting to maintain. Between bouts

of drinking and staring at walls, I somehow managed to create a theater of normalcy ... until I couldn't anymore.

While all my friends were telling me to do the responsible thing, to stick it out for the sake of maintaining control of my business and home, it was an unending nightmare trying to sustain a sense of order while suffering through an emotional apocalypse. Money, the house, the business didn't mean jack shit to me compared to having someone I deeply loved leave me, and leave ugly, after 18 years of being together. I knew I'd die by drink or my own hand if the pain continued.

It was in the darkest night of my dark night of the soul that I received a phone call from an old friend I hadn't heard from in at least a decade. It was Joe Bageant. He had no idea what I'd been going through, but I am convinced that somewhere deep down Joe had heard my sobs and felt my desperation. I told him of my situation and he gave me the only advice that made any real difference. Joe said "Marc, it's alright to run from your problems." I repeat, he said "Marc, it's alright to run from your problems." He was the only one of my friends to say what I had been thinking and feeling but was too emotionally conflicted to do: get the fuck out of Dodge, and get out now! And Joe backed it up by offering me his beach hut in Belize as a sanctuary. I packed my car and drove to the coffeehouse I owned with my wife. She was

behind the counter waiting on a customer. I walked up to her and gave her a long and heartfelt kiss. I said goodbye. I haven't seen her since.

Joe Bageant wasn't big on doing the "responsible" things in life. He was big on telling the truth, when he wasn't making colorful shit up, and he was real big at trying to change the fucked-up world we live in. Joe was responsible in that that he kept gas in the truck and food on the table, but Joe never did anything that he didn't want to do. He got through life by really and truly being himself. Joe had the Buddha nature. He instinctively knew that life was a richer experience if you didn't try to control or organize it according to outmoded belief systems. If responsibility entailed compromising your values, your compassion and happiness, then Joe was the most irresponsible man on the planet.

Redneck with a conscience

I know Joe made his rep as a progressive redneck with a conscience, but that was only one dimension of a complex and tricky dude. When I first met him in Boulder, Colorado in the early 70s, Joe was living in a converted school bus with his wife Cindy and son Timothy (named after Dr. Leary). On the surface they looked like your stereotypical hippie family. But when they spoke in their sultry southern drawls the words that came out of their mouths weren't littered with hippie cliches or new age jargon. The Bageant family weren't Aquarian age Clampetts, they were totally unique and totally magic. Cindy was an oldschool southern gal with the most bodacious Afro I've ever seen on a white chick and Joe was some kind of madcap hillbilly visionary. Joe laid the southern thing on thick, mostly to humorous effect. He knew his chicken-fried diphthongs would spook the longhairs who were still re-living the last reel of Easy Rider in their heads. Joe played with people's expectations, he was a real mindfucker. Like Neal Cassidy, Joe had a sense of playfulness and knew how to drive a bus.

Boulder in the 70s was becoming a mecca

for poets thanks to the Naropa Institute's Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics. The streets and bars were crawling with bards and beatniks. Ginsberg, Burroughs, Corso, Creeley, Di Prima, Waldman and dozens of other writers were reading, writing and speechifying in bookstores, schoolrooms and coffeehouses. The Muses had gathered over Boulder like a radiant syntactical cloud, raining down vowels and consonants on tongues of invisible angels. It was impossible to be around the energy of the moment and not think poetic thoughts.

Bageant wasn't a writer, or much of one at the time. He wasn't part of Boulder's literary scene. But, as I would soon discover, Joe was paying very close attention to what was going on and secretly he wanted in. Years later, in an interview with *Energy Grid* magazine, Joe described Boulder's poetry vortex and writing in general:

"Nobody was sitting me on their knee and telling me the secrets of writing and magicianship. But I was accepted in their company and at parties and got to watch them live their lives creatively and with passion. I came to the conclusion that this writing thing and the arts in general had as much to do with how you lived as anything else. It was clear to me that I should watch and learn from people like Ginsberg, who was the most famous poet on the planet for a reason.

"As far as writing goes, I was influenced by all the usual suspects of my generation, Tom Wolfe, Hunter Thompson, Gay Talese, William Styron, Genet, and especially all the Southern writers, Welty, Willie Morris ... not to mention a lot of people who never got the respect they deserved, especially poets like Marc Campbell of Taos, New Mexico and Jack Collom of Boulder, Colorado. Their works really clued me in on the connection between words, your brain and your heart."

Joe mentions me in the above quote and I share it not to flatter myself but to give you some insight to Joe's approach to the whole writing thing. I had no idea at the time that Joe gave a shit about my poetry or anybody's. In some ways I think he may have actually

The Bageant family weren't Aquarian age Clampetts, they were totally unique and totally magic

JOE BAGEANT (1946-2011)

Joe had chosen Belize as a retreat because he liked the small fishing village where he lived. It wasn't a tourist area. It was dirt poor and Joe felt connected to the people living there

been embarrassed by the notion of becoming a writer. It was too much of a “scene,” too bourgeois and narcissistic. I never saw him writing. I read him my poems and he would nod and smile and blurt out a “right on” now and then, but I had no idea that he was listening with the ears of a blossoming writer. When Joe eventually sprung his work on me it was jaw-droppingly good, fully formed, inventive and visionary. He worked the southern vernacular up into something that drifted on wings of song.

Poets are a competitive lot, lyrical gun-slingers looking to lay waste to the latest hot-shot wordsmith that pulls into town. I must admit that, along with just about every local poet in Boulder, Joe's talent sent me racing to the typewriter to take up the gauntlet he had thrown down. Envy, jealousy and the competitive urge may lack virtue in and of themselves, but they can fuel great works. When poets say they only write for themselves, I respond “bullshit.” Go to any open poetry reading and watch the poets chomping at the bit to hit the lectern and spew their restless poetry. It makes the open mic night at a blues club look like the epitome of brotherly goodwill and graciousness. Joe had quietly been honing his craft in the shadows, but when he finally unleashed his writing it was one glorious monster.

Self-taught everyman

On the one hand, Joe was a down-to-earth, unschooled, self-taught everyman who happened to have a brilliant analytical mind. On the other, he was a cosmic cowboy who had eaten his fair share of good LSD and knew that within the yin and yang of the material world lay dimensions of untold beauty and mystery. Instead of fracturing his point of view, Joe's multiple and occasionally opposing characteristics played off of each other and deepened his perspective on all things, from the mundane to the magnificent. With the added element of a biting sense of humor and a healthy dose of cynicism, Bageant was son and brother to Lenny Bruce, Paul Krassner and Tim Leary. Eating peyote

with Joe was like taking a fast ride down the highway of absolute reality while a hyperkinetic bluegrass band played the music of the spheres on a transistor radio made of human brain matter.

When I spent time with Joe in 2009 he was ill. He had problems with his liver (he had been a drinker in his life) and his energy level was somewhat diminished, but his mind was as quick and lucid as ever. He spoke of the many projects he was working on – his blog, a screenplay, memoirs, columns, essays, etc – and gave no hint that his days might be numbered. The word “cancer” was never spoken, so I assume he didn't have it then or didn't want to talk about it. I did detect in Joe a sense of urgency at the time. Upon reflection, it seemed as though he was trying to get as much done as swiftly as possible. He had passed the age of 60 and, along with his liver problems, I think he was very conscious of his own mortality. I was used to seeing Joe operating at a high level, but I was not used to seeing him in states of exhaustion.

It's usually spine-stiffening to see an old friend after years of no physical contact. Those are moments when you're reminded that we're not going to live forever and there are no exceptions. Not you, not me, not Joe.

Joe had chosen Belize as a retreat because he liked the small fishing village where he lived. It wasn't a tourist area. It was dirt poor and Joe felt connected to the people living there. Hopkins Village was founded by Africans who had jumped from shipwrecked slave ships in the 1600s and forged out a life for themselves and defended it against the encroachment of European imperialists. These were Joe's kind of people – independent and loving life despite hardship and adversity.

I had gone to Belize to cry on a friend's shoulder, but Joe really wasn't up for wallowing in pity. I mistook his coolness to my pain as being Buddhist detachment or his own self-absorption. As I said, I understand now that he intuitively knew his days on earth were limited and to waste it on the past,

mine or his own, was to squander precious time. He had pulled me out the fire and that was enough. It was time to move on, brother. Losing your life always trumps losing your wife. He had saved my fucking life. What more did I want?

Spiritual adventure

Any day spent with Joe was a spiritual adventure. He was always sparking on all cylinders, a speedfreak without the speed. Fortunately for all of us, before he died Joe finished his memoir *Rainbow Pie: A Redneck Memoir*. I have the feeling it was just the first volume of others to follow. I can't wait to read it. Buy it and be happy to get a chance to spend some time with an extraordinary soul.

I have no idea what Joe would have done had he lived another 20 years. But I like the future he imagined for himself:

"I plan to have a cottage in someplace like Andalusia, or French Martinique; someplace VERY cheap that I can go and write and snipe at the Republic of Terror. One man never beat a mob in its own turf. I'll stroke my wife's sweet snatch, pet my dogs and give heart to my children (every one of whom is a good lefty) in some dry place where my arthritic fingers will loosen up enough to learn to play flamenco guitar. I'm serious folks! There is not a person on this earth who can say I never did what I promised – eventually. And every reader here, every son and daughter of good yeoman liberty and decency, as it is defined by the suffering poor of this planet, is invited to come visit, eat tapas and drink wine at my table. Solidarity!"

I drank wine at Joe Bageant's table and it was sweet and the taste lingers still.

From Joe Bageant's *Lafayette Park Blues*:

"America: When we first stepped onto this playground of the national soul together, I truly believed you were not a bully, that you were the protector of queers and thick-tongued immigrants and laboring spiritual hoboes like me. I have tossed down your dreams straight from the bottle with no chaser, then bought a round for the house,

because this is the goddam land of the free where even a redneck boy from Virginia can dream the dreams of bards, call himself a writer then walk away from dark ancestral ghosts to actually become one.

"I believed it all, America. And I still fall for it if I let my guard down, just like the abused wife who believes she will not be punched again for that thousand and first time. All the neighbors – whole nations – believed in you too, despite the muffled screams of the black slave and the Red Indian coming from within your own house. But now you are lurking on the neighbors' porches smelling of the halls of Abu Gharib and gun grease and there are no cops to call because you ARE the cops, so they are going to break down the doors and cut your balls off.

"I can't sleep at nights and don't you pretend that you are asleep. Talk to me! You are going to have to say you love your native son or this whole terrible ecstatic thing of ours is over. You have changed over the many years we have been writhing together in this little power struggle of yours and mine – the one between little guy liberty and big authority. Now you have become the police court judge of my days and I dare not even leave your house for a quart of milk or a look at the stars. It's too late for counseling. You have broken my heart one too many times. Cracked one too many ribs.

"Time is short. Dawn will bring nothing good, I promise you.

"Speak to me like you used to.

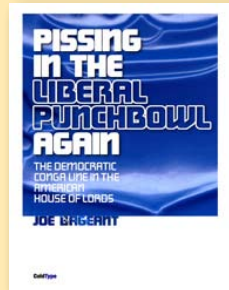
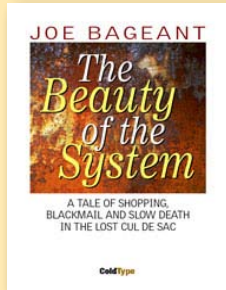
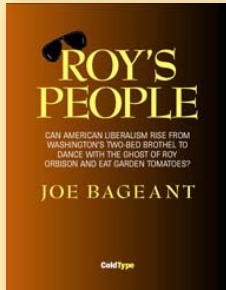
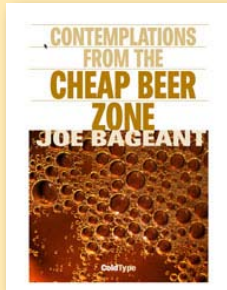
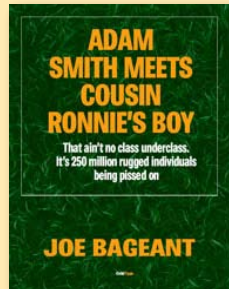
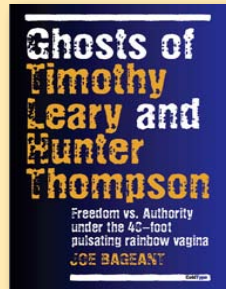
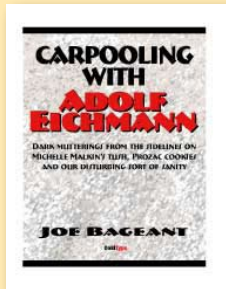
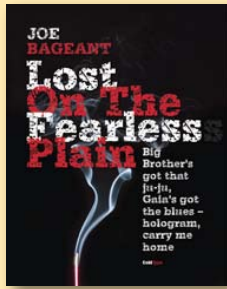
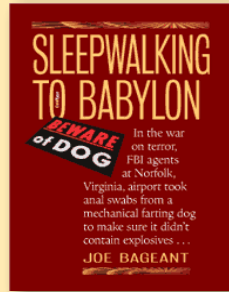
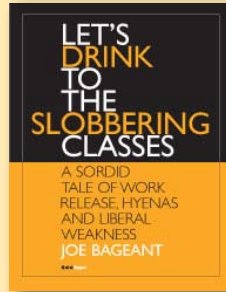
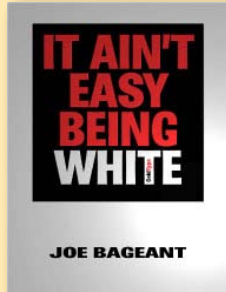
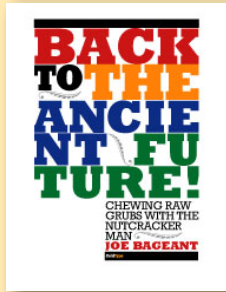
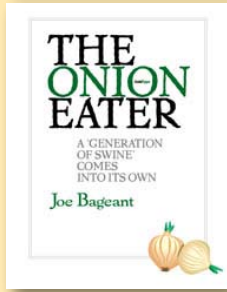
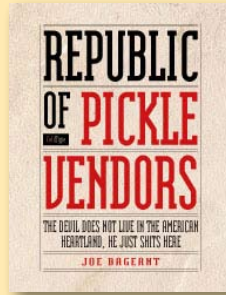
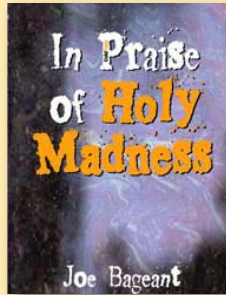
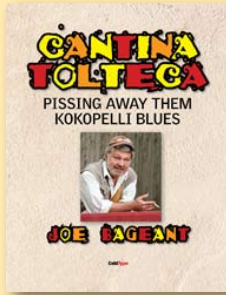
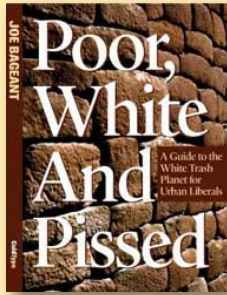
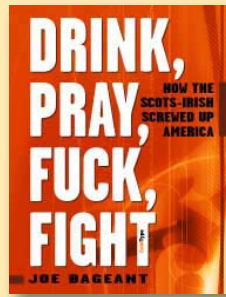
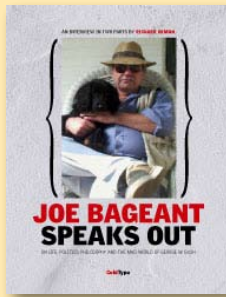
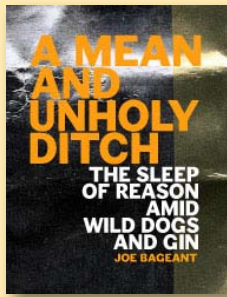
"Right now.

"Or it's over."

There'll never be another like Joe – but that doesn't mean we all can't try. Power to the people and the poets! **CT**

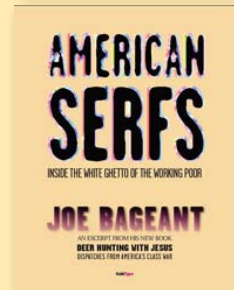
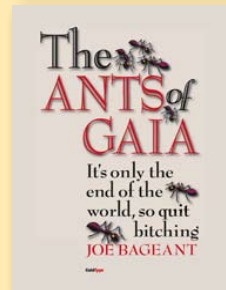
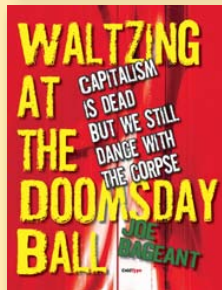
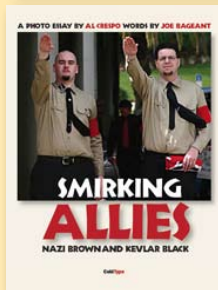
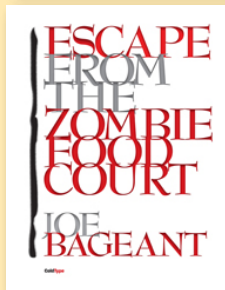
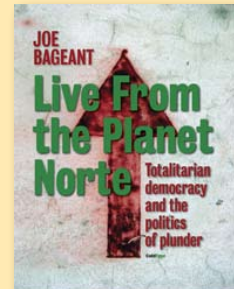
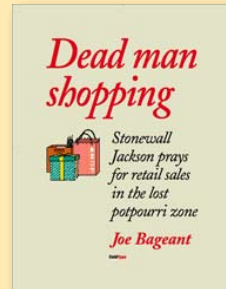
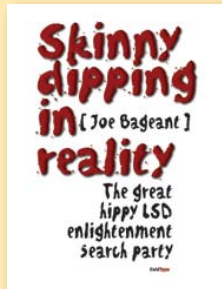
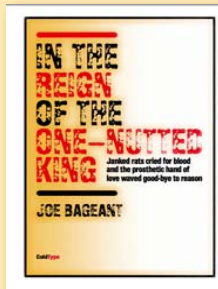
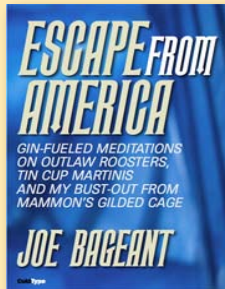
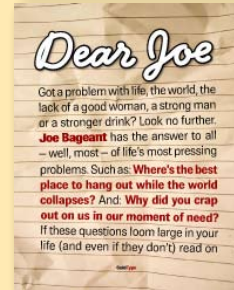
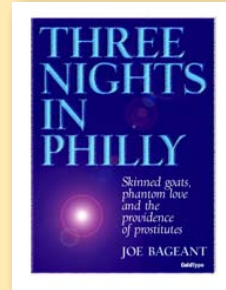
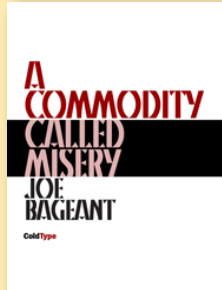
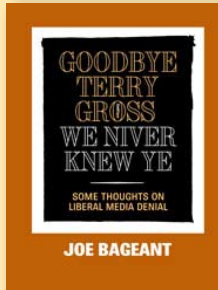
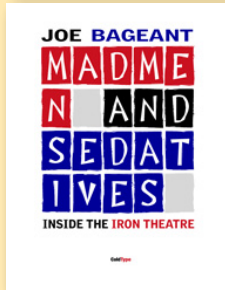
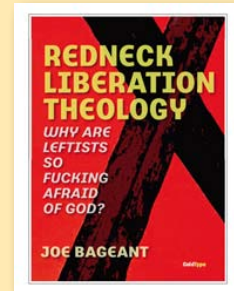
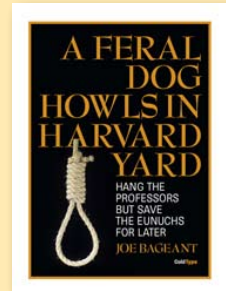
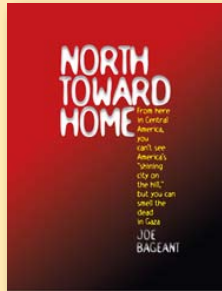
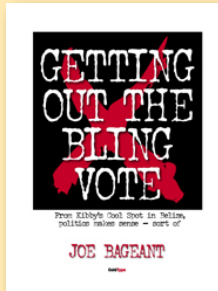
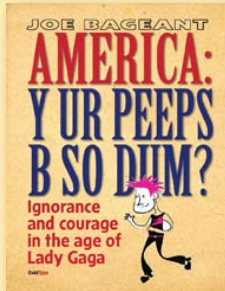
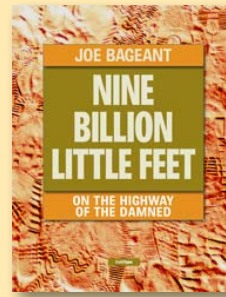
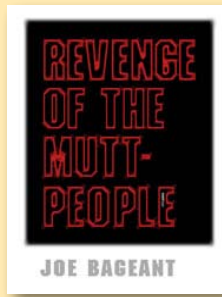
Marc Campbell was the lead singer and lyricist for The Nails, a six piece New Wave band that was formed in the 70s in Boulder, Colorado, where he became friends with Joe Bageant. The band recorded two critically acclaimed albums for RCA records. Campbell is best known for the cult hit "88 Lines About 44 Women."

He had saved my fucking life. What more did I want?

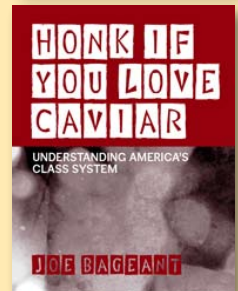
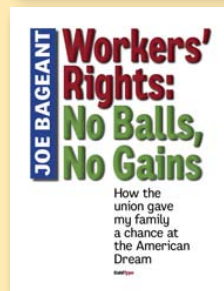
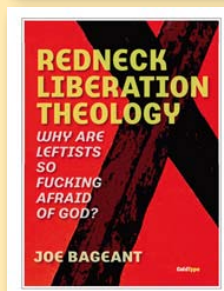
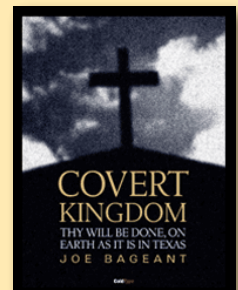
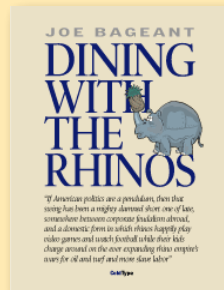
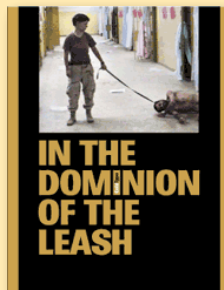
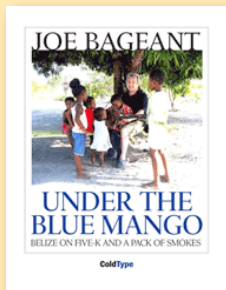
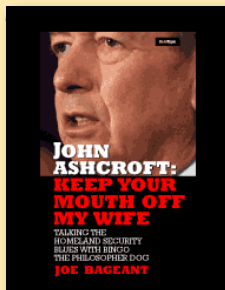
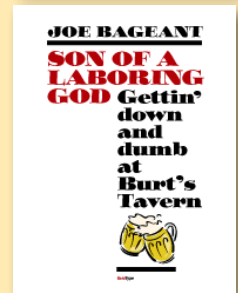
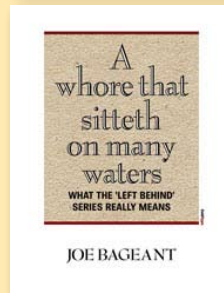
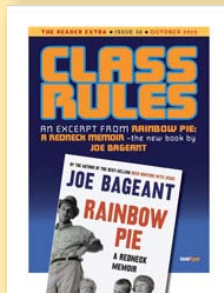
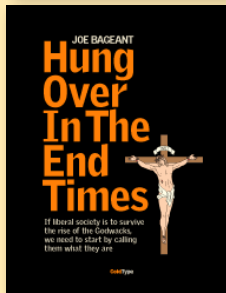
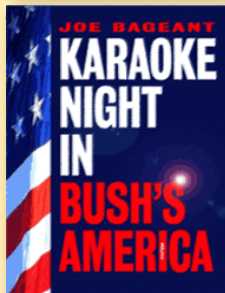
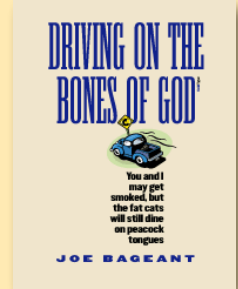
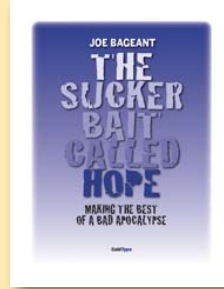
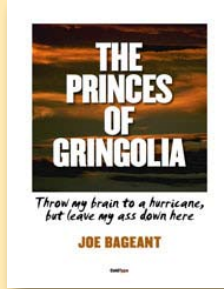
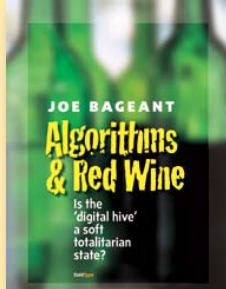
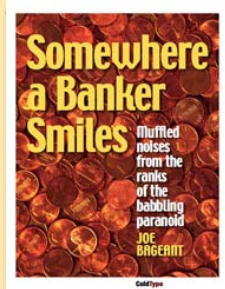
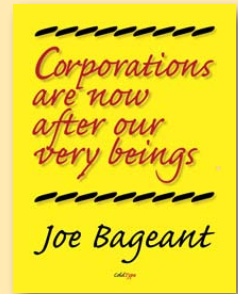
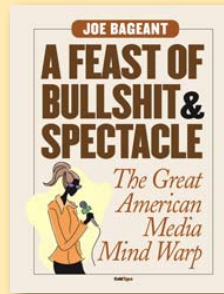
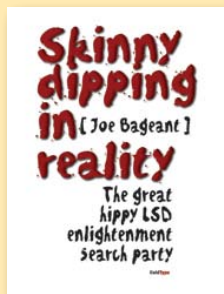
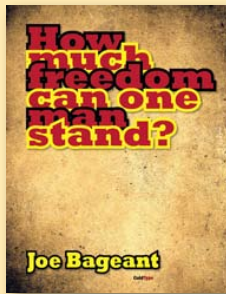
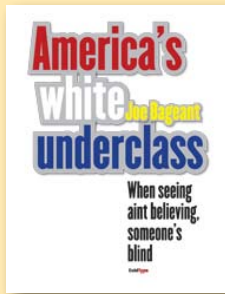


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The Gold and the Stone

Richard Goldstein was savagely attacked over his damning report on Israel's 'Cast Lead' attack on Gaza. **Uri Avnery** looks at reasons behind the South African judge's sudden change of mind

There is something tragicomic about the persona of Richard Goldstone. First there was a veritable storm of fury when the original Goldstone report was issued.

What a fiend! A Jew who claims to be a Zionist and an Israel-lover, who publishes the most abominable slanders against our valiant soldiers, aiding and abetting the worst anti-Semites around the world! The very prototype of a self-hating Jew! Still worse, a "mosser" – a Jew who turns another Jew over to the evil Goyim, the most detested figure in Jewish folklore.

And now the turnabout. Goldstone, the Jew who has recanted. Goldstone who has publicly confessed that he was wrong all along. That the Israeli army committed no crimes in the 2009-2010 "Cast Lead" Gaza operation. On the contrary, while the Israeli army has conducted honest and meticulous investigations into all the allegations, Hamas has not investigated any of the horrendous crimes it has committed.

Goldstone, the Man of Stone, has become Goldstone, the Man of Gold. A man of conscience! A man to be admired!

It was, of course, Binyamin Netanyahu who had the final word. Goldstone's recantation, he summarized, has confirmed once again that the IDF is the Most Moral Army in the World..

My heart bleeds for Judge Goldstone. From

the beginning he was placed in an impossible situation.

The UN commission which appointed him to head the inquiry into the allegations of war crimes committed during the operation was acting on a seemingly logical but actually foolish calculation. Appointing to the job a good Jew, and an avowed Zionist to boot, would disarm, it was thought, any allegation of anti-Israeli bias.

Goldstone and his colleagues undoubtedly did an honest and conscientious job. They sifted the evidence laid before them and arrived at reasonable conclusions on that basis. However, almost all the evidence came from Palestinian and UN sources. The commission could not interrogate the officers and soldiers of the Israeli forces because our government, in a typical and almost routine act of folly, refused to cooperate.

Why? The basic assumption is that all the world is out to get us, not because of anything we do, but because we are Jews. We know we are right, and we know that they are out to prove us wrong. So why cooperate with these bloody anti-Semites and Jewish self-haters?

Today, almost all influential Israelis concede that this was a stupid attitude. But there is no guarantee that our leaders will behave any differently next time, especially since the army is dead set against allowing any soldiers to appear before a non-Israeli forum, or, for that matter, before an Israeli non-military fo-

The commission could not interrogate the officers and soldiers of the Israeli forces because our government, in a typical and almost routine act of folly, refused to cooperate

ABOUT TURN

Years and years of the occupation have created an army for whom Palestinians, and Arabs in general, are mere objects. Not human enemies, not even human monsters, just objects

rum either.

Back to poor Goldstone. After the publication of his commission's report, his life became hell.

The full fury of the Jewish ghetto against traitors from its midst was turned on him. Jews objected to his attending his grandson's Bar Mitzvah. His friends turned away from him, He was ostracized by all the people he valued.

So he searched his soul and found that he had been wrong all along. His findings were one-sided. He would have found differently if he had heard the Israeli side of the story. The Israeli army has conducted honest investigations into the allegations, while the barbarous Hamas has not conducted any investigations at all into their obvious war crimes.

So when was Goldstone wrong? The first or the second time?

The answer is, alas, that he was wrong both times.

The very term "war crimes" is problematic. War itself is a crime, never to be justified unless it is the only way to prevent a bigger crime – as with the war against Adolf Hitler, and now – on an incomparably smaller scale – against Muammar Gaddafi.

The idea of war crimes arose after the horrendous atrocities of the 30-year war, which devastated central Europe. The idea was that it is impossible to prevent brutal actions if they are needed to win a war, but that such actions are illegitimate if they are not needed for this purpose. The principle is not moral, but practical. Killing prisoners and civilians is a war crime, because it serves no effective military purpose, since both sides can do it. So is the wanton destruction of property.

In Israel this principle was embodied in the landmark judgment by Binyamin Halevy after the 1956 Kafr Qasim massacre of innocent farmers, men, women and children. The Judge ruled that a "black flag" flies over "manifestly" illegal orders – orders which even a simple person can see are illegal, without talking to a lawyer. Since then, obeying such orders has been a crime under Israeli law.

THE REAL question about Cast Lead is not

whether individual soldiers did commit such crimes. They sure did – any army is composed of all types of human beings, decent youngsters with a moral conscience besides sadists, imbeciles and others suffering from moral insanity. In a war you give all of them arms and a license to kill, and the results can be foreseen. That is one reason why "war is hell".

The problem with Lebanon War II and Cast Lead is that the basic approach – the same in both cases – makes war crimes as good as inevitable. The planners were no monsters – they just did their job. They superimposed two facts one on the other. The result was inevitable.

One consideration was the requirement to avoid casualties on our side. We have a people's army, composed of conscripts from all walks of life (like the US army in Vietnam but not in Afghanistan.) Our public opinion judges wars according to the number of (our) soldiers killed and wounded. So the directive to the military planners is: do everything possible so the number of our casualties will be next to nil.

The other fact is the total disregard for the humanity of the other side. Years and years of the occupation have created an army for whom Palestinians, and Arabs in general, are mere objects. Not human enemies, not even human monsters, just objects.

These two mental attitudes lead necessarily to a strategic and tactical doctrine which dictates the application of lethal force to anyone and anything that can possibly menace soldiers advancing in enemy territory – liquidating them in front of the soldiers preferably from afar by artillery and air power.

When the opposition is a resistance movement operating in a densely populated area, the results can almost be calculated mathematically. In Cast Lead, at least 350 Palestinian civilians, among them hundreds of women and children, were killed, together with about 750 enemy fighters. On the Israeli side: altogether 5 (five!) Israeli soldiers were killed by enemy fire (some six more by "friendly fire").

This result did not contradict the unde-

clared political aim of the operation. It was to pressure the Gaza Strip population into overthrowing the Hamas government. This result, of course, was not achieved. Rather the opposite.

The logic – and the balance of casualties – of Lebanon War II were about the same, with added huge material destruction of civilian targets.

Following the Goldstone report, our army did indeed conduct quite extensive investigations into individual incidents. The number is impressive, the results are not. Some 150 or so cases were investigated, two soldiers were convicted (one for theft), one officer was indicted for the killing – by mistake – of an entire extended family.

This seems to satisfy Goldstone, who gratefully accepted an invitation from the Israeli Minister of the Interior – perhaps the most rabid racist in the entire government, in which racists abound – to visit Israel. (When the conversation was leaked, Goldstone cancelled the matter and stated that the report would not be withdrawn.)

On the other side, Goldstone is aflame with indignation against Hamas, for launching rockets and mortar shells at civilians in Israel and conducting no investigations at all. Isn't it rather ridiculous: using the same standards for one of the five mightiest armies in the world and a band of irregular and poorly equipped resistance fighters (alias terrorists)?

Terrorism is the weapon of the weak. ("Give me tanks and airplanes, and I promise I won't plant bombs" a Palestinian once said.) Since the entire military strategy of Hamas is terrorizing Israeli communities along the border in order to persuade Israel to put an end to the occupation (and, in the case of Gaza, to the ongoing blockade), Goldstone's indignation seems a bit surprising.

Altogether, Goldstone has now paved the way for another Cast Lead operation which will be far worse.

I expect, however, that he can now pray in any synagogue he chooses. **CT**

Israeli peace activist Uri Avnery recently celebrated his 89th birthday

This seems to satisfy Goldstone, who gratefully accepted an invitation from the Israeli Minister of the Interior – perhaps the most rabid racist in the entire government, in which racists abound – to visit Israel

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UNDER OCCUPATION

NOT WAR. NOT PEACE!

Photojournalist
Jack Laurenson reports
from Occupied Palestine,
as the country teeters
on the edge of another
intifada

A series of commands barked in Hebrew and the roar of an engine signals trouble.

I climb onto a rocky outcrop overlooking the descending dirt road to get a better view of whatever is coming. An armored vehicle screeches around the corner. Then another. Sirens wail and wheels spin as the mighty olive-green motors accelerate up the road spraying stones and dust behind them. They grind to a halt in front of the advancing protesters, revving their engines aggressively – it would've been impressive had it not been so intimidating.

It's clear this demonstration isn't going anywhere as a dozen or so heavily-armed and pissed-off-looking soldiers bundle out of the vehicles and begin shoving the activists back up the road with the butts of their M16 rifles.

The soldiers are silent, but clearly determined and heavy-handed. There's no way





Israeli Defense Force (IDF) troops intercept a demonstration and block the road with armored vehicles.

UNDER OCCUPATION



Above: IDF troops monitor a demonstration in al Ma'sara, south-west of Bethlehem. Villagers protest against the construction of settlements on Palestinian land and the 'security barrier' which annexes huge amounts of fertile Arab land into Israel.

they are letting this collection of Palestinian and Israeli peace activists past them. The demonstrators start to yell, mostly in Arabic but also in English – for the benefit of a handful of foreigners who have come along to observe the protest.

“This is a peaceful demonstration! It's our land! You have no right to tell us where we can and can't go! This is Palestine, not Israel!”

As the stand-off between the protesters and IDF soldiers continues, I wander around taking pictures and recording audio. The soldiers are uncomfortable with my presence and glare, but they allow me to work.

Al Ma'sara is under siege and surrounded by more and more illegal Israeli settlements. Any attempt to protest against the growing Jewish colonies or the ongoing construction

of the 'security barrier' – which annexes vast amounts of fertile Palestinian land into Israel – is met with force.

“There was a protest in 2009 with a large turn-out. They arrested literally everybody, all the foreigners and all the Palestinians. Those with foreign passports were released quite quickly, but some Arabs were locked away for months,” Hassan tells me. He is one of the leaders of the National Resistance Committee in the occupied Palestinian Territories. One of his brothers is dead – apparently assassinated in Europe by Mossad in the 90's – the other is serving a nine-year sentence in an Israeli prison for throwing stones at soldiers and organising protests in the village. Hassan tells me the situation in his area is worse than ever.

“The security barrier is a land-grab, built



Despite having one son killed by the IDF in the second intifada and another serving nine years in Israeli prison for protesting, Fatima feels she has no choice but to continue demonstrating against the occupation and settlements.

UNDER OCCUPATION

A little girl walks through the streets of Hebron, dwarfed by dilapidated buildings and a watchtower on the “apartheid wall” that has annexed Arab land into Israel.





UNDER OCCUPATION



Above: Outside the Palestinian population hubs of Ramallah, Jericho, Jenin and Nablus, rural areas are being overwhelmed with illegal Israeli settlements. In this picture, a new settlement is being built overlooking an Arab neighborhood outside Bethlehem.

only on Palestinian land, well within internationally recognized borders. Nine villages in this area (just south-west of Bethlehem) have lost large amounts of land. Homes demolished, olive trees uprooted and farmland seized. Land is taken for security reasons, but then they simply build Jewish homes on it. We have to protest, or we'll have nothing left."

This protest ends quickly, and uncharacteristically peacefully. As the activists wander back into the village a handful of Palestinian youths throw stones at the soldiers. The troops, aware of the presence of international 'observer' groups don't respond, but get back in their armored vehicles and drive back to their initial positions overlooking the small village. It's very cold, and they're not in

the mood for a fight with rowdy kids. Not today.

With the peace process going nowhere and illegal Israeli settlements on the increase, analysts are predicting that Palestine could be on the brink of a new non-violent intifada – a mass uprising. With demonstrations planned across the occupied Palestinian Territories, it's looking plausible that Palestine could be the next Middle East domino to topple. **CT**

Jack Laursen is a freelance photojournalist and reporter based in London. His work focuses mostly on society, human rights and the environment. He is also a founding member of the Lacuna Media creative collective – www.lacunamedia.org

UNDER OCCUPATION

Below: An Israeli armored vehicle patrols the streets of occupied Hebron in Palestine. Hebron is illegally occupied by some 500 ultra-orthodox Jewish settlers who regularly attack Palestinians. The settlers are protected by the Israeli Army.



Left: The Israelis say the “security barrier” is a necessary defense against Palestinian terrorists. The Palestinians say it is an “apartheid wall” and annexes vast amounts of Arab land into Israel. The International Court of Justice has called it an ‘obstacle to peace’ and branded it illegal under the Geneva conventions.

Victim of the military empire

John W. Whitehead wonders why Americans aren't outraged by the inhumane treatment of Bradley Manning in an army prison

There can be no doubt that Manning's inhumane treatment by the US government is intended to send a clear warning to all those who would challenge the military empire – "DON'T EVEN CONSIDER IT"

"It is indispensable to our success in this war that those we ask to fight it know that in the discharge of their dangerous responsibilities to their country they are never expected to forget that they are Americans, and the valiant defenders of a sacred idea of how nations should govern their own affairs and their relations with others – even our enemies." – John McCain, "Torture's Terrible Toll"

Depending on your view of the endless wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and America's role in them, Pfc. Bradley E. Manning, the 23-year-old Army soldier who is accused of "aiding the enemy" by leaking classified military and diplomatic documents to the anti-secrecy website, Wikileaks, is either a courageous whistleblower or a traitorous snitch. Manning is alleged to have leaked over 250,000 United States diplomatic cables, as well as footage of an American Apache helicopter airstrike in Baghdad from July 12, 2007, in which 18 people were killed, many of them civilians. Two of those killed were Reuters journalists. If convicted, Manning could face the death penalty.

There can be no doubt that Manning's inhumane treatment by the US government is intended to send a clear warning to all those who would challenge the military empire – "DON'T EVEN CONSIDER IT." Man-

ning, a slight, 5'2", 105-pound intelligence analyst, has been held in maximum solitary confinement (his escape would supposedly pose a national security risk) at the Marine Corps Brig in Quantico, Virginia, since July 2010 – treatment normally reserved for the most violent or dangerous of criminals.

As Glenn Greenwald of *Salon* observes, Manning has been "subjected for many months without pause to inhumane, personality-erasing, soul-destroying, insanity-inducing conditions of isolation similar to those perfected at America's Supermax prison in Florence, Colorado, all without so much as having been convicted of anything. And as is true of many prisoners subjected to warped treatment of this sort, the brig's medical personnel now administer regular doses of anti-depressants to Manning to prevent his brain from snapping from the effects of this isolation."

Imprisoned in a windowless, 6 x 12 foot cell containing a bed, a drinking fountain and a toilet, Manning has been kept under Suicide and/or Prevention of Injury (POI) watch during his incarceration, largely against the advice of two forensic psychiatrists. Under suicide watch, Manning has been confined to his tiny cell for 24 hours a day and stripped of all clothing with the exception of his underwear. His prescription eyeglasses were taken away, leaving him in essential blindness except for those limited

times when he is permitted to read or watch television, at which time his glasses are returned to him. A guard is stationed outside Manning's cell at all times. In a thinly veiled attempt to harass the young man, guards check on Manning every five minutes, asking if he is ok. He is not allowed to have a pillow or sheets, but he currently has a mattress that has a built-in pillow and two blankets.

Things are not much better for Manning under POI watch. As his attorney, David Coombs, points out, he is forced to remain in his cell for 23 hours a day. He is not allowed to have personal items in the cell, and is only allowed to have one book or one magazine at any time to read in the cell. He is not allowed to exercise in his cell and if he attempts to do push-ups, sit-ups or any other form of exercise, he will be forced to stop by the brig guards. He gets one hour of exercise outside of his cell daily, so his exercise routine consists of him walking around in figure eights in an empty room for an hour. When he goes to sleep, he must strip down to his underwear and surrender his clothing to the guards. If he falls asleep with a blanket over his head or curled up toward the wall, the guards wake him up.

Most recently, it was revealed that Manning was stripped and left naked in his cell for seven hours, after which time he was made to stand naked outside his cell during an inspection – allegedly part of an effort by the government aimed at pressuring Manning to identify others involved in the WikiLeaks case. The tactic is certainly not a new one. Indeed, as one investigative news source pointed out, the forced nudity recalls “how the Bush administration used nudity and other abusive tactics to break down ‘war on terror’ detainees. In 2004, the CIA told President George W. Bush’s lawyers how useful forced nudity was for instilling ‘learned helplessness’ in prisoners.”

The American government, of course, insists that such treatment does not rise to the level of torture. In fact, Col. T. V. Johnson, a Quantico spokesman, characterized

charges that Manning has been mistreated as “poppycock.” After all, Manning is not being starved, beaten or waterboarded. He’s merely been denied human interaction and the most basic attributes of civilized imprisonment. Yet as surgeon Atul Gawande points out in a 2009 article for the *New Yorker*, solitary confinement rises to the level of torture: “A US military study of almost a hundred and fifty naval aviators returned from imprisonment in Vietnam, many of whom were treated even worse than [John] McCain, reported that they found social isolation to be as torturous and agonizing as any physical abuse they suffered.”

There was a time in our nation’s history – long before the abuses at Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib and before we were re-programmed to think of such practices as waterboarding as benign forms of legalized torture – that even solitary confinement was frowned upon. The United States Supreme Court even came close to declaring it unconstitutional in 1890 and went so far as to compare it to “[t]he rack, the thumb-screw, [and] the wheel” in its 1940 decision in *Chambers v. Florida*. Unfortunately, that perception of solitary confinement as torture changed with the rise in popularity of American supermax prisons, designed specifically for mass solitary confinement, in the late 20th century. As Gawande writes:

“Public sentiment in America is the reason that solitary confinement has exploded in this country, even as other Western nations have taken steps to reduce it. This is the dark side of American exceptionalism. With little concern or demurral, we have consigned tens of thousands of our own citizens to conditions that horrified our highest court a century ago. Our willingness to discard these standards for American prisoners made it easy to discard the Geneva Conventions prohibiting similar treatment of foreign prisoners of war, to the detriment of America’s moral stature in the world. In much the same way that a previous generation of Americans countenanced legalized segregation, ours has countenanced legal-

Unfortunately, that perception of solitary confinement as torture changed with the rise in popularity of American supermax prisons, designed specifically for mass solitary confinement, in the late 20th century

AMERICA'S SHAME

Yet the key here is that Manning, an American citizen entitled to every protection afforded by the US Constitution, has yet to be convicted of anything, which makes his pre-trial incarceration that much more troubling

ized torture. And there is no clearer manifestation of this than our routine use of solitary confinement – on our own people, in our own communities...”

Which brings us back to Bradley Manning, a young man who hoped to “change something” by exposing what he saw as widespread government corruption. Whether or not Manning is shown to be the source of the leaks, there can be no denying that the information made public by Wikileaks has painted a damning picture of a US government operating in a way that is completely at odds with everything this nation once stood for.

Yet the key here is that Manning, an American citizen entitled to every protection afforded by the US Constitution, has yet to be convicted of anything, which makes his pre-trial incarceration that much more troubling. Moreover, not only does such cruel, unusual and inhumane treatment violate a long list of international human rights treaties, but as Greenwald points out, “[s]ubjecting a detainee like Manning to this level of prolonged cruel and inhumane detention can thus jeopardize the ability of the US to secure extradition for other prisoners, as these conditions are viewed in much of the civilized world as barbaric.”

In fact, John McCain, who experienced torture and solitary confinement during his imprisonment in Vietnam, noted in a 2005 Newsweek editorial, “We are American, and we hold ourselves to humane standards of treatment of people no matter how evil or

terrible they may be. To do otherwise undermines our security, but it also undermines our greatness as a nation. We are not simply any other country. We stand for something more in the world – a moral mission, one of freedom and democracy and human rights at home and abroad... It is indispensable to our success in this war that those we ask to fight it know that in the discharge of their dangerous responsibilities to their country they are never expected to forget that they are Americans, and the valiant defenders of a sacred idea of how nations should govern their own affairs and their relations with others – even our enemies.”

Sadly, we in America have conveniently forgotten that we once stood for something more than a warring military empire. Indeed, in our once-stalwart defense of human rights, our adherence to a moral code that was rooted in a respect for human life, and our willingness to lead the world by example through innovation and progress in science and the arts, we were the antithesis of all that America – now the largest international exporter of weapons and war – has come to stand for today. **CT**

John W. Whitehead is a constitutional attorney and founder and president of The Rutherford Institute. His new book “The Freedom Wars” (TRI Press) is available online at www.amazon.com. He can be contacted at johnw@rutherford.org. Information about The Rutherford Institute is available at www.rutherford.org

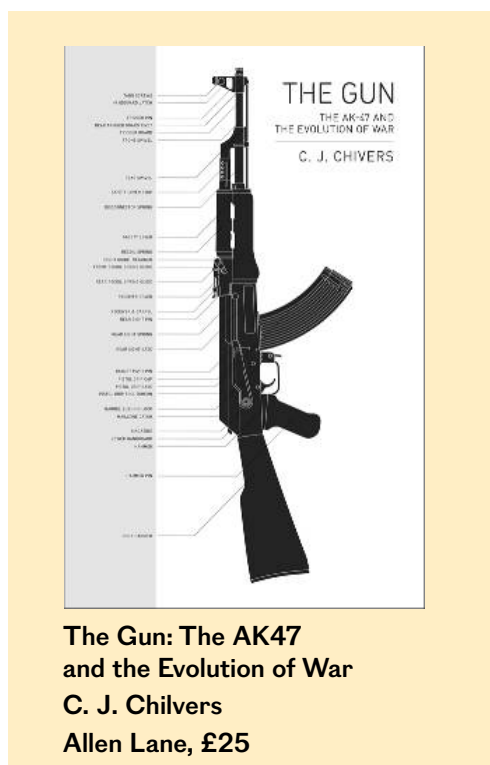
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It's still their fault

Bernard Porter is absorbed in the tale of the AK47, 'the people's gun', a true Soviet success story

The Kalashnikov automatic rifle is light, portable and cheap. It scarcely ever jams, even in the most extreme conditions – tropical heat, Arctic cold, bogs, deserts. It can be disassembled and reassembled 'by Slavic schoolboys in less than 30 seconds flat'. Millions have been manufactured and distributed worldwide. The gun has become iconic, especially among anti-colonial freedom fighters and terrorists: its distinctive silhouette is even to be found on the Mozambique national flag. In 2009, a Missouri car dealer offered a free voucher worth half a Kalashnikov with every pick-up truck he sold. (The voucher was for the semi-automatic version. US gun laws may be liberal, but they do have limits.) More to the point: the Kalashnikov has probably killed more people than any other hand-held weapon in history. That makes it one of the great industrial success stories of modern times.

It was, of course, a Soviet success. For C.J. Chivers, a retrospective Cold Warrior, brought up – brainwashed, you might say – in the dominant American free-market discourse, this poses a bit of a problem. Soviet industry, hidebound by state directives and state planning, uncompetitive and with no profit motive driving it on, should not by rights (or by theory) have been so efficient. The main purpose of his book is to try to explain why it was. The solution is a dark one. It all has to do with the particular way the Kalashnikov



The Kalashnikov has probably killed more people than any other hand-held weapon in history. That makes it one of the great industrial success stories of modern times

was developed and then distributed, which in Chivers's view makes it intrinsically far more evil than any comparable gun the capitalist world produced – quite apart from all those deaths.

It was not as if the capitalist world had not been trying. The idea of a weapon that would give a single foot soldier – or later a freedom fighter, terrorist or mass murderer – a disproportionate killing power had been a holy grail

BOOK REVIEW

Richard Gatling's way was more ingenious: with one gun now doing the killing work of 100 riflemen, he argued, the other 99 could go home, and live in peace

of arms manufacturers for centuries. (There were medieval crossbows that fired volleys.) It was often justified quite high-mindedly. Mikhail Kalashnikov always claimed that he developed his gun to help his compatriots defend the Soviet Motherland against the capitalist hordes. In the 19th century its bulkier precursors, the Gatling and Maxim 'volley' or 'machine' guns, had given a similar advantage to small and vastly outnumbered European platoons in the colonies and to American warders in prison riots; later on, hand-held automatic rifles did the same for subject peoples rising against their materially more powerful colonial masters. They levelled the battlefield. Weapons dealers are always being asked to justify their macabre trade; that is one way of doing it.

Richard Gatling's way was more ingenious: with one gun now doing the killing work of 100 riflemen, he argued, the other 99 could go home, and live in peace. (There must be a flaw there somewhere.) And then there was the argument that you get with every radically new weapon: 'With a few hundred Gatlings on both sides,' the Indianapolis Sentinel claimed around 1880, 'armies would melt away like dew before the sun, and men would soon learn to settle their disputes by arbitration, or some other means less destructive of life.' Again, no. Gatlings and Maxims were two of the major reasons the First World War turned out as bloody as it did. Lord Salisbury was nearer the mark with his back-handed compliment to Hiram Maxim at a dinner held to honour him in London in 1900: 'I consider Mr Maxim to be one of the greatest benefactors the world has ever known.' How so? the puzzled gunmaker asked. 'Well, I should say that you have prevented more men from dying of old age than any other man that ever lived.' If Chivers is to be believed, Maxim won't have lost any sleep over that.

Gatling and Maxim were both pretty typical Western capitalists: they took risks and amassed huge fortunes, though Gatling lost his before his death. So was the American inventor of the hand-held Thompson (or 'Tommy') submachine gun, which was

roughly the same weight as the later Kalashnikov, could be held under the arm – or in a violin case – and had what Chivers calls 'a spectacular run' in the later 1920s and 1930s. Today it is mainly associated with Chicago gangsters, though Chivers thinks that only 'a few hundred' Tommy guns got into their hands. Mostly they were bought by the propertied classes to guard their homes, estates and businesses.

It's a little puzzling that the US should have lost its lead in this field to the Russians in the 1940s. The Avtomat Kalashnikova 1947, to give the gun its full name – hence 'AK-47' – was very much a Soviet achievement. Its inventor – or the nearest to an inventor it had – was a modest Red Army sergeant with a mechanical knack, who might not have been given the opportunity to realise his potential under other systems, and whom the Soviet propaganda machine turned into a model Soviet citizen, which, though Chivers spends an awful lot of time trying to debunk this, he probably was. Predictably, he became a Hero of Socialist Labour; less predictably, he retained enough of his aura to be dubbed a Hero of the Russian Federation after the fall of the USSR. He's still alive, aged 91, and was active on the American lecture circuit until recently. His personal life and conduct seem exemplary compared, for example, with that of the greedy, draft-dodging trigamist Hiram Maxim – apart from the small fact of his having been indirectly responsible for the death and wounding of so many. 'Why did you make this machine? You don't like living people? You are smart. Why not make something to help people, not make them dead?' one of his victims, a dreadfully maimed Iraqi, told Chivers he would like to ask Kalashnikov. We know what his answer would have been: 'It is the Germans who are responsible for the fact that I became a fabricator of arms. If not for them, I would have constructed agricultural machines.' There is no reason to doubt his mainly patriotic motivation – 'I made it to protect the Motherland' – or his unhappiness about the later uses of the gun. 'Then it was like a genie out of the bottle and began

to walk on its own in directions that I did not want.' On balance, however, it had been a good thing, 'because many use it to defend their countries'. So, 'I sleep soundly.'

It was not just an individual achievement, however. (It would not have been Soviet if it had been.) The young engineer was supported by an industrial system that was able to spot the virtues of his gun and then maximise them. A committee arranged a competition for new designs, rigorously tested them, selected the best one, and then developed it, rationally. So it was a triumph for socialism, too. That riled many Americans, who at the time refused to believe the AK-47 could be as good as it was made out to be. Western capitalism should have been at least equal to this. Why was it not?

Reading this book, we can get some idea. Its most interesting parts are not on the Russian arms industry, but on the American. The sorriest story is that of the M16 assault rifle, issued to the troops in Vietnam in the 1960s, which jammed repeatedly – exactly what American soldiers did not want when ambushed by Kalashnikov-pointing Vietcong. 'You know what killed most of us?' one survivor of a particularly gory action in 1967 asked rhetorically. 'Our own rifle ... Practically every one of our dead was found with his rifle tore down next to him where he had been trying to fix it.' 'It was a pretty good bayonet holder,' was the best another could say of it. Some wielded them like clubs. The M16 was 'heralded as a triumph of private industry'; but private industry turned out to be a combination of 'salesmanship, sham science, cover-ups, chicanery, incompetence, and no small amount of dishonesty by a gun manufacturer [Colt] and senior American military officers'. To all this we can add stupidity on the officers' part: they tended to dismiss the Kalashnikov not only because it was socialist, but also because it wasn't particularly accurate. But who needs accuracy when you're spraying bullets around? In any case, the more accurate a gun is – the more tightly engineered – the more liable it is to jam. The Russians worked this out early on;

one of the distinctive characteristics of the AK-47 is that its parts are loose-fitting.

In the meantime the US Army top brass seemed obsessed with sharp-shooting and – harder to understand – with experimenting, gruesomely, to find out which sorts of bullet made the biggest wounds. (This was called 'terminal ballistics'. At one point a batch of human heads was imported from India for them to practise on.) What on earth was the point of that? As Chivers remarks, 'there is, after all, but one degree of death.' So much, then, for the 'article of political faith in Washington', that 'the American businessman was the world's most astute, and the American engineer the most innovative'; and, it could be added, their generals the brightest buttons in the box.

Chivers, however, seems reluctant to give much credit to the Soviet system for its success with the gun. For a start, he argues that it wasn't really a fair test of capitalism. The American system of arms manufacture 'was neither capitalist nor fully state-driven. It was a disharmonious hybrid.' It was the state part of the hybrid that let it down. Second, it had to operate in 'a stable Western nation with functioning police, courts and legislatures and a durable public compact'. Which is why the Tommy gun in particular didn't take off. One result of the Chicago gang wars had been the passage of the National Firearms Act of 1934, limiting the usage of automatic weapons (the reason the Missouri car dealer could only offer semis), and so cutting down on the demand which, in a truly capitalist system, is the main engine of innovation and growth. Of course the army should have picked up on all this, but it was too busy shooting bullets into cadavers.

Whether the Soviets played similar games we don't know. What is certain is that they were not so easily distracted; not by such games, or by the thousands of other demands that are a feature of consumer capitalist societies – for fridges and cars, for example. Unlike the Gatling and the Maxim, which were born of 'individual entrepreneurship and inventiveness', and so somehow cuddlier, the

The sorriest story is that of the M16 assault rifle, issued to the troops in Vietnam in the 1960s, which jammed repeatedly – exactly what American soldiers did not want when ambushed by Kalashnikov-pointing Vietcong

BOOK REVIEW

The best passages of this book are the technical ones about weapons; the most boring and unnecessary the tirades about the evils of Sovietism; and the most superficial are those expounding his narrow neoliberal ideology

AK-47 was 'a product of Stalin's state, not of a single man; it was the work of a government and the result of the vast resources the government applied to creating it.' It was 'the sinister product of sinister forms of government, set loose on the world via dark processes that were, and often remain, all but unchecked'. It shows what happens when gun manufacture is 'uncoupled from free markets and linked to mass production in the planned economies of opaque or brittle nations'. It is, in other words, a Communist thing.

Kalashnikovs later proliferated among 'guerrillas, thugs, bandits, child soldiers, and a host of other users at odds with the stated, or perhaps supposed, reasons of their design'. The chapters on this make grim reading: AK-47s (and knock-offs) were used to mow down anti-Soviet demonstrators in Hungary and other satellite states; to prop up Soviet allies; by anti-Soviet rebels, when they managed to get hold of them; and lastly – and currently – to enable terrorism, genocide and the bloodiest forms of criminal activity. 'The people's gun,' Chivers writes, 'defender of Russian soil and socialist ideal, had evolved into a familiar hand tool for genocide and terror.' This may not have been what the socialists had intended. But it was still their fault. Some might blame market mechanisms: the lifting of state controls on its proliferation, combined with the weapon's qualities, enabled the spread of the Kalashnikov. Chivers does not dispute the gun's superiority over its rivals, but adds:

The AK-47 was not to break out globally because it was well conceived and well made, or because it pushed Soviet small-arms development ahead of the West. Technical qualities did not drive socialist arms production. It was the other way around. Soviet military policies mixed with Kremlin foreign policy decisions to propel the output that made the AK-47 and its knock-offs available almost anywhere. Were it not for this more complicated set of circumstances, the AK-47 would have been a less significant weapon.

And, he says, Mikhail Kalashnikov would have 'remained an obscure figure' – as obscure

as Chivers clearly feels he deserves to be.

The Soviets were to blame for this in three ways. First, they deliberately used the sale and licensing of AK-47s as an instrument of foreign policy: 'support us and we'll supply you with Kalashnikovs.' No Western country, of course, would ever use weapons sales as an instrument of diplomacy. Second, they 'stockpiled' the guns in greater numbers than really necessary, so creating a surplus; 'a behaviour', Chivers claims, 'linked to the excessive rifle production in planned economies'. But he produces no evidence that the guns were produced in greater numbers than a paranoid nation might believe would be needed in the future. And, again, doesn't America stockpile weapons – nuclear warheads, for example? Lastly, the Soviet Union collapsed, enabling the contents of the stockpiles to trickle out in the ensuing anarchy. So the old Communist system and its failure to stop its own collapse lies at the root of it all.

Chivers knows his guns – he used to be a US Marine Corps infantry captain – and also his modern Russia, as a former newspaper correspondent there. But that's about all. The best passages of this book are the technical ones about weapons; the most boring and unnecessary the tirades about the evils of Sovietism; and the most superficial are those expounding his narrow neoliberal ideology. All the stuff, for example, about the dangers of 'uncoupling' weapons production from 'free markets': is he really saying that if the market had been freer in the 1950s and 1960s, fewer Kalashnikovs would have been sold? The American gun lobby is always telling us that it's not guns that kill people, people kill people. But it makes it worse if the guns they kill people with can kill more than one person at a time. And even more so, it seems, if they're Communist guns. **CT**

***Bernard Porter** has written extensively about imperial and secret service history. His next book, however, will be on Victorian architecture. This essay was originally published in the London Review of Books – www.lrb.org*

Bait and switch

Who's getting rich off our tax dollars? If you answer 'public employees,' you're wrong, writes **Sam Pizzigati**

Lavishly paid corporate executives, flush with tax-deductible taxpayer dollars, have plenty of reason to relish the right-wing assault on 'overpaid' public employees. But we can wipe that grin off their faces.

Somebody is getting rich off our tax dollars. That somebody, governors in Wisconsin, New Jersey, and a host of other states would have us believe, just happens to be our neighbour, the public employee.

Teachers, fire fighters, cops, and case workers, have become, in effect, the new "welfare queens." Ambitious pols the nation over, taking a page from the Ronald Reagan playbook, are creating mythic tax dollar-gobbling stereotypes that demonize Americans just struggling to get by.

These stereotypes do more than demonize. They distract. They shove off the political radar screen the fortunates who really are getting rich off our tax dollars. Fortunates such as William Swanson, the CEO of Raytheon, the high-tech giant.

CEO Swanson has taken home \$97.8 million over the past five years. His company gets 27 percent of its revenue from federal contracts. Swanson's rival, Lockheed Martin CEO Robert Stevens, has pocketed \$111.1 million over the past five years. The company he runs gets 37 percent of its revenue from federal contracts, with most of that coming from the Pentagon.

And don't forget Louis Chenevert, the chief exec at United Technologies, the Connecticut-based company that ranks as the 21st biggest federal contractor. Recent news reports revealed that Chenevert made \$22.1 million in 2010, a 7.7 percent jump over the \$20.5 million he pulled in the year before.

Chenevert "bolstered" the United Tech bottom line, says the Hartford Business Journal, "in part through job cuts and plant closings." The \$1.5 billion in tax dollars his company collected from federal contracts did a bit of bolstering, too.

Companies like UT, Lockheed, and Raytheon don't just lavish our tax dollars on their top execs. They deduct all the multiple millions they lavish on these execs off their taxes. In other words, the more CEOs pocket, the less their corporations pay at tax time – and the heavier the tax burden on average Americans. Top executives at America's biggest corporations, in effect, get us coming and going. Our tax dollars pump up their pay. Then they deduct their pay off their corporate tax bills, a move that enhances their corporate bottom-line "performance" and sets them up, in turn, for even bigger executive paydays.

A half-century ago, American taxpayers could count on a much better deal. Back then, our law and our courts did not accept, as a given, a corporate executive right to get rich at taxpayer expense.

In other words, the more CEOs pocket, the less their corporations pay at tax time – and the heavier the tax burden on average Americans

PAY DAY

Major corporations can now deduct any executive pay up to \$1 million, no questions asked

Back in the 1950s, Indiana corporate executive Frederick Ernest thought he had that right. Poor Ernest thought wrong.

Ernest served as the top exec at a 1948 start-up in the machine tool trade. The Korean War, beginning in 1950, had made that trade a hot one. The revenues at Ernest's company had soared from \$213,400 in 1949 to \$3,237,000 in 1952.

Executive pay had soared, too. The company's four top officers saw their take-home jump over ten-fold to \$85,000, the equivalent of over \$700,000 today.

Accountants at Ernest's hot new company claimed this executive pay as a "reasonable" corporate outlay and an appropriate corporate tax deduction. But the IRS rejected that claim. A displeased Ernest would take the IRS to court.

The legal dust wouldn't settle until 1961. A federal appeals court that year ruled that Ernest's machine tool firm could only deduct \$35,000 – about \$300,000 today – of the \$85,000 each of the top four execs received in compensation.

These execs, the court concluded, owed their fabulous pay increases to the demand the Korean War created for industrial re-tooling, not any individual business "sagacity and industry." Consequently, their company had no right to claim their huge paychecks as a reasonable and deductible corporate expense.

Corporate executives today face nothing remotely close to that sort of scrutiny. Major corporations can now deduct any executive pay up to \$1 million, no questions asked, and any compensation over \$1 million as well, so long as they define that excess over \$1 million as a "performance-based" incen-

tive. A small but valiant band of lawmakers has been trying to shut this gaping "pay for performance" loophole ever since Congress legislated the current deductibility standard in 1993.

In the last Congress, Rep. Barbara Lee from California proposed legislation that would, if passed, have denied tax deductions on any executive pay that runs over \$500,000 or 25 times the pay of a company's lowest-paid workers.

Rep. Lee's proposed Income Equity Act didn't go anywhere. But Congress, in the landmark health care reform enacted last year, did opt to deny health insurers tax deductions on any executive pay that runs over \$500,000 a year.

Will this limit in the health care reform legislation turn out to be the first step toward ending taxpayer subsidies for excessive executive pay? That outcome now seems, for the first time in ages, somewhat politically plausible.

What's changing the plausibility calculus? A newly launched – and incredibly imaginative – "US Uncut" grassroots campaign against corporate tax avoidance has, for starters, begun to build some appreciable political momentum.

Couple this momentum with the energy cascading out of Wisconsin – from the massive push back against demonizing public employees – and a sense of real change, not just spring, suddenly seems to be breaking out all over. **CT**

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

Libya and the Holy Triumvirate

William Blum says Moammar Gaddafi's real crime in the eyes of Western leaders isn't the fact that he's a dictator who kills his own people, it's his lack of respect

Libya is engaged in a civil war. The United States and the European Union and NATO – the Holy Triumvirate – are intervening, bloodily, in a civil war. To overthrow Moammar Gaddafi. First The Holy Triumvirate spoke only of imposing a no-fly zone. After getting support from international bodies on that understanding they immediately began to wage war against Libyan military forces, and whoever was nearby, on a daily basis. In the world of commerce this is called “bait and switch”.

Gaddafi's crime? He was never respectful enough of The Holy Triumvirate, which recognizes no higher power, and maneuvers the United Nations for its own purposes, depending on China and Russia to be as spineless and hypocritical as Barack Obama. The man the Triumvirate allows to replace Gaddafi will be more respectful.

So who are the good guys? The Libyan rebels, we're told. The ones who go around murdering and raping African blacks on the supposition that they're all mercenaries for Gaddafi. One or more of the victims may indeed have been members of a Libyan government military battalion; or may not have been. During the 1990s, in the name of pan-African unity, Gaddafi opened the borders to tens of thousands of sub-Saharan Africans to live and work in Libya. That, along with his earlier pan-Arab vision, did not win him

points with The Holy Triumvirate. Corporate bosses have the same problem about their employees forming unions. Oh, and did I mention that Gaddafi is strongly anti-Zionist?

Does anyone know what kind of government the rebels would create? The Triumvirate has no idea. To what extent will the new government embody an Islamic influence as opposed to the present secular government? What jihadi forces might they unleash? (And these forces do indeed exist in eastern Libya, where the rebels are concentrated.) Will they do away with much of the welfare state that Gaddafi used his oil money to create? Will the state-dominated economy be privatized? Who will wind up owning Libya's oil? Will the new regime continue to invest Libyan oil revenues in sub-Saharan African development projects? Will they allow a US military base and NATO exercises? Will we find out before long that the “rebels” were instigated and armed by Holy Triumvirate intelligence services?

In the 1990s, Slobodan Milosevic of Yugoslavia was guilty of “crimes” similar to Gaddafi's. His country was commonly referred to as “the last communists of Europe”. The Holy Triumvirate bombed him, arrested him, and let him die in prison. The Libyan government, it should be noted, refers to itself as the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. American foreign policy is never

So who are the good guys? The Libyan rebels, we're told. The ones who go around murdering and raping African blacks on the supposition that they're all mercenaries for Gaddafi

ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

There's also the excuse given by Obama to not prosecute those engaged in torture: because they were following orders. Has this "educated" man never heard of the Nuremberg Trials?

far removed from the Cold War.

We must look closely at the no-fly zone set up for Iraq by the US and the UK (falsely claimed by them as being authorized by the United Nations) beginning in the early 1990s and lasting more than a decade. It was in actuality a license for very frequent bombing and killing of Iraqi citizens; softening up the country for the coming invasion. The no-fly zone-cum invasion force in Libya is killing people every day with no end in sight, softening up the country for regime change. Who in the universe can stand up to The Holy Triumvirate? Has the entire history of the world ever seen such power and such arrogance?

And by the way, for the 10th time, Gaddafi did not carry out the bombing of PanAm Flight 103 in 1988.¹ Please enlighten your favorite progressive writers on this.

Barack "I'd kill for a peace prize" Obama
Is anyone keeping count?

I am. Libya makes six.

Six countries that Barack H. Obama has waged war against in his 26 months in office. (To anyone who disputes that dropping bombs on a populated land is act of war, I would ask what they think of the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor.)

America's first black president now invades Africa.

Is there anyone left who still thinks that Barack Obama is some kind of improvement over George W. Bush?

Probably two types still think so. 1) Those to whom color matters a lot; 2) Those who are very impressed by the ability to put together grammatically correct sentences.

It certainly can't have much otherwise to do with intellect or intelligence. Obama has said numerous things, which if uttered by Bush would have inspired lots of rolled eyeballs, snickers, and chuckling reports in the columns and broadcasts of mainstream media. Like the one the president has repeated on a number of occasions when pressed to investigate Bush and Cheney for war crimes, along the lines of "I prefer to look forward rather than backwards". Picture a defendant

before a judge asking to be found innocent on such grounds. It simply makes laws, law enforcement, crime, justice, and facts irrelevant.

There's also the excuse given by Obama to not prosecute those engaged in torture: because they were following orders. Has this "educated" man never heard of the Nuremberg Trials, where this defense was summarily rejected? Forever, it was assumed.

Just 18 days before the Gulf oil spill Obama said: "It turns out, by the way, that oil rigs today generally don't cause spills. They are technologically very advanced." (*Washington Post*, May 27, 2010) Picture George W. having said this, and the later reaction.

"All the forces that we're seeing at work in Egypt are forces that naturally should be aligned with us, should be aligned with Israel," Obama said in early March.² Imagine if Bush had implied this – that the Arab protesters in Egypt against a man receiving billions in US aid including the means to repress and torture them, should "naturally" be aligned with the United States and – God help us – Israel.

A week later, on March 10, State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley told a forum in Cambridge, Mass. that Wikileaks hero Bradley Manning's treatment by the Defense Department in a Marine prison was "ridiculous, counterproductive and stupid." The next day our "brainy" president was asked about Crowley's comment. Replied the Great Black Hope: "I have actually asked the Pentagon whether or not the procedures that have been taken in terms of his confinement are appropriate and are meeting our basic standards. They assure me that they are."

Right, George. I mean Barack. Bush should have asked Donald Rumsfeld whether anyone in US custody was being tortured anywhere in the world. He could then have held a news conference like Obama did to announce the happy news – "No torture by America!" We would still be chortling at that one.

Obama closed his remark with: "I can't go into details about some of their concerns, but some of this has to do with Pvt. Man-

ning's safety as well.”³

Ah yes, of course, Manning is being tortured for his own good. Someone please remind me – Did Georgieboy ever stoop to using that particular absurdity to excuse prisoner hell at Guantanamo?

Is it that Barack Obama is not bothered by the insult to Bradley Manning's human rights, the daily wearing away of this brave young man's mental stability?

The answer to the question is No. The president is not bothered by these things.

How do I know? Because Barack Obama is not bothered by anything as long as he can exult in being the president of the United States, eat his hamburgers, and play his basketball. Let me repeat once again what I first wrote in May 2009:

The problem, I'm increasingly afraid, is that the man doesn't really believe strongly in anything, certainly not in controversial areas. He learned a long time ago how to take positions that avoid controversy, how to express opinions without clearly taking sides, how to talk eloquently without actually saying anything, how to leave his listeners' heads filled with stirring clichés, platitudes, and slogans. And it worked. Oh how it worked! What could happen now, having reached the presidency of the United States, to induce him to change his style?

Remember that in his own book, “The Audacity of Hope”, Obama wrote: “I serve as a blank screen on which people of vastly different political stripes project their own views.”

Obama is a product of marketing. He is the prime example of the product “As seen on TV”.

Writer Sam Smith recently wrote that Obama is the most conservative Democratic president we've ever had. “In an earlier time, there would have been a name for him: Republican.”

Indeed, if John McCain had won the 2008 election, and then done everything that Obama has done in exactly the same way, liberals would be raging about such awful policies.

I believe that Barack Obama is one of the worst things that has ever happened to the American left. The millions of young people who jubilantly supported him in 2008, and numerous older supporters, will need a long recovery period before they're ready to once again offer their idealism and their passion on the alter of political activism.

If you don't like how things have turned out, next time find out exactly what your candidate means when he talks of “change”.

Dear Lord, please save us from the Holy Republican Empire

Glenn Beck, Sarah Palin, Mike Huckabee, John Boehner, and many other Republicans often find it difficult to speak about domestic or foreign issues without bringing religion into the picture. Speaker of the House of Representatives John Boehner, for example, in a recent talk at the National Religious Broadcasters conference stated that America's national debt is a “moral hazard.” The *Washington Post* (March 5, 2011) reported that “Boehner made clear that this fiscal crisis requires people to get on their knees.”

Rep. Joe Barton of Texas justified his opposition to controlling greenhouse gases because “you can't regulate God.”

Arizona Senator Jon Kyl accused Democratic Senate Leader Harry Reid of “disrespecting one of the two holiest of holidays for Christians” for considering keeping Congress in session during Christmas.

Rep. Steve King of Iowa compared Democrats to Pontius Pilate, the ancient Roman official who sentenced Jesus to be crucified.⁴

And South Carolina Senator Jim DeMint recently declared that “the bigger government gets, the smaller God gets. ... America works, freedom works, when people have that internal gyroscope that comes from a belief in God and Biblical faith. Once we push that out, you no longer have the capacity to live as a free person without the external controls of an authoritarian government. I've said it often and I believe it -- the bigger government gets, the smaller God gets. As

Rep. Steve King of Iowa compared Democrats to Pontius Pilate, the ancient Roman official who sentenced Jesus to be crucified

ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

Once the government of the United States of America makes it clear that an individual foreign leader is not one of the Good Guys, the US mainstream media invariably picks up on this and goes out of its way to denigrate the individual at every opportunity

people become more dependent on government, less dependent on God.”⁵

So, in a futile attempt to enlighten the likes of these esteemed Republican members of Congress, I feel obliged to point out the following:

On the 4th day of November 1796, a “Treaty of peace and friendship between the United States of America and the Bey and subjects of Tripoli, of Barbary” was concluded at Tripoli [Libya]. Article 11 of the treaty begins: “As the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion ... “ Be it further noted: Article VI, Section II, of the United States Constitution states: “This Constitution, and the Laws of the United States which shall be made in Pursuance thereof; and all Treaties made, or which shall be made, under the Authority of the United States, shall be the supreme Law of the Land; and the Judges in every State shall be bound thereby, any Thing in the Constitution or Laws of any State to the Contrary notwithstanding.”

The creed of America’s founders was neither Christianity nor secularism, but religious liberty.

After the terrorist attacks of 9-11, a Taliban leader declared that “God is on our side, and if the world’s people try to set fire to Afghanistan, God will protect us and help us.”⁶

“With or without religion, good people will do good things and bad people will do bad things. But for good people to do bad things – that takes religion.” – Steven Weinberg, Nobel Prize-winning physicist.

The Bad Guys

I’ve written on many occasions about America’s ODE – Officially Designated Enemies: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Hugo Chávez, Fidel Castro, Daniel Ortega, Hasan Nasrallah, Moammar Gaddafi, and others. Once the government of the United States of America makes it clear that an individual foreign leader is not one of the Good Guys, that he doesn’t believe that America is God’s gift to humankind, and that he is not willing to allow his country to become

an obedient client state, the US mainstream media invariably picks up on this and goes out of its way to denigrate the individual at every opportunity. (If any reader knows of any exceptions to this rule I’d be interested in hearing from them.)

Juan Forero has long been a Latin American correspondent for the *Washington Post*. He’s also the same for National Public Radio. I used to send letters to the *Post* pointing out how Forero was distorting the facts each time he wrote about Hugo Chávez, errors of omission compounded with errors of commission. None were printed, so I began to send my missives directly to Forero. He once actually replied saying that he (sort of) agreed with me on the point I had raised and implied that he would try to avoid similar errors in the future. I actually detected some improvement after that for a short period, then it was back to usual. During the current unrest in Libya he wrote: “Chavez said it ‘was a great lie’ that Gaddafi’s forces had attacked civilians.”⁷

Well, how stupid can Hugo Chávez think the world is? We’ve all seen and read of Gaddafi’s attacks on civilians.

But it turns out that if you find the original Spanish you get a fuller and different picture. According to the United Press International (UPI) Spanish-language report, Chávez said that the fighting in Libya was a civil war and those who were attacked were thus not simply protestors or civilians; they were on the other side of the civil war; i.e., combatants.⁸

Al Jazeera in America

The uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East have given a great boost to al Jazeera, the television network based in Doha, Qatar. Until recently Americans shied away from the station; it was just too easily associated with the Middle East and Muslims, which of course leads easily to thinking about terrorists and “terrorists”; and certainly any well-brought-up American knew that the station could not be as unbiased as CBS, CNN, NPR or Fox News. The station had reason to be paranoid about its office in the United

States, land of ten million crazies (more than a few of them holding public office). It occupies six floors in a downtown Washington, DC office building, but its name doesn't appear on the building directory.

But US mainstream media now quote al Jazeera English and show their news footage. Many progressives, including myself, have taken to watching the station in preference to US mainstream media. In general, the news is of more substance, the guests are mainly more or less progressive, and there are no commercials. However, the more I watch it the more I realize that the station's presenters and correspondents are not necessarily as well imbued with the progressive perspective as they should be.

One case in point of many I could give: On March 12 al Jazeera correspondent Roger Wilkinson was reporting about the trial in Cuba of Alan Gross, the American arrested after he dispensed electronic equipment to Cuban citizens. Gross entered Cuba as a tourist but was actually there in behalf of Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI), a private contractor working for the Agency for International Development (AID), a division of the State Department. Gross was thus a covert unregistered agent of a foreign government. Wilkinson reported this very controversial story with all the innocence and distortion of the US mainstream media. He mentioned in passing that the Cuban government tries to control the Internet. What can one conclude from that other than that Cuban officials want to hide certain information from its citizens? Just like the US mainstream media, Wilkinson gave no examples of any Internet sites blocked by the Cuban government; for the simple reason, perhaps, that there aren't any. What is the terrible truth that Cubans might learn if they had full access to the Internet? Ironically, it's the US government and US multinationals who impinge upon this access, for political reasons and by pricing their services beyond Cuba's means. This is why Cuba and Venezuela are building their own undersea cable connection.

Wilkinson spoke of AID's program of "de-

mocracy promotion", but gave no hint that in the world of AID and the private organizations that contract with it – including Gross's employer – this term is code for "regime change". AID has long played a subversive role in world affairs. Here is John Gilligan, Director of AID during the Carter administration:

"At one time, many AID field offices were infiltrated from top to bottom with CIA people. The idea was to plant operatives in every kind of activity we had overseas, government, volunteer, religious, every kind."⁹

AID has been but one of many institutions employed by the United States for more than 50 years to subvert the Cuban revolution. It is because of this that we can formulate this equation: The United States is to the Cuban government like al Qaeda is to American government. Cuba's laws dealing with activities typically carried out by the likes of AID and DAI reflect this history. It's not paranoia. It's self-preservation. In discussing a case like Alan Gross without considering this equation is a serious defect in journalism and political analysis.

Hopefully the Gross case will serve to temper the nature of US "democracy promotion" efforts in Cuba.

Washington's policy – and therefore Britain's policy – toward Cuba has always stemmed mainly from a desire to keep the island from becoming a good example for the Third World of an alternative to capitalism. But Western leaders actually do not, or do not dare, understand what can motivate people like the Cuban leaders and their followers. Here's one of the Wikileaks US-Embassy cables, March 25, 2009 – William Hague, then-British Conservative MP and Shadow Foreign Secretary, giving the US embassy in London a report on his recent visit to Cuba: Hague "said that he was slightly surprised that the Cuban leadership did not appear to be moving toward more of a Chinese model of economic opening, but were rather still 'romantic revolutionaries.'" In his conversation with Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez "the discussion turned to political

The United States is to the Cuban government like al Qaeda is to American government

ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

“The discussion turned to political ideology, during which Hague commented that people in Britain were more interested in shopping than ideology”

ideology, during which Hague commented that people in Britain were more interested in shopping than ideology.” [Oh dear, what a jolly good defense of the Western way of life. Rule Britannia! God Bless America!] Hague then reported that “Rodriguez appeared disdainful of the notion and said one needed shopping only to buy food and a few good books.”

CT

Japan devastated by an earthquake and tsunami. America devastated by the profit motive.

Christine Todd Whitman, George W. Bush’s first Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) administrator, speaking of how the nuclear industry has learned from every previous nuclear accident or disaster: “It’s safer than working in a grocery store,” she said.

Whitman is now co-chairwoman of the nuclear industry’s Clean and Safe Energy Coalition.¹⁰

Notes

1. killinghope.org/bblum6/panam.htm
2. March 4, 2011, Democratic Party function, Miami, FL, CQ Transcriptions
3. Los Angeles Times, March 11, 2011
4. For this and the previous two examples, see “Jim DeMint’s Theory Of Relativity: ‘The Bigger Government Gets, The Smaller God Gets’”, Think Progress, March 15, 2011
5. Fox News Sunday, December 19, 2010
6. Washington Post, September 19, 2001
7. Washington Post, March 7, 2011
8. UPI Reporte LatAm, March 4, 2011
9. George Cotter, “Spies, strings and missionaries”, The Christian Century (Chicago), March 25, 1981, p.321
10. “Former EPA chief: Nuke crisis ‘a very good lesson’”, Politico, March 14, 2011

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”

BENDIB’S WORLD

Khalil Bendib (www.bendib.com)



Trading places: A tale of two countries

David Michael Green contrasts international lifestyles

Regressives love markets as a tool for organizing our social sphere. Love 'em! That's fine, up to a point. Marketplace of ideas? Great notion. Political choice? Could we have a lot more, please? Competition in commercial relations? I wish the folks on the right were one-tenth as serious about that as is their rhetoric.

In other respects, however, the market is not the way to go. Letting the market take care of my health security (have we already forgotten that "managed care" was originally sold to us on the basis of bringing the wonders of the business model to medicine?) hasn't worked out so very well. And, as we're going to realize acutely in the coming decades, turning over environmental stewardship to the magic of the marketplace has been about as brilliant an idea as would be giving nuclear warheads to angry meth-torqued teenagers or religious lunatics sporting apocalyptic visions of the paradise that will follow global annihilation.

But, I've got an idea. And perhaps my (mostly imaginary) friends on the right will indulge me and play along. Let's call it the Marketplace of Countries, shall we?

Let's take two (for the sake of simplicity) countries and compare them to each other. Then we can use the magical market modality to determine our respective assessments of them. If it turns out that one country

looks a lot more attractive than the other, surely we'll want to exercise that much vaunted power of marketplace choice, and validate that one as the superior place to live, right?

Fair enough?

An additional beauty of this test is that while the right and what little that goes for a left in America today can hardly ever agree on any solutions to problems, I think we can mostly agree on what constitutes the problems, right? Not always, but mostly. For example, a richer country is better than a poorer one, isn't it? No debate on that. A more educated society beats an ignorant one, no? And wouldn't we all like to feel safe from crime?

Okay, then! Let's compare Country A and Country B on a variety of measures, and see what we come up with, shall we?

How about if we start with physical security? Suppose I told you that in Country A the murder rate is 5.0 per 100,000 people. I believe you'd say "Ouch!"

That ranks in about the top ten percent of countries internationally. Maybe, therefore, you'd like it better in Country B, where the rate is about one-sixth of that nasty figure, at .89 per hundred thousand people instead. And that's true even though Country A has the death penalty going, while in Country B they think that the government murdering its own people is a pretty barbaric thing to

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FIGURING IT OUT

In order to achieve this record of fewer hospital beds, staggeringly greater infant mortality, and killing people off at a younger age, Country A is actually spending twice as much as Country B in annual health care costs

do. Hmm. So much for that whole deterrent argument, eh? But I digress...

How about health? How do the two countries compare? In Country A, there are substantially fewer hospital beds per thousand people (3.3) than in Country B (3.6), and the infant mortality rate – always a key indicator of national health – is more than twice as bad, with 6.3 deaths per thousand live births in A, compared to 2.75 in B. That probably explains why the World Health Organization ranks Country A as having only the 37th best health care system on the planet (out of about 200 countries), while Country B's is 23rd best. That may also help explain why people live a fair bit longer in Country B (80.74 years) as compared to Country A (78.14).

Surely, though, Country B is spending a helluva lot more than is A on its health care system in order to get these numbers, right? I mean anyone can improve delivery by spending more money, can't they? Well, not exactly. In order to achieve this record of fewer hospital beds, staggeringly greater infant mortality, and killing people off at a younger age, Country A is actually spending twice as much as Country B in annual health care costs. That is, \$4271 versus \$2145 per person, per year. At that rate, good thing they spent more! Just think how sick people would be in Country A if they spent four times what Country B does on health care.

The two countries are pretty similar in terms of education measures. Both sport 99 percent literacy rates. People go to school a bit longer, on average, in Country A than B – 12.0 years versus 11.4. But Country B devotes a greater portion of its GDP to education, and does slightly better than Country A on measures of reading, scientific and mathematical literacy.

Country A and Country B are also pretty similar when it comes to measures of civil and political liberties. They both get rated 6 on a 7 point scale. Not bad. But that is where the similarities end. Government corruption levels in Country B are among

the lowest in the world, earning a 9.2 rating on a 10-point scale, while in Country A that number is only 7.6. In Country A, voter registration rates run at about 50 percent, whereas in Country B they're 74 percent. In A, turnout of registered voters tops out at 64 percent, while in Country B fully eight out of every ten registered voters shows up at the polling place. In Country B 43 percent of parliamentarians are women, whereas in Country A it's only 14 percent. And the overall gender empowerment index (a composite statistic that accounts for women's participation in government, business, academia, salary ratios, etc.) for B is .824, whereas for A it is .757. In short, both countries are relatively free democracies, but B achieves much greater participation of its people – and, importantly, all of its people – than does A.

Religion and teen pregnancy

There are certain social indicators that are quite telling as well. In Country A, they sure go to church a lot. Forty-four percent of people attend once a week or more often, while in Country B only 4 percent do. It's not so clear that such piousness makes them better people over there in A, however. Teenage pregnancy rates are not only higher, they're nearly ten times higher in Country A than in Country B, coming in at an annual rate of 1672 versus 178 per one million people, respectively.

And a look at environmental responsibility shows similar massive discrepancies. Country A produces over three times more the annual carbon emissions – 19.48 tons per capita – than does Country B, at 5.4 tons. That's not only, er, rude, it happens to be quite lethal as well. Given the global pollution and climate effects of such a massive carbon footprint, one might say that Country A doesn't exactly play well with others.

But, you might argue, what everyone really cares about is getting rich. I'd say that varies a lot from culture to culture (which also means that any given society doesn't have to be obsessed with money if it doesn't

want to be), but I'd surely agree that it's important to compare economic performance across national boundaries. Country A had a slightly better rate of GDP growth in 2005 than did Country B, 3.2 percent over 2.7, and a slightly lower unemployment rate in 2004, 5.5 versus 6.5 percent. However, it's also important to note that A grows in population each year at a much greater rate (.883 percent, using 2008 figures) than does B (.157 percent), which likely more than wipes out the GDP growth rate differential between the two countries. In any case, the net difference in GDP per capita between them turns out to be pretty small anyhow. In Country A people earned, on average, \$44,155 in 2006, while in Country B that figure is \$42,553.

Equally wealthy?

So, for all their differences, it turns out that A and B are more or less equally wealthy countries, right? Well, yes and no. They do indeed both enjoy relatively equal (and quite high) standards of living. But GDP per capita is, after all, a very well-named figure. As a measurement of economic well being, it is indeed gross. Since it is an average, it tells us nothing about the distribution of wealth and income in a given country. Very different concentrations of wealth can produce identical averages.

And, it turns out that they are very different in this case. In Country A the share of income received by the richest ten percent of the population is 31 percent, whereas in Country B it is 20 percent. In Country A, child poverty rates are ten times what they are in Country B. Ten times. That is, the share of children living in households with income below fifty percent of the national median is 22.4 percent in A, whereas in B it is a mere 2.6 percent. And the overall polarization of wealth, as measured by the Gini coefficient statistic, is twice as high in Country A (45) as compared to Country B (23). Country A is thus the 42nd highest country in the world in terms of economic inequali-

tarianism, located right between Cameroon and Uruguay. Every single country that is higher than it on that list is a third world country, as are the next 26 below it on the list, assuming one does not count Russia (#54) as a developed economy. Country B, on the other hand, is the least unequal society in the entire world.

Ah, well, you say: "Country B is some communist dictatorship, where they have no free market and they imprison the wealthy! It's North Korea, right?! Evil egalitarianism brought to us courtesy the business end of gun barrel!"

Alas, 'fraid not. Indeed, here we can consult our good friends at the ultra-conservative Heritage Foundation, which ranks countries according to their level of economic freedom, per an index that the right-wing think tank has cooked up. Turns out that in extraordinarily unequal Country A, that figure is 3.2, while in extraordinarily equal country B it's – wait for it, now – all the way down to 3.1. It would seem that both places are – in the current parlance of our friendly downsizing, union-busting, middle class-crushing political class – quite "open for business", thank you very much.

And, interestingly, notwithstanding its welcoming attitude to business big and small, it turns out that working conditions are also much better in Country B than in Country A. People in B work 1564 hours per year, whereas in A it is 1792. Based on a forty hour work week, that means that the 228 extra hours being worked by the folks in Country A translate into nearly six additional work weeks per year, even though, as we've seen, GDP per capita is pretty similar. (Hmm. Doesn't that therefore also mean that they work for a lot less over there in Country A?) And, indeed, when it comes to vacation and holidays, the legally required minimum that workers must receive in Country B ranges from 25 to 32 days, depending on one's age. In Country A that number is zero. Although most workers actually get 7 to 21 days off work each year,

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many do not, and none are legally required to. Moreover, when people lose their jobs, they do much better in Country B than in Country A. In addition to not losing health and pension coverage, the unemployment benefit replacement rate (a composite statistic) is 29 in Country B, and more than double that (14) in Country A.

In Country B, people receive substantial support through government programs throughout the duration of their lives, from cradle to grave. In Country A, there is little of that, except for seniors, who receive a modest governmental pension supplement and help with their health care expenses. Of course, such programs are expensive, and in Country B all forms of taxation combined are equal to 54 percent of GDP, while in Country A that figure is instead 30 percent. For individuals in Country B, that translates into 41 percent of family income going to taxes, while only 19 percent does so in Country A.

Yet, that does not seem to bother the citizens of Country B, who indeed are quite delighted with the economic system. When asked to rate themselves on a ten-point scale with respect to their degree of financial satisfaction, the mean response there was 6.6. What was it for Country A, where people get to keep so much more of what they earn? A whopping 6.7.

Emerging pattern

We could go on and on with this. Did I mention, for instance, that 82 percent of workers in Country B are members of trade unions (the highest level in the industrialized world), but only a mere 13 percent in Country A (nearly the lowest). I'm sure that little factoid has nothing to do with the comparative economic conditions for workers in each place, eh? Anyhow, you get the picture I think. Call me crazy, but it seems like there's a pattern emerging here.

So let's recap, shall we? In Country B, as compared to Country A, people are way safer, they're healthier and they live longer. They are far more equal socially, politically

and economically. They're much more engaged in their democracy, and their government is less corrupt. They are far more environmentally responsible, secularist, and they have one-tenth the teenage pregnancy rates. They spend more on education, and their public is more literate in language, math and science. They pay more in taxes, but in exchange for that, they get far more benefits and a lifetime of almost complete freedom from economic anxiety. They work far fewer hours each year, and they are just as satisfied with their financial position as the folks in Country A, despite netting far less income after taxes. They have essentially eliminated poverty within their national borders, while tens of millions of children and adults are impoverished in Country A. Oh, and I didn't even mention how much Country A loves to fight wars, and Country B never does.

So, where would you rather live? Hey you guys out there on the right, with your constant mantra about the wonders of the marketplace. I'm talkin' to you. Which product are you gonna buy at this market? Sorry, I can't hear you. I can no longer make out the lofty choruses of your "Ode To Market", or the sweet strains of "Bring Back The Mornin' Again, Ronald".

All I hear are footsteps, and they're getting quieter and quieter.

Here's what Barack Obama said about Americans in his state of the union address, as reported in the official text: "As contentious and frustrating and messy as our democracy can sometimes be, I know there isn't a person here who would trade places with any other nation on Earth. (Applause.)"

(Other) regressives, meanwhile, love to rail against the perils of evil European socialism, as supposedly embodied by the pernicious Mr. Obama himself. For example, a 2009 article in Slate noted that, "The columnist Charles Krauthammer recently called the president's address to a joint session of Congress last month 'the boldest social democratic manifesto ever issued by

a US president.' Newt Gingrich claims that Obama wants to bring us 'European socialism.'"

So, let me see here. According to both the far right and the alleged left, European socialism is a total disaster of malaise and stagnation and oppression, and America is all warm and fuzzy and "exceptional", right?

But how is it, then, that Country B above – you know, the one that kicks ass in just about every measure – is that paragon of evil socialism, Sweden?

(Though it also could have been Norway. Or Denmark. Or Germany. Or Canada. Or just about any developed democracy in the world, including those prissy poofs in France, who actually do have the world's best health care system. As opposed to the blowhards from a certain other country –

ranked right between Slovenia and Costa Rica on the list – who merely claim to. Incessantly.)

And why is it that the dysfunctional Country A – deficient in nearly every measure, and often quite sickeningly so – is none other than America?

I wish I could have been at the state of the union speech, so that I could have jumped up in the halls of Congress and shouted to the president, "Excuse me, Barack, but, yes, there is a person here who wants to trade places!"

"It's me! (Notable absence of applause.)"

CT

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

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Wisconsin: Not your father's culture war

we're watching a right wing revolution, says **Bill Berkowitz**

Everything the Heritage Foundation has been seeking, thinking about, researching, promoting, marketing, writing about and fundraising for - from destroying unions to putting the kybosh on public education - is now on the table

It may not leap out at you, but what's going on in Wisconsin and several other states is a fusion of Koch-ist free-market fundamentalism, Tea Party swagger, and the Religious Right's traditional values agenda; think the Heritage Foundation's full-blown project coming home to roost.

With the stripping away of fifty years of collective bargaining rights for public employee unions in Wisconsin, the culture wars of the past three decades are morphing into something much larger: a right-wing cultural revolution. And while battles over reproductive rights, same-sex marriage and an assortment of other highly-charged social issues will continue to be fought over, the political landscape is dramatically changing.

The "culture wars," as reported by the mainstream media since the Reagan administration, has been portrayed as mostly being about such hot-button issues as abortion, homosexuality, and prayer in the public schools. And while it is true that those issues, and a slate of similarly divisive ones, have propelled the modern "culture wars" forward, the battle over union rights in Wisconsin and Ohio (with other states likely to follow) is not just another battle in the "culture wars." Rather it is a redefinition of this country's social contract and a complete realignment of the political landscape.

What's going on is a fusion of Koch-ist anti-union free-market fundamentalism, Tea Party bluster, and the Religious Right's traditional values agenda; think the Heritage Foundation's nearly four-decade-old mission coming home to roost.

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Naomi Klein, author of *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, sees the battle in Wisconsin as a classic example of "shock doctrine" politics in action. Klein quotes the late Milton Friedman as saying that it is a crisis, whether real or conjured, that "produces real change. When the crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is out basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable."

In a recent interview with MSNBC's Chris Hayes, Klein pointed out Governor Walker has defined the situation as a sky-is-falling "budget crisis" - which Klein said the Governor has "exaggerated" - thus leading to the draconian "solutions" that he's proposed.

Interestingly, Alvaro Vargas Llosa, a Senior Fellow of The Center on Global Pros-

perity at the conservative/libertarian Independent Institute, and a supporter of Gov. Walker, kind of confirmed Klein's view in a recent piece titled "Wisconsin Matters to the World." Vargas Llosa wrote that, "the battle of Wisconsin ... has acquired planetary significance. If the forces of reason prevail, the contagion could spread like wildfire, bringing sanity to Washington and across the nation. If they don't, the best chance in many years to reverse America's slow decline will have been missed."

It is Vargas Llosa's "forces of reason" that have waged a long-term struggle to destroy all unions. It is those "forces of reason" that has brought wave after wave of "culture war" issues to state after state. And, it is those "forces of reason" that has unleashed a "cultural revolution" in this country.

In order for the "forces of reason" to succeed, they need to have the full complement of conservative forces on board: the nascent Tea Party and its multi-millionaire backers, the conservative think tanks and its economic hit men, and leading Religious Right organizations and its grassroots army. And they all certainly appear to be.

For years, some have called the union between economic conservatives and social conservatives a marriage of convenience and expediency. And it often has been. While there are definite splits within the conservative movement, particularly among hardcore libertarians and the social issues crowd, conservatives have always recognized that they need, and feed off, each other.

While many hypothesized that the growth of the Tea Party movement would adversely affect the influence of the Religious Right in Republican Party politics, it appears that that isn't quite panning out.

A recent analysis by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life found "that Tea Party supporters tend to have conservative opinions not just about economic matters, but also about social issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage. In addition, they are much more likely than registered voters as a whole to say that

their religion is the most important factor in determining their opinions on these social issues. And they draw disproportionate support from the ranks of white evangelical Protestants."

Most, if not all, of the potential candidates for the Republican Party's 2012 presidential nomination recognize this. That is why Newt Gingrich, who appears to be ready to set up a presidential exploratory committee, speaks at an Ohio Right to Life banquet one night and a CPAC gathering another.

It was also recently reported that Mike Huckabee, Newt Gingrich, Michele Bachmann, and Haley Barbour, all potential GOP presidential candidates, intend to participate in what's being called a "Pastors' Policy Briefing," an event sponsored by the Iowa Renewal Project. People for the American Way's Right Wing Watch pointed out that "The Iowa Renewal Project is one of many state-level 'restoration projects' that attempt to organize pastors to support conservative causes and Republican candidates."

A brief scan of a site called ProLifeBlogs.com [1] reveals headline after headline – "Obama, Dems and Union Thugs: Elections Matter Only If Democrats Win," "Pro-union Demonstrators Assault FNC's Mike Tobin, Attempt to Shout Down Field Reports," "Madison Protests - Socialists" – bashing Wisconsin's public sector union workers.

In Wisconsin, the free-market piece is now the major focus. Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker's goal, to radically redefine collective bargaining rights of public sector unions, appears – after weeks of mass protests and public opinion polls supporting the workers – to be coming to pass. As the *New Republic's* John Judis recently pointed out, the conservative plan is "to snuff out their [public unions] very existence." It is not a stretch to see that the destruction of the unions can directly lead to rendering the Democratic Party impotent.

Bill Berkowitz is a freelance writer and longtime observer of the conservative movement

Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker's goal, to radically redefine collective bargaining rights of public sector unions, appears – after weeks of mass protests and public opinion polls supporting the workers – to be coming to pass

So this is how the other half lives

Damian Bathersby goes shopping. With his wife . . .

The shelves in this place were so bare it looked like they'd sold all their stock and I was a bit worried about the work-experience kid getting in trouble, because he'd forgotten to put price tags on things

Was it Gandhi who said money can't buy class?
Or maybe it was Charlie Sheen. I forget.

But I don't really care, because I have neither money nor class.

My wife, on the other hand, is very classy, so I spend a lot of time pretending I have the level of sophistication she deserves.

Which is why I got her a Louis Vuitton bag the other day.

Bloody classy, hey!

You see, it was her birthday and so we went to the Gold Coast for a couple of nights.

I would like to be able to say I "took" her to the Gold Coast, but the truth is she earned the tickets in a promotion at her work. I did, however, fill the car with petrol and drive us down there, which must count for something.

We were wandering aimlessly around Surfers Paradise one night when she began dragging me across the street.

"Come on," she said. "I want you to see this."

For a minute it appeared she was dragging me towards a strip club, so I quickened my pace.

But at the last minute she veered towards a brightly lit shop with gold trim on the windows and what even I recognised as very high-quality goods on display.

"What? Where? Why?" I babbled in the incoherent style of a man who thought he was heading for pole dancers and alcohol but suddenly realised he was going shopping somewhere he was out of his depth.

"Hurry up," she said. "I want to show you how the other half lives."

As we rushed towards the gold-plated entry I was pretty sure they wouldn't let the likes of us inside, but a man in a dark suit appeared from nowhere, opened the door with a flourish and greeted us with, "Good evening, sir. Good evening, madam. Welcome to Louis Vuitton."

How bloody classy is that?

The shelves in this place were so bare it looked like they'd sold all their stock and I was a bit worried about the work-experience kid getting in trouble, because he'd forgotten to put price tags on things.

Another bloke in a suit asked if there was anything special we wanted to see and I was opening my mouth to say, "Strewth mate, I reckon this stuff is a bit rich for us", when my wife gave me a kick in the shins.

"Just looking," she said, beaming. But, as there was no one else in the shop, he said he'd stay with us in case we had any questions.

I reckon he was worried we were going to steal something, but my wife told me it was a strange and unfamiliar concept known as "good customer service".

So she and her new BLVFF (Best Louis Vuitton Friend Forever) spent a lovely half-hour wandering around, admiring the range while I followed a few metres behind, constantly checking neither of them had stolen my wallet.

Every now and then my wife would turn, give me a dis-approving look and say something like, “I hope you’re not touching things” or “don’t slouch, this is Louis Vuitton!”

Then she and her BLVFF would smile knowingly at each other while I resisted the urge to plunge a Louis Vuitton letter opener between their oh-so-smug shoulder blades.

I soon realised we couldn’t have afforded even a roll of Louis Vuitton toilet paper, especially when it turned out the small suitcase my wife fell in love with cost more than \$7000.

I don’t think the salesman ever thought he’d get a sale out of us – he was just being a nice bloke (which made me feel a bit guilty about the letter-opener thing).

As we were saying goodbye he disappeared into a back room and emerged with

a Louis Vuitton sample book (about the size of a Women’s Weekly cookbook) in a Louis Vuitton carry bag.

A small souvenir of our visit, he told my wife, who looked like she’d just won the lottery.

You have never seen anyone happier than she was as she walked down the centre of Surfers Paradise carrying her Louis Vuitton bag and basking in the admiring looks of passers-by who had no way of knowing it held a free catalogue and not a \$5000 watch or pair of shoes.

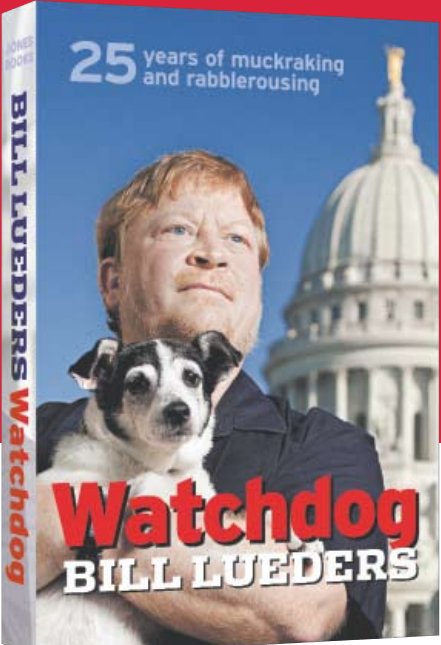
I know some of you will disagree, but I reckon that when I tell this story in years to come, I can honestly refer to it as the time I got my wife a Louis Vuitton bag on her birthday.

And I reckon the catalogue will make a ripper coffee table book.

Maybe I do have some class. **CT**


Damian Bathersby is a columnist with the Sunshine Coast Daily at Maroochydore, Queensland, Australia, where this article first appeared.

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25 years of
muckraking
 and
rabbleroising
 all in one book

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