

INSIDE: OPENING THE DEBATE ON ISRAEL ● SIXTEEN KILOS OF WRITER'S BLOCK ● BONO'S INDEPENDENT ● MY MISSING YEARS ● MEMORIAL DAY? ● & MORE

The^{ColdType} READER

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**ARE YOU SURE
YOU'RE FEELING OK?**

The^{ColdType}READER



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Drug companies are cashing in on a host of newly-defined medical conditions, including female sexual dysfunction, erectile dysfunction, restless legs syndrome, sleeplessness, social anxiety disorder and irritable bowel syndrome. If we believe the industry, says Stan Cox, we've all got a disease in need of treatment

ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE FEELING OK?

You see a TV show or a commercial featuring medical problems, and you start feeling the symptoms yourself: a twinge in the leg or maybe a moment of doubt about your emotional stability.

If so, you, like millions of Americans, could be suffering from a serious condition known as telechondria. But help is here, with new Advertil(R) in the green-and-yellow caplet. Ask your doctor ...

No, wait, don't really ask. Telechondriacs have not yet been recognized by science. Pharmacists are not dispensing drugs like "Advertil," and they probably never will. The last chemical that pharmaceutical executives would want to sell you is one that makes it harder for them to convince you that you're sick and need their products.

Drug corporations and their "awareness" groups, as we're all painfully aware, have defined and redefined a host of medical conditions – including female sexual dysfunction, erectile dysfunction, restless legs,

sleeplessness, bipolar disorder, attention deficit disorder, social anxiety disorder and irritable bowel syndrome – to include larger and larger segments of the population in the United States and other Western nations.

Accepting for a moment the industry's claims about the numbers of people suffering from the eight diseases listed above, we could do some simple calculations showing that up to 93 percent of adult women and men in the United States suffer from at least one of them. Throw in a few more conditions like depression, bone density loss and premenstrual dysphoric disorder, and industry figures make it appear that virtually every American has a disease in need of a treatment.

Last year, Ray Moynihan and Alan Cassels called attention to the epidemic of disease marketing in their book "Selling Sickness." Last month, health professionals, academics, journalists and consumers gathered in Newcastle, Australia, for the Inaugural Conference on Disease Mongering.

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GOOD HEALTH?

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A set of papers from that meeting was published free by the online journal PLoS Medicine. Also last month, the Prescription Access Litigation Project (PALP) in Boston announced its “2006 Bitter Pill Awards,” recognizing drug companies that engaged in the year’s worst “overzealous and questionable marketing practices.”

These and other recent activities make it all too clear that the profitable practices exposed in Lynn Payer’s 1992 book “Disease Mongers: How Doctors, Drug Companies, and Insurers Are Making You Feel Sick” have been refined and amplified in recent years, with the apparent goal of medicating an entire population.

Restless legs

The evolution of “restless legs syndrome,” documented by Steven Woloshin and Lisa Schwartz in a paper from the Disease Mongering Conference, is a case study in how a pharmaceutical company, with help from the media, can turn what is a serious problem for some people into a contrived medical condition for millions more.

Woloshin and Schwartz analyzed media coverage in the interval between 2003, when GlaxoSmithKline Inc. first issued press releases about trials of its drug Requip for relief of restless legs syndrome, and 2005, when the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved that use.

Of 187 major newspaper articles published during those two years, 64 percent relayed without comment the

industry’s claims that millions of Americans – as many as “1 in 10 adults” – suffer restless leg. Forty-five percent of the articles stressed that many people may be unaware they’re sick, even though, according to 73 percent of the articles, the syndrome can have extreme physical, social and emotional consequences. Reports of the relief provided by drug treatment used “miracle language” 34 percent of the time, while 93 percent of articles failed to quantify Requip’s side effects.

Yet the relief people get from Requip appears to be anything but miraculous. In one trial, 73 percent of subjects saw improvement – compared with 57 percent whose symptoms improved with a placebo! Side effects that occurred in clinical trials at least twice as often with Requip as with a placebo included nausea (40 percent of subjects), vomiting (11 percent), somnolence (12 percent), dizziness (11 percent) and fatigue (8 percent).

My attempts to obtain responses from several drug companies to charges of mongering restless leg and other conditions went unanswered. Quoted last month by the Guardian (U.K.) as he defended his company against bad publicity generated by the conference, David Stout of GlaxoSmithKline said, “You need to talk to the patients. Things like restless leg syndrome can ruin people’s lives. It is easy to trivialize things when you don’t have them. If people did not want the treatments, they would not seek them.”

Restless leg syndrome in its most

serious form is indeed no joke. My father was tormented for years by near-constant symptoms, until, without ever having seen an advertisement, he sought treatment.

But, says Dr. David Henry, who is a physician, professor at the University of Newcastle and co-organizer of the Disease Mongering conference, “When you extend a drug beyond the [most severely afflicted] group on which claims of its effectiveness are based, you see a falling ratio of good to harm. The benefits of the drug diminish, while the side effects tend to stay the same.”

Henry told me, “The companies know quite consciously that they’re going into areas where they’re doing net harm.”

In their conference paper, Woloshin and Schwartz note that restless legs syndrome is one of those “disease promotion stories” that the press loves to cover: “The stories are full of drama: a huge but unrecognized public health crisis, compelling personal anecdotes, uncaring or ignorant doctors, and miracle cures.”

Irritable bowels

The story of another disease, irritable bowel syndrome, has all of those dramatic elements, plus dead patients.

In “Selling Sickness,” Moynihan and Cassels describe public-relations offensives by Novartis Pharmaceuticals and GlaxoSmithKline to popularize a condition called irritable bowel syndrome (symptoms of which are described as “abdominal pain or discomfort associated with changes in

bowel habits in the absence of any apparent structural abnormality”).

The companies stood to gain billions in sales if, as they claimed, as many as 20 percent of Americans had the syndrome. GlaxoSmithKline’s drug Lotronex received FDA approval for treatment of irritable bowel in 2000, and Novartis’ Zelnorm was approved in 2002. In statements to the FDA and the public, the companies tended to characterize irritable bowel syndrome as it is experienced by the worst-afflicted patients – a tiny percentage of the total – while emphasizing claims that the syndrome hits vast numbers of Americans.

TV star Kelsey Grammer and his wife Camille Grammer, who suffers from the disease, made the rounds of talk shows in a publicity effort quietly funded by GlaxoSmithKline, while Novartis deployed former Wonder Woman Lynda Carter to stress that common stomach problems might be irritable bowel, a “real medical condition.” The FDA wrote to Novartis in 2003, demanding that the company discontinue other advertising that it considered misleading because it exaggerated the drug’s benefits and the numbers of people who need it while minimizing its side effects.

Lotronex can now be prescribed only by doctors who have enrolled in a GlaxoSmithKline “Prescribing Program.” According to Moynihan and Cassels, the drug came under fire in late 2000 when three FDA scientists wrote to their superiors expressing alarm over a rising toll of deaths and

The story of another disease, irritable bowel syndrome, has all of those dramatic elements, plus dead patients

GOOD HEALTH?

Evidence is accumulating that one drug prescribed for bipolar disorder (Lilly's Zyprexa) causes withdrawal symptoms . . . the drugs are associated with a heightened risk of suicide and that antipsychotic drugs in general are associated with increased death rates

hospitalizations of irritable-bowel patients during the nine months that Lotronex had been on the market. (The concern was spurred by the remarkably increased rates; the deaths had not been shown in a clinical trial to have been caused by Lotronex.)

“Selling Sickness” contains this frightening description of one side effect: “For some of those who experienced severe constipation after taking the drug, their feces would become so impacted within their bowel that the bowel wall perforated, leading to potentially fatal infections inside the body.”

Devastating?

A conference paper by David Healy traced the expanding definition of bipolar disorder over the past quarter century. The disease officially entered the manual of mental disorders in 1980, and based on its original diagnostic criteria – which included an episode of hospitalization – bipolar disorder is a devastating disease for 0.1 percent of the U.S. population. Over time, it has been broadened with additional criteria based on community surveys, so that the disease once known as “manic depression” is now said to affect 5 percent or more of Americans.

According to Healy, there is “almost no evidence” that drug treatment works for that much broader group of “community-based” disorders. Yet manufacturers like Eli Lilly and Co. and Janssen L.P. have heavily promoted pharmaceutical treatment

of bipolar, as broadly defined, through websites, patient literature and new scientific journals devoted to the disease.

Evidence is accumulating that one drug prescribed for bipolar disorder (Lilly's Zyprexa) causes withdrawal symptoms, that patients on drugs for bipolar tend to be hospitalized more often than those who are not, that the drugs are associated with a heightened risk of suicide and that antipsychotic drugs in general are associated with increased death rates.

Despite such problems, says Healy, there is a recent “surge of diagnoses of bipolar disorder in American children.” He cites one book that actually appears to accept the possibility that bipolar disorder may first show up in hyperactive fetuses.

The drug industry has thoroughly penetrated the juvenile market for another well-known disease, attention deficit disorder (ADD, also called attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, ADHD). The numbers of prescriptions to be written are huge; the National Institutes of Mental Health estimates that there's an average of at least one afflicted child per typical-size classroom. But people spend many more years as adults than as children, and stiff competition among the major ADD drugmakers – among them Shire PLC, Novartis and Lilly – guaranteed that the larger pool of potential adult patients would be targeted.

All three companies contribute or have contributed funds to the organization Children and Adults with

Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD), which calls ADD “a lifespan disorder, affecting children, adolescents and adults.” In “Selling Sickness,” Moynihan and Cassels describe a talk by a Shire executive at a CHADD charity golf event, in which he estimated that 8 million U.S. adults could benefit from treatment. CHADD gets about 20 percent of its funding from drug firms, and its website provides detailed advice on medication for ADD. One example:

Although there is little research on utilizing short-acting and long-acting medications together, many individuals, especially teenagers and adults, find that they may need to supplement a longer-acting medication taken in the morning with a shorter-acting dose taken in mid- to late afternoon. The “booster” dose may provide better coverage for doing homework or other late afternoon or evening activities and may also reduce problems of “rebound” when the earlier dose wears off.

The marketing of ADD can venture into bewildering territory. One of PALP’s 2006 Bitter Pill Awards went to Lilly for a TV commercial plugging its drug Strattera. In the ad, information on approved uses and risks is accompanied by wildly distracting sights and sounds of a video game. The FDA issued Lilly a mild rebuke over the ad: “The overall effect of the distracting visuals and graphics is to undermine the consumer’s ability to pay attention and comprehend the risk information ...”

The Bitter Pill Awards stressed the obvious irony of an attention-con-

founder ad targeted at a clientele who have difficulty paying attention. It could also be that the well-known practice of drawing notice away from side-effects information had to be cranked up a couple of notches in this ad to help persuade people who don’t really have a serious ADD problem that they might just need Strattera.

“Selling Sickness” traces another history of market expansion: the memorable publicity blitz that started with the FDA’s 1999 approval of GlaxoSmithKline’s antidepressant Paxil for a condition called “social anxiety disorder.” An early press release insisted that social anxiety disorder is “not just shyness” but something far worse.

Enough people were convinced that they had that “something worse” to make Paxil the country’s biggest-selling antidepressant for a time in 2000. Moynihan and Cassels write that GlaxoSmithKline avoided the term “social phobia,” which was preferred by psychiatry for what can be a seriously debilitating condition, probably because “a lot more people can be categorized as being ill if you apply the definition of an anxiety disorder rather than a phobia.”

It also couldn’t have hurt that the initial letters of GlaxoSmithKline’s name for the disease spelled “SAD.”

Erection problems

Seeing the continuing deluge of advertising for impotence remedies in the American media, a visitor from the planet Zefitor could be forgiven for wondering how Earth, with such

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GOOD HEALTH?

In the past year, any TV viewer who's managed to stay awake through commercials knows that the drugmakers' latest target is sleeplessness

seemingly dysfunctional male humans, ever came to be inhabited by 6.5 billion of the species.

At the Disease Mongering Conference, Joel Lexchin traced the history of the Pfizer Inc. campaign that transformed the father of all impotence drugs, Viagra, “from an effective product for erectile dysfunction due to medical problems, such as diabetes and spinal-cord damage, into a drug that ‘normal’ men can use.”

Pfizer spent \$303 million in direct-to-consumer advertising for Viagra in 1999-2001, often featuring younger-looking men and sports stars. That effort paid off handsomely, by extending the market well beyond men with well-defined medical conditions and attaining its greatest sales growth in the 18 to 45 age group. Pfizer's salesmanship broke the age barrier for Viagra, but the company failed to extend the drug's market to that half of the human population that is completely immune to erectile dysfunction: women.

A paper by conference speaker Leonore Tiefer traced the term “female sexual dysfunction” (FSD) back to 1997. In the years that followed, demand for a “pink Viagra” was boosted by sisters Jennifer and Laura Berman, who, says Tiefer, “became the female face of FSD, opening a clinic at UCLA in 2001, and continuing to popularize FSD and off-label drug treatments on their television program, website and books; in appearances on the television show Oprah; and in innumerable women's magazines.”

Pfizer aggressively promoted FSD, which it labeled “female sexual arousal disorder.” But its plans for a women's Viagra eventually fizzled because of “consistently poor clinical trial results.”

Tiefer is coordinator of the Campaign for a New View of Women's Sexual Problems, which runs the media-watchdog website fsd-alert.org. The Campaign and other groups have been fighting back against the medicalization of sex with some success.

Sleeping sickness

What latest malady is the pharmaceutical industry selling? It's turning out to be a hard-to-escape one-two punch: sleeplessness and sleepiness.

In the past year, any TV viewer who's managed to stay awake through commercials knows that the drugmakers' latest target is sleeplessness. The media blitzes of two companies, the sanofi-aventis Group (that's their lower-case), which makes Ambien, and Sepracor Inc., which makes Lunesta, earned them a 2006 Bitter Pill Award “for overmarketing insomnia medications to anyone who's ever had a bad night's sleep.”

Last month, at the request of government- and industry-funded groups, the National Institute of Medicine issued a report concluding that 50 million to 70 million Americans suffer from sleep problems and that U.S. businesses lose as much as \$100 billion a year because of sleepy workers.

In a Baltimore Sun op-ed column,

Ira R. Allen, vice president of the Center for the Advancement of Health, blasted the Institute for having been “co-opted.” He stressed to me that he was not criticizing the report’s methods or results, that “sleep is an important issue” and that “there were some legitimate partners in sponsoring the report.” But, he said, “The report was issued right on the heels of National Sleep Awareness Week (March 27-April 2), and just as advertising for sleep aids was reaching a peak.”

That, he said, is just too much of a coincidence: “I doubt that the United States has suddenly been invaded by tsetse flies! I’m not naive; I know the country’s economy is built on advertising. But our organization’s message is ‘Transparency, transparency, transparency.’ Don’t hide your motive.”

Even if we accept the Institute’s and the drug industry’s claims of a sleep-loss epidemic, other research has shown that the benefits of drug treatment are far from overwhelming. The class of drugs to which Ambien and Lunesta belong provide an extra half-hour of sleep per night, on average. (And Ambien made headlines earlier this year when reports revealed that some patients who took the drug were eating and even cooking in their sleep.)

The lack of a clearly superior pharmaceutical solution to sleeplessness may partly explain the recent orgy of advertising for sleep problems and sleep aids in general. Drug companies spent \$345 million on ads for sleep drugs in 2005 alone, and that’s expected to increase this year.

But, you say, you’re already getting enough sleep? Well, maybe it’s too much! The latest, and perhaps most disturbing, wave of sleep-controlling drugs are designed to let you stay awake for up to 48 hours with no ill effects.

According to the Feb. 18, 2006, print edition of the British magazine *New Scientist*, Cephalon Inc., the maker of one such product called Provigil, insists that the drug is meant only for treating serious diseases like narcolepsy and sleep apnea. But Provigil is also becoming a “lifestyle drug” for people who can’t fit everything they want to do into 16 hours a day. And it can’t help but beckon employers with the promise of an always-alert work force.

New Scientist reports that the Pentagon’s Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (the notorious DARPA) “is one of the most active players in the drive to conquer sleep.” Sometime this year, DARPA will test an experimental wakefulness drug, CX717, on combat soldiers engaged in hard work for four straight nights with only four hours of “recovery sleep” in between. Tests have shown that monkeys awake on CX717 for 36 straight hours had better memory and alertness than undrugged monkeys after normal sleep.

Yet another generation of drugs that skew sleep toward the most restorative, so-called “slow wave” phase are on the horizon. Due for release as early as next year, Merck & Co. Inc.’s gaboxadol, says *New Scientist*, holds out “the promise of a pow-

Ambien made headlines earlier this year when reports revealed that some patients who took the drug were eating and even cooking in their sleep

GOOD HEALTH?

We should exercise the same healthy skepticism when being sold a drug as we do when being sold a secondhand car

er nap par excellence.” The temptation to seek approval for the broadest possible labeling (and profit base) for drugs like Provigil, CX717 and gaboxadol will likely be overwhelming.

Sane political leaders

What kinds of medical conditions will expand to embrace millions of newly diagnosed “patients” in the coming months and years? I put that question to Dr. Richard Lippin, an occupational-health physician, health forecaster, and co-founder of a health-care reform blog, Critical Condition. His response:

“My guess is anything to do with pain, fatigue or feeling stressed. The first two are related to medicalizing the avoidance of aging and death among baby boomers and the third – stress – is due to very real anxiety people should feel about a host of worldwide and U.S. megatrends that legitimately create anxiety and depression – trends like global warming, wars, economic collapse, political corruption, etc. But the answers are not pills. The answer is to elect sane political leaders. There is no pill for the ‘white water’ that’s ahead for all of us.”

David Henry says that the disease-mongering documented at his conference “can’t be stopped. It’s a consequence of our political economy, the domination of marketing in all areas of life. So we need to build counterforces. People are becoming more skeptical, and that needs to be encouraged. We should exercise the same healthy skepticism when being sold a drug as we do when being sold a secondhand car.”

He says greater use of the attention-getting term “disease mongering” will prove useful in changing the behavior of medical professionals, the media and even pharmaceutical public-relations departments. “We want it to be an idea that pops up in their heads, so PR people will say, ‘Hey, we don’t want to run this ad and be accused of disease mongering!’”

Where would be a good place for average Americans to start exercising the healthy skepticism that’s needed to fight disease mongering by the pharmaceutical industry? Ask your doctor. **CT**

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Third World leaders, when they're threatened by the United States, have a habit of writing to Washington in the hope of removing the threat. Doesn't work, says William Blum, who shows how the Bush administration and its predecessors have a curious habit of turning deaf ears and blind eyes to their opponents

APPEALING TO THE US NOT VERY APPEALING

With his recent letter to President Bush, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has become part of a long tradition of Third-World leaders who, under imminent military or political threat from the United States, communicated with Washington officials in the hope of removing that threat.

Under the apparent belief that it was all a misunderstanding, that the United States was not really intent upon crushing them and their movements for social change, the Guatemalan foreign minister in 1954, President Cheddi Jagan of British Guiana in 1961, and Maurice Bishop, leader of Grenada, in 1983 all made their appeals to be left in peace, Jagan doing so at the White House in a talk with President John F. Kennedy.(1) All were crushed anyhow. In 1961, Che Guevara offered a Kennedy aide several important Cuban concessions if Washington would call off the dogs of war. To no avail.(2)

In 2002, before the coup in Venezuela that ousted Hugo Chavez, some of the plotters went to Washington to

get a green light from the Bush administration. Chavez learned of this visit and was so distressed by it that he sent officials from his government to plead his own case in Washington. The success of this endeavor can be judged by the fact that the coup took place soon thereafter. (3)

Shortly before the US invasion of Iraq in March 2003, Iraqi officials, including the chief of the Iraqi Intelligence Service, informed Washington, through a Lebanese-American businessman, that they wanted the United States to know that Iraq no longer had weapons of mass destruction, and they offered to allow American troops and experts and "2000 FBI agents" to conduct a search. The Iraqis also offered to hand over a man accused of being involved in the World Trade Center bombing in 1993 who was being held in Baghdad. The Iraqis, moreover, pledged to hold UN-supervised free elections; surely free elections is something the United States believes in, the Iraqis reasoned, and will be moved by. They also offered full support for any US plan in the Arab-Israeli peace process. "If this

The Iraqis, moreover, pledged to hold UN-supervised free elections; surely free elections is something the United States believes in, the Iraqis reasoned, and will be moved by

DON'T BOTHER TO WRITE

NOTES

1. Guatemala: Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (1982), p.183; Jagan: Arthur Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days* (1965), pp.774-9; Bishop: Associated Press, May 29, 1983, *Leftist Government Officials Visit United States*
2. Miami Herald, April 29, 1996, p.1
3. NY Times, April 16, 2002
4. *The Pentagon Papers* (NY Times edition, Bantam Books, 1971), pp.4, 5, 8, 26.
5. Washington Post, September 14, 1969, p.25
6. Archimedes L.A. Patti, *Why Vietnam? Prelude to America's Albatross* (1980). Patti is the former intelligence officer (OSS) consulted by Ho; Chester Cooper, *The Lost Crusade: The Full Story of US Involvement in Vietnam from Roosevelt to Nixon* (1971) pp.22, 25-7, 40.

William Blum is the author of *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II*, *Rogue State: a guide to the World's Only Super Power*, and *West-Bloc Dissident: a Cold War Political Memoir*.

is about oil," said the intelligence official, "we will talk about US oil concessions." These proposals were portrayed by the Iraqi officials as having the approval of President Saddam Hussein. (NYT 11-6-03) The United States ignored these overtures.

The above incidents reflect Third World leaders' apparent belief that the United States was open to negotiation, to discussion, to being reasonable. Undoubtedly, fear and desperation played a major role in producing this mental state, but also perhaps the mystique of America, which has captured the world's heart and imagination for two centuries. In 1945 and 1946, Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh wrote at least eight letters to US President Harry Truman and the State Department asking for America's help in winning Vietnamese independence from the French. He wrote that world peace was being endangered by French efforts to reconquer Indochina and he requested that "the four powers" (US, Soviet Union, China, and Great Britain) intervene in order to mediate a fair settlement and bring the Indochinese issue before the United Nations. (4)

This was a remarkable repeat of history. In 1919, at the Versailles Peace Conference following the First World War, Ho Chi Minh had appealed to US Secretary of State Robert Lansing (uncle of Allen Dulles and John Foster Dulles, whom Lansing appointed to the US delegation) for America's help in achieving basic civil liberties and an improvement in the living conditions for the colonial subjects of French

Indochina. His plea was ignored. (5) His pleas following the Second World War were likewise ignored, with consequences for Vietnam, the rest of Indochina, and the United States we all know only too well. Ho Chi Minh's pleas were ignored because he was, after all, some sort of Communist; yet he and his Vietminh followers had in fact been long-time admirers of the United States. Ho trusted the United States more than he did the Soviet Union and reportedly had a picture of George Washington and a copy of the American Declaration of Independence on his desk. According to a former American intelligence officer, Ho sought his advice on framing the Vietminh's own declaration of independence. The actual declaration of 1945 begins: "All men are created equal. They are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." (6)

Now comes the president of Iran with a lengthy personal letter to President Bush. It has the same purpose as the communications mentioned above: to dissuade the American pit bull from attacking and destroying, from adding to the level of suffering in this sad old world. But if the White House has already decided upon an attack, Ahmadinejad's letter will have no effect. Was there anything Czechoslovakia could have done to prevent a Nazi invasion in 1938? Or Poland in 1939? **CT**

William Blum's Anti-Empire report begins on Page 30

When Stephen Colbert delivered a vicious satire of George W. Bush's relationship with the American media at the annual White House Correspondents' Association dinner, the assembled tuxedoed journalists were not impressed. Robert Parry has some words of advice for the media watchdogs who became lapdogs to power

COLBERT AND THE COURTIER PRESS

Washington Post columnist Richard Cohen has joined the swelling ranks of big-name journalists outraged over comedian Stephen Colbert's allegedly rude performance, offending George W. Bush at the White House Correspondents' Association Dinner on April 29.

"Colbert was not just a failure as a comedian but rude," Cohen wrote. "Rudeness means taking advantage of the other person's sense of decorum or tradition or civility that keeps that other person from striking back or, worse, rising in a huff and leaving. The other night, that person was George W. Bush."

According to Cohen, Colbert was so boorish that he not only criticized Bush's policies to the President's face, but the comedian mocked the assembled Washington journalists decked out in their tuxedos and evening gowns.

"Colbert took a swipe at Bush's Iraq policy, at domestic eavesdropping, and he took a shot at the news corps for purportedly being nothing

more than stenographers recording what the Bush White House said," Cohen wrote. "Colbert was more than rude. He was a bully." [Washington Post, May 4, 2006]

Yet, while Cohen may see himself defending decorum and civility, his column is another sign of what's terribly wrong with the U.S. news media: With few exceptions, the Washington press corps has failed to hold Bush and his top advisers accountable for their long record of deception and for actions that have violated U.S. constitutional principles and American moral standards.

Over the past several years, as Bush asserted unlimited presidential powers and implemented policies that have led the United States into the business of torture and an unprovoked war in Iraq, Washington journalists mostly stayed on the sidelines or actively assisted the administration, often wrapping its extraordinary actions in a cloak of normality designed more to calm than alert the public. At such a dangerous moment, when a government is committing

According to Cohen, Colbert was so boorish that he not only criticized Bush's policies to the President's face, but the comedian mocked the assembled Washington journalists decked out in their tuxedos and evening gowns

RUDE AWAKENING

Like eager employees laughing at the boss's jokes, the journalists applauded Bush's own comedy routine

crimes of state, politeness is not necessarily a virtue.

So, average Americans are growing more and more agitated because too often in the past five years they have watched the national press act more like courtiers to a monarch than an independent, aggressive Fourth Estate. This fawning style of the Washington media continued into the April 29 dinner.

Even as the number of U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq passed 2,400 and the toll of Iraqi dead soared into the tens of thousands, the journalists seemed more interested in staying in Bush's favor than in risking his displeasure. Like eager employees laughing at the boss' jokes, the journalists applauded Bush's own comedy routine, which featured a double who voiced Bush's private contempt for the news media while the real Bush expressed his insincere respect.

Two years ago, at a similar dinner, journalists laughed and clapped when Bush put on a slide show of himself searching under Oval Office furniture for Iraq's non-existent weapons of mass destruction.

Rather than shock over Bush's tasteless humor – as the President rubbed the media's noses in the deceptions about Iraq's WMD – the press corps played the part of the good straight man. Even representatives of the New York Times and the Washington Post – the pillars of what the Right still likes to call the “liberal media” – sat politely after having served as little more than conveyor belts for Bush's pre-war propaganda.

But the media's willful blindness didn't end even when Bush's WMD claims were no longer tenable. Less than a year ago, as evidence surfaced in Great Britain proving that Bush had twisted the WMD intelligence, major U.S. newspapers averted their eyes and chastised anyone who didn't go along.

The so-called Downing Street Memo and other official government papers, which appeared in British newspapers in late spring 2005, documented how the White House in 2002 and early 2003 was manipulating intelligence to justify invading Iraq and ousting Saddam Hussein.

On July 23, 2002, British intelligence chief Richard Dearlove told Prime Minister Tony Blair about discussions with top Bush advisers in Washington, according to the meeting minutes. “Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD. But the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy,” Dearlove said. [See Consortiumnews.com's “LMSM – the Lying Mainstream Media.”]

Despite that dramatic evidence – emerging in June 2005 – the Washington Post failed to pay much attention. When hundreds of Post readers complained, a lead editorial lectured them for questioning the Post's news judgment.

“The memos add not a single fact to what was previously known about the administration's prewar deliberations,” the Post's editorial sniffed. “Not only that: They add nothing to

what was publicly known in July 2002.” [Washington Post, June 15, 2005]

When Rep. John Conyers and a few Democratic congressmen tried to draw public attention to the historically important British documents – but were denied an actual hearing room by the Republican majority – Post political correspondent Dana Milbank mocked the Democrats for the cheesy surroundings of their rump hearing.

“In the Capitol basement yesterday, long-suffering House Democrats took a trip to the land of make-believe,” Milbank wrote. “They pretended a small conference room was the Judiciary Committee hearing room, draping white linens over folding tables to make them look like witness tables and bringing in cardboard name tags and extra flags to make the whole thing look official.” [Washington Post, June 17, 2005]

After Colbert’s lampooning of Bush and the Washington press corps, Milbank appeared on MSNBC on May 1 to pronounce the comedian’s spoof “not funny,” while Milbank judged the President’s skit with Bush impersonator Steve Bridges a humorous hit.

Milbank’s assessment was shared by many journalists at the dinner, a reaction that can partly be explained by the pressure Washington reporters have long felt from well-organized right-wing media-attack groups to give Bush and other conservatives the benefit of every doubt.

For Washington journalists, who

realized their reactions at the dinner were being broadcast on C-SPAN, laughing along with Bush was a win-win – they could look good with the White House and avoid any career-damaging attacks from the Right – while laughing at Colbert’s jokes could have been a career lose-lose. However clever Colbert’s jokes were, they were guaranteed to face a tough crowd with a lot of reasons to give the comedian a chilly reception.

Colbert’s monologue also struck too close to home when he poked fun at the journalists for letting the country down by not asking the tough questions before the Iraq War.

Using his faux persona as a right-wing Bush acolyte, Colbert explained to the journalists their proper role: “The President makes decisions; he’s the decider. The press secretary announces those decisions, and you people of the press type those decisions down.

“Make, announce, type. Put them through a spell check and go home. Get to know your family again. Make love to your wife. Write that novel you got kicking around in your head. You know, the one about the intrepid Washington reporter with the courage to stand up to the administration. You know – fiction.”

Even before the Colbert controversy, the White House Correspondents’ Association annual dinner and similar press-politician hobnobbing have been cringing examples of unethical journalistic behavior.

The American people count on the news media to act as their eyes and

Colbert’s monologue also struck too close to home when he poked fun at the journalists for letting the country down by not asking the tough questions before the Iraq War

RUDE AWAKENING

In a world with a truly independent news media, it is hard to imagine there would ever be a White House Correspondents' dinner

ears, as watchdogs on the government, not lap dogs wagging tails and licking the faces of administration officials. Whatever value these dinners might once have had – as an opportunity for reporters to get to know government sources in a more casual atmosphere – has long passed.

Since the mid-1980s, the dinners have become competitions among the news organizations to attract the biggest Hollywood celebrities or infamous characters from the latest national scandal. Combined with lavish parties sponsored by free-spending outlets like Vanity Fair or Bloomberg News, the dinners have become all about the buzz.

Plus, while these self-indulgent affairs might seem fairly harmless in normal political times, they are more objectionable when American troops are dying overseas and the Executive Branch is asserting its right to trample constitutional rights, including First Amendment protections for journalists.

This contradiction is especially striking as the news media fawns over Bush while he attacks any nascent signs of journalistic independence. The administration is currently looking into the possibility of jailing investigative reporters and their sources for revealing policies that the White House wanted to keep secret, such as warrantless wiretaps of Americans and clandestine overseas prisons where detainees are hidden and allegedly tortured.

The fact that so many national journalists see no problem cavorting

with Bush and his inner circle at such a time explains why so many Americans have reached the conclusion that the nation needs a new news media, one that demonstrates a true commitment to the public's right to know, rather than a desire for cozy relations with the insiders.

Indeed, in a world with a truly independent news media, it is hard to imagine there would ever be a White House Correspondents' dinner.

In such a world, the Washington Post also might find better use for its treasured space on its Op-Ed page than giving it over to a columnist who favors decorum over accountability. The Post might even hire a columnist who would object less to a sharp-tongued comedian lampooning a politician and complain more about a President who disdains domestic and international law, who tolerates abusive treatment of prisoners, and who inflicts mayhem on a nation thousands of miles away that was not threatening the United States.

Only the likes of Richard Cohen could see George W. Bush as the victim and Stephen Colbert as the bully. **CT**

*Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Secrecy & Privilege: Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq*, can be ordered at secrecyandprivilege.com. It's also available at Amazon.com, as is his 1999 book, *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth.'**

Is it anti-Semitic to be critical of Washington's massive support for Israel? Yes, say critics of a controversial paper by two professors, 'The Israel lobby and US Foreign Policy'. No, says Norman Solomon, America's biggest anti-Semitism problem has to do with the misuse of the label as a tactic to short-circuit debate

OPENING THE DEBATE ON ISRAEL

The extended controversy over a paper by two professors, "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy," is prying the lid off a debate that has been bottled up for decades.

Routinely, the American news media have ignored or pilloried any strong criticism of Washington's massive support for Israel. But the paper and an article based on it by respected academics John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago and Stephen Walt, academic dean of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, first published on March 23 in the *London Review of Books*, are catalysts for some healthy public discussion of key issues.

The first mainstream media reactions to the paper – often with the customary name-calling – were mostly efforts to shut down debate before it could begin.

Early venues for vituperative attacks on the paper included the op-ed pages of the *Los Angeles Times* ("nutty"), the *Boston Herald* (headline: "Anti-Semitic Paranoia at Har-

vard") and *The Washington Post* (headline: "Yes, It's Anti-Semitic").

But other voices have emerged, on the airwaves and in print, to bypass the facile attacks and address crucial issues. If this keeps up, the uproar over what Mr. Mearsheimer and Mr. Walt had to say could invigorate public discourse about Washington's policies toward a country that consistently has received a bigger U.S. aid package for a longer period than any other nation.

In April, syndicated columnist Molly Ivins put her astute finger on a vital point. "In the United States, we do not have full-throated, full-throttle debate about Israel," she wrote. "In Israel, they have it as a matter of course, but the truth is that the accusation of anti-Semitism is far too often raised in this country against anyone who criticizes the government of Israel. ..."

She continued, "I don't know that I've ever felt intimidated by the knee-jerk 'you're anti-Semitic' charge leveled at anyone who criticizes Israel, but I do know I have certainly heard

"The truth is that the accusation of anti-Semitism is far too often raised in this country against anyone who criticizes the government of Israel"

THE ISRAEL LOBBY

Numerous American Jewish groups dedicated to supporting Israel are eager to equate Israel with Judaism. Sometimes they have the arrogance to depict the country and the religion as inseparable

it often enough to become tired of it. And I wonder if that doesn't produce the same result: giving up on the discussion."

The point rings true, and it's one of the central themes emphasized by Mr. Mearsheimer and Mr. Walt.

If the barriers to democratic discourse can be overcome, the paper's authors say, the results could be highly beneficial: "Open debate will expose the limits of the strategic and moral case for one-sided U.S. support and could move the U.S. to a position more consistent with its own national interest, with the interests of the other states in the region, and with Israel's long-term interests as well."

Outsized support for Israel has been "the centerpiece of U.S. Middle Eastern policy," the professors contend – and the Israel lobby makes that support possible. "Other special-interest groups have managed to skew America's foreign policy, but no lobby has managed to divert it as far from what the national interest would suggest," the paper says. One of the consequences is that "the United States has become the de facto enabler of Israeli expansion in the occupied territories, making it complicit in the crimes perpetrated against the Palestinians."

In the United States, "the lobby's campaign to quash debate about Israel is unhealthy for democracy," Mr. Mearsheimer and Mr. Walt assert. They point to grave effects on the body politic: "The inability of Congress to conduct a genuine debate on these important issues paralyzes the

entire process of democratic deliberation."

While their paper overstates the extent to which pro-Israel pressures determine U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, a very powerful lobby for Israel clearly has enormous leverage in Washington. And the professors make a convincing case that the U.S. government has been much too closely aligned with Israel – to the detriment of human rights, democracy and other principles that are supposed to constitute American values.

The failure to make a distinction between anti-Semitism and criticism of Israel routinely stifles public debate.

When convenient, pro-Israel groups in the United States will concede that it's possible to oppose Israeli policies without being anti-Semitic. Yet many of Israel's boosters reflexively pull out the heavy artillery of charging anti-Semitism when their position is challenged.

Numerous American Jewish groups dedicated to supporting Israel are eager to equate Israel with Judaism. Sometimes they have the arrogance to depict the country and the religion as inseparable. For example, in April 2000, a full-page United Jewish Appeal ad in *The New York Times* proclaimed: "The seeds of Jewish life and Jewish communities everywhere begin in Israel."

Like many other American Jews who grew up in the 1950s and '60s, I went door to door with blue-and-white UJA cans to raise money for planting trees in Israel. I heard about

relatives who had died in concentration camps during the Holocaust two decades earlier and about relatives who had survived and went to Israel. In 1959, my family visited some of them, on a kibbutz and in Tel Aviv.

The 1960 blockbuster movie *Exodus* dramatized the birth of Israel a dozen years earlier. As I remember, Arabs were portrayed in the picture as cold-blooded killers while the Jews who killed Arabs were presented as heroic fighters engaged in self-defense.

The film was in sync with frequent media messages that lauded Jews for risking the perilous journey to Palestine and making the desert bloom, as though no one of consequence had been living there before.

The Six-Day War in June 1967 enabled Israel to expand the territory it controlled several times over, in the process suppressing huge numbers of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Their plights and legitimate grievances got little space in the U.S. media.

In 1969, the independent American journalist I. F. Stone expressed hope for “a reconstructed Palestine of Jewish and Arab states in peaceful coexistence.” He contended that “to bring it about, Israel and the Jewish communities of the world must be willing to look some unpleasant truths squarely in the face. ...

“One is to recognize that the Arab guerrillas are doing to us what our terrorists and saboteurs of the Irgun, Stern and Haganah did to the British. Another is to be willing to admit that

their motives are as honorable as were ours. As a Jew, even as I felt revulsion against the terrorism, I felt it justified by the homelessness of the surviving Jews from the Nazi camps and the bitter scenes when refugee ships sank, or sank themselves, when refused admission to Palestine.

“The best of Arab youth feels the same way; they cannot forget the atrocities committed by us against villages like Deir Yassin, nor the uprooting of the Palestinian Arabs from their ancient homeland, for which they feel the same deep ties of sentiment as do so many Jews, however assimilated elsewhere.”

When I crossed the Allenby Bridge from Jordan into the West Bank 15 years ago, I spoke with a 19-year-old border guard who was carrying a machine gun. He told me that he’d emigrated from Brooklyn, N.Y., a few months earlier. He said the Palestinians should get out of his country.

In East Jerusalem, I saw Israeli soldiers brandishing rifle butts at elderly women in a queue. Some in the line reminded me of my grandmothers, only these women were Arab.

Today, visitors to the Web site of the Israeli human-rights group B’Tselem can find profuse documentation about systematic denial of Palestinian rights and ongoing violence in all directions. Since autumn 2000, in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, according to the latest figures posted, the number of Israelis killed by Palestinians has totaled 998 and the number of Palestinians killed by Israelis has totaled 3,466.

As I remember, Arabs were portrayed in the picture as cold-blooded killers while the Jews who killed Arabs were presented as heroic fighters engaged in self-defense

THE ISRAEL LOBBY

Now, the neoconservative agenda for the Middle East maintains the U.S. embrace of Israel with great enthusiasm. And defenders of that agenda often resort to timeworn tactics for squelching debate

Overall, in the American news media, the horrible killings of Israelis by Palestinian suicide bombers get front-page and prime-time coverage while the horrible killings of Palestinians by Israelis get relatively scant and dispassionate coverage.

If the U.S. news media were to become committed to a single standard of human rights, the shift would transform public discourse about basic Israeli policies – and jeopardize the U.S. government’s support for them. It is against just such a single standard that the epithet of “anti-Semitism” is commonly wielded. From the viewpoint of Israel and its supporters, the ongoing threat of using the label helps to prevent U.S. media coverage from getting out of hand. Journalists understand critical words about Israel to be hazardous to their careers.

In the real world, bigotry toward Jews and support for Israel have long been independent variables. For instance, as Oval Office tapes attest, President Richard M. Nixon was anti-Semitic and did not restrain himself from expressing that virulent prejudice in private. Yet he was a big admirer of the Israeli military and a consistent backer of Israel’s government.

Now, the neoconservative agenda for the Middle East maintains the U.S. embrace of Israel with great enthusiasm. And defenders of that agenda often resort to timeworn tactics for squelching debate.

Last fall, when I met with editors at a newspaper in the Pacific Northwest,

a member of the editorial board responded to my reference to neocons by declaring flatly that “neocon” is an “anti-Semitic” term. The absurd claim would probably amuse the most powerful neocons in the U.S. government’s executive branch today, Vice President Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld, neither of whom is Jewish.

Over the past couple of decades, a growing number of American Jews have seen their way clear to oppose Israeli actions.

Yet their voices continue to be nearly drowned out in major U.S. media outlets by Israel-right-or-wrong outfits such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Committee.

As with all forms of bigotry, anti-Semitism should be condemned. At the same time, these days, America’s biggest anti-Semitism problem has to do with the misuse of the label as a manipulative tactic to short-circuit debate about Washington’s alliance with Israel. **CT**

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This essay originally appeared in the Baltimore Sun.

*How many people take eleven years to get a university degree, ‘logging more time on probation than the population of Animal House’? Well, **Andy Moore** did before he finally got his degree, helped by his love for a girl called Peggy, and a man who ‘so honored my potential that I had no choice but to repay him with success’*

CLOSE TO HOME: MY MISSING YEARS

I used to be ashamed that it took me 11 years to graduate from UW-Madison. At parties and picnics, during beers and breezy banter, I dreaded the question, “When did you go to school here?” Luckily, since my answer spanned a decade, no one took me seriously. “Ha!” people laughed. “No, really!”

I became a master at blowing conversational smoke at the topic of college, ingeniously derailing the subject the way my mother used to avoid revealing her age.

The story of why it took me so long to graduate isn’t nearly as worthy as how I finally finished. A turning point in life isn’t a product of an event so much as the presence of a key person. In the matter of getting over my undergraduate hump, that person was former Dean of Students Paul Ginsberg.

The path I traveled to Dean Paul’s door had many stops and starts. The ingredients in a soufflé don’t matter if it collapses in the oven, so I won’t drag you through the whole ordeal.

Suffice it to say I logged more time

on probation than the entire population of Animal House. I began to wear my academic crashes like badges of dishonor, gaining a rebel reputation among my fellow drinkers at the Plaza Tavern, who were, I started to notice, getting younger by the minute.

My self-respect bottomed out one frigid afternoon in South Hall. There I sat at the head of a long, gleaming conference table in what was surely going to be my last hearing as a UW student. At the other end of the table, a block away, sat a kind, serious man. An assistant dean. Dean Martin.

And I tell you as a factual measure of just how hard I threw in the towel that day that when he wondered at the end of our conversation if I had questions for him, I asked, “Will you be making any more pictures with Jerry Lewis?”

That comment ended what we now refer to as my “Missing Years.” Other than swimming, which paid for the first four years of my college, pretending to be a student was almost all I knew how to do. Fortunately, I had one other skill: flirting with girls, a

I began to wear my academic crashes like badges of dishonor, gaining a rebel reputation among my fellow drinkers at the Plaza Tavern, who were, I started to notice, getting younger by the minute

SCHOOLDAZE

By the time I got to the Peggy part I'd made up my mind the visit was worthwhile even if I didn't get back into school

knack that led me to the other key person in this story. A lanky girl from Mequon named Peggy.

Love, like one too many beers, blinds you to a person's imperfections. That's why when Peggy looked at me, she saw a clever, sensitive, good-time guy instead of a lazy, manipulating loser with no life goals.

It was only a matter of time.

You can go through the motions in school. You can laze your way through a job. But love? Love is the consummate taskmaster. It's the only career worth having that comes with never-ending accountability.

Peggy's love took the ratty, tangled pile of rope that was my life and laid it out straight. From where we stood together, that length of life didn't look too bad. Even doable. And I knew that without the fire she ignited within me, it would twist back up like a gnarled strand of Christmas lights.

For all her gifts, Peggy had only one request of me: Finish college. "I don't care if you use your degree," she said, her eyes saying the rest – we'll have another diploma if we need it. This meant, for one last time, I had to hike up Bascom Hill to try to get back in school.

Paul Ginsberg's office was on the first floor of Bascom Hall. His high windows opened to a brochure view down the groomed, grassy hill to Library Mall. Pipe smoke filled the room. Blue curtains of it. The smoke held fast to the sunlight coming through the windows and fixed a neon sheen upon the space.

Portly and serene, Paul sat Bud-

dha-like behind a paper-fouled desk. My student file, fat and corner-torn as an old phone book, sat over to the left. Paul's eyes were heavy-lidded, nearly shut. He turned toward me and opened his palm to an empty chair.

"Please sit down," he said, then reached for his pipe. He took his time, like he had all the time in the world. In my anxious state of mind, watching him slowly, silently dispatch his tobacco tools was unbearable.

He devoted complete concentration to this work, lost in it, loading and tamping, sweeping spare flecks of leaf tobacco from his desk, hissing in the chimney smoke when the fire touched the bowl. I was certain he'd forgotten I was in the room.

As I soon learned, this was merely Paul's way. The most important thing in the world to him was the thing at hand. And after he completely serviced his pipe, he fixed his sleepy eyes upon me and, like magic, I became the center of his universe.

"Tell me why you're here," he instructed in a soft, barely audible rasp.

I gave it all to him. I had nothing to lose. An academic confessional. My indiscretions, my irresponsibilities, my self-delusions and wasting of other people's money and time.

It poured from me in a single, 30-minute breath. And it felt so good in the doing, so liberating as it all emptied out that, by the time I got to the Peggy part I'd made up my mind the visit was worthwhile even if I didn't get back into school.

Paul never interrupted. He listened to much of it with his eyes closed. And when I finished, my words clinging to the smoke that enveloped us, he said, "Bring Peggy here next week." And we were done. Or, I should say, beginning.

Paul met with Peggy and me the next week. I was re-admitted that fall. Paul continued to treat us as a team. I met with him regularly that semester, and Paul spent as much time asking about how we were doing as people as he did asking me about my studies. He so honored my potential that I had no choice but to repay him with success.

I think a lot about my friend Paul lately. He's 81, and bravely shouldering the indignities of surgery and recovery. We still get together for lunch from time to time. The focus of our conversation has now shifted to another student.

In June Peggy's and my 18-year-old, Tucker, graduates from East High.

He's enrolled at UW-LaCrosse for the fall. Suddenly my 11-year odyssey to finish college is an embarrassment again, and even as my apple-from-the-tree worries grow deeper roots each day, I realize I've been concerned about all the wrong things for the last year.

The whole college search thing, all the hand-wringing, online searching and screening, the course comparisons, the campus visits, the obsession over facilities, all of that. It temporarily obscured the lesson I learned from Paul.

There's just one thing that will make a difference for our son in college and beyond. People. People like Paul who will treat Tucker's potential as a holy thing, who will take him by the shoulders and turn him in the direction of his own gifts. **CT**

This article originally appeared in Isthmus, the alternative newsweekly for Madison, Wisconsin.

He so honored my potential that I had no choice but to repay him with success

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IN THE RED

Last month, London's *Independent* newspaper was guest-edited by rock star Bono, as a fundraising campaign for relieving African poverty and eradicating AIDS. Unimpressed, Harry Browne, writer for Dublin's *Village* magazine, describes the event as a 'low point in the history of journalism and public culture'

RED LIGHT DISTRICT: BONO'S INDEPENDENT

Since Bono is responsible for creating this paper in his image, does that mean he's God?

I have no embarrassment at all. No shame." Bono says it himself, in the course of his luvvie interview with comic Eddie Izzard, and that's a typically 'disarming' tactic. But don't be disarmed: Bono's shamelessness is of a whole different order from anything we've seen before, and it crosses new frontiers in the edition of the London *Independent* that he allegedly 'edited' today (16 May).

For a day, you see, it's the RED *Independent*. (The capital letters in RED are obligatory, for some reason.) Much of the paper is given over to plugging Brand RED, this corporate PR strategy that sees a few big companies buy Bono-bestowed credibility in return for some shillings to Africa. If the word for Bono is indeed 'shameless', then the word that comes to mind in relation to the newspaper itself (a usually credible outlet in Irish

mogul Tony O'Reilly's media empire) is 'prostitute'.

Much of Bono's RED *Indy* is online, but its special qualities are best appreciated on paper. RED is somehow related to the colour red anyway, so we get a front-page created by celebrity artist Damien Hirst, soaked in red and declaring "NO NEWS TODAY" and an asterisk leading to the small print: "Just 6,500 Africans died today as a result of a preventable, treatable disease. (HIV/AIDS)" So far, not terrible, highlighting the issue and its absence from the conventional Western news agenda. But why does it say "Genesis 1.27" on the cover? That's the line about how "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Since Bono is responsible for creating this paper in his image, does that mean he's God?



It's not an entirely facetious question. Certainly this edition, largely given over to Africa and AIDS, creates an image of a continent in dire need of an outside Savior. On page after page, in stories, photographs and advertisements, Africans are presented as pathetic victims, often children. No Africans write about Africa. Only one is presented in an interview as having any agency at all, Nigerian finance minister Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala. It is remarkable that even for the sake of appearances Bono is incapable of hiding his essential paternalism.

A colleague points out that there is nothing here about the arms trade. But perhaps this is not surprising given all the advertising and editorial space given over to endorsing RED mobile phones from Motorola, a military contractor. Nothing either covering mineral exploitation in Africa, perhaps something else Motorola might be sensitive about, given the importance of African-extracted materials in cellphones.

The self-crafted character of Bono, on the other hand, is never far from the page. Justifying his commercial fundraising strategy, he writes: "For anyone who thinks this means I'm going to retire to the boardroom and stop banging my fist on the door of No. 10 [Downing Street], I'm sorry to disappoint you." Frankly, we hadn't noticed any fistbanging: the butler is always discreetly ready to open the door unbidden for a welcome guest like Bono.

Bono's status on Downing Street, at No. 10 and No. 11 (where Gordon

Brown, Chancellor of the Exchequer, is to be found), is underlined by the cozy, snoozy interview Tony Blair and Brown "teamed up" to do (by phone) with the U2 frontman. Bono's hard-hitting line of questioning includes: "Chancellor, I've just got back from a trip to Washington, where your announcement of \$15bn over 10 years for education for the poorest of the poor created a real reverberation. Are you worried that some of your other G8 partners and finance ministers are not coming up with new initiatives to match this?"

Bono is still reverberating when he talks to Blair: "Prime Minister, I want to just take you to a more personal place in your trips to this terrible beauty that we call Africa now – to an inspiring moment, a person you have met, or a moment of despair." Bono likes his Yeatsian "terrible beauty", repeating the phrase in his editorial.

Half the proceeds from this edition supposedly go to fight AIDS in Africa. Given all the extra advertising for cool products, gigs and charities targeting the day's once-off buyers, you can be sure those proceeds will be considerable.

No outing with Bono would be complete without licking-up to the White House as well as Downing Street. So we've got Condoleezza Rice naming her "ten best musical works". Condi, it seems, is a "big fan" of Bono and names "anything" by U2 as number 7 on her list, just ahead of Elton John's 'Rocket Man'. As for Cream's 'Sunshine of Your Love' at number 2 (after Mozart): "I love to work out to

A colleague points out that there is nothing here about the arms trade. But perhaps this is not surprising given all the advertising and editorial space given over to endorsing RED mobile phones from Motorola, a military contractor

IN THE RED

Since this story clearly involves the West's role in the suffering of people from the poorer world, and it also involves poor people taking their own, desperate measures to defy a Western government's prescriptions, it fails to fit Bono's world-view

this song. Believe it or not I loved acid rock in college – and I still do.”

What a long strange trip it's been. And that's before you open the supplement and find, after some grim monochrome photos of Deep South poverty from Sam Taylor-Wood, another hard-hitting interview. “She's the bright young star breaking all the rules. He's the grand master whose influence on the way we dress is felt around the world. In a rare interview, STELLA McCARTNEY asks Giorgio Armani about fur, fashion and film—and why RED is his new favourite colour.”

Indy associate editor Paul Valley is Bono's luvvie for the day, with his full-page ‘big question’ feature, “Can rock stars change the world?” arriving at an ever-so-British qualified Yes – “Oh all right then. But with a little help from their friends. Which includes all of us – fans, activists, politicians and now – as Project RED so clearly demonstrates – shoppers too.”

The edition is themed around this notion. Even “The 5-Minute Interview”, with BBC radio DJ Zane Lowe, finishes with an incongruous, not to say idiotically phrased, question, “Can big corporations make a difference to people's lives?” Lowe sings from Bono's hymnsheet: “The only thing people who are trying to make a difference can do is work alongside corporations. We're not going to abolish big business, people aren't going to stop drinking Starbucks and buying Nike, but you can say to them, ‘There's a big difference you can make and if we find a way to make it easier

for you, would you contribute?’”

This notion of lowest common denominator activism is the keynote of Bono's signed, somewhat tetchy editorial: “So forgive us if we expand our strategy to reach the high street, where so many of you live and work. We need to meet you where you are as you shop, as you phone, as you lead your busy, businessy lives.”

Two more signed opinion pieces, by Geldof and Niall Fitzgerald (chairman of Reuters, former chairman of Unilever) both advocate more or less neoliberal solutions to Africa's crisis. In fairness (and believe me, it's tough to feel fair about these egomaniacal creeps), Geldof, like Bono in the Blair-Brown interview, does criticise “enforced liberalisation by the IMF, the World Bank or the EU”, but in both cases it's pretty parenthetical.

Not much new ‘news’ makes the paper at all. There is room for a rubbishy Google short declaring that “Irish are top users of ‘lonely’ search term”, but no room at all for the story convulsing Bono's hometown of Dublin: 41 Afghan men have been on hunger and thirst strike inside historic St Patrick's Cathedral to prevent their deportation to the dangers of their home country. Since this story clearly involves the West's role in the suffering of people from the poorer world, and it also involves poor people taking their own, desperate measures to defy a Western government's prescriptions, it fails to fit Bono's world-view.

Young fogey Johann Hari interviews Hugo Chavez with reasonable

sympathy over two pages, pausing to wring his hands about Chavez's admiration for Castro and Mugabe. The interview appears to be shorter than the online version because of the big ads for Unicef and the Global Business Coalition on HIV/Aids.

One weak attempt at self-mockery is John Walsh's unfunny column about some of the "less successful guest-star interventions in history" – Groucho Marx addressing the Pentagon War Room on the eve of D-Day, Margaret Thatcher guest-editing teen-mag Jackie – "the usual questions about petting, bra sizes and periods were replaced by enquiries about the public sector borrowing requirement". (Did I say unfunny?) Bono is obsessed with justifying Live8, and the centre-spread is given over to a board game called "Glenea-

gles Crazy Golf" ("Will the G8 keep their word?"). The biggest move available in the game is "Move Forward 3: Independent goes RED".

Much more can be said about this low point in the history of journalism and public culture, but the final word should go to Julia Raeside on Megas-tar.co.uk : "We wonder if Simon Kellner, the editor of the Indy, will get to spend a day being a self-important, whining rock bore in silly pink sunglasses and trousers that are ever so slightly too tight." **CT**

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This article originally appeared at counterpunch.org

"We wonder if Simon Kellner, the editor of the Indy, will get to spend a day being a self-important, whining rock bore in silly pink sunglasses and trousers that are ever so slightly too tight"

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THE WRITING GAME

Paul Ash is a working novelist. He's invited to a host of dinner parties, where he thrills guests with details of his bloody plot. Only problem is, he wants to write his book the old-fashioned way, on a 'big-ass, manual typewriter,' which he finds after much searching. At last, he can sit down and start to write like a pro . . .

SIXTEEN KILOS OF WRITER'S BLOCK

I have spent months talking about plot, characters, structure and telling some fairly graphic and bloody stories – it's a faction about Angola, or will be once I finish the bloody thing

I am writing a novel. Actually, it would be more accurate to say that I am sinking, quite fast, as it happens, in the quicksand of “research”. Others might call it writer's block. But you don't want to hear about my travails. Funnily enough, neither do my friends.

This was not always so. Until recently it was clearly a coup to have a working novelist present at dinner parties. I sure as hell got a lot of invitations. Invariably someone would ask, “How's the novel going?” and a respectful hush would fall on the table as I detailed progress to date. I have spent months talking about plot, characters, structure and telling some fairly graphic and bloody stories – it's a faction about Angola, or will be once I finish the bloody thing – that have girls making soft, tender gestures and boys sadly shaking their heads. One could, quite reasonably, say that the time spent talking would have been better used writing, blah blah blah, yes, I know already . . . who are you? My mother?

Part of the problem was that I was

determined to write it on a typewriter. I have a typewriter which I use from time to time to write letters. I like the way the words flow when I type. I like the thump of the carriage every time I hit the Shift key and how the clacking keys work into my subconscious, like distant rifle fire, appropriate, I felt, given the subject and all.

But my machine is an old and cranky 1936 Remington portable and my first novel, I reasoned, needed a big-ass, manual desk typewriter. So I scoured. Oh boy, did I scour. In junk shops. Antique dealers. I trawled pawn brokers like an addict. I went to shops I remembered as a kid and was mildly surprised that they, like their owners, had shuffled off into history. I had figured, wrongly as it turns out, that they would be indestructible. Like their typewriters.

I also had to do this all on the sly. Someone looking for a desk typewriter in the 21st century attracts attention, none of it benevolent. And forget, if you will, please – even though my wife won't – that I have two Macs which would do just fine as

writing machines.

Eventually, I struck gold.

Surfing the shady world of international typewriter web rings I found Olex, a dealer in Pretoria that could sell me 16 kilograms of brand-new Olivetti.

The typewriter business is still big in Africa, apparently, and the company sells a couple of hundred a year to police forces, lawyers and shipping companies north of the Limpopo.

I nearly wet myself when I heard the price – nearly half a Mac. Italian quality, I figured.

A couple of days later I brought my stealth purchase home, secure in my firmly held conceit that using a typewriter would force me to write with linear and logical precision. Like a pro, said the voices in my head.

Like Kerouac. Yeah, yeah. I set her up the next day and got to work. Thunk-clack-clackclack.

Ting! I thumped all day. It was like chewing wet cement. I made countless typos. The voices shrieked: “Stop!

You fucking HATE this!” I forged on. By sunset I had six or so error-riddled pages. But hey . . . I’d begun.

That night I went to a party. Standing on the balcony, watching cold rain sweep in from the north, I felt superlative. I boasted to a writer friend – who is published – that I had started.

“Good,” he said. “And?”

“I’m using a typewriter.”

He choked on his vodka but to his everlasting credit, didn’t actually laugh at me. “That, bru,” he said, “is pure affectation.”

And there it was. Killed with one straight arrow to the heart: *affectation*. Like a real author, like Jack, I then got drunk, went home, shot the albatross and took it back to the dealer. **CT**

Paul Ash is deputy editor of the Travel & Food section of Johannesburg’s Sunday Times. This article first appeared in the newspaper’s award-winning weekly Lifestyle supplement.

A couple of days later I brought my stealth purchase home, secure in my firmly held conceit that using a typewriter would force me to write with linear and logical precision

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ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

*One day Dubya may face trial as a war criminal, says **Bill Blum**, who also demolishes the economic myths of the post-war Marshall Plan, and wonders if UN Security Council members will ever stand up to the schoolyard bully. And what did Condoleezza tell the Foreign Relations Committee about India?*

“COME OUT WITH YOUR HANDS UP”

It will be interesting to see if Cheney shows up again before a large crowd in a venue which has not been carefully chosen to insure that only right-thinking folks will be present

I used to be called brother, John, Daddy, uncle, friend,” John Allen Muhammad said at his trial in Maryland earlier this month. “Now I’m called evil.”

Muhammad, formerly known as “the DC Sniper”, was on trial for six slayings in Maryland in 2002. Already sentenced to die in Virginia for several other murders, he insisted that he was innocent despite the evidence against him – including DNA, fingerprints, and ballistics analysis of a rifle found in his car.[1]

Bereft of any real political power, I’m reduced to day-dreaming ... a courtroom in some liberated part of the world, in the not-too-distant future, a tribunal ... a defendant testifying ...

“I used to be called brother, George, son, Daddy, uncle, friend, Dubya, governor, president. Now I’m called war criminal,” he says sadly, insisting on his innocence despite the overwhelming evidence presented against him.

Can the man ever take to heart or mind the realization that America’s

immune system is trying to get rid of him? Probably not. No more than his accomplice can.

Two years ago the vice president visited Yankee Stadium for a baseball game. During the singing of “God Bless America” in the seventh inning, an image of Cheney was shown on the scoreboard. It was greeted with so much booing that the Yankees quickly removed the image.[2] Yet last month the vice president showed up at the home opener for the Washington Nationals to throw out the first pitch.

The Washington Post reported that he “drew boisterous boos from the moment he stepped on the field until he jogged off. The derisive greeting was surprisingly loud and long, given the bipartisan nature of our national pastime, and drowned out a smattering of applause reported from the upper decks.”[3]

It will be interesting to see if Cheney shows up again before a large crowd in a venue which has not been carefully chosen to insure that only right-thinking folks will be present.

Even that might not help. Twice in the last few months, a public talk of Donald Rumsfeld has been interrupted by people in the audience calling him a war criminal and accusing him of lying to get the United States into war. This happened in a meeting room at the very respectable National Press Club in Washington and again at a forum at the equally respectable Southern Center for International Policy in Atlanta.

In Chile, last November, as former dictator Augusto Pinochet moved closer to being tried for the deaths of thousands, he declared to a judge: "I lament those losses and suffer for them. God does things, and he will forgive me if I committed some excesses, which I don't believe I did." [4]

Dubya couldn't have said it better. Let's hope that one day we can compel him to stand before a judge, but not one appointed by him.

But what about the Marshall Plan?

During my years of writing and speaking about the harm and injustice inflicted upon the world by unending United States interventions, I've often been met with resentment from those who accuse me of chronicling only the negative side of US foreign policy and ignoring the many positive sides.

When I ask the person to give me some examples of what s/he thinks show the virtuous face of America's dealings with the world in modern times, one of the things almost always mentioned is The Marshall Plan. This is explained in words along the lines of: "After World War II, we unselfish-

ly built up Europe economically, including our wartime enemies, and allowed them to compete with us." Even those today who are very cynical about US foreign policy, who are quick to question the White House's motives in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere, have no problem in swallowing this picture of an altruistic America of the period of 1948-1952.

After World War II, the United States, triumphant abroad and undamaged at home, saw a door wide open for world supremacy. Only the thing called "communism" stood in the way, politically, militarily, and ideologically.

The entire US foreign policy establishment was mobilized to confront this "enemy", and the Marshall Plan was an integral part of this campaign. How could it be otherwise? Anti-communism had been the principal pillar of US foreign policy from the Russian Revolution up to World War II, pausing for the war until the closing months of the Pacific campaign, when Washington put challenging communism ahead of fighting the Japanese. This return to anti-communism included the dropping of the atom bomb on Japan as a warning to the Soviets. [5]

After the war, anti-communism continued as the leitmotif of foreign policy as naturally as if World War II and the alliance with the Soviet Union had not happened. Along with the CIA, the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, the Council on Foreign Relations, various corporations, and other private institutions, the Mar-

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ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

The CIA also skimmed large amounts of Marshall Plan funds to covertly maintain cultural institutions, journalists, and publishers, at home and abroad, for the heated and omnipresent propaganda of the Cold War; the selling of the Marshall Plan to the American public and elsewhere was entwined with fighting "the red menace"

shall Plan was one more arrow in the quiver in the remaking of Europe to suit Washington's desires – spreading the capitalist gospel (to counter strong postwar tendencies towards socialism); opening markets to provide new customers for US corporations (a major reason for helping to rebuild the European economies; e.g., almost a billion dollars of tobacco, at 1948 prices, spurred by US tobacco interests); pushing for the creation of the Common Market and NATO as integral parts of the West European bulwark against the alleged Soviet threat; suppressing the left all over Western Europe, most notably sabotaging the Communist Parties in France and Italy in their bids for legal, non-violent, electoral victory.

Marshall Plan funds were secretly siphoned off to finance this last endeavor, and the promise of aid to a country, or the threat of its cutoff, was used as a bullying club; indeed, France and Italy would certainly have been exempted from receiving aid if they had not gone along with the plots to exclude the communists.

The CIA also skimmed large amounts of Marshall Plan funds to covertly maintain cultural institutions, journalists, and publishers, at home and abroad, for the heated and omnipresent propaganda of the Cold War; the selling of the Marshall Plan to the American public and elsewhere was entwined with fighting "the red menace".

Moreover, in its covert operations, CIA personnel at times used the Marshall Plan as cover, and one of the

Plan's chief architects, Richard Bissell, then moved to the CIA, stopping off briefly at the Ford Foundation, a long time conduit for CIA covert funds; one big happy family.

The Marshall Plan imposed all kinds of restrictions on the recipient countries, all manner of economic and fiscal criteria which had to be met, designed for a wide open return to free enterprise.

The US had the right to control not only how Marshall Plan dollars were spent, but also to approve the expenditure of an equivalent amount of the local currency, giving Washington substantial power over the internal plans and programs of the European states; welfare programs for the needy survivors of the war were looked upon with disfavor by the United States; even rationing smelled too much like socialism and had to go or be scaled down; nationalization of industry was even more vehemently opposed by Washington.

The great bulk of Marshall Plan funds returned to the United States, or never left, to buy American goods, making American corporations among the chief beneficiaries.

It could be seen as more a joint business operation between governments, with contracts written by Washington lawyers, than an American "handout"; often it was a business arrangement between American and European ruling classes, many of the latter fresh from their service to the Third Reich, some of the former as well; or it was an arrangement between Congressmen and their favorite

corporations to export certain commodities, including a lot of military goods. Thus did the Marshall Plan lay the foundation for the military industrial complex as a permanent feature of American life.

It is very difficult to find, or put together, a clear, credible description of how the Marshall Plan was principally responsible for the recovery in each of the 16 recipient nations. The opposing view, no less clear, is that the Europeans – highly educated, skilled and experienced – could have recovered from the war on their own without an extensive master plan and aid program from abroad, and indeed had already made significant strides in this direction before the Plan's funds began flowing.

Marshall Plan funds were not directed primarily toward feeding individuals or building individual houses, schools, or factories, but at strengthening the economic superstructure, particularly the iron-steel and power industries. The period was in fact marked by deflationary policies, unemployment and recession. The one unambiguous outcome was the full restoration of the propertied class.[6]

Is someone finally learning a lesson ?

The United States has been pushing the UN Security Council to invoke Chapter VII of the UN Charter against Iran because of its nuclear research. Chapter VII (“Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression”) can be used to impose

sanctions and take military action against a country deemed guilty of such violations (except of course if the country holds a veto power in the Security Council).

The United States made use of Chapter VII to bomb Yugoslavia in 1999 and to invade Iraq in 2003. On both occasions, the applicability of the chapter and the use of force were highly questionable, but to placate Council opponents of military action the US agreed to some modifications in the language of the Council resolution and refrained from stating explicitly that it intended to take military action. Nonetheless, in each case, after the resolution was passed, the US took military action. Severe military action.

In early May, John Bolton, the US ambassador to the UN, asserted: “The fundamental point is for Russia and China to agree that this [Iran's nuclear research] is a threat to international peace and security under Chapter VII.”

However, Yury Fedotov, the Russian ambassador to the United Kingdom, declared that his country opposed the Chapter VII reference because it evoked “memories of past UN resolutions on Yugoslavia and Iraq that led to US-led military action which had not been authorised by the Security Council.”

In the past, the United States had argued that the reference to Chapter VII in a Council resolution was needed to obtain “robust language,” said Fedotov, but “afterwards it was used to justify unilateral action. In the case

The one unambiguous outcome was the full restoration of the propertied class

ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

Atheists are also the minority group most Americans are least willing to allow their children to marry. The researchers conclude that atheists offer "a glaring exception to the rule of increasing social tolerance over the last 30 years"

of Yugoslavia, for example, we were told at the beginning that references to Chapter VII were necessary to send political signals, and it finally ended up with the Nato bombardments.”[7]

It remains to be seen whether the Russians or any other Security Council members have taken this lesson to heart and can stand up to the schoolyard bully’s pressure by refusing to give the United States another pretext for expanding the empire’s control over the Middle East.

You can love your mom, eat lotsa apple pie, and wave the American flag, but if you don’t believe in God you are a hell bound subversive

A recent study by the University of Minnesota department of sociology has identified atheists as “America’s most distrusted minority”. University researchers found that Americans rate atheists below Muslims, recent immigrants, homosexuals and other minority groups in “sharing their vision of American society.”

Atheists are also the minority group most Americans are least willing to allow their children to marry. The researchers conclude that atheists offer “a glaring exception to the rule of increasing social tolerance over the last 30 years.”

Many of the study’s respondents associated atheism with an array of moral indiscretions ranging from criminal behavior to rampant materialism and cultural elitism. The study’s lead researcher believes a fear of moral decline and resulting social disorder is behind the findings. “Ameri-

cans believe they share more than rules and procedures with their fellow citizens, they share an understanding of right and wrong. Our findings seem to rest on a view of atheists as self-interested individuals who are not concerned with the common good.”[8]

Hmmm. I’ve been a political activist for more than 40 years. I’ve marched and fought and published weekly newspapers alongside countless atheists and agnostics who have risked jail and being clubbed on the head, and who have forsaken a much higher standard of living, for no purpose other than the common good. Rampant materialism? Hardly. “Secular humanism”, many atheists call it. And we don’t read about mobs of atheists stoning, massacring, or otherwise harming or humiliating human beings who do not share their non-beliefs.

The public attitude depicted by this survey may derive in part from the Cold-War upbringing of so many Americans – the idea and the image of the “godless atheistic communist”. But I think more than that is the deep-seated feeling of insecurity, even threat, that atheists can bring out in the religioso, putting into question, consciously or unconsciously, their core beliefs.

You must wonder at times, as I do, how this world became so unbearably cruel, corrupt, unjust, and stupid. Can it have reached this remarkable level by chance, or was it planned? It’s enough to make one believe in God. Or the Devil.

Manure of the taurus

The US Interests Section in Havana has been flashing electronic messages on its building for the benefit of Cubans passing by. One recent message said that Forbes, the weekly financial magazine, had named Fidel Castro the world's seventh-wealthiest head of state, with a fortune estimated at \$900 million. This has shocked Cuban passers by[9], as well it should in a socialist society that claims to have the fairest income distribution in the world. Are you not also shocked, dear readers?

What's that? You want to know exactly what Forbes based their rankings on? Well, as it turns out, two months before the Interests Section flashed their message, Forbes had already stated that the estimates were "more art than science". "In the past," wrote the magazine, "we have relied on a percentage of Cuba's gross domestic product to estimate Fidel Castro's fortune. This year, we have used more traditional valuation methods, comparing state-owned assets Castro is assumed to control with comparable publicly traded companies."

The magazine gave as examples state-owned companies such as retail and pharmaceutical businesses and a convention center.[10]

So there you have it. It was based on nothing. Inasmuch as George W. "controls" the US military shall we assign the value of all the Defense Department assets to his personal wealth? And Tony Blair's wealth includes the BBC, does it not?

Another message flashed by the

Interests Section is: "In a free country you don't need permission to leave the country. Is Cuba a free country?" This, too, is an attempt to blow smoke in people's eyes. It implies that there's some sort of blanket government restriction or prohibition of travel abroad for Cubans, a limitation on their "freedom". However, the reality is a lot more complex and a lot less Orwellian.

The main barrier to overseas travel for most Cubans is financial; they simply can't afford it. If they have the money and a visa they can normally fly anywhere, but it's very difficult to obtain a visa from the United States unless you're part of the annual immigration quota.

Cuba being a poor country concerned with equality tries to make sure that citizens complete their military service or their social service. Before emigrating abroad, trained professionals are supposed to give something back to the country for their free education, which includes medical school and all other schools. And Cuba, being unceasingly threatened by a well-known country to the north, must take precautions: Certain people in the military and those who have worked in intelligence or have other sensitive information may also need permission to travel; this is something that is found to one extent or another all over the world.

Americans need permission to travel to Cuba. Is the United States a free country? Washington makes it so difficult for its citizens to obtain permission to travel to Cuba it's virtually a

Atheists are also the minority group most Americans are least willing to allow their children to marry. The researchers conclude that atheists offer "a glaring exception to the rule of increasing social tolerance over the last 30 years"

ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

"India is a rising global power that we believe can be a pillar of stability in a rapidly changing Asia. In other words, in short, India is a natural partner for the United States"

prohibition. I have been rejected twice by the US Treasury Department.

Americans on the "No-fly list" can't go anywhere. All Americans need permission to leave the country. The permission slip – of which one must have a sufficient quantity – is green and bears the picture of a US president.

Save this for that glorious day when more than two centuries of American "democracy" reaches its zenith with a choice between Condi and Hillary

Condoleezza Rice, testifying April 5 before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee about the US-India nuclear deal:

"India's society is open and free. It is transparent and stable. It is multi-ethnic. It is a multi-religious democracy that is characterized by individual freedom and the rule of law. It is a country with which we share common values. ... India is a rising global power that we believe can be a pillar of stability in a rapidly changing Asia. In other words, in short, India is a natural partner for the United States."

And here is a State Department human rights report – released the very same day – that had this to say about India:

"The Government generally respected the rights of its citizens and continued efforts to curb human rights abuses, although numerous serious problems remained. These included extrajudicial killings, disappearances, custodial deaths, excessive use of force, arbitrary arrests, torture, poor prison conditions, and extended

pretrial detention, especially related to combating insurgencies in Jammu and Kashmir. Societal violence and discrimination against women, trafficking of women and children for forced prostitution and labor, and female feticide and infanticide remained concerns. Poor enforcement of laws, widespread corruption, a lack of accountability, and the severely overburdened court system weakened the delivery of justice."

Is it not enough to murder your brain?

For the record

In March I agreed to speak on a panel at the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee convention, to be held in June in Washington, DC. The panel is called: "America, Empire, Democracy and the Middle East". Then someone at the ADC apparently realized that I was the person whose book had been recommended by Osama bin Laden in January, and they tried to cancel my appearance with phoney excuses. I objected, calling them cowards; they relented, then changed their mind again, telling me finally "all of the seats on the journalism panel, for the ADC convention, are filled." Two months after our agreement, they had discovered that all the panel seats were filled.

American Muslims are very conservative. 72% of them voted for Bush in 2000, before they got a taste of a police state. Now, they're still very conservative, plus afraid.

University officials are also conservative, or can easily be bullied by

campus conservative organizations which are part of a well-financed national campaign (think David Horowitz) to attack the left on campus, be they faculty, students or outside speakers. Since the bin Laden recommendation, January 19, I have not been offered a single speaking engagement on any campus; a few students have tried to arrange something for me but were not successful at convincing school officials. This despite January-May normally being the most active period for me and other campus speakers.

Speakout, a California agency which places progressive speakers on campuses, informs me that the Horowitz-type groups have succeeded in cutting sharply into their business.[11] **CT**

NOTES

- [1] (Thanks to Kevin Barrett of the Muslim-Jewish-Christian Alliance for 9/11 Truth for the title of this section) Washington Post, May 5, 2006, p.B1
- [2] New York Times, June 30, 2004
- [3] Washington Post, April 12, 2006, p.C3
- [4] Associated Press, November 16, 2005

[5] See my essay on the use of the atomic bomb:
<http://members.aol.com/essays6/abomb.htm>

[6] See, for example, Joyce & Gabriel Kolko, "The Limits of Power: The World and US Foreign Policy 1945-1954" (1972), chapters 13, 16, 17; Sallie Pisani, "The CIA and the Marshall Plan" (1991) passim; Frances Stonor Saunders, "The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the world of arts and letters" (2000) passim

[7] The Independent (London), May 8, 2006

[8] <http://www.ur.umn.edu/FMPro?-db=releases&-lay=web&-format=umn-newsreleases/releasesdetail.html&ID=2816&-Find>

[9] Washington Post, May 13, 2006, p.10

[10] Reuters, March 17, 2006

[11] <http://www.speakersandartists.org/>

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; Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire. His web site is www.killinghope.org

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ON PROPAGANDA

Canada's National Post recently ran a front page story suggesting Iran was about to make Jews wear badges on their clothes. The story, says C. L. Cook, was bullshit, 'phoney as Saddam's WMD, fake as the babies thrown from Kuwaiti incubators, abandoned to die on a hospital floor, etc . . . used to justify the first Gulf War'

HATE BAITING AT THE NATIONAL POST

I can't believe it took this long for the Likudite Canwest Global to descend to the eye-poking, nostril-gouging level it has in its smear assault against "evil" Iran

It sometimes seems we live in a time of unprecedented corruption, perfidy, and abomination; but, as the Bible says somewhere: "There's nothing new under the sun."

"Hitler" is a name often invoked in the media these days. The terrors of the Nazi regime, especially referencing its grotesque concentration camps, where State enemies were dispatched after suffering religious humiliation, torture, and God knows what else. The world has witnessed ruthless invasions and occupations, inflicted by a tyrannical, rogue nation on its smaller neighbours before; in the form of Hitler's Germany, the world watched, horror-struck, a racist, ideologically perverse campaign of global domination, whose goal was no less than the enslavement of the entire planet.

Yes verily there is nothing new under the sun.

The story of Jewish suffering under the Nazis, both during the rise of fascism in Germany, through its progression to its inevitable ends behind the barbed wire of the concentration camps, reminds of the gruesome poten-



tial of collective barbarity. Even today, more than 70 years from the shocking and awful ascension of Hitler and his henchmen, the remembrance of the legislated "branding" of German Jews, all made to sew the Star of David on their clothing, is a particularly poignant symbol of totalitarianism, the apposite of human decency, early warning of terrible portent.

It also serves a reminder of how quickly a society can be led into madness, an induced insanity that would allow the blasphemies, forever recorded

in the annals of history. It's a story that demands reverent acknowledgement, respect, and a regular revisiting. As indeed it is remembered in solemn ceremonies, news media, and motion pictures. It is a lesson hard learned by millions of our predecessors, and not to be treated cynically for political advancement, or commercial interest.

Though that's a message apparently lost on the editors of Canada's National Post newspaper.

The logical extension of the avowedly pro-Israel media monster's pro-war propaganda-driven "information" dissemination philosophy, (as iterated by its late owner, Israel "Izzy" Asper, on his assumption of much of the media empire built by the disgraced former media magnate, Lord Black) the Holocaust hijacking presented on the Post's front page recently was the flowering of a hate war waged by Canwest in the service of a greater and possibly perpetual state of war in the world.

I can't believe it took this long for the Likudite Canwest Global to descend to the eye-poking, nostril-gouging level it has in its smear assault against "evil" Iran; as sinisterly personified singularly in the person of its president, another Hitler in the making, who given half a chance would create a nuclear-tipped missile to set fire to the world; beginning in Israel.

And he hates Jews, we're daily told; would have them all wear badges, immolate the nation, etc...

Yet, the story is bullshit.

Phoney as Saddam's WMD, the National Post published a pack of lies; lies told at a time when the rally cry to

an unprovoked war of conquest and occupation in a far off land is the goal of a furious lobbying campaign in America, and around the world. Fake as the babies thrown from Kuwaiti incubators, abandoned to die on the cold, cold hospital floor, etc... used to "justify" the first Gulf War. The Post's 'Iran Eyes Badges for Jews, Christians?' is an incitement to disgust, fear, and the loathing of Iran, and its people, the ones likely to suffer should another front in the War on Terror be allowed opened.

Unlike America, Canada has laws against crimes of incitement to hatred of identifiable groups, based on ethnic, gender, or sexual orientation parameters. What are Persian-Canadians, and the greater Muslim population of Canada, to make of the Post's story? What effects might they suffer at the long-knuckled hands of the National Post's misinformed readership? Canada's newly-arrived prime minister, Harper responded to questions from the Canwest reporter tasked to refute the front page fiasco, saying simply:

"Unfortunately we've seen enough already from the Iranian regime to suggest that it is very capable of this kind of action. It boggles the mind that any regime on the face of the earth would want to do anything that would remind people of Nazi Germany."

Yes Stephen, it boggles the mind to be sure. **CT**

Chris Cook is a contributing editor of PEJ News where this commentary first appeared. He also hosts Gorilla Radio, broad/webcast from the University of Victoria, Canada.

The Post's 'Iran Eyes Badges for Jews, Christians?' is an incitement to disgust, fear, and the loathing of Iran, and its people, the ones likely to suffer should another front in the War on Terror be allowed opened

LAST WORDS

*As we were finalising this issue on May 29, America's Memorial Day, we received the latest rant from correspondent **David Rubinson's Drant Daily** (rubinson@kab.com). With the latest storm breaking about American war crimes in Iraq, it echoes what many of us are thinking*

MEMORIAL DAY?

Now come all the impassioned eulogies for Our Troops. Lies, all of it. I do not support our troops. I do not support anyone's troops.

It is emblematic that throughout the USA we dedicate an official holiday to the deification and glorification of "our" warriors.

All across America today, people of every kind, hawks and doves, peaceniks and sabre rattlers, pro-war and anti-war, are stepping up proudly to proclaim that, whether they support the war or not, they support our troops.

I do not support our troops. They are not mine. They are not admirable brave men and women, nor are they fighting for our country. They are certainly not fighting for me.

They are murderers and killers, torturers and rapists, who have willingly committed inhuman and unconscionable acts on uncountable victims.

Some of them may also be victims but all of them are perpetrators.

Many of them may be reluctant warriors, but all of them have the moral obligation to refuse to kill, and choose instead to follow orders.

They may have been sent to do the filthy work of insane power mongers and incomprehensibly greedy pigs, but the filthy work they do – often, as can be seen on countless video clips – with gusto and relish.

America looks out into the world, and sees

not the hundreds of thousands of humans we have killed, wounded, or burned beyond recognition, but sees only its own brave soldiers, as if they were the victims.

And this of course is why we go so easily into war. For Us, the Others don't exist. It is all about Us, and Our sons and Our mothers and Our children.

Supporting Our Troops means we support ourselves, and rationalizes what we have done.

For each of us has made the same moral choice as each of the soldiers. Each of us has, in one way or another, followed orders, and death and destruction have been the result.

We must find the courage to NOT support the troops, and NOT support what we all have committed. We must blame the troops, and blame ourselves, and take full responsibility for what we and our soldiers have done.

Today should be called Victims' Day.

A day for the nation to stop everything and contemplate and examine in extreme detail, everything we have brought on humanity. For centuries.

A day when we individually and collectively face the truth.

Today let us mark the beginning of redemption by memorializing and humanizing and glorifying the victims of our crimes. Let us march and sadly display the tragic photos of those we have killed, and not of Us, their killers. **CT**

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WRITING WORTH READING
FROM AROUND THE WORLD