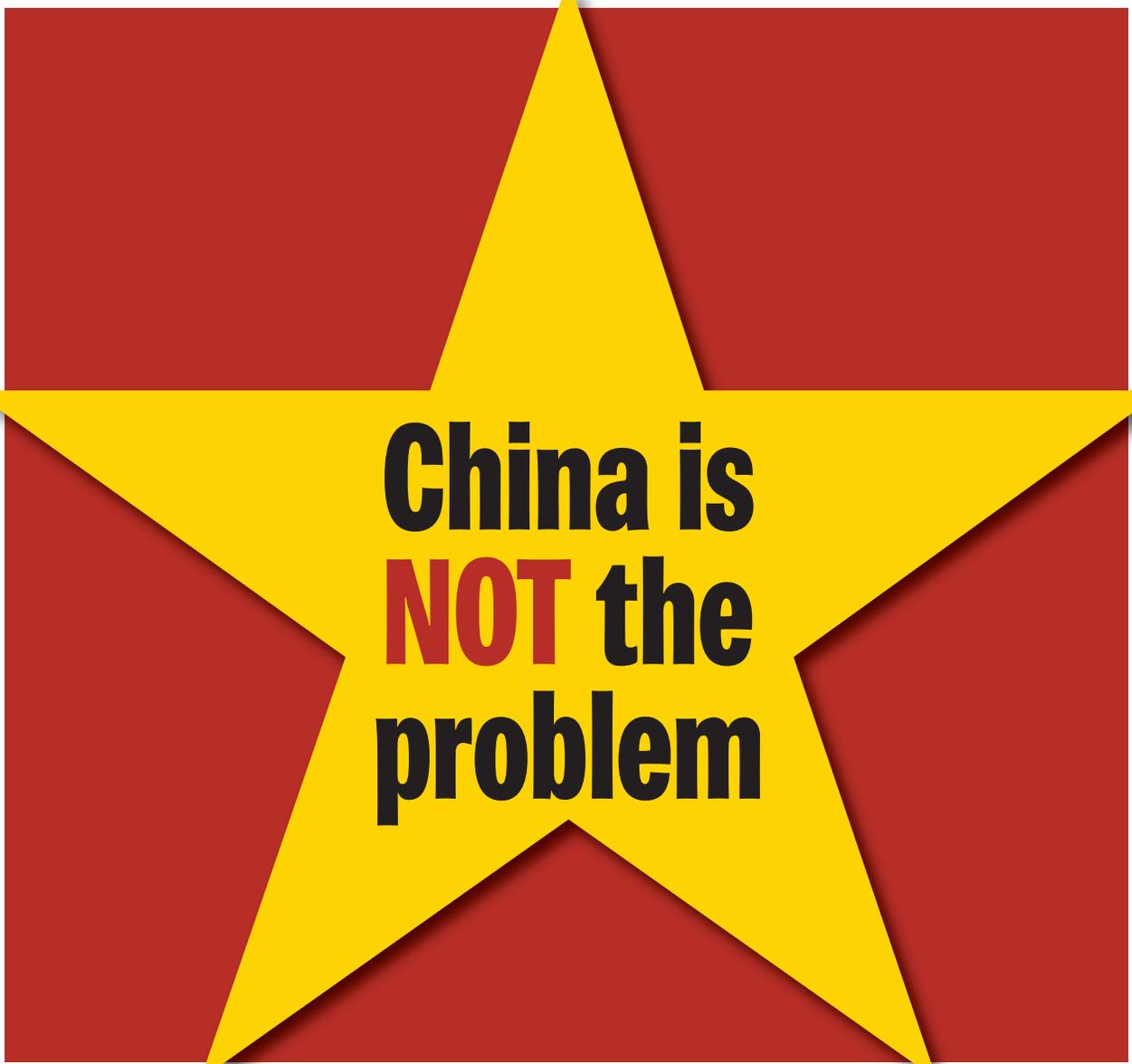

INSIDE: INSIDE BRITAIN'S DEATH SQUADS ● GOLD,
GUNS AND DEFYING GRAVITY ● LOAN SHARKING
MADE LEGAL ● INSIDE THE TEXAS DEATH HOUSE

ColdType
The **READER**

WRITING WORTH READING ● ISSUE 18 ● SEPTEMBER 2007



**China is
NOT the
problem**

 **PAUL CRAIG ROBERTS ON THE PROBLEMS OF GLOBALISATION**

The ^{ColdType} READER



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FIGHTING THE DICK BOATS

BY MICHAEL I. NIMAN

People living within five miles or so of any major American waterway can hear their psychotic roar on hot summer evenings. They're "dick boats" – long, sleek, overpowered speedboats that can cut a sunset cruise into a deafening four-minute drag race. Their nickname is based on common beliefs that their owners are compensating for anatomical deficiencies.

A dick boat on the Niagara River, for example, can be heard by more than 100,000 people. One circling Manhattan could be heard by millions. But the noise pollution only makes this summer pastime obnoxious, like the midlife crises cruising their throaty Harleys up and down urban avenues. What makes the dick boat fetish criminal is that they burn upwards of 25 gallons of gas per hour.

Perhaps dick boat operators can afford \$75 per hour for their thrills – Viagra's expensive too, I guess. But the real cost here isn't in dollars, it's in pollution and the squandering of dwindling oil reserves. While the focus lately has

been on carbon dioxide and global warming, oil consumption also fouls waterways through spills and runoff and is a main cause of smog, both in its refinement and in its end-use burning. Obtaining oil, more and more, leads to global political instability as nations compete for dwindling reserves, fight wars over control of oil fields and often fund despotic regimes and terrorists with their oil dollars. Your dick boat operator isn't just some poor, pathetic bastard loudly masturbating – he's destroying the planet.

Every month new studies link global warming to human activities. Other studies attribute radical weather patterns to global warming. This summer headlines report a massive drought in California, heat waves in Europe, floods across Britain and the American Southwest (Arizona's new "monsoon season") and so on. In response, some of us are buying more efficient light bulbs, carpooling, insulating our homes and basically downshifting our consumptive ways. Others are partying like there's no tomorrow.

Your dick boat operator isn't just some poor, pathetic bastard loudly masturbating – he's destroying the planet

THE SELFISH RICH

The SUVs of the Jersey Shore seem well adorned with a bumper crop of oversized American flag stickers, like frontline assault vehicles in a patriotic push against salt marshes

This summer I've been observing carbon culture. In Buffalo I listen to air conditioners hum on 65-degree nights. Their owners never open their windows, so they don't know how cool the outside world is or the magic that a small fan could accomplish. I've been in office buildings that were hypercooled so the inhabitants could wear the standard white collar uniform of jackets and ties on hot, humid days and still be comfortable. The business class in Miami wears the same coats and air-condition their buildings to the same temperature despite being in the tropics.

In the Finger Lakes there's a 7,000-square-foot house. Its windows never open. Air conditioning runs during the months when the heat is off. It's usually occupied only by a caretaker. The owner flies in on a chartered seaplane a few weekends a year. This house is not an anomaly. It's actually small compared to the trophy homes recently built up and down the eastern seaboard. And its owner's chartered seaplane, while guzzling far more gas than a dick boat, is still frugal compared to the private jets so prized by the nouveau ultra-rich. America's upward transfer of wealth is hell on the ecosystem.

On the New Jersey coast I stayed in a friend's family bungalow, purchased by a grandfather in 1948 and maintained by a circle of siblings who struggle to pay the taxes. It's one of the last of its kind – a 900-square-foot beach house. Its neighbors have all been torn down so that colossal beach chateaux could be jimmed onto their lots. In this neighborhood of newly minted multi-

millionaires, SUVs are standard transport, clogging all the arteries leading to New York City and its North Jersey suburbs like big blobs of metal cholesterol.

The SUVs of the Jersey Shore seem well adorned with a bumper crop of oversized American flag stickers, like frontline assault vehicles in a patriotic push against salt marshes. Despite the semiotic jingoism, there's nothing patriotic about driving around in a giant car. Of course we don't call them giant cars, nor do we use the 1980s descriptive, suburban assault vehicle. No, they're "sporty." Get it, sport? Their drivers wear them like high-fashion body armor despite the social cost of this consumptive fetish. Insecure neurotics feel powerful in their 250-horsepower, 6,000 pound, obese cars – and hurricanes batter Haiti.

Dream vacation

A middle-class American family saves for years to take the dream vacation of a lifetime – an 8,000-mile sojourn in a rented RV. Three thousand gallons later they're home, having taken a toilet, shower, stove and refrigerator for a tour of the country. Other families head out to local lakes, "personal water craft" in tow. The worst of these jet skis, the old two-stroke buzz bombs, still commonly in use, consume seven gallons of gas per hour, burning five and dumping two raw, mixed with foul exhaust, into whatever waterway they operate in. This is like pissing in the swimming pool, only gas is a much nastier pollutant than urine.

When the consuming classes in

America come home from vacation, they're returning to larger and larger houses. Since 1970, the average size of a new American home grew by more than 60 percent, while the average size of families occupying those homes dropped 15 percent. This translates into lots of heated and air-conditioned empty space.

Let's go back to New Jersey, which seems like an epicenter for apocalyptic consumerism. While there I saw an ad in a local newspaper: "Replace your old obsolescent home," on your own lot, with a new modern home. The advertiser offered a complete demolition-construction service. You just move out of your "obsolete" old home, wait a few months and move back into your new McMansion. Same neighbors. Same view. New digs. The old house gets trucked off to a landfill. Lots of new plastic and flake board is delivered. Your new home is built. Voila!

Even with these bloated new homes, however, Americans still can't find places to store all the useless stuff we feel compelled to buy and somehow need to hoard – so there's recently been a boom in the self-storage industry, which has grown by 740 percent over the last 22 years. Last year Americans spent almost \$23 billion dollars renting storage spaces from over 59,000 storage facilities, totaling 78 square miles of indoor storage. Those unlucky enough to still be living in old, obsolete, closet-deprived homes can load giant cars with big green and red plastic tubs of Christmas gear, orange tubs of Halloween frights and clear tubs of miscellaneous goods for a trip to the storage locker.

For nearly 11 million American families, such trips are becoming ritual.

The problem is a runaway culture of consumerism where commercial culture conditions people to seek fulfillment in the purchase of products. Only products aren't fulfilling – not for long, at least. Like good addicts, obedient consumers take their credit cards out for a spin, perpetually trying to fill permanently empty vessels: their souls.

All of this consumption squanders precious, nonrenewable resources both in production and shipping while producing all sorts of waste products such as carbon, the effects of which we are only now beginning to understand. Fetishistic consumerism isn't harmless – it's adding up to the biggest threat humanity and the world has ever faced.

Let's go back, one final time, to the New Jersey shore. All those giant cars. The dick boats. Air-conditioned trophy homes. This all adds up to one mother-fucker of a carbon footprint. And that adds up to the global climate crisis we're just seeing the beginning of. And oil spills killing oceans. And sewage, garbage and global-warming-induced offshore dead zones. And, by most accounts and models, ocean level rise and an increase in hurricane activity that together or separately will wipe out all those multi-million dollar homes built on a series of barrier islands we call the Jersey Shore. I guess we reap what we sow. **CT**

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Even with these bloated new homes, however, Americans still can't find places to store all the useless stuff we feel compelled to buy and somehow need to hoard

THE ROCKER'S TALE

BY PATRICIA BARDEN

When I offered the guitar for the auction, John was a little taken aback. He tried to talk me out of it – several times, in fact – but I insisted

In addition to being a tech geek, I'm a rocker. I've been playing guitar since I was a teenager. So when Patti Smith agreed to a silent auction to benefit the Center for Media and Democracy (CMD) at her August 5 concert in Madison, Wisconsin, I began looking forward to meeting the quintessential godmother of punk rock. Little did I know how special the evening would turn out to be.

As CMD staff were soliciting auction items, executive director John Stauber asked me if I "had an old guitar laying around that I'd like to donate." I mulled his question over for a few days and then offered my 1958 Gibson LG-1 acoustic guitar.

The Gibson wasn't considered a "top-of-the-line" instrument – it was originally sold as a student guitar – but was rich in sentimental value. I acquired it when I was 21 years old. I don't remember exactly how – it was either given to me by my guitar teacher or I purchased it for about \$50. Regardless, I've played and carried that guitar with me for the last 33 years.

When I offered the guitar for the auction, John was a little taken aback. He tried to talk me out of it – several times, in fact – but I insisted. I wanted to donate it, out of gratitude for everything that CMD has done for me. Patti Smith agreed to sign the guitar, and my Gibson became the premier item of the auction.

The night before the concert, as we were packing up the auction items, CMD office and outreach manager Sari Williams asked me, "Are you sure you want to auction your guitar?" I told her that while I felt sad about letting it go, I believe that whatever you put out to the universe, both good and bad, comes back to you ten-fold. I've made that statement many times, but I've never seen karma play out quite so instantaneously.

The next day, I helped set the auction up in the lobby of Madison's Barrymore Theatre. Patti Smith suddenly appeared next to us, almost as if she had materialized out of thin air. The first thing that struck me was how down-to-earth and unpretentious she is. If you didn't

recognize her, you'd never have guessed that you were standing next to a Rock and Roll Hall of Fame member.

Patti asked to see the guitar, and asked if it was mine. I said that it was, and that I'd owned it since I was 21. She asked, "Are you sure you want to sell it?" I said I had decided to let it go, especially as it would benefit a great cause.

She walked around the lobby strumming my guitar and then asked me to sit down on the sofa with her. She asked what the suggested bid on the guitar was. I told her \$750 and she replied, "How about if I donate \$1000 to CMD and you keep your guitar?"

Her selflessness and generosity left me dumstruck. I accepted her offer and asked if she'd sign the Gibson for me.

She inscribed "People have the power – Patti Smith" in the upper left-hand corner of the body (where it won't be touched when it's played).

Afterwards, CMD senior researcher Diane Farsetta jokingly asked me if I'll still play the Gibson or if it's become a "holy relic." While it's even more special to me now, I know that Patti would want me to continue to play it.

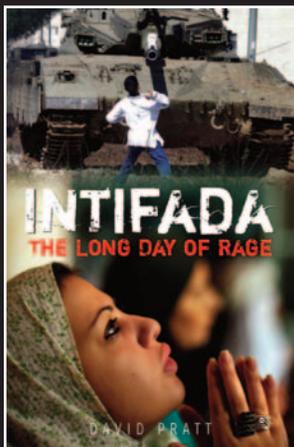
There are no words to express how truly touched I am by Patti's kindness. And the concert was amazing. They really did build things to last in the 40's, Patti. Rock on! **CT**

Tricia Barden is IT director at the Center for Media and Democracy's. This article originally appeared on the Centre's web site at <http://prwatch.org>

She walked around the lobby strumming my guitar and then asked me to sit down on the sofa with her

"This is eyewitness reporting at its best – clear, well-observed, fair. Read it, and you'll understand why most of what you read about Israel and the Palestinians is nonsense"

– Charles Glass, former ABC News Chief Mideast Correspondent



INTIFADA

THE LONG DAY OF RAGE

By David Pratt

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GOLD, GUNS AND DEFYING GRAVITY

BY DAVID PRATT

Glancing anxiously towards the cockpit, it slowly dawned on me that the plane's co-pilot, was actually gesturing at us to try and shut the hatch through which the Congolese jungle could be seen sweeping past a few hundred feet below

The wall of jungle came hurtling towards us at a terrifying speed. Not for the first time I could feel myself willing the plane into the air. “Up, up,” I heard the voice inside my head saying, as my body involuntarily bobbed up and down in the seat like a demented African meerkat.

It wasn't just the roughness of the rutted dirt runway that was making me bounce. It was the desperate psychological urge to help propel our take-off safely over the trees into the humid air that hung like a saturated canopy above the rainforest.

Having cleared the tops with barely feet to spare, the aircraft suddenly banked so steeply that the horizon became virtually vertical and I felt my stomach lurch as gravity tugged at my insides. Just as I was reassuring myself that the worst was almost over, the fuselage door at the back of the plane suddenly flew open, sending a deafening blast of air into the cabin. It was so powerful that the heavy industrial harnesses used to hold the cargo of highly inflammable fuel drums we were carry-

ing on board, fluttered like celebratory bunting.

Next to me, our only “official” passenger – a Congolese goldmining engineer – was anything but celebrating. Having clamped his hands instinctively to the armrests of his seat, his fear-filled eyes seemed ready to pop out of his head. Glancing anxiously towards the cockpit, it slowly dawned on me that the plane's co-pilot, was gesturing at us to try to shut the hatch through which the Congolese jungle could be seen sweeping past a few hundred feet below.

He had to be kidding. Already this was all getting a bit too Indiana Jones for my liking. Shamefully, I decide to remain seated and watched as my indomitable cameraman colleague, buffeted by the wind, edged his way back up the aircraft, before getting his shoulder behind the door and heaving it shut. Not surprisingly, the experience was enough to leave lesser mortals like my fellow passengers and I on the edge of mental meltdown. But not the plane's pilots – fortunately.

For Chris ‘Peppersteak’ Laidler, and

Paddy Hyndman, who sat grinning in the cockpit, it was all just another day at the office, albeit one in the skies over Africa's "heart of darkness" – the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). For the best part of the last seven years Laidler and Hyndman have worked as bush pilots flying in and out of one of the continent's most politically volatile areas – the Great Lakes region that straddles Uganda, Rwanda and the vastness of north-eastern Congo.

In that time, Laidler had picked up – along with a few furrows on his brow – the Peppersteak nickname, because as Hyndman pointed out, it doesn't matter what kind of restaurant he goes to; Thai, Italian or Indian, it's always the same order – pepper steak. Not that restaurants like these are thick on the ground at most of the pilots' destinations; even in today's shrinking 21st-century world, the remoteness and isolation of the places into which they fly inside Congo still beggars belief.

On bush airstrips in these far-flung places, Congolese children who perhaps hadn't seen a white person for the first 10 years of their lives, have been known to feed grass to the engines of stationary aircraft after thinking they were living creatures.

Breathtaking in its beauty, the region is full of rivers, volcanoes, giant lakes the size of seas, and lush impenetrable rainforest where pygmies live as they have done for centuries. But here also roam rival tribal militias armed with the "panga" machetes of old, as well as modern Africa's ubiquitous new weapon – the Kalashnikov assault rifle.

Many of these militias are little more

than violent bit players and pawns in the bitter struggle for Congo's vast natural mineral resources. As the brutal Belgian colonial rulers of the past were quick to realise, the fertile Congolese earth and its dense forested hills are bursting to the seams with diamonds, tin and copper.

Here, too, lies vast quantities of coltan from which the crucial microchip ingredient Tantalum is extracted, and without which our computerised world of mobile phones and PlayStations would cease to function. Above all, though, it is gold that has brought the biggest fortune hunters to Congo in recent times, massive multinational companies keen to extract and profit from some of the purest gold to be found on the planet.

For the men who work the mines in Ituri Province in Eastern Congo, their link with the world outside is through the air bridge that bush pilots, like Laidler and Hyndman, risk life and limb to keep open.

Pioneering streak

I had come to Congo for a few weeks with a cameraman friend, to make a film about the two flyers. Within days I was to realise just how the work routine of these pilots made our own nine-to-five lives seem gut-wrenchingly mundane.

Young modern men, these aviators might be. But, despite their airborne habit listening to The Killers on their iPods, they still possessed a pioneering streak more in tune with the values of a bygone age, a time when enormous risk-taking was expected when explor-

On bush airstrips in these far-flung places, Congolese children who perhaps hadn't seen a white person for the first 10 years of their lives, have been known to feed grass to the engines of stationary aircraft after thinking they were living creatures

INTO AFRICA

At some of the bigger airstrip towns like Bukavu and Goma, on the banks of Lake Kivu, the runways are flanked by ancient Dakotas and Antonov bi-planes of the type any locations researcher for *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* would have died for

ing places like Africa, and shrugged off with an insouciance and black humour only those confident enough in their own resourcefulness were able to muster.

Indeed, many of the pilots I met in Congo might have come from the pages of books like *Wind, Sand and Stars* by the French writer and aviator-adventurer, Antoine de Saint-Exupery. The miners and engineers often seemed like contemporary clones of characters out of old Humphrey Bogart films such as the *The African Queen* and *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*. North-eastern Congo has always looked and felt like the setting for a Boy's Own tale of derring-do. At some of the bigger airstrip towns like Bukavu and Goma, on the banks of Lake Kivu, the runways are flanked by ancient Dakotas and Antonov bi-planes of the type any locations researcher for *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* would have died for.

All in, Congo has never been a country for the faint of heart. At its murkiest it has seen its fair share of despots, mercenaries and arms dealers, while today's bush goldmines are still the workplaces of roughneck drillers, ex-French Foreign Legionnaires and Gurkha soldiers, who guard the mining compounds from potentially marauding militias who think nothing of chopping up and eating their enemies.

Then there are the bush pilots who ferry in the rigs, spare parts and supplies, the fuel and the workers. What, I wondered, had brought men like Chris Laidler and Paddy Hyndman from places as far apart as Surrey and Nova Scotia to this life of gold, guns and de-

fying gravity in the skies over Congo? "I don't know really to be honest. I suppose I thought it would be quite good fun. I got a job in Botswana and kind of enjoyed it so decided to stay here in Africa," says Laidler, in an elusive hybrid accent that is part Australian, part South African, in keeping with his nomadic lifestyle.

Flying, or at least an interest in aviation, had run in both men's families. In Laidler's case his father had been a pilot with British Airways, in Hyndman's grew from his father's keen amateur enthusiasm and a sister who flew DC3s in the Canadian bush. "My old man is a physician and his hobby was aviation, before he switched to golf," said Hyndman. "We always had aviation magazines lying around, so I guess I was stimulated by that as a kid early on."

After flight school and stints flying elsewhere in remote areas of the world, including parts of Australia and Papua New Guinea, both ended up in Africa working for Kilwa Air. Like many of the aviation outfits that serve the gold mining industry in Congo, Kilwa is South African-based, although the company operates mainly out of Mwanza in Tanzania. The demands of the company are high, with a seven-day working week starting at 6am and often lasting 12 hours or more, up to seven of them in the air. And then there are the dangers, something both pilots insist they rarely think about, despite having had their fair share of touch-and-go moments.

"I think the worst was coming into Mongbwalu," recalls Laidler, referring to the strip from which we had taken off a few days earlier, when the door

had flown open shortly after take-off. On the occasion of Laidler and Hyndman's own heart-stopper, the weather was bad with low cloud engulfing the surrounding hills and ridges:

"The engine failed when we landed and tried to put it in reverse. We were fully loaded with a couple of tons of freight and were half way down the strip with only about three hundred yards left." Laidler continued. "We decided to do a go-around and just squeezed off the end and came round for another try. That was hairy canary."

Looks like Miss Piggy

The ability to get in and out of such tight strips the pilots put down to the special flying qualities of their 21-year-old Spanish-built CASA 212.

"It's hideous and looks like Miss Piggy but I love it and it's perfect for what we use it for. We beat it half to death, but it's still very forgiving," said Hyndman. If he worries about anything, it's the fact that the terrain has not been properly mapped, the weather and rainforest are unpredictable, and then there's Lake Victoria, which "has more convective thunderstorm activity than just about anywhere in the world".

There is also the issue of the "Big M" – maintenance. While Kilwa Air has a good track record, not all operators in Africa are as rigorous in the upkeep of their aircraft.

"There was one operator in Stone-town in Zanzibar which had been sending their planes over the Zanzibar Strait to Dar es Salaam. One of my friends was flying," Hyndman remem-

bers. "The plane was half way across when he lost his single engine, and he was headed into the drink. He survived, though the plane is now at the bottom," he tells me, before adding the all-too-common postscript to his story. "Later they found out the company had been replacing parts in the plane with bits they had ripped off a Volkswagen bug in the parking lot."

Others pilots elsewhere in Congo have been less lucky as Hyndman's friend. Laidler doesn't like to talk too much about one new crew a few years ago who, being unaware of the correct procedure for going into a particular strip in bad weather, turned the wrong way before slamming into a ridge killing all 16 crew and passengers on board. When rescuers found the wreckage and bodies some time later, the remains had been looted, and the dead stripped of clothes and belongings before being mutilated.

"These things don't always happen, but if you go down in the wrong place then it probably will. I mean if I went down in the Congo, the chances of me coming out are pretty slim, because I'll either be put in prison or be held by some local militia," Laidler said with a shrug.

From 2002 to 2004, many local militias from tribes such as the Lendu and the Hema acted as the proxy forces of neighbouring Uganda and Rwanda in the struggle for gold inside Congo. Most gained a grisly reputation for brutality whenever violence gripped the region around mining towns like Mongbwalu.

Forces under local and foreign commanders, some with ominous nom de

When rescuers found the wreckage and bodies some time later, what had survived had been looted, and the dead stripped of clothes and belongings before being mutilated

Faced with losing his own life and that of his crew, the Russian pilot is said to have opened the ramp on the Antonov transport aircraft, and put the plane into an extremely steep climb leaving some 80 heavily armed men tumbling like toy soldiers from a tin box to their deaths in the bush below

guerres including Commander Kung Fu, fought ruthlessly, often targeting civilians in the battles for control of the gold supply. Widespread ethnic slaughter, torture, rape, and other violations of human rights and international law were widespread around Mongbwalu and in other northeastern areas.

“When our company first arrived with their drill rigs they rolled through Mongbwalu and it was empty because all the locals thought the trucks and rigs were tanks, so they cleared out of town and have always been on edge since,” said Hyndman. “About two years ago it got so bad again, we had to haul all the miners out”. But, with so many weapons around it’s not only gunfire from militiamen on the ground that present dangers, sometimes the cargo and even the passengers themselves can pose a threat.

“All pilots worry about hazardous materials, acetylene, bottles of oxygen and those kinds of things, and then sometimes we have security guards on board and have to take their ammunition clips away”.

One story tells of a Russian company that was ferrying scores of Congolese soldiers when a fight broke out on board over one of the men’s girlfriends and the troops started shooting at each other. Faced with losing his own life and that of his crew, the Russian pilot is said to have opened the ramp on the Antonov transport aircraft, and put the plane into an extremely steep climb leaving some 80 heavily armed men tumbling like toy soldiers from a tin box to their deaths in the bush below.

Given the obvious stresses bush pi-

lots face, how long did Laidler and Hyndman think they would continue working in Congo? Was it not also the case that most pilots seem so hooked on flying that hanging up their wings was easier said than done?

“I think what people say about it taking its toll on you is true, it takes years off your life. Christ, I feel like an old man already. I’m only 32, yet I look 40,” Laidler complains, before then telling me that if he didn’t like it he wouldn’t do it, and how much better it was than flying at “a boring 10,000 metres”.

While both men talk of settling down and getting married, somehow it doesn’t quite square with two characters clearly steeped in Africa and an adrenaline-fuelled lifestyle that Hyndman admits, is “a powerful narcotic”. So what would they do if they weren’t flying, I asked him one afternoon as the CASA cruised over Lake Victoria en-route back into Congo from Entebbe in Uganda.

“I need to quit while I’m ahead,” Hyndman replied, putting down the copy of Ernest Hemingway’s *The Green Hills of Africa* that he’d been reading when the flying wasn’t too demanding. “If I wasn’t flying I don’t know what I’d do,” he confesses with a grin while chewing on a piece of his favourite South African beef jerky.

“I’m too old now to be stripper.” **CT**

David Pratt is foreign editor of the Sunday Herald, Scotland’s leading national Sunday newspaper. His latest book is INTIFADA: Palestine and Israel – The Long Day of Rage

CHINA IS NOT THE PROBLEM

BY PAUL CRAIG ROBERTS

At a time when even the Wall Street Journal has disappeared into the maw of a huge media conglomerate, the New York Times remains an independent newspaper. But it doesn't show any independence in reporting or in thought.

The Times issued a mea culpa for letting its reporter, Judith Miller, misinform readers about Iraq, thus helping the neoconservatives set the stage for their invasion. Now the Times' reporting on Iran seems to be repeating the mistake. After the US commits another senseless act of naked aggression by bombing Iran, will the Times publish another mea culpa?

The Times editorials also serve as conduits for propaganda. On August 13, a Times editorial jumped on China for "irresponsible threats" that threaten free trade. The Times' editorialists do not understand that the offshoring of American jobs, which the Times mistakenly thinks is free trade, is a far greater threat to America than a reminder from the Chinese, who are tired of US bullying, that China is America's

banker.

Let's briefly review the "China threat" and then turn to the real problem.

Members of the US government believe, as do many Americans, that the Chinese currency is undervalued relative to the US dollar and that this is the reason for America's large trade deficit with China. Pressure continues to be applied to China to revalue its currency in order to reduce its trade advantage over goods made in the US.

The pressure put on China is misdirected. The exchange rate is not the main cause of the US trade deficit with China. The costs of labor, regulation and harassment are far lower in China, and US corporations have offshored their production to China in order to benefit from these lower costs. When a company shifts its production from the US to a foreign country, it transforms US GDP into imports. Every time a US company offshores goods and services, it adds to the US trade deficit.

Clearly, it is a mistake for the US government and economists to think of the

The costs of labor, regulation and harassment are far lower in China, and US corporations have offshored their production to China in order to benefit from these lower costs

Tariffs would benefit American labor, something that the US Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers, and the Republican Party would strongly oppose

imbalance as if it were produced by Chinese companies underselling goods produced by US companies in America. The imbalance is the result of US companies producing their goods in China and selling them in America.

Many believe the solution is to force China to revalue its currency, thereby driving up the prices of 70% of the goods on Wal-Mart shelves. Mysteriously, members of the US government believe that it would help the US consumer, who is as dependent on imported manufactured goods as he is on imported energy, to be charged higher prices.

China believes that the exchange rate is not the cause of US offshoring and opposes any rapid change in its currency's value. In a message issued in order to tell the US to ease off the public bullying, China reminded Washington that the US doesn't hold all the cards.

The NYT editorial expresses the concern that China's "threat" will cause protectionist US lawmakers to stick on tariffs and start a trade war. "Free trade, free market" economists rush to tell us how bad this would be for US consumers: A tariff would raise the price of consumer goods.

The free market economists don't tell us that dollar depreciation would have the same effect. Goods made in China would go up 30 percent in price if a 30 percent tariff was placed on them, and the goods would go up 30 percent in price if the value of the Chinese currency rises 30 percent against the dollar.

So, why all the fuss about tariffs?

The fuss about tariffs makes even less sense once one realizes that the purpose of tariffs is to protect domesti-

cally produced goods from cheaper imports. However, US tariffs today would be imposed on the offshored production of US firms. In the era of offshoring, corporations are not a constituency for tariffs.

Tariffs would benefit American labor, something that the US Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers, and the Republican Party would strongly oppose. A wage equalization tariff would wipe out much of the advantage of offshoring. Profits would come down, and with lower profits would come lower CEO compensation and shareholder returns.

Obviously, the corporate interests and Wall Street do not want any tariffs.

The NYT and "free trade" economists haven't caught on, because they mistakenly think that offshoring is trade. In fact, offshoring is labor arbitrage. US labor is simply removed from production functions that produce goods and services for US markets and replaced with foreign labor. No trade is involved. Instead of being produced in America, US brand names sold in America are produced in China.

It is not China's fault that American corporations have so little regard for their employees and fellow citizens that they destroy their economic opportunities and give them to foreigners instead.

It is paradoxical that everyone is blaming China for the behavior of American firms. What is China supposed to do, close its borders to foreign capital?

When free market economists align, as they have done, with foreigners against American citizens, they destroy

their credibility and the future of economic freedom. Recently the Independent Institute, with which I am associated, stressed that free market associations “have defended completely open immigration and free markets in labor,” emphasizing that 500 economists signed the Independent Institute’s Open Letter on Immigration in behalf of open immigration.

Such a policy is satisfying to some in its ideological purity. But what it means in practice is that the Americans, who are displaced in their professional and manufacturing jobs by offshoring and work visas for foreigners, also cannot find work in the unskilled and semi-skilled jobs taken over by illegal immigrants. A free market policy that gives the bird to American labor is not going to win acceptance by the population. Such a policy serves only the owners of capital and its senior managers.

Free market economists will dispute this conclusion. They claim that offshoring and unrestricted immigration provide consumers with cheaper prices in the market place. What the free market economists do not say is that offshoring and unrestricted immigration also provide US citizens with lower incomes, fewer job opportunities, and less satisfying jobs. There is no evidence that consumer prices fall by more than incomes so that US citizens can be said to benefit materially. The psychological experience of a citizen losing his career to a foreigner is alienating.

The free market economists ignore that a country that offshores its production also offshores its jobs. It becomes dependent on goods and services made

in foreign countries, but lacks sufficient export earnings with which to pay for them. A country whose workforce is being reallocated, under pressure of offshoring, to domestic services has nothing to trade for its imports. That is why the US trade deficit has exploded to over \$800 billion annually.

Among all the countries of the world, only the US can get away with exploding trade deficits. The reason is that the US inherited from Great Britain, exhausted by two world wars, the reserve currency role. To be the reserve currency country means that your currency is the accepted means of payment to settle international accounts. Countries pay their oil import bills in dollars and settle the deficits in their trade accounts in dollars.

The enormous and continuing US deficits are wearing out the US dollar as reserve currency. A time will come when the US cannot pay for the imports, on which it has become ever more dependent, by flooding the world with ever more dollars.

Offshoring and free market ideology are turning the US into a third world country. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, one-quarter of all new US jobs created between June 2006 and June 2007 were for waitresses and bartenders. Almost all of the net new US jobs in the 21st century have been in domestic services.

Free market economists simply ignore the facts and proceed with their ideological justifications of open borders, a policy that is rapidly destroying the ladders of upward mobility for the US population.

What the free market economists do not say is that offshoring and unrestricted immigration also provide US citizens with lower incomes, fewer job opportunities, and less satisfying jobs

*Paul Craig Roberts was Assistant Secretary of the Treasury in the Reagan Administration. He is the author of **Supply-Side Revolution: An Insider’s Account of Policymaking in Washington; Alienation and the Soviet Economy and Meltdown: Inside the Soviet Economy***

CT

BARBIE BITES BACK

BY WILLIAM BOWLES

'Command and control' eh. Bad timing by the NYT but then the 'paper of record' is not well known for getting its facts straight or, apparently, on time

The toy company, Mattel has had to recall 18 million of its products (2 million of them in the UK), all manufactured in China, for various health and safety reasons including high levels of lead in the paint and magnets that come off. Coincidentally, the New York Times ran a puff piece on Mattel, 'Toy-making in China, Mattel's Way' on 26 Jul 2007^[1]. In it they informed (the largely uninformed) reader that,

'Independent analysts, and even watchdog groups, say Mattel may be the best role model for how to operate prudently in China... Mattel, and many of the outside analysts, say the key is command and control...'

'Command and control' eh. Bad timing by the NYT but then the 'paper of record' is not well known for getting its facts straight or, apparently, on time.

And not unconnected, earlier this year the International Center for Corporate Accountability (ICCA) issued a report praising Mattel for its plants in China. It said in part,

"Mattel is the first and only global

consumer products company to apply a required standards system to both its own manufacturing facilities and those of its major vendors, and to independently monitor and publicly disclose the results. It is our desire that more companies adopt and uphold such standards in their manufacturing facilities worldwide, as it is an extremely important initiative that can benefit workers everywhere."^[2]

A report that has come back to haunt Mattel and the NYT (See Note 2 below upon which much of the NYT piece is obviously based.)

Mattel Inc. Revenue

\$5.179 billion USD (2005)

Operating income

\$664.529 million USD (2005)

Net income

\$417.019 million USD (2005)

Employees

26,000 (2005)

Mattel is the biggest toy company on the planet with the Barbie doll making up 80% of its profits. Mattel also

owns Fisher-Price and a number of other toy 'manufacturers'.^[3] There's a terrible irony involved here that needs to be explained and one which goes to the very heart of how capitalism maintains itself at the expense of all workers regardless of where they are.

The move to cheap labour markets goes back to the 1970s when corporations, in order to maintain their level of profits started to move production to wherever the costs were the lowest starting with the tax-free havens in Mexico (maquiladoras) and elsewhere in Latin America and the Caribbean (eg Haiti). Not only did they export production, they also exported the toxic by-products of the production.^[4]

These so-called special economic zones were set-up in countries where labour and environmental laws were all but non-existent, employing what often amounts to indentured as well as non-unionised, female labour. Often locked into the plants, working long hours in hazardous conditions and paid wages a tiny fraction of those paid in the developed world.^[5]

The corporations argue that these workers not only have jobs but are paid wages far in excess of their national average but what is not said is that the products are sold in the developed world at developed world prices, thus the comparisons are without merit.

The net result is the de-industrialisation of the industrial countries and the subsequent transformation of these formerly manufacturing companies into nothing more than marketing and distribution entities. The result has also been devastating for workers of the in-

dustrialised countries, driving down wages and standards of living to their pre-1970s levels.

Profits lead to fiasco

All fine and good, chains like Wal-Mart are making a fortune out of the process, screwing not only workers in countries like China but also their own employees.^[6] Under such conditions, sooner or later, the drive to maximise profits leads to the Mattel fiasco with workers in the developed world now paying twice over, or rather their children are.

What should also be pointed out is that the decades-long struggle to improve the working conditions in the industrial countries that resulted in strict laws governing environmental pollution have been bypassed, a process not unconnected to the virtual demise of the organised labour movement under the impact of the so-called liberalisation process. However the impact of climate change has thrown the process into sharp relief, revealing the direct connection between global warming and the drive to maintain profits even if it means threatening the health of our children.

Of course the mainstream media are quick to blame the Chinese government but the blame lies much closer to home, in the boardrooms of the trans-nationals. Hopefully, the Mattel affair will stir workers not only to resist but to form alliances with the environmental movement and one hopes with emerging labour movements in countries like China, for it is only when workers unite globally that we stand a chance of not only reversing the slide toward climate

However the impact of climate change has thrown the process into sharp relief, revealing the direct connection between global warming and the drive to maintain profits even if it means threatening the health of our children

GLOBAL SINS

catastrophe but of getting rid of an economic system that cares only about profit, not about workers wherever they may be. **CT**

NOTES

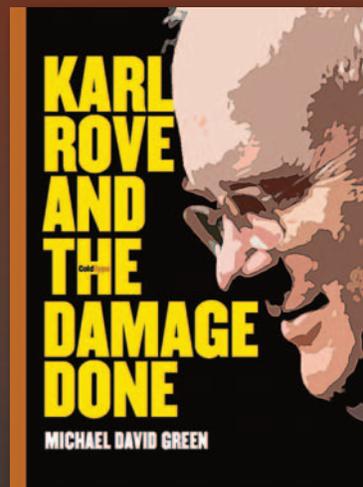
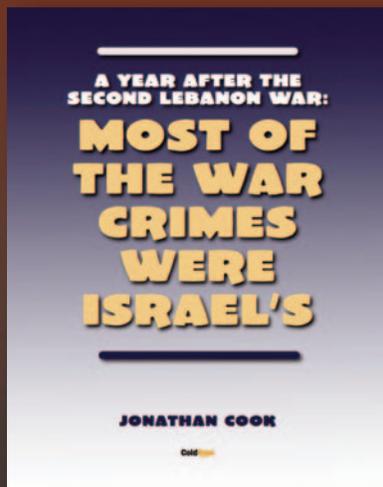
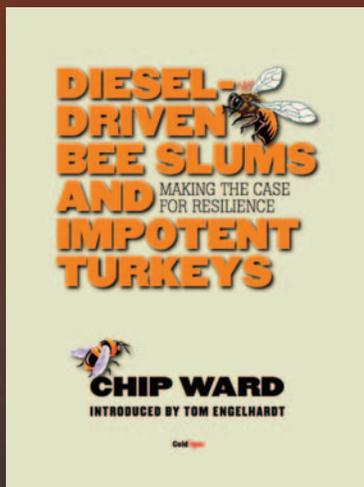
1. 'Toymaking in China, Mattel's Way', New York Times, July 26, 2007.
2. See 'Independent Monitor Completes Audit of Mattel Suppliers in China'.
3. For a potted history of the company (but one which excludes any info on Mattel moving production to China), see the Wiki entry on Mattel

Also see 'China: It's Mattel's Fault That Chinese Companies Manufactured Toys Covered With Lead. What?'

4. See 'Maquiladoras at a Glance', CorpWatch June 30th, 1999
5. See for example, 'Farmers Rally Against Special Economic Zones', The South Asian, 1 October, 2006
6. See, 'Wakeup Walmart.com'.

William Bowles edits the London-based website, *Investigating New Imperialism* – <http://williambowles.info> – where this essay first appeared.

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LOAN SHARKING MADE LEGAL

BY MARNEY WHITE

There's a sure way that a presidential candidate could get the attention of even the most politically apathetic citizen this year: vow to outlaw outrageous interest rates legally being charged to American consumers by credit card and student loan corporations. These rates are causing real and enduring pain to hard-working Americans and their families who find themselves behind the eight-ball.

Like me.

I'm not much different from a lot of people. Not long ago, I had a credit rating of 755, all my bills were paid on time, and I had no credit card balances outstanding. Then suddenly, I found myself out of work for over 6 months at the age of 39, with two kids in tow (ages 9 and 11). While interviewing for "career positions", I even tried a stint at Starbucks to tide us over. In my interview, they assured me I'd be able to get forty hours per week as a "barista" (woo-hoo!). But, during my illustrious five-week career, they never gave me more than 10 hours a week (at \$7.25 an hour).

I was told by fellow employees that my experience was par for the course. As my childcare bill was always bigger than my paycheck, I had to quit. (But I can still make a killer venti decaf cinnamon soy latte.)

The only full-time job offer I received after a diligent search was for a commission-only career position that at least showed promise. I had no option but to take it. While trying to build my business, put food on the table and keep a roof over our heads, I soon had to start using my credit cards, and rapidly maxed-out my \$5,500 in available credit.

Before long, having no base salary as a safety net, my bills got paid later and later. Surreal as it seemed, I found myself negotiating payment arrangements with my utility and phone companies, as the disconnect notices arrived in the mail. My stress level went through the roof, and my hair quite literally began falling out.

Fast-forward three years, and that \$5,500 turned into \$14,000+ in debt. My student loans, which were approx-

In my interview, they assured me I'd be able to get forty hours per week as a "barista" (woo-hoo!). But, during my illustrious five-week career, they never gave me more than 10 hours a week (at \$7.25 an hour)

INTO DEBT

The Old Navy card I opened to buy school clothes for the kids was (quelle surprise!) also parented by G.E. Money Bank. Both cards (and others) were charging me nearly 30% interest. For children's school clothes and family dental care!

imately \$42,000 when all of this started, ballooned to \$69,000 from late fees and penalties, after I ran out of hardship deferments (and interest kept accruing, even in deferment).

Trying to figure out how I could have gotten into this situation, I examined my credit card statements more closely. Taking for granted the low interest rates I qualified for before all of this happened, I had never expected what I now saw.

To my utter astonishment, I discovered that I was being charged between 22% and 29.5% on all of my balances. This included one card, Care Credit (owned by G.E. Money Bank – hey, why stop at war profiteering?), which is intended to help people stretch out payments for dental and other medical care. The Old Navy card I opened to buy school clothes for the kids was (quelle surprise!) also parented by G.E. Money Bank. Both cards (and others) were charging me nearly 30% interest. For children's school clothes and family dental care!

Isn't there a term for near-30% interest on loans? Something like, "loan sharking"? "Usury"? Does the mafia even charge this much?

It got worse for me from there. When I was able to make the minimum payments, I noticed that my balances kept hitting the ceiling of my credit limit, as soon as I'd get them a little bit below it, costing me a \$35 "over limit fee", in addition to any \$35 "late fees" I might incur. That's every month I was late, and/or over the limit. Which was a lot of months. And interest was compounding on those junk fees, as well as

on my balance. I started to wonder, how was I supposed to pay this off?

Conservatives want to deny or ignore the fact that the working poor are using credit cards to provide for necessities – not merely niceties – for their families. A 2005 survey targeting low- to middle-income wage earners entitled "The Plastic Safety Net" (<http://www.demos.org/pub654.cfm>) found that these families resort to credit cards to cover their lack of health insurance, retirement funds, and unemployment coverage, not their Aspen ski trips.

Republicans will never understand this because most of them haven't had the humiliating experience of rummaging through their car, purse, and pockets to scrape together \$1.70 to buy their child a slice of pizza. That kind of poor is simply beyond the scope of their experience, and therefore, their comprehension. But we can hope to expect better from our Democratic candidates, who fancy themselves advocates of the people.

Big gift from Congress

As if things weren't already hard enough, the credit card companies got a big gift from the Congress via the Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act of 2005. (FYI, Biden voted for it; Edwards, Obama, and Kucinich voted against it. Polling data must not have been out in time for Hillary to take a stand.) Don't let the title fool you: it's another one of those Orwellian "black is white and up is down" gifts bestowed upon us by BushCo. It gave the credit card compa-

nies permission to double your payments in order to change the time required to pay off your balances to 10 years, instead of 20, if you made minimum payments. Trouble is that many people were already hard-pressed to make minimum payments before they doubled.

Another gift to corporate finance wovven into that “Consumer Protection” Act was the newly-granted right of these companies to raise rates to usurious heights, and add draconian late and over-limit fees. Horrified yet? Wait — there’s more.

If you happen to fall behind on one card, the rates for ALL of your cards can now be bumped up to these stratospheric levels! I kid you not, this even happens to people who are NOT in dire straits, and don’t have bad credit, but simply forget about a payment and get caught in these nets!

Tightened bankruptcy laws

In an appreciative nod to their contributors at the banks and credit card companies, Republican legislators also tightened bankruptcy laws. So now, you’re really out of luck if you fall on seriously hard times. Oh – and don’t forget that most people who get in this deep do so because of the expenses associated with a catastrophic illness, a divorce, underemployment, or unemployment.

That, I realized, was how my \$5,500 had turned to \$14,000+, and how my student loans grew from \$42,000 to \$69,000 faster than Mickey’s broom multiplied in “Fantasia” ... all because of a few years of reversal of fortune.

After 3½ years, I finally garnered enough experience to obtain a position with a base salary, plus commission, etc. Now, my bills are being paid on time again (and I’ve noticed my hair growing back in). But I’ve still got these balances from hell, and you don’t even want to know my credit score.

There are too many people living this same nightmare... and worse.

If a candidate wants to know how to be carried to victory on a groundswell of popular outrage in 2008, here’s their answer. This issue will resonate with a lot of angry voters looking for their government to give them some protection from corporate pillaging. It’s the sleeper issue of the decade.

John Edwards, anti-poverty poster child, are you listening? You’re whispering about it this, but you need to start shouting. Senator Obama, this issue is a sure enough thing that even you could take a position on it! Hillary? Oh, never mind.

This unconscionable legislation has its foot on the neck of increasing numbers of the middle class, and stomps on their fingers as they dangle precipitously from the ledge of financial security, only to slip off and fall into the ranks of the “working poor”.

I found a foothold, and pulled myself up on the ledge again — scrapes, bruises and all.

Millions of others won’t be so lucky.

CT

Marney Whitelives on Long Island with her family, assorted cats, and a tank full of tetras. She welcomes comments at Marney_White@verizon.net.

If you happen to fall behind on one card, the rates for ALL of your cards can now be bumped up to these stratospheric levels!

ISRAEL'S JEWISH PROBLEM IN TEHRAN

BY JONATHAN COOK

If Ahmadinejad really is Hitler, ready to commit genocide against Israel's Jews as soon as he can get his hands on a nuclear weapon, why are some 25,000 Jews living peacefully in Iran and more than reluctant to leave

Iran is the new Nazi Germany and its president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the new Hitler. Or so Israeli officials have been declaring for months as they and their American allies try to persuade the doubters in Washington that an attack on Tehran is essential. And if the latest media reports are to be trusted, it looks like they may again be winning the battle for hearts and minds: Vice-President Dick Cheney is said to be diverting the White House back on track to launch a military strike.

Earlier this year Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's opposition leader and the man who appears to be styling himself scaremonger-in-chief, told us: "It's 1938 and Iran is Germany. And Iran is racing to arm itself with atomic bombs." Of Ahmadinejad, he said: "He is preparing another Holocaust for the Jewish state."

A few weeks ago, as Israel's military intelligence claimed — as it has been doing regularly since the early 1990s — that Iran is only a year or so away from the "point of no return" on developing a nuclear warhead, Netanyahu was at it again. "Iran could be the first unde-

terrable nuclear power," he warned, adding: "This is a Jewish problem like Hitler was a Jewish problem . . . The future of the Jewish people depends on the future of Israel."

But Netanyahu has been far from alone in making extravagant claims about a looming genocide from Iran. Israel's new president, Shimon Peres, has compared an Iranian nuclear bomb to a "flying concentration camp." And the prime minister, Ehud Olmert, told a German newspaper last year: "[Ahmadinejad] speaks as Hitler did in his time of the extermination of the entire Jewish nation."

There is an interesting problem with selling the "Iran as Nazi Germany" line. If Ahmadinejad really is Hitler, ready to commit genocide against Israel's Jews as soon as he can get his hands on a nuclear weapon, why are some 25,000 Jews living peacefully in Iran and more than reluctant to leave despite repeated enticements from Israel and American Jews?

What is the basis for Israel's dire forecasts — the ideological scaffolding being erected, presumably, to justify an

attack on Iran? Helpfully, as George Bush defended his Iraq policies last month, he reminded us yet again of the menace Iran supposedly poses: it is “threatening to wipe Israel off the map”.

This myth has been endlessly recycled since a translating error was made of a speech Ahmadinejad delivered nearly two years ago. Farsi experts have verified that the Iranian president, far from threatening to destroy Israel, was quoting from an earlier speech by the late Ayatollah Khomeini in which he reassured supporters of the Palestinians that “the Zionist regime in Jerusalem” would “vanish from the page of time”.

He was not threatening to exterminate Jews or even Israel. He was comparing Israel’s occupation of the Palestinians with other illegitimate systems of rule whose time had passed, including the Shahs who once ruled Iran, apartheid South Africa and the Soviet empire. Nonetheless, this erroneous translation has survived and prospered because Israel and her supporters have exploited it for their own crude propaganda purposes.

Largest in Middle East

Meanwhile, the 25,000-strong Iranian Jewish community is the largest in the Middle East outside Israel and traces its roots back 3,000 years. As one of several non-Muslim minorities in Iran, Jews there suffer discrimination, but they are certainly no worse off than the one million Palestinian citizens of Israel – and far better off than Palestinians under Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza.

Iranian Jews have little influence on decision-making and are not allowed to hold senior posts in the army or bureaucracy. But they enjoy many freedoms. They have an elected representative in parliament, they practice their religion openly in synagogues, their charities are funded by the Jewish diaspora, and they can travel freely, including to Israel. In Tehran there are six kosher butchers and about 30 synagogues. Ahmadinejad’s office recently made a donation to a Jewish hospital in Tehran.

As Ciamak Moresadegh, an Iranian Jewish leader, observed: “If you think Judaism and Zionism are one, it is like thinking Islam and the Taliban are the same, and they are not.” Iran’s leaders denounce Zionism, which they blame for fueling discrimination against the Palestinians, but they have also repeatedly avowed that they have no problem with Jews, Judaism or even the state of Israel. Ahmadinejad, caricatured as a merchant of genocide, has in fact called for ‘regime change’ – and then only in the sense that he believes a referendum should be held of all inhabitants of Israel and the occupied territories, including refugees from war, on the nature of the government.

Despite the absence of any threat to Iran’s Jews, the Israeli media recently reported that the Israeli government has been trying to find new ways to entice Iranian Jews to Israel. The Ma’ariv newspaper pointed out that previous schemes had found few takers. There was, noted the report, “a lack of desire on the part of thousands of Iranian Jews to leave”. According to the New York-

Iran’s leaders denounce Zionism, which they blame for fueling discrimination against the Palestinians, but they have also repeatedly avowed that they have no problem with Jews, Judaism or even the state of Israel

Israel introduced a similar scheme a few years ago, when Argentina's economy plunged into deep recession, broadcasting an offer of \$20,000 to every Jew who settled in Israel

based Forward newspaper, a campaign to convince Iranian Jews to emigrate to Israel caused only 152 out of these 25,000 Jews to leave Iran between October 2005 and September 2006, and most of them were said to have emigrated for economic reasons, not political ones.

To step up these efforts — and presumably to avoid the embarrassing incongruence of claiming an imminent second Holocaust while thousands of Jews live happily in Tehran — Israel is now backing a move by Jewish donors to guarantee every Iranian Jewish family \$60,000 to settle in Israel, in addition to a host of existing financial incentives that are offered to Jewish immigrants, including loans and cheap mortgages.

Identity not for sale

The announcement was met with scorn by the Society of Iranian Jews, which issued a statement that their national identity was not for sale. “The identity of Iranian Jews is not tradeable for any amount of money. Iranian Jews are among the most ancient Iranians. Iran’s Jews love their Iranian identity and their culture, so threats and this immature political enticement will not achieve their aim of wiping out the identity of Iranian Jews.”

However, this financial gesture may not only be unwelcome but self-fulfilling too, if past experience is the yardstick. Israel introduced a similar scheme a few years ago, when Argentina’s economy plunged into deep recession, broadcasting an offer of \$20,000 to every Jew who settled in Israel. Months later the Israeli media reported a rise in anti-Semitic attacks in Argentina, only

adding to the pressure on Jews there to leave. Of course, there was no mention of a possible causal connection between the attacks and Israel’s generous offer to Jews to abandon their homeland as other Argentinians sank into poverty.

But if financial enticements — and a possible popular backlash — fail to move Iranian Jews, there is good reason to fear that Israel may resort to other, more dubious ways of encouraging them to emigrate. That is certainly a path Israel has chosen before with other communities of Arab Jews, whom it has regarded either as a pool of potential spies and agents provocateurs to be used when needed or as “human dust”, in the words of Israel’s first prime minister, David Ben Gurion, to be recruited to Israel’s “demographic battle” against the Palestinians.

In “Operation Susannah” of 1954, for example, Israel recklessly recruited a group of Egyptian Jews to stage a series of explosions in Egypt in a bid to discourage Britain from withdrawing from the Suez Canal zone. When the plot came to light, it naturally cast a shadow of disloyalty over Egypt’s wider Jewish community. Following Israel’s invasion and occupation of Sinai two years later, the government of Gamal Abdel Nasser expelled some 25,000 Egyptian Jews and, after others were imprisoned on suspicion of spying, the rest soon left.

Even more notoriously, Israel went to greater lengths to ensure the exit of the Arab world’s largest Jewish population, in Iraq. In 1950 a series of bombs targeted on Jews in Baghdad forced a rapid exodus of some 130,000 Iraqi Jews to Israel, convinced that Arab extremists

were behind the attacks. Only later did it emerge that the bombs had been planted by members of the Zionist underground, supported by the Israeli government.

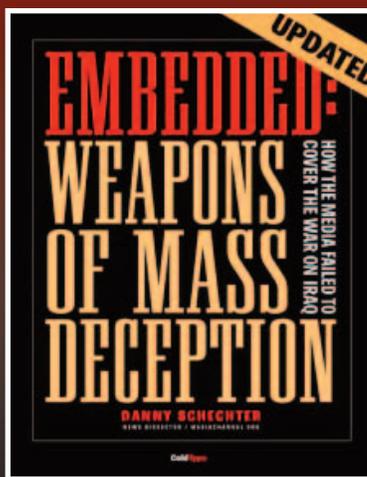
Now, Iran's Jews may find themselves treated in much the same manner — as simple human fodder. Stories are growing of Israel exploiting the free movement between Iran and Israel enjoyed by Iranian Jews and their Israeli relatives to carry out spying operations on Iran's nuclear programme. Such reports have come from reliable sources such as the American investigative journalist Seymour Hersh, citing US government officials. The fallout from such actions is not difficult to predict. Besieged by the US and the international community, Tehran is cracking down on dissent and minority groups, fearful that its own grip on power is shaky and that the well-publicised subversion being carried out by US and Israeli agents is likely only to be stepped up. So far most officials in Tehran have been careful to

avoid suggesting that Iran's Jews have double loyalties, as has the local Jewish community itself, both of them aware of Israel's interests in provoking such a confrontation. But as the strains increase, and Israel's need to prove Tehran's genocidal intent grows ever stronger, that policy may end up being forfeited — and with it the future of Iran's Jews.

More important than the welfare of Iranian Jewish families, it seems, is the value of Iranian Jews as a propaganda tool in Israel's battle to persuade the world that coexistence with the Muslim world is impossible. For those who want to engineer a clash of civilizations, the 3,000-year-old Jewish legacy in Iran is not something to be treasured, only another obstacle to war. **CT**

*Jonathan Cook, a journalist based in Nazareth, Israel, is the author of **Blood and Religion: The Unmasking of the Jewish and Democratic State** (Pluto Press). His website is <http://jkcook.net>*

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CELLPHONES: BAD FOR YOUR HEALTH?

BY STAN COX

In recent years, protesters in England and Northern Ireland have brought down cell towers by sawing, removing bolts, and pulling with tow trucks and ropes

In the wee hours of July 14, a 45-year-old Australian named John Patterson climbed into a tank and drove it through the streets of Sydney, knocking down six cell-phone towers and an electrical substation along the way. Patterson, a former telecommunications worker, reportedly had mapped out the locations of the towers, which he claimed were harming his health.

In recent years, protesters in England and Northern Ireland have brought down cell towers by sawing, removing bolts, and pulling with tow trucks and ropes. In one such case, locals bought the structure and sold off pieces of it as souvenirs to help with funding of future protests. In attempts to fend off objections to towers in Germany, some churches have taken to disguising them as giant crucifixes.

Opposition to towers usually finds more socially acceptable outlets, and protests are being heard more often than ever in meetings of city councils, planning commissions, and other government bodies. This summer alone,

citizen efforts to block cell towers have sprouted in, among a host of other places, including California, New Jersey, Maryland, Illinois, North Dakota and north of the border in Ontario and British Columbia. Transmitters are already banned from the roofs of schools in many districts.

For years, towers have been even less welcome in the United Kingdom, where this summer has seen disputes across the country.

Most opponents cite not only aesthetics but also concerns over potential health effects of electromagnetic (EM) fields generated by the towers. Once ridiculed as crackpots and Luddites, they're starting to get backup from the scientific community.

It's not just cell phones they're worried about. The Tottenham area of London is considering the suspension of all wireless technology in its schools. Last year, Fred Gilbert, a respected scientist and president of Lakehead University in Ontario, banned wireless internet on his campus. And resident groups in San Francisco are currently battling Earth-

link and Google over a proposed city-wide Wi-Fi system.

For decades, concerns have been raised about the health effects of “extremely low frequency” fields that are produced by electrical equipment or power lines. People living close to large power lines or working next to heavy electrical equipment are spending a lot of time in electromagnetic fields generated by those sources. Others of us can be exposed briefly to very strong fields each day.

But in the past decade, suspicion has spread to cell phones and other wireless technologies, which operate at frequencies that are millions to tens of millions higher but at low power and “pulsed.”

Then there’s your cell phone, laptop, or other wireless device, which not only receives but also sends pulsed signals at high frequencies. Because it’s usually very close to your head (or lap) when in use, the fields experienced by your body are stronger than those from a cell tower down the street.

A growing number of scientists, along with a diverse collection of technology critics, are pointing out that our bodies constantly generate electrical pulses as part of their normal functioning. They maintain that incoming radiation from modern technology may be fouling those signals.

But with hundreds of billions in sales at stake, the communications industry (and more than a few scientists) insist that radio-frequency radiation can’t have biological effects unless it’s intense enough to heat your flesh or organs, in the way a microwave oven cooks meat.

It’s also turning out that when scien-

tific studies are funded by industry, the results are a lot less likely to show that EM fields are a health hazard.

Low frequency, more frequent disease?

Before the digital revolution, a long line of epidemiological studies compared people who were exposed to strong low-frequency fields — people living in the shadow of power lines, for example, or long-time military radar operators — to similar but unexposed groups.

One solid outcome of that research was to show that rates of childhood leukemia are associated with low-frequency EM exposure; as a result, the International Agency for Research on Cancer has labeled that type of energy as a possible carcinogen, just as they might label a chemical compound.

Other studies have found increased incidence of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (commonly called ALS or Lou Gehrig’s disease), higher rates of breast cancer among both men and women, and immune-system dysfunction in occupations with high exposure.

Five years ago, the California Public Utilities Commission asked three epidemiologists in the state Department of Health Services to review and evaluate the scientific literature on health effects of low-frequency EM fields.

The epidemiologists, who had expertise in physics, medicine, and genetics, agreed in their report that they were “inclined to believe that EMFs can cause some degree of increased risk of childhood leukemia, adult brain cancer, Lou Gehrig’s disease, and miscarriage” and were open to the possibility

A growing number of scientists, along with a diverse collection of technology critics, are pointing out that our bodies constantly generate electrical pulses as part of their normal functioning

DIALING DANGER

Now that cell phones have been widely available for more than a decade, some studies are relating brain-tumor rates to long-term phone use

that they raise the risks of adult leukemia and suicide. They did not see associations with other cancer types, heart disease, or Alzheimer's disease.

Epidemiological and animal studies have not been unanimous in finding negative health effects from low-frequency EM fields, so the electric-utility industry continues to emphasize that no cause-and-effect link has been proven.

High resistance

Now the most intense debate is focused on radio-frequency fields. As soon as cell phones came into common usage, there was widespread concern that holding an electronic device against the side of your head many hours a month for the rest of your life might be harmful, and researchers went to work looking for links to health problems, often zeroing in on the possibility of brain tumors.

Until recently, cell phones had not been widely used over enough years to evaluate effects on cancers that take a long time to develop. A number of researchers failed to find an effect during those years, but now that the phones have been widely available for more than a decade, some studies are relating brain-tumor rates to long-term phone use.

Some lab studies have found short-term harm as well. Treatment with cell-phone frequencies has disrupted thyroid-gland functioning in lab rats, for example. And at Lund University in Sweden, rats were exposed to cell-phone EM fields of varying strengths for two hours; 50 days later, exposed rats

showed significant brain damage relative to non-exposed controls.

The authors were blunt in their assessment: "We chose 12-26-week-old rats because they are comparable with human teenagers – notably frequent users of mobile phones – with respect to age. The situation of the growing brain might deserve special concern from society because biologic and maturational processes are particularly vulnerable during the growth process."

Even more recently, health concerns have been raised about the antenna masts that serve cell phones and other wireless devices. EM fields at, say, a couple of blocks from a tower are not as strong as those from a wireless device held close to the body; nevertheless many city-dwellers are now continuously bathed in emissions that will only grow in their coverage and intensity.

Last year, the RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia closed off the top two floors of its 17-story business school for a time because five employees working on its upper floors had been diagnosed with brain tumors in a single month, and seven since 1999. Cell phone towers had been placed on the building's roof a decade earlier and, although there was no proven link between them and the tumors, university officials were taking no chances.

Data on the health effects of cell or W-Fi towers are still sparse and inconsistent. Their opponents point to statistically rigorous studies like one in Austria finding that headaches and difficulty with concentration were more common among people exposed to stronger fields from cell towers. All sides

seem to agree on the need for more research with solid data and robust statistical design.

San Francisco, one of the world's most technology-happy cities, is home to more than 2,400 cell-phone antennas, and many of those transmitters are due to be replaced with more powerful models that can better handle text messaging and photographs, and possibly a new generation of even higher-frequency phones.

Now there's hot-and-heavy debate over plans to add 2,200 more towers for a city-wide Earthlink/Google Wi-Fi network. On July 31, the city's Board of Supervisors considered an appeal by the San Francisco Neighborhood Antenna-Free Union (SNAFU) that the network proposal be put through an environmental review – a step that up to now has not been required for such telecommunications projects.

In support of the appeal, Magda Havas, professor of environmental and resource studies at Trent University in Ontario submitted an analysis of radio-frequency effects found in more than 50 human, animal, and cellular-level studies published in scientific journals.

Havas has specialized in investigating the effects of both low- and high-frequency EM radiation. She says most of the research in the field is properly done, but that alone won't guarantee that all studies will give similar results. "Natural variability in biological populations is the norm," she said.

And, she says, informative research takes time and focus: "For example, studies that consider all kinds of brain

tumors in people who've only used cell phones for, say, five years don't show an association. But those studies that consider only tumors on the same side of the head where the phone is held and include only people who've used a phone for ten years or more give the same answer very consistently: there's an increased risk of tumors." In other research, wireless frequencies have been associated with higher rates of miscarriage, testicular cancer, and low sperm counts.

Direct current from a battery can be used to encourage healing of broken bones. EM fields of various frequencies have also been shown to reduce tissue damage from heart attacks, help heal wounds, reduce pain, improve sleep, and relieve depression and anxiety. If they are biologically active enough to promote health, are they also active enough to degrade it?

At the 2006 meeting of the International Commission for Electromagnetic Safety in Benevento, Italy, 42 scientists from 16 countries signed a resolution arguing for much stricter regulation of EM fields from wireless communication.

Four years earlier, in Freiburger, Germany, a group of physicians had signed a statement also calling for tighter regulation of wireless communication and a prohibition on use of wireless devices by children. In the years since, more than 3,000 doctors have signed the so-called "Freiburger Appeal" and documents modeled on it.

But in the US, industry has pushed for and gotten exemption from strict regulation, most notably through the

EM fields of various frequencies have been shown to reduce tissue damage from heart attacks, help heal wounds, reduce pain, improve sleep, and relieve depression and anxiety. If they are biologically active enough to promote health, are they also active enough to degrade it?

DIALING DANGER

Some emphasize the risk of financial influence when such intense interest is being shown by huge utilities and a global communications industry that's expected to sell \$250 billion worth of wireless handsets per year by 2011

Telecommunications Act of 1996. Libby Kelley, director of the Council on Wireless Technology Impacts in Novato, California says, "The technology always comes first, the scientific and environmental questions later. EM trails chemicals by about 10 years, but I hope we'll catch up."

Kelley says a major problem is that the Telecommunications Act does not permit state or local governments to block the siting of towers based on health concerns: "We'll go to hearings and try to bring up health issues, and officials will tell us, 'We can't talk about that. We could get sued in federal court!'"

High-voltage influence?

Industry officials are correct when they say the scientific literature contains many studies that did not find power lines or telecommunication devices to have significant health effects. But when, as often happens, a range of studies give some positive and some negative results, industry people usually make statements like, "Technology A has not been proven to cause disease B."

Michael Kundi, professor at the Medical University of Vienna, Austria and an EM researcher, has issued a warning about distortions of the concept of cause-and-effect, particularly when a scientific study concludes that "there is no evidence for a causal relationship" between environmental factors and human health. Noting that science is rarely able to prove that A did or did not "cause" B, he wrote that such

statements can be "readily misused by interested parties to claim that exposure is not associated with adverse health effects."

Scientists and groups concerned about current standards for EM fields have criticized the World Health Organization (WHO) and other for downplaying the risks. And some emphasize the risk of financial influence when such intense interest is being shown by huge utilities and a global communications industry that's expected to sell \$250 billion worth of wireless handsets per year by 2011 (that's just for the instruments, not counting monthly bills). Microwave News cited Belgian reports in late 2006 that two industry groups – the GSM Association and Mobile Manufacturers Forum – accounted for more than 40 percent of the budget for WHO's EM fields project in 2005-06.

When a US National Academy of Sciences committee was formed earlier this year to look into health effects of wireless communication devices, the Center for Science in the Public Interest and Sage Associates wrote a letter to the Academy charging that the appointment of two of the committee's six members was improper under federal conflict-of-interest laws.

One of the committee members, Leeka Kheifets, a professor of epidemiology in UCLA's School of Public Health, has, says the letter, "spent the majority of the past 20 years working in various capacities with the Electric Power Research Institute, the research arm of the electric power industry."

The other, Bernard Veyret, senior sci-

entist at the University of Bordeaux in France, “is on the consulting board of Bouygues Telecom (one of 3 French mobile phone providers), has contracts with Alcatel and other providers, and has received research funding from Electricite de France, the operator of the French electricity grid.”

Differing results

A paper published in January in the journal *Environmental Health Perspectives* found that when studies of cell phone use and health problems were funded by industry, they were much less likely to find a statistically significant relationship than were publicly funded studies.

The authors categorized the titles of the papers they surveyed as either negative (as in “Cellular phones have no effect on sleep patterns”), or neutral (e.g., “Sleep patterns of adolescents using cellular phones”), or positive, (e.g., “Cellular phones disrupt sleep”). Fully 42 percent of the privately funded studies had negative titles and none had positive ones. In public or nonprofit studies, titles were 18 percent negative and 46 percent positive.

Alluding to previous studies in the pharmaceutical and tobacco industries, the authors concluded, “Our findings add to the existing evidence that single-source sponsorship is associated with outcomes that favor the sponsors’ products.”

By email, I asked Dr. John Moulder, a senior editor of the journal *Radiation Research*, for his reaction to the study. Moulder, who is Professor and Director of Radiation Biology in the Department

of Radiation Oncology at the University of Wisconsin, did not think the analysis was adequate to conclusively demonstrate industry influence and told me that in his capacity as an editor, “I have not noted such an effect, but I have not systematically looked for one either. I am certainly aware that an industry bias exists in other areas of medicine, such as reporting of clinical trials.”

Moulder was lead author on a 2005 paper concluding that the scientific literature to that point showed “a lack of convincing evidence for a causal association between cancer and exposure to the RF [radio-frequency] energy used for mobile telecommunications.”

The Center for Science in the Public Interest has questioned Moulder’s objectivity because he has served as a consultant to electric-power and telecommunications firms and groups. Moulder told me, “I have not done any consulting for the electric power and telecommunications industry in years, and when I was doing consulting for these industries, the journals for which I served as an editor or reviewer were made aware of it.”

A year ago, *Microwave News* also reported that approximately one-half of all studies looking into possible damage to DNA by communication-frequency EM fields found no effect. But three-fourths of those negative studies were industry- or military-funded; indeed, only 3 of 35 industry or military papers found an effect, whereas 32 of 37 publicly funded studies found effects.

Magda Havas sees a shortage of public money in the US for research on EM health effects as one of the chief

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DIALING DANGER

"Much of the research here ends up being funded directly or indirectly by industry. That affects both the design and the interpretation of studies"

*Stan Cox is a plant breeder and writer in Salina, Kansas. His book **Sick Planet: Corporate Food and Medicine** will be published by Pluto Press in Spring 2008*

factors leading to lack of a rigorous public policy, telling me, "Much of the research here ends up being funded directly or indirectly by industry. That affects both the design and the interpretation of studies."

As for research done directly by company scientists, "It's the same as in any industry. They can decide what information to make public. They are free to downplay harmful effects and release information that's beneficial to their product."

Meanwhile, at Trent University where Havas works, students using laptops are exposed to radio-frequency levels that exceed international guidelines. Of that, she says, "For people who've been fully informed and decide to take the risk, that's their choice. But what about those who have no choice, who have a cell-phone tower outside their bedroom window

"It's the equivalent of secondhand smoke. We took a long time to get the political will to establish smoke-free environments, and we now know we should have done it sooner. How long will it take to react to secondhand radiation?"

CT

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An international working group of well-known scientists known as the BioInitiative recently announced the coming release of a report that, according to one of the project leaders, Cindy Sage of Sage Associates, is expected to æmotivate public health officials and agencies to take preventive action on [EM fields] and warn the public to avoid exposures.æ A summary of the report is due by August 31, 2007. Look for it then at www.BioInitiative.org
<http://www.BioInitiative.org>

INSIDE BRITAIN'S DEATH SQUADS

BY SIMON BASKETTER

Operation Banner: An Analysis Of Military Operations In Northern Ireland is the official history of an occupation that started in 1969 and formally ended on 31 July this year.

The book is co-written by General Mike Jackson, who was second in command of the Parachute Regiment when they shot dead 14 unarmed people after a civil rights march in Derry. He was later to command British forces during the invasion of Iraq.

According to the official history, the conflict in Northern Ireland was about two warring tribes, the Catholics and Protestants, who had to be kept apart for their own sakes by British soldiers.

But in reality the occupation of Northern Ireland was brutal, repressive and murderous. Far from keeping “warring tribes” apart, military intelligence recruited, trained and armed Loyalist murder gangs in Northern Ireland, ordering them to carry out a series of assassinations.

The latest source to shed light on the death squads run by the British army in Northern Ireland is known only

as “John Black”. He is a convicted Loyalist terrorist.

Black alleges that he – along with dozens of other members of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), a Loyalist terror organisation – were trained and armed by British military intelligence.

“Military intelligence trained, armed and moulded squads of Loyalists to put pressure on the IRA,” he says.

He also claims UVF members were ordered by military intelligence to carry out assassinations in order to sow terror among the Catholic population and undermine the Republican movement.

Black was convicted twice of terrorist offences, in the 1970s and in the early 1990s. He says he carried out some 50 UVF operations sanctioned by the army’s secret Force Research Unit (FRU). He became a “killer, bomber, arsonist and robber”, he says.

Black was a UVF member in the early 1970s when he was first approached. As well as being trained in firearms at army barracks and firing ranges around Northern Ireland – primarily at Palace Barracks near Holywood in County Down – Loyalists were

The lone machine will primarily be used by disabled voters, who in surveys, say they prefer the touch-screen machines

CRIMES OF WAR

"In primaries, you have a lot of ballot types. It is a very precise science. You don't do it lightly ... You can't do it at Kinko's"

given intelligence on potential targets and details about which targets to attack.

As many as 120 people could have been trained by military intelligence. At times they were given uniforms to provide cover while they were with their handlers. Black even drank with his handlers in the bars on military bases.

While the army-backed murder squads were active, military intelligence would impose an Out Of Bounds (OOB) order on the area in which the attack was about to take place. A OOB means an intelligence operation is under way – so police and army stay out of the area. This gave Loyalist murder gangs the freedom to operate with impunity.

Black says he was trained by the army in how to use a variety of handguns, machine guns and rifles, as well as in bomb making techniques. He claims his handlers gave the UVF consignments of guns and ammunition.

Loyalists were given classes on how to avoid leaving incriminating evidence at the scene of crimes and how to steal cars for use in assassination operations.

Black says he was told, "We don't expect that active service units of the UVF will kill somebody every time they go out. The mere fact that an attempt has been made and shots fired – even if they wound or miss altogether – is all part of the terror tactics." The policy was meant to "scare the shit" out of Catholics.

McGurk's Bar

A bomb was planted in McGurk's Bar – a predominantly Catholic bar on North

Queen Street in Belfast – on 4 December 1971. It exploded, killing 15 men, women and children.

In the immediate aftermath of the McGurk's Bar bombing, the army told the media that the bomb had belonged to the IRA. It had been inside the bar waiting to be transported when it exploded, they said.

This was a lie. Seven years later a UVF man received 15 life sentences for the bombing. For years, the families of the victims have been lobbying for the bombing to be reinvestigated. They argue it was the result of collusion between the UVF and the army. Black says he was told about the planned bombing two weeks before the attack and was with his handler at the time it happened. He also claims he saw his handler take pot shots at Catholic teenagers on the streets of Belfast.

Pat Irvine, whose mother Kitty was killed in the McGurk's bombing, told Socialist Worker, "It is clear that the attack took place in collusion with the state. We are concerned with ensuring that Black's paymasters, and those who took the decisions at the highest levels of the establishment, are exposed for their role in collusion.

"The family of Kitty Irvine knows this for certain. No doubt, the source will be accused of fantasy or profiteering, as with any other whistleblower on the dirty war in the north east of Ireland.

"The British authorities will try to stymie any further investigation into their own government's and army's felonies. The government and military are guilty of war crimes against Irish

men, women and children.”

Bloody Sunday

In the weeks leading up to Bloody Sunday in Derry, on 30 January 1972, in which the Parachute Regiment killed

14 people, Black claims he was informed by his handlers that the army had been ordered by the cabinet “to use whatever force and tactics necessary to put these troublemakers down”.

“The Bloody Sunday massacre was sanctioned by the government and top military chiefs,” he believes.

The day before Bloody Sunday, Black says he was taken for a training session at Palace Barracks, where he was given a pep talk by a major who praised him for “having the courage and loyalty to participate in covert actions against the common enemy”.

The major told Black, “We are hoping to provoke a confrontation with the IRA in Derry – and give them an example of what to expect in future attacks.”

Black was provided with a uniform, a gas mask, camouflage face paint and a rifle as cover for the time he would spend in Derry with his handler. Black says he watched from a military intelligence observation post as soldiers opened fire on civilians. He claims to have seen members of military intelligence shooting at – and hitting – unarmed civilians from the gun nest in the observation post.

New Lodge Six

In 1973, handlers organised and took part in a gun attack in Belfast that left six Catholic men dead. The killings took place within hours of each other on the

night of 3 February and early hours of 4 February in the New Lodge area in the north of the city.

The army claimed all six were shot dead during a gun battle with the IRA. But no gun battle took place – and none of the six dead men was armed.

Locals and a number of the victims’ families have always alleged the killings took place as a result of collusion between paramilitaries and the army. Black claims he was one of a team of four gunmen led by an FRU member who opened fire in the New Lodge area that night.

Black said his handler phoned him on the day: “He rang and told me that something was planned for that night – and that our role in it was to create the impression that the New Lodge was under attack from Loyalists.

“Later I listened with him to the military radio until a code came over it, which was the cue for us to start shooting. Me and two other UVF men were positioned in an entry close to Edlingham Street beside the New Lodge.

“The four of us fired shots for around 15 minutes, then we went to a different point at Edlingham Street where British soldiers were firing into the area.”

Black said that the attack was designed to draw the local IRA into a gun battle with the troops.

John Loughran, a spokesperson for the victims’ families, told Socialist Worker that he is hopeful that Black’s claims will help uncover the truth about what happened that night.

“It is the families’ view that these killings were sanctioned at the highest political levels in Whitehall,” he says.

One election official commented that she would defy Bowen’s orders, saying her rural county has never had a problem with electronic voting

CRIMES OF WAR

The machines did not start up and properly function, forcing voters to use paper ballots or return later in the day to vote

“Now that this has been acknowledged by someone involved in the murky underworld of British military intelligence, this must be considered as new evidence. This is the basis for a new investigation into the killings of six innocent men.”

Counter gangs

In 1971 British army brigadier Frank Kitson proposed establishing “counter gangs” to defeat the rapidly developing “insurgency” in the north of Ireland.

The philosophy was simple and brutal – terrorise Catholics through the use of Loyalist gangs that were controlled by the security forces, but whose activities could not be traced back to the British government.

From the late 1970s onwards, both Labour and Tory governments backed the Force Research Unit which supplied names, addresses and photographs of targets to paramilitaries. During this time the FRU worked alongside the Special Branch of Northern Ireland’s police force.

In the 1980s, the FRU was led by Colonel Gordon Kerr. He now heads British intelligence in Iraq.

The key person supplying the information was British army agent Brian Nelson. He infiltrated the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), a Loyalist paramilitary group. His information was responsible for the murder of at

least 30 Catholics, including solicitor Pat Finucane.

Jack Grantham, a former FRU handler, described Nelson’s role “as an extension of the operational capability of the British army”.

“By that I mean refining their targeting, increasing their operational efficiency by re-arming them and using them to target known subversives which fitted the criteria and other type of person that the FRU wanted eliminating.”

In January this year the Northern Ireland police ombudsman’s report concluded that one UVF unit in the Mount Vernon area of north Belfast was run by Northern Ireland Special Branch. That unit carried out up to 16 murders.

Earlier this month the Department of Public Prosecutions said there would be no prosecution of police or soldiers over the death of Pat Finucane.

For more on the British army’s role in Northern Ireland go to » Pat Finucane murder: outrage at ‘no prosecutions’ announcement, » Exposing Gordon Kerr and Tony Blair’s secret army and » Britain’s chilling role in Northern Ireland death squads revealed **CT**

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MINNEAPOLIS: A BRIDGE TOO FAR

BY JAMES CLAY FULLER

The collapse of that Hwy. I35W bridge across the Mississippi in downtown Minneapolis could have, and should have, big-time consequences, but I have yet to see any mention of what may be the most significant of the likely long-term outcomes.

They involve further cuts to programs and systems necessary to the well-being of most citizens – not, as you might expect, improvements.

For now, of course, there is a Greek chorus chanting about how we must not talk about blame, nor outcomes; we must simply honor the losses of those who were directly affected by the terrible event.

It's not difficult to understand such feelings, particularly in Minnesota, where people do tend to rush to the aid of others in times of emergency – even if they are among those who ignore pedestrians in crosswalks and run red lights at other times – but it should be noted that the loudest of those condemning “the blame game,” are those on the right whose favorite politicians

deserve to be in career-ending trouble over this mess.

Those who cry “Don't bring politics into it,” are the same people who most surely were figuring a way to cover their sorry asses within 10 minutes of hearing of the tragedy.

Politics is in it, has to be in it, because it is the political and social views of a powerful minority in our society that got us into the mess we're in now with a rapidly failing infrastructure.

It is their political maneuvering that is likely to trade on the Minneapolis bridge collapse to lead us further down the road toward the ruination of American democracy, along with America's roads, bridges, dams, transit, communications, air travel, utilities and other systems.

They are the same people who created the circumstances under which our bridge, or some other bridge, or a dam, or an airplane, simply had to fall down.

The Star Tribune's Nick Coleman is the only commentator, local or national, I've seen to address that fact head on,

Those who cry “Don't bring politics into it,” are the same people who most surely were figuring a way to cover their sorry asses within 10 minutes of hearing of the tragedy

AFTER THE DISASTER

Therefore – ahem – we should sell those bridges and roads and suchlike burdens at very low prices to corporations that are courageously offering to take them off our hands and run them as toll roads and bridges

and he obviously has been taking considerable heat from the “Don’t talk blame” phonies. Unfortunately, Coleman is like others with public platforms who have yet to recognize the worst of the likely consequences.

Here’s what we’re almost sure to see when the talk has died down and the network and cable news crews have gone back east:

First, the promised federal funding to rebuilding the Minneapolis I35 bridge will come through – though maybe not as promptly nor as adequately as promised under the scrutiny of television cameras.

But not too far down the road, the White House and its sycophants in Congress will begin a push to “privatize” more of our infrastructure. The argument, bolstered by millions of dollars worth of propaganda provided by industry, will be that government simply can’t afford to maintain public highways and major bridges at a safe and efficient level. Our collapsed bridge will be cited as proof of that claim.

Therefore – ahem – we should sell those bridges and roads and suchlike burdens at very low prices to corporations that are courageously offering to take them off our hands and run them as toll roads and bridges.

The propaganda will not mention – nor will most undertrained scribes who pass themselves off as journalists these days – that the tolls, in providing enormous profits for the corporations, will cost us far more, in perpetuity, than would the taxes to bring our infrastructure up to acceptable levels.

Neither will there be any notice of the fact that by turning roads and bridges and other public assets into businesses, the rich, the corporate elite, get a permanent protection against paying their fair share of taxes. The poor and middle class tax rate will, in effect, rise, however, because tolls will, in the long run, cost us more than adequate taxes.

I know this is coming, because the push began long before the Minneapolis bridge collapsed, though it’s still largely under the public radar – and anyone who knows anything about news, selling and marketing knows that those who seek to turn the entire country over to profiteers simply cannot let such an opportunity pass.

Second, dead certain, outcome: There will be a strong effort to pull money away from public transportation, especially light rail transit, to fund some repairs to roads and bridges.

This is an opportunity the right will not miss. Despite occasional claims to the contrary, they despise public transit; they don’t use it, they have a deeply emotional fear of being “forced” from their cars onto trains and buses with the great unwashed, they mostly live in burbs which public transportation doesn’t effectively reach, and some major funders of right wing politicians, notably executives of the oil and auto industries, are enraged by efforts to increase use of public transportation.

Third certain outcome: Both the Republicans in Washington and Minnesota’s neocon governor, his depart-

ment heads and the right wing extremists who still hold many seats in our state legislature, will block every move to start repairing our crumbling infrastructure that doesn't include "practical measures" to "keep spending within reasonable limits."

What that means, bluntly, is further cuts to virtually every state service that aids the poor, children, elderly citizens, anyone who now relies on state aid for survival at some level. It also means further cuts in funding for education at all levels – a favorite target of those right wingers through the years they controlled the legislature – and for aid to cities. If the right wins this battle, the burden of paying for such already tragically sagging services as police and fire departments will be shifted further to property taxes and away from income taxes, which have been cut substantially for the state's richest residents.

They have a good chance of winning, given the usual weak-willed, feeble responses of Democrats to such attacks on the public good.

Does 'deficient' mean dangerous?

As widely reported since the disaster, almost 600,000 road bridges in the United States are classified as "deficient" by the American Society of Civil Engineers. But as the coverage of the Minneapolis mess dies down, we'll start to be told, over and over, that "deficient" really doesn't mean dangerous until a bridge actually falls down.

Not so widely reported, but still out there, is the fact that one third of our country's dams are rated as "hazardous." I won't take the space to list

examples, but if you want an idea of what that can and at some unknown point will mean here, Google "failed dams" or "dam collapses" or some such.

It's possible we'll see a move to sell our publicly owned dams, too.

Another disaster that will (not just "may") occur at any time is a major airline crash, or two or three.

There have been numerous reports on the disastrous state of our air traffic control system – overworked and undertrained controllers, grossly outdated computer systems and more. If it isn't completely overhauled, soon and, yes, at great expense, the crashes are coming. Should we somehow avoid that for another year or two or three, it will be only because of heroic efforts on the part of the remaining competent controllers – who are bailing out at a fearsome rate, by the way.

The anti-government, anti-tax right is responsible for all of these messes. Our president, our mad vice president, the right wing nutters in Congress, are as responsible for the deaths and maimings that have occurred and that will occur in result of neglect of our infrastructure just as surely at they are responsible for the horrors in Iraq.

Our governor and his sponsors, the Minnesota Taxpayers League, and their servants in the legislature are responsible for all sorts of human pain because of their program cuts. We have fewer cops on city streets because of them, more kids are going without medical care because of them, more young people are unable to afford college because of them, and so much more.

Our president, our mad vice president, the right wing nutters in Congress, are as responsible for the deaths and maimings that have occurred and that will occur in result of neglect of our infrastructure just as surely at they are responsible for the horrors in Iraq

AFTER THE DISASTER

The Star Tribune and some national news outfits have reported that the department knowingly rejected recommendations for adding steel plates to reinforce the bridge that went down because, and only because, it was cheaper just to inspect it more often

At the moment, talking about the bridge, they're singing a different dirge, but it's an act. Any course changing they're doing is only minor, and temporary.

Our governor, Tim Pawlenty, slavish servant of the Taxpayers League, is playing statesman at the moment, in the most obvious and phony way possible. At first he lied blatantly, proclaiming that 2005 and 2006 bridge inspections showed that there were "no structural defects" in the I35 bridge. He backed down quickly on that after being caught.

He ordered inspection of all bridges in the state, with immediate attention to a handful that are of the same type as the one that went down. He is being sympathetic to the people who were hurt and the families of those who were killed or injured. He is pledging quick replacement for the bridge, and generally doing a good job of following the politicians' script for such events.

But. Carol Molnau, Pawlenty's lieutenant governor, whom he also appointed as commissioner of the state's Department of Transportation, is firmly and repeatedly proclaiming that despite the thousands of bridges in the state that also are known to be "deficient," and few of which have repairs or replacement scheduled, her department is doing a fine job.

She insists on that even though the Star Tribune and some national news outfits have reported that the department knowingly rejected recommendations for adding steel plates to reinforce the bridge that went down because, and only because, it was

cheaper just to inspect it more often.

She also had her chin jutting out when pushed on the need for further spending now that the true dangers of deteriorating bridges have been exposed. "We put together a system in this state that addresses the needs that we have within the fiscal restraints we have, as well," she was quoted as saying by the Strib.

Note: Many of those "fiscal restraints" exist only because of Republican cuts in taxes paid by the rich, and because Pawlenty and the rest of the Republican crew have squeezed spending on infrastructure until there is no juice left.

And then there is Mary Liz Holberg, a Republican senator from semi-rural Lakeville, a still powerful member of the Senate Transportation Committee, who grew visibly angry on Minnesota public television's "Almanac" a couple of days after the bridge collapse when one of the show's hosts tried to get her to admit that much more spending on infrastructure, and bridges in particular, is necessary.

Democrats must give in on a number of Republican demands for cuts in other programs before her party can agree to pay for making bridges safe, she insisted, though she didn't phrase it quite that way.

"Something will get done," she repeated two or three times, but she wouldn't say what, and she still insisted that the money had to come from elsewhere in the state budget because Republicans will not allow tax increases (or taking back substantial cuts they gave the rich). Fixes in funding of infra-

structure repairs “can’t happen overnight,” she said, and “We still have to respect the family budget,” which is Republican code for “hold taxes on the rich to a bare minimum.”

Conclusion: The right wingers in the legislature will stall, obfuscate, dig in and refuse to fund even bridge repair, let alone other badly needed infrastructure fixes, unless the Democrats cave in and agree to take the money from the usual places: education, food programs, health care programs and the like.

The only thing that could change that is honest and complete press coverage of every ploy and a resulting public outcry of considerable volume.

Don’t hold your breath. **CT**

FOLLOW UP

A SUCCESSFUL STING BY TIMMY DO-RIGHT

If you wonder how we’ve come to the sorry state we’re in, there’s a news story in the Star Tribune (Aug. 16, page B6) that answers the question, though that is not the intent of the reporter nor of the pollsters whose new results he passes on.

A poll by SurveyUSA over the previous weekend shows that in the wake of the Hwy. I35W bridge collapse in Minneapolis, Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty’s approval rating is at an all-time high, the Strib reported.

The poll says 59 percent of Min-

nesotans now approve of “the job Pawlenty is doing.”

Last month, the the Strib says, the same polling firm found that 53 percent of Minnesotans approved of right-wing Tim’s job performance – which was, in itself, enough to demonstrate the appalling ignorance of the average citizen.

The bridge disaster and Pawlenty’s follow-the-script public appearances immediately after that happened accounts for the big jump in the approval rating, the Strib and various experts agree.

Big whoop.

It’s the same phenomenon that gave us Rudolph (Screw the Emergency Workers) Giuliani as a presidential candidate who must be taken seriously.

Go to the disaster site, stick out your jaw, puff up your chest in your best imitation of Dudley Do-right. With sad eyes and somber voice, express sympathy for the survivors and the families and friends of victims. Switch to firm voice and vow that everything humanly possible will be done to see things right, to get to the bottom of the problem, to repair the damage, to make the city/state/nation whole again.

Repeat, repeat, repeat.

Keep the promises vague.

It is entirely possible, sometimes probable, that office holders following that well-worn routine are genuinely sorrowful and sympathetic. But it’s hard to tell who really cares for the people hurt by whatever disaster it is and who is simply going through the motions while focusing privately on covering his or her exposed ass.

What should matter is what led to

It’s the same phenomenon that gave us Rudolph (Screw the Emergency Workers) Giuliani as a presidential candidate who must be taken seriously

AFTER THE DISASTER

Pawlenty's ever-so-amusing predecessor, rassler Jessie Ventura, also took big whacks at budgets for bridge and road repair in order to cut license-plate fees on costly, over-sized gas guzzlers, which he prefers to drive

the mess and what happens next – but by the time facts are available and something actually is done to address the situation, the public is on to other things, or absorbed by the sad tales of broken families and uplifting tales of heroism with which television, radio and newspapers bombard us.

Facts? We don't need no stinkin' facts.

The public goes for it every time, regardless of the history of Dudley Politico.

In our case, Tim Pawlenty is a right-wing bobo who has done all in his power as governor and as a leading legislator working on behalf of the no-tax fanatics to undermine Minnesota's infrastructure.

Now he's pushing like crazy to rush the building of a replacement bridge without proper consideration for design, structural longevity, possible accommodation for transit and without clear safeguards for environmental and worker safety and rights.

Hey, we have a Republican National Convention coming next year, and Tim wants a national role so badly he's embarrassing himself playing to those with power in the party. He wants that bridge up, or at least well underway by the time the neocons and "social issue" nutters get here.

The bridge collapse probably can't be laid directly at his feet, although some recommended near-emergency

repairs on the now-fallen structure were rejected by his equally fanatical anti-tax transportation commissioner (and lieutenant governor).

Pawlenty's ever-so-amusing predecessor, rassler Jessie Ventura, also took big whacks at budgets for bridge and road repair in order to cut license-plate fees on costly, over-sized gas guzzlers, which he prefers to drive.

Both The (brainless) Body and Pawlenty got plenty of support from the Republicans who controlled the Legislature until this year.

Still, there's no question that "staying the course" on Pawlenty's program could only lead to more collapses in the future, and until the Minneapolis bridge killed people, he wasn't about to give an inch on his screw-the-public program.

But, having done the Do-right thing, here he is, at the top of the polls.

And the people who think he's doing a heckuva job are the body politic, the voters of Minnesota.

Do you wonder that the republic is eroding at the rate of many a Minnesota lake shore? **CT**

James Clay Fuller worked in newspapers and magazines for more than 45 years. His day job for 30 years was at the Minneapolis StarTribune, where he was a business and economics reporter, features writer, and sometime music critic. His web site is <http://jamesclayfuller.com>

Check out ColdType's archives at:
<http://coldtype.net/archives.html>

INSIDE THE TEXAS DEATH HOUSE

BY LILIANA SEGURA

Kenneth Foster's time is running out. After ten years on death row, the state of Texas is gearing up to kill him for a murder he didn't commit.

Foster was convicted for the 1996 murder of Michael LaHood Jr., who was shot following a string of robberies, by a man named Mauriceo Brown. Brown admitted to the shooting and was executed by lethal injection last year. Now Foster faces the same fate. So, if Brown was the shooter, what did the 19-year-old Foster do to get a death sentence? He sat in his car, 80 feet away, unaware that a murder was taking place.

Foster was convicted under Texas's "law of parties," a twist on a felony murder statute that enables a jury to convict a defendant who was not the primary actor in a crime. This can mean sentencing someone to death even if he or she had no proven role in a murder. Texas's law states that "if, in the attempt to carry out a conspiracy to commit one felony, another felony is committed by one of the conspirators, all conspirators are guilty of the felony

actually committed, though having no intent to commit it." Defendants, the Texas courts say, can be held responsible for "failing to anticipate" that the "conspiracy" – in Foster's case, the robberies, for which he was the getaway driver – would lead to a murder. Foster's sentence, death row prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal recently commented, "criminalizes presence, not actions."

In theory, the law of parties is "a well-recognized legal document," says Houston defense attorney Clifford Gunter, and most states with the death penalty on the books include a similar provision for "non-triggermen." Nevertheless, critics of the Texas law say it's an aberration – a slippery legal statute that stands in direct violation of the 1982 Supreme Court decision in *Enmund v. Florida*.

Still the "prevailing view," according to Gunter, *Enmund* held that the death penalty was unconstitutional for a defendant "who aids and abets a felony in the course of which a murder is committed by others but who does not himself kill, attempt to kill, or intend

So, if Brown was the shooter, what did the 19-year-old Foster do to get a death sentence? He sat in his car, 80 feet away, unaware that a murder was taking place

"A kid in the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong people can end up being sentenced to death"

that a killing take place or that lethal force will be employed." In Texas today, the law or parties says exactly the opposite.

Even more troubling is the law in practice. When Justice Byron White wrote the Enmund decision in 1982, he observed that the Court was not aware of a single execution of someone who did not kill or intend to kill. What a difference another quarter-century makes. Months after Enmund was decided, Texas executed its first prisoner since the reinstatement of the death penalty in 1976. In the tidal wave of capital cases that followed, numerous defendants would be sentenced to die under the law of parties.

One was Norman Green. Green was charged for a murder during a botched robbery in an electronics store in 1985. He got death. His accomplice, the man who actually pulled the trigger, got life. The arbitrary result exemplifies what Green's appellate lawyer, Verna Langham – who also handled Kenneth Foster's first appeal – sees as the danger of the law of parties. "[It] is subject to such loose interpretation," she told the *Austin Chronicle* in 2005. "A kid in the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong people can end up being sentenced to death." Green was executed in 1999.

No formal study has been done on the number of defendants subjected to the law of parties in Texas. Anti-death penalty activists estimate that Texas death row has 80 to 100. This number seems high to David Dow, founder and director of the Texas Innocence Network and author of *Executed on a Tech-*

nicality (2005). But he says that it could be an accurate measure of the number of prisoners whose juries were given the choice of applying the law of parties, even if their conviction did not hinge on it. "In a lot of cases, you have a [law of parties] instruction, but jurors have to find one or the other: Either the person was responsible for killing the victim or they are responsible for participating in a crime where it should have been anticipated that a murder would take place."

For a defendant facing lethal injection, it's a distinction without a difference. Regardless of the number of times the law of parties has been used, its clear effect has been to broaden the pool of defendants eligible for death. By inviting a jury to speculate whether a defendant "should have known" a murder could happen, it drastically lowers the burden of proof for a punishment supposedly reserved for "the worst of the worst."

Easier to sentence people to death

From the zeal of prosecutors to the legal machinery that supports them, "the structure of the Texas's legal system makes it easier to sentence people to death," says Dow. Between the Polunsky Unit in Livingston and the women's death row in Gatesville, nearly 400 prisoners are awaiting execution. By the end of the summer, Texas will have killed its 400th prisoner since the death penalty was brought back. The state that famously carried out 152 executions under Governor George W. Bush has seen Gov. Rick Perry surpass his record. Since taking office in December

2000, Perry has signed off on over 158 executions – a number that will be dated when this piece goes to press (and which would be higher still were it not for the Supreme Court’s 2005 decision in *Roper v. Simmons*, which forced Perry to commute the death sentences of 28 prisoners who were younger than 18 at the time of their crime). In this context, it’s hard not to see the law of parties as an irresistible tool in a legal system designed to summarily execute people. Especially if the defendant is black and the victim is white.

Convicted of killing a white man

Kenneth Foster’s case is a good example. He’s not just a black man accused of killing a white man; he was convicted for killing the son of an attorney highly esteemed by the legal community. As with so many other cases involving families of influence, the media was all over it, and the LaHood family’s wish for an execution quickly became public knowledge. (LaHood’s mother reaffirmed her support of Mauriceo Brown’s execution last year.)

In other particularly high-profile cases, the law of parties has come in similarly handy for the prosecution. In the trial of Patrick Murphy Jr. – one of the notorious “Texas Seven,” who in 2000 escaped from prison, killed a police officer on Christmas Eve, and were summarily sentenced to die – prosecutors seeking death sentences across the board used the law of parties to circumvent the fact that Murphy was not at the scene of the crime.

Prospective jurors were asked not just how they felt about capital punish-

ment, but also about the law of parties specifically. (It worked. Murphy is now sitting on death row.)

The many excesses of Texas capital law offer a portrait of a brutal and broken system – one that has long been protested by anti-death penalty activists. More recently, prisoners themselves have begun to organize from the inside. Kenneth Foster is among them. In 2005 he helped found D.R.I.V.E, a group of death row prisoners who protest the death penalty as well the abusive conditions of their incarceration. D.R.I.V.E, which stands for “Death Row Inner-Communalist Vanguard Engagement,” is multi-racial, highly political, and, perhaps most important, thriving – on one of the most repressive death rows in the country.

Members encourage fellow prisoners to protest on execution days, and to protest their own executions (refusing to walk to the van that takes them to the executions chamber; refusing last meals). They also protest inhumane prison conditions.

Last fall, a dozen death row prisoners at Polunsky went on a hunger strike to protest the inedible food and constantly overflowing toilets in their cells, among other abuses. Comparing themselves to the hunger strikers at Guantanamo Bay, they eventually caught the attention of the *New York Times*.

Some members of the group also invoke the legacy of Gary Graham – a.k.a. Shaka Sankofa – the Texas death row prisoner who was executed in 2000, despite overwhelming evidence that he could be innocent. Graham, who was put to death amidst wide-

Prosecutors seeking death sentences across the board used the law of parties to circumvent the fact that Murphy was not at the scene of the crime

In the slaughterhouse state of Texas, innocence can be harder to prove than guilt

spread protests, maintained his innocence until the end, declaring in his last statement, “They are murdering me tonight.” This era, which Dow considers the “heyday” of protest around executions, coincided with increased repression on Texas death row. Following an attempted prison break in the late 90s, the death row population was relocated.

At their new home in the Polunsky Unit, prisoners are housed for 23 hours a day in cells that are 60 square feet (the American Correctional Association recommends a minimum of 80 feet). Work and recreation privileges are pretty much non-existent, and the few prisoners entitled to small luxuries can easily have them taken away.

Such is the case of Stephen Moody, whose participation in last fall’s hunger strike led to the confiscation of his radio. Texas death row prisoners are allowed no contact visits, and only a few phone calls a year.

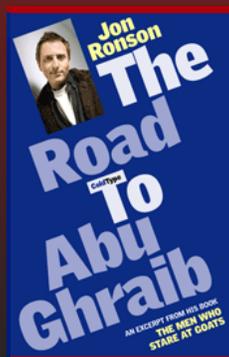
Despite this, Kenneth Foster and D.R.I.V.E. have allies on the outside. In addition to his supporters and family in Texas, a New York-based political hip-hop group called the Welfare Poets is speaking out on behalf of Foster and

other prisoners on Texas death row; grassroots groups like the Campaign to End the Death Penalty are working to protest Foster’s execution, from Harlem to Austin.

With Foster’s legal recourses almost dried up, a letter campaign to members of the appeal board is underway. But it’s a long shot. “Perry has never granted clemency in a capital case before, even when the Board recommended it,” says Bryan McCann, a CEDP activist in Austin. In a state that will have executed 400 people by September, clemency has only been granted two times. “If Kenneth Foster has a good innocence claim, that would be great for him,” Dow says, noting that innocence is what gets attention these days. But while Foster’s supporters argue that Foster is innocent – that nobody should be executed “for driving a car,” in the slaughterhouse state of Texas, innocence can be harder to prove than guilt.

CT

Liliana Segura is a writer based in Brooklyn. Her essay was originally printed in the July/August 2007 issue of The Brooklyn Rail in New York. <http://brooklynrail.org>



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WHY FOSTER CAN'T READ MY BOOK

BY DAVE ZIRIN

Who knew sports history could strike fear in the most fearsome prison system in the USA? But what other explanation could there be for the fact that the history of “America’s Pastime” is being denied to Texas Death Row prisoner Kenneth Foster Jr.?

Kenneth’s case has garnered international attention because both prosecution and defense agree that he was 80 feet away from the murder of Michael LaHood. Earlier in the evening, he had been driving the man who pulled the trigger, Maurecio Brown. In Texas, that’s enough to land him on Death Row.

Foster and I began to exchange letters on sports and politics after he read my book *Welcome to the Terrordome*.

“I have never had the opportunity to view sports in this way,” he wrote.

“And as I went through these revelations I began to have epiphanies about the way sports have a similar existence in prison. The similarities shook me Facing execution, the only thing that I began to get obsessive about was how to get heard and be free, and as the saying

goes – you can’t serve 2 gods. Sports, as you know, becomes a way of life. You monitor it, you almost come to breathe it. Sports becomes a way of life in prison, because it becomes a way of survival. For men that don’t have family or friends to help them financially ...it becomes a way to occupy your time. That’s another sad story in itself, but it’s the root to many men’s obsession with sports.”

It didn’t matter whether he was on Death Row or Park Avenue – I felt smarter having read his words. But even more satisfying was the thought that thinking about sports took his mind – for a moment – away from his imminent death, the 11-year-old daughter he will never touch again and the words he will never write.

I thought sending him my first book, *What’s My Name Fool?: Sports and Resistance in the U.S.*, would be a good follow-up – but here is where the Texas Department of Corrections got its briefs in a bunch. A form titled “Texas Dept of Criminal Justice, Publication review/denial notification” issued to Kenneth on Aug. 9 says that What’s My Name Fool?

“Sports becomes a way of life in prison, because it becomes a way of survival. For men that don’t have family or friends to help them financially ...it becomes a way to occupy your time”

There is something repugnant about the fact that they think a book – any book – would be the source of resistance, rather than the reality that 159 people have been executed since Gov. Rick Perry took office in 2001

*Dave Zirin's latest book is **Welcome to the Terrordome: The Pain, Politics and Promise of Sports***

was banned from the row: “It contains material that a reasonable person would construe as written solely for the purpose of communicating information designed to achieve the breakdown of prisons through offender disruption such as strikes or riots.”

It specifically said that Pages 44 and 55 met this criteria.

After lifting my jaw off the ground, I went to read those dangerous pages.

On Page 44, the radioactive quote in question was from that seditious revolutionary Jackie Robinson – you know, the guy whose number is retired by all of Major League Baseball. I quoted Robinson’s autobiography, *I Never Had It Made*, when he wrote about suffering racism early in his rookie season:

“I felt tortured and I tried to just play ball and ignore the insults. But it was really getting to me. ... For one wild and rage-crazed moment I thought, ‘To hell with Mr. Rickey’s “noble experiment.” ... To hell with the image of the patient black freak I was supposed to create.’ I could throw down my bat, stride over to that Phillies dugout, grab one of those white sons of and smash his teeth in with my despised black fist. Then I could walk away from it all.”

On Page 55, the offensive passage was about Jack Johnson’s defeat of the “Great White Hope,” Jim Jeffries. It read: “Johnson was faster, stronger and smarter than Jeffries. He knocked Jeffries out with ease. After Johnson’s victory, there were race riots around the country – in Illinois, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Colorado, Texas and Washington, D.C. Most of the riots consisted of white lynch mobs attacking

Blacks, and Blacks fighting back. This reaction to a boxing match was one of the most widespread racial uprisings in the U.S. until the 1968 assassination of civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.”

Let’s forget about the fact that there is something bizarre – almost comical – about Texas prison authorities believing that a sports history could lead to “the breakdown of prisons through offender disruption such as strikes or riots.” Let’s forget that they are denying a man reading material in his last hours.

There is something repugnant about the fact that they think a book – any book – would be the source of resistance, rather than the reality that 159 people have been executed since Gov. Rick Perry took office in 2001, or the fact that the people on Death Row have no civil rights, no access to radio, television or even arts and crafts.

It reminds me of the words of Carl Oglesby of the 1960s group Students for a Democratic Society: “It isn’t the rebels who cause the troubles of the world, it’s the troubles that cause the rebels.”

The officials’ fear that ideas – even the ideas of sports history – could cause a crisis in Texas prisons reveals only how aware the Lone Star jailers are of how inhumanely they treat their prisoners.

There was a time in Texas when it was illegal to teach slaves to read. The fear was that ideas could turn anger often directed inward into action against those with their boots on black necks. It is perhaps the most fitting possible tribute to Jackie Robinson and Jack Johnson that their stories still strike fear into the hearts of those wearing the boots. **CT**

IRAQ IS ABOUT TO GET WORSE

BY CHRIS HEDGES

The war in Iraq is about to get worse – much worse. The Democrats' decision to let the war run its course, while they frantically wash their hands of responsibility, means that it will sputter and stagger forward until the mission collapses. This will be sudden. The security of the Green Zone, our imperial city, will be increasingly breached. Command and control will disintegrate. And we will back out of Iraq humiliated and defeated. But this will not be the end of the conflict. It will, in fact, signal a phase of the war far deadlier and more dangerous to American interests.

Iraq no longer exists as a unified country. The experiment that was Iraq, the cobbling together of disparate and antagonistic patches of the Ottoman Empire by the victorious powers in the wake of World War I, belongs to the history books. It will never come back. The Kurds have set up a de facto state in the north, the Shiites control most of the south and the center of the country is a battleground.

There are 2 million Iraqis who have

fled their homes and are internally displaced. Another 2 million have left the country, most to Syria and Jordan, which now has the largest number of refugees per capita of any country on Earth. An Oxfam report estimates that one in three Iraqis are in need of emergency aid, but the chaos and violence is so widespread that assistance is impossible. Iraq is in a state of anarchy. The American occupation forces are one more source of terror tossed into the caldron of suicide bombings, mercenary armies, militias, massive explosions, ambushes, kidnappings and mass executions. But wait until we leave.

It was not supposed to turn out like this. Remember all those visions of a democratic Iraq, visions peddled by the White House and fatuous pundits like Thomas Friedman and the gravel-voiced morons who pollute our airwaves on CNN and Fox News? They assured us that the war would be a cakewalk. We would be greeted as liberators. Democracy would seep out over the borders of Iraq to usher in a new Middle East. Now, struggling to

Remember all those visions of a democratic Iraq, visions peddled by the White House and fatuous pundits like Thomas Friedman and the gravel-voiced morons who pollute our airwaves on CNN and Fox News?

A DOOMED WAR

The Kurds, like the Shiites and the Sunnis, know that if they do not get their hands on water resources and oil they cannot survive. But Turkey, Syria and Iran have no intention of allowing the Kurds to create a viable enclave

salvage their own credibility, they blame the debacle on poor planning and mismanagement.

There are probably about 10,000 Arabists in the United States – people who have lived for prolonged periods in the Middle East and speak Arabic. At the inception of the war you could not have rounded up more than about a dozen who thought this was a good idea. And I include all the Arabists in the State Department, the Pentagon and the intelligence community. Anyone who had spent significant time in Iraq knew this would not work. The war was not doomed because Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz did not do sufficient planning for the occupation. The war was doomed, period. It never had a chance. And even a cursory knowledge of Iraqi history and politics made this apparent.

Stupidity of occupation

This is not to deny the stupidity of the occupation. The disbanding of the Iraqi army; the ham-fisted attempt to install the crook and, it now turns out, Iranian spy Ahmed Chalabi in power; the firing of all Baathist public officials, including university professors, primary school teachers, nurses and doctors; the failure to secure Baghdad and the vast weapons depots from looters; allowing heavily armed American units to blast their way through densely populated neighborhoods, giving the insurgency its most potent recruiting tool – all ensured a swift descent into chaos.

But Iraq would not have held together even if we had been spared the gross incompetence of the Bush admin-

istration. Saddam Hussein, like the more benign dictator Josip Broz Tito in the former Yugoslavia, understood that the glue that held the country together was the secret police.

Iraq, however, is different from Yugoslavia. Iraq has oil – lots of it. It also has water in a part of the world that is running out of water. And the dismemberment of Iraq will unleash a mad scramble for dwindling resources that will include the involvement of neighboring states. The Kurds, like the Shiites and the Sunnis, know that if they do not get their hands on water resources and oil they cannot survive. But Turkey, Syria and Iran have no intention of allowing the Kurds to create a viable enclave. A functioning Kurdistan in northern Iraq means rebellion by the repressed Kurdish minorities in these countries.

The Kurds, orphans of the 20th century who have been repeatedly sold out by every ally they ever had, including the United States, will be crushed. The possibility that Iraq will become a Shiite state, run by clerics allied with Iran, terrifies the Arab world. Turkey, as well as Saudi Arabia, the United States and Israel, would most likely keep the conflict going by arming Sunni militias. This anarchy could end with foreign forces, including Iran and Turkey, carving up the battered carcass of Iraq. No matter what happens, many, many Iraqis are going to die. And it is our fault.

The neoconservatives – and the liberal interventionists, who still serve as the neocons' useful idiots when it comes to Iran – have learned nothing. They talk about hitting Iran and maybe

even Pakistan with airstrikes. Strikes on Iran would ensure a regional conflict. Such an action has the potential of drawing Israel into war – especially if Iran retaliates for any airstrikes by hitting Israel, as I would expect Tehran to do. There are still many in the U.S. who cling to the doctrine of pre-emptive war, a doctrine that the post-World War II Nuremberg laws define as a criminal “war of aggression.”

The occupation of Iraq, along with the Afghanistan occupation, has only furthered the spread of failed states and increased authoritarianism, savage violence, instability and anarchy. It has swelled the ranks of our real enemies – the Islamic terrorists – and opened up voids of lawlessness where they can operate and plot against us. It has scut-

tled the art of diplomacy. It has left us an outlaw state intent on creating more outlaw states. It has empowered Iran, as well as Russia and China, which sit on the sidelines gleefully watching our self-immolation. This is what George W. Bush and those “reluctant hawks” who supported him have bequeathed us.

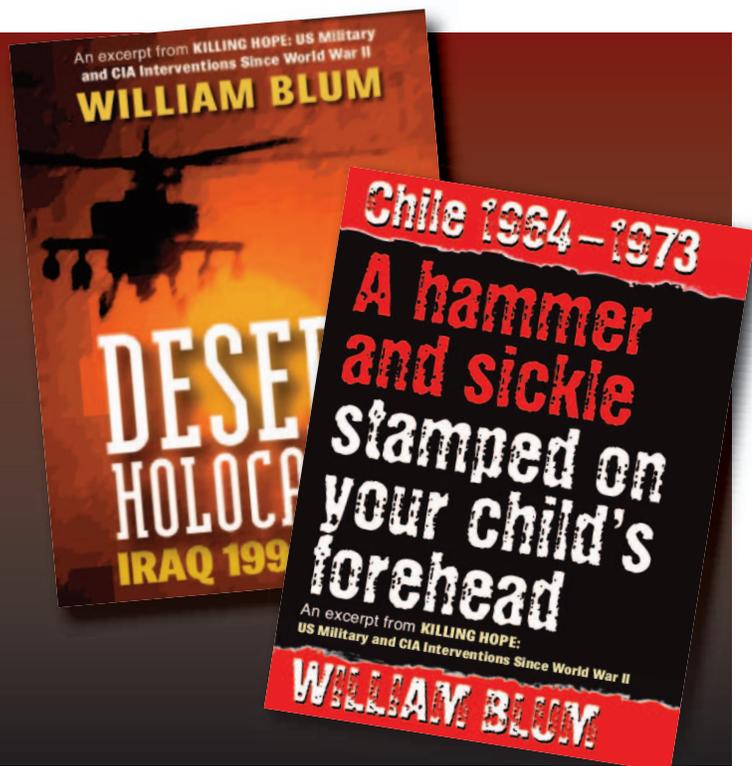
What is terrifying is not that the architects and numerous apologists of the Iraq war have learned nothing, but that they may not yet be finished. **CT**

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

It has empowered Iran, as well as Russia and China, which sit on the sidelines gleefully watching our self-immolation

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THE CONVENIENCE OF DENIAL

BY NORMAN SOLOMON

CNN's retired military generals turned war analysts were so good, Eason said, that they had all been vetted and approved by the U.S. government"

The man who ran CNN's news operation during the invasion of Iraq is now doing damage control in response to a new documentary's evidence that he kow-towed to the Pentagon on behalf of the cable network. His current denial says a lot about how "liberal media" outlets remain deeply embedded in the mind-sets of pro-military conformity.

In mid-August, the former CNN executive publicly defended himself against a portion of the "War Made Easy" film (based on my book of the same name) that has drawn much comment from viewers since the documentary's release earlier this summer. As Inter Press Service reported, the movie shows "a news clip of Eason Jordan, a CNN News chief executive who, in an interview with CNN, boasts of the network's cadre of professional 'military experts.' In fact, CNN's retired military generals turned war analysts were so good, Eason said, that they had all been vetted and approved by the U.S. government."

Inter Press called the vetting-and-

approval process "shocking" — and added that "in a country revered for its freedom of speech and unfettered press, Eason's comments would infuriate any veteran reporter who upholds the most basic and important tenet of the journalistic profession: independence."

But Eason Jordan doesn't want us to see it that way. And he has now fired back via an article in IraqSlogger, which calls itself "the world's premier Iraq-focused Web site." Jordan runs that Web site.

The journalist who wrote the Aug. 14 article, Christina Davidson, was in an awkward spot: "War Made Easy" directly criticizes her boss, and it was the subject of the article:

http://www.iraqslogger.com/index.php/post/3919/War_Made_Easy_Makes_Easy_Viewing

Davidson's only assessment of the film that wasn't favorable had to do with its criticisms of Jordan. "While there's no doubt that journalistic laziness contributed to the uncritical re-broadcasting of the Bush administration's official line," she wrote, "Solomon

takes it a little too far in trying to make the case that all of the cable networks were actively complicit in promoting the war. Solomon bases his reasoning primarily on one choice quote from Eason Jordan, former CNN news chief and current CEO of IraqSlogger's parent company, Praedict."

In fact, the film provides a wide range of evidence that "all of the cable networks were actively complicit in promoting the war" – the result of chronic biases rather than "journalistic laziness."

And CNN, like the rest of the cable news operations, comes in for plenty of tough scrutiny in the documentary. As the magazine *Variety* noted in a review of "War Made Easy" on Aug. 13, "Fox News is predictably bashed here, but supposedly neutral CNN gets it even harder."

<http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117934412.html?categoryid=31&cs=1>

Myth of "the liberal media"

CNN is among the news outlets at the core of the myth of "the liberal media" – perpetuated, in part, by the fact that people are often overly impressed by the significance of rhetorical attacks on some media organizations by more conservative outlets. (Before his resignation from CNN in 2005, Eason Jordan was himself subjected to denunciations from the right – for allegedly skewing news coverage to curry favor with the Baghdad government during Saddam's rule and, after the invasion, for reportedly stating that U.S. troops had targeted some journalists in Iraq.) But antipathy from right-wing pundits is

hardly an indication of journalistic independence.

Stretching to defend Jordan's CNN record, IraqSlogger complains that the CEO of its parent company is unfairly characterized in the film: "Solomon assumes that Jordan was seeking the blessing of Pentagon officials on the propriety of his choices, when in fact he was just doing a boss's duty."

The article then provides a quote from Jordan, supplying his explanation to set the record straight: "Employers routinely vet prospective employees with their previous employers. In these cases, we vetted retired generals to ensure they were experts in specific military and geographic areas. The generals were not vetted for political views."

The explanation can only flunk the laugh test.

Eason Jordan was CNN's chief news executive when, on April 20, 2003 (a month after U.S. troops invaded Iraq), he appeared on CNN and revealed that he'd gotten the Defense Department's approval of which retired high-ranking officers to put on the network's payroll. "I went to the Pentagon myself several times before the war started and met with important people there and said, for instance – 'At CNN, here are the generals we're thinking of retaining to advise us on the air and off about the war' – and we got a big thumbs-up on all of them. That was important."

With war euphoria riding high, Jordan was eager to shore up his – and CNN's – image as cooperative pals of the nation's military commanders. Now, Jordan is trying some backspin with the

With war euphoria riding high, Jordan was eager to shore up his – and CNN's – image as cooperative pals of the nation's military commanders. Now, Jordan is trying some backspin

SPINNING THE WAR

Part of that deadly avoidance comes when powerful news executives do the bidding of the Pentagon – and then, later on, claim that they did nothing of the kind

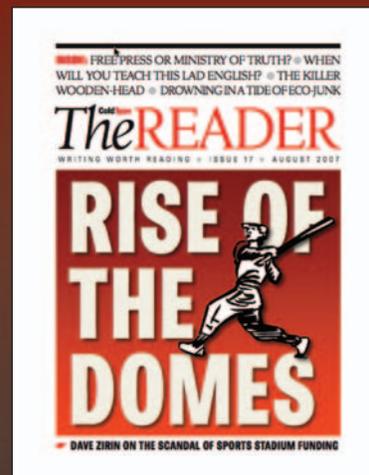
claim that he was merely checking job references.

“Often journalists blame the government for the failure of the journalists themselves to do independent reporting,” I note in the documentary. “But nobody forced the major networks like CNN to do so much commentary from retired generals and admirals and all the rest of it.” What Jordan did on behalf of CNN “wasn’t even something to hide, ultimately. It was something to say to the American people on his own network, ‘See, we’re team players. We may be the news media, but we’re on the same side and the same page as the Pentagon.’ And that really runs directly counter to the idea of an inde-

pendent press. And that suggests that we have some deep patterns of media avoidance when the U.S. is involved in a war based on lies.”

Part of that deadly avoidance comes when powerful news executives do the bidding of the Pentagon – and then, later on, claim that they did nothing of the kind. **CT**

The new documentary film “War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death” – based on Norman Solomon’s book of the same title, narrated by Sean Penn and produced by the Media Education Foundation – is available on DVD



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READ THIS OR BUSH WILL BE PRESIDENT FOR ALL YOUR LIFE

BY WILLIAM BLUM

On several occasions I've been presented with the argument that contrary to widespread opinion in the anti-war movement and on the left, oil was not really a factor in the the United States invasion and occupation of Iraq. The argument's key, perhaps sole, point is that the oil companies did not push for the war.

Responding to only this particular point: firstly, the executives of multinational corporations are not in the habit of making public statements concerning vital issues of American foreign policy, either for or against. And we don't know what the oil company executives said in private to high Washington officials, although we do know that such executives have a lot more access to such officials than you or I, like at Cheney's secret gatherings. More importantly, we have to distinguish between oil as a fuel and oil as a political weapon.

A reading of the policy papers issued by the neo-conservatives since the demise of the Soviet Union makes it clear that these people will not tolerate any

other country or group of countries challenging the global hegemony of the world's only superpower. A sample — In 1992 they wrote: “We must maintain the mechanisms for deterring potential competitors from even *aspiring* to a larger regional or global role.”^[1] And in 2002, in the White House “National Security Strategy” paper: “Our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States. ... America will act against such emerging threats before they are fully formed. ... We must deter and defend against the threat before it is unleashed. ... We cannot let our enemies strike first. ... To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively.”

As the world has been learning in great sorrow, the neo-conservative world-dominators are not just (policy) paper tigers.

Japan and the European Union easily fall into the categories of potential competitors or potential adversaries,

A reading of the policy papers issued by the neo-cons since the demise of the Soviet Union makes it clear that these people will not tolerate any other country or group of countries challenging the global hegemony of the world's only superpower

Like a hurt lover, Bolton exclaims that Britain has been brought to "a clear decision point. ... What London needs to know is that its answer will have consequences"

economically speaking. They both are crucially dependent upon oil imports. To one extent or another so is most of the world. The Bush administration doesn't need the approval of the oil companies to pursue its grandiose agenda of world domination, using the vast Iraqi oil reserves as one more of its weapons.

For those who would like to believe that there's a limit to the neo-cons' imperial arrogance, that even the likes of Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Bolton, Wolfowitz, Rice, and the rest of the gang would never treat Europe as anything like an enemy, I suggest a look at a recent article by the former US ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton, which appeared in the Financial Times of London.

In it, the Cheney intimate and current senior fellow at the neo-con citadel, American Enterprise Institute, berates British prime minister Gordon Brown for implying that the UK could have a "special relationship" with both the United States and the European Union (which Bolton refers to as "the European porridge").

Like a hurt lover, Bolton exclaims that Britain has been brought to "a clear decision point. ... What London needs to know is that its answer will have consequences." The article is entitled: "Britain Cannot Have Two Best Friends".

Bolton goes on to ask: "Why does a 'union' with a common foreign and security policy, and with the prospect of a real 'foreign minister' have two permanent seats on the UN Security Council and often as many as three non-perma-

nent seats out of a total of 15 council members? France and Britain may not relish the prospect of giving up their unique status, but what is it that makes them different – as members of the 'Union' – from Luxembourg or Malta? One Union, one seat. Mr Brown cannot have it both ways (nor will President Nicolas Sarkozy)."

The Empire has not yet made Europe an ODE (Officially Designated Enemy) like Iran, but, Bolton declares, "If Mr Bush decides that the only way to stop Iran is to use military force, where will Mr Brown come down? Supporting the US or allowing Iran to goose-step towards nuclear weapons?"^[2]

Washington's exquisite imperial mentality, its stated determination to "act against such emerging threats before they are fully formed", sees "potential adversaries" in China and Russia as well, of course. The United States – with hypocrisy breathtaking even for the Bush administration – regularly castigates China for its expanding military budget; and tries to surround Russia with military bases, missile shields, and countries with ties to Washington and NATO.

Moreover, the United States has been competing with Russia for the vast oil and gas reserves of the land-locked Caspian Sea area since the 1990s. The building and protection of pipelines in Afghanistan was in all likelihood a major factor in the US invasion and occupation of that country. And in this case we know that the American oil company UNOCAL met with Taliban officials in Texas and in Afghanistan before 9-11 to discuss the pipelines.^[3]

A license to lie that never expires

I touched upon this a year ago, but our much-esteemed leader and his equally-esteemed acolytes continue to use the same argument in order to deflect attention from their deformed child, the War On Terror – the argument being that since the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, US counterterrorism policy has worked. How do they know? Because there haven't been any terrorist attacks in the United States in the six years since that infamous day.

Right, but there weren't any terrorist attacks in the United States in the six years *before* Sept. 11, 2001 either, the last one being the Oklahoma City bombing of April 19, 1995, with no known connection to al Qaeda. The absence of terrorist attacks in the US appears to be the norm, with or without a War on Terror.

More significantly, in the six years since 9-11 the United States has been the target of terrorist attacks on scores of occasions, not even counting anything in Iraq or Afghanistan – attacks on military, diplomatic, civilian, Christian, and other targets associated with the United States, in the Middle East, South Asia and the Pacific, more than a dozen times in Pakistan alone. The attacks include the October 2002 bombings of two nightclubs in Bali, Indonesia, which killed more than 200 people, almost all of them Americans and citizens of their Australian and British war allies; the following year brought the heavy bombing of the US-managed Marriott Hotel in Jakarta, Indonesia, the site of diplomatic receptions and 4th of July celebrations held by the American Embassy; and other horren-

dous attacks in more recent years on US allies in Madrid and London because of the war.

When the Bush administration argues that the absence of terrorist attacks in the US since 9-11 means that its war on terrorism has created a safer world for Americans ... why do I doubt this?

The past is unpredictable

As the call for withdrawal of American forces from Iraq grows louder, those who support the war are rewriting history to paint a scary picture of what happened in Vietnam after the United States military left in March 1973.

They speak of invasions by the North Vietnamese communists, but fail to point out that a two-decades-long civil war had simply continued after the Americans left, minus a good deal of the horror which US bombs and chemical weapons had been causing.

They speak of the "bloodbath" that followed the American withdrawal, a term that implies killing of large numbers of civilians who didn't support the communists. But this never happened. If it had taken place the anti-communists in the United States who supported the war in Vietnam would have been more than happy to publicize a "commie bloodbath". It would have made big headlines all over the world. The fact that you can't find anything of the sort is indicative of the fact that nothing like a bloodbath took place. It would be difficult to otherwise disprove this negative.

"Some 600,000 Vietnamese drowned in the South China Sea attempting to

When the Bush administration argues that the absence of terrorist attacks in the US since 9-11 means that its war on terrorism has created a safer world for Americans ... why do I doubt this?

In actuality, instead of a bloodbath of those who had collaborated with the enemy, the Vietnamese sent them to "re-education" camps, a more civilized treatment than in post-World War Two Europe

escape."^[4] Has anyone not confined to a right-wing happy farm ever heard of this before?

They mix Vietnam and Cambodia together in the same thought, leaving the impression that the horrors of Pol Pot included Vietnam. This is the conservative National Review Online: "Six weeks later, the last Americans lifted off in helicopters from the roof of the U.S. embassy in Saigon, leaving hundreds of panicked South Vietnamese immediately behind and an entire region to the mercy of the communists. The scene was similar in Phnom Penh [Cambodia]. The torture and murder spree that followed left millions of corpses."^[5]

And here's dear old Fox News, July 26, reporters Sean Hannity and Alan Colmes, with their guest, actor Jon Voight. Voight says "Right now, we're having a lot of people who don't know a whole lot of things crying for us pulling out of Iraq. This — there was a bloodbath when we pulled out of Vietnam, 2.5 million people in Cambodia and Vietnam — South Vietnam were slaughtered."

Alan Colmes' response, in its entirety: "Yes, sir." Hannity said nothing. The many devoted listeners of Fox News could only nod their heads sagely.

In actuality, instead of a bloodbath of those who had collaborated with the enemy, the Vietnamese sent them to "re-education" camps, a more civilized treatment than in post-World War Two Europe where many of those who had collaborated with the Germans were publicly paraded, shaven bald, humili-

ated in other ways, and/or hung from the nearest tree. But some conservatives today would have you believe that the Vietnamese camps were virtually little Auschwitzes.^[6]

Has the conservative view of Vietnam post-US withdrawal already hardened into historical concrete? "The agreed-upon historical record", to use Gore Vidal's term?

The way of all flesh, the way of all wars

In 1967 and '68 I was writing a column of a type very similar to this report, only it wasn't online of course; it was for the Washington Free Press, part of the so-called "underground press". In looking over those old columns recently I found three items whose relevance has not been dimmed by time at all:

(1) [From the Washington Post, 1968]: "It has never been clearer that the Marines are fighting for their own pride, from their own fear and for their buddies who have already died. No American in Hue is fighting for Vietnam, for the Vietnamese, or against Communism."^[7]

[Make the obvious substitutions and we have: No American in Baghdad is fighting for Iraq, for the Iraqi people, or against terrorism. And how many of today's warriors can look at what is happening in Iraq and convince themselves that they're fighting for something called freedom and democracy?]

(2) Arthur Sylvester, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, was the man most responsible for "giving, controlling and managing the war news from Vietnam". One day in July 1965,

Sylvester told American journalists that they had a patriotic duty to disseminate only information that made the United States look good. When one of the newsmen exclaimed: “Surely, Arthur, you don’t expect the American press to be handmaidens of government,” Sylvester replied, “That’s exactly what I expect,” adding: “Look, if you think any American official is going to tell you the truth, then you’re stupid. Did you hear that? – stupid.” And when a correspondent for a New York paper began a question, he was interrupted by Sylvester who said: “Aw, come on. What does someone in New York care about the war in Vietnam?”^[8]

(3) The US recently completed an operation in the III Corps area of South Vietnam called “Resolved to Win”. Now, a new operation is being planned for the same area. This one is called “Complete Victory”, which should give you an idea of how successful “Resolved to Win” was. I expect that the only operation standing a chance of success will be the one called “Total Withdrawal.”

Libertarians: an eccentric blend of anarchy and runaway capitalism

What is it about libertarians? Their philosophy, in theory and in practice, seems to amount to little more than: “If the government is doing it, it’s oppressive and we’re against it.” Corporations, however, tend to get free passes. Perhaps the most prominent libertarian today is Texas Congressman Ron Paul, who ran as the Libertarian Party’s candidate for president in 1988 and is running now for the same office as a Re-

publican. He’s against the war in Iraq, in no uncertain terms, but if the war were officially being fought by, for, and in the name of a consortium of Lockheed Martin, Halliburton, Bechtel, and some other giant American corporations, would he have the same attitude? And one could, of course, argue that the war is indeed being fought for such a consortium. So is it simply the *idea* or the *image* of “a government operation” that bothers him and other libertarians?

Paul recently said: “The government is too bureaucratic, it spends too much money, they waste the money.”^[9]

Does the man think that corporations are not bureaucratic? Do libertarians think that any large institution is not overbearingly bureaucratic? Is it not the nature of the beast? Who amongst us has not had the frustrating experience with a corporation trying to correct an erroneous billing or trying to get a faulty product repaired or replaced?

Can not a case be made that corporations spend too much (of our) money? What do libertarians think of the exceedingly obscene salaries paid to corporate executives? Or of two dozen varieties of corporate theft and corruption? Did someone mention Enron?

Ron Paul and other libertarians are against social security. Do they believe that it’s better for elderly people to live in a homeless shelter than to be dependent on government “handouts”? That’s exactly what it would come down to with many senior citizens if not for their social security.

Most libertarians I’m sure are not racists, but Paul certainly sounds like

Who amongst us has not had the frustrating experience with a corporation trying to correct an erroneous billing or trying to get a faulty product repaired or replaced?

ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

Ron Paul and other libertarians are against social security. Do they believe that it's better for elderly people to live in a homeless shelter than to be dependent on government "handouts"?

one. Here are a couple of comments from his newsletter:

“Opinion polls consistently show that only about 5 percent of blacks have sensible political opinions, i.e. support the free market, individual liberty and the end of welfare and affirmative action.”

“Given the inefficiencies of what D.C. laughingly calls the ‘criminal justice system,’ I think we can safely assume that 95 percent of the black males in that city are semi-criminal or entirely criminal.”^[10]

Author Ellen Willis has written that “the fundamental fallacy of right libertarianism is that the state is the only source of coercive power.” They don’t recognize “that the corporations that control most economic resources, and therefore most people’s access to the necessities of life, have far more power than government to dictate our behavior and the day-to-day terms of our existence.”^[11]

CT

NOTES

[1] “Defense Planning Guidance for the Fiscal Years 1994-1999”, New York Times, March 8, 1992, p.14, emphasis added

[2] Financial Times (London), August 2, 2007

[3] BBC News, December 4, 1997, “Taleban in Texas for talks on gas pipeline”

[4] Joseph Farah, editor of the conserva-

tive WorldNetDaily

(worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=56769), August 6, 2007

[5] Mona Charen, National Review Online, July 20, 2007

[6] Search Google News: <bloodbath iraq vietnam> for more examples

[7] Washington Post, February 20, 1968, article by Lee Lescaze

[8] Congressional Record (House of Representatives), May 12, 1966, pp. 9977-78, reprint of an article by Morley Safer of CBS News

[9] National Public Radio, Morning Edition, August 9, 2007

[10] Atlanta Progressive News, June 3, 2007

(www.atlantaprogressivenews.com/views/0024-views.html)

As far as I can determine, Paul does not deny that these remarks, and others equally racist, appeared in his newsletter, but he claims that a staff member of his is the author of those remarks.

[11] Ellen Willis, Dissent magazine, Fall 1997

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

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DESPERATE TO DISCREDIT CHAVEZ

BY JOHN PILGER

I walked with Roberto Navarrete into the national stadium in Santiago, Chile. With the southern winter's wind skating down from the Andes, it was empty and ghostly. Little had changed, he said: the chicken wire, the broken seats, the tunnel to the changing rooms from which the screams echoed. We stopped at a large number 28. "This is where I was, facing the scoreboard. This is where I was called to be tortured."

Thousands of "the detained and the disappeared" were imprisoned in the stadium following the Washington-backed coup by General Pinochet against the democracy of Salvador Allende on September 11 1973. For the majority people of Latin America, the abandonados, the infamy and historical lesson of the first "9/11" have never been forgotten. "In the Allende years, we had a hope the human spirit would triumph," said Roberto. "But in Latin America those believing they are born to rule behave with such brutality to defend their rights, their property, their hold over society that they approach

true fascism. People who are well-dressed, whose houses are full of food, bang pots in the streets in protest as though they don't have anything. This is what we had in Chile 36 years ago. This is what we see in Venezuela today. It is as if Chávez is Allende. It is so evocative for me."

In making my film *The War on Democracy*, I sought the help of Chileans like Roberto and his family, and Sara de Witt, who courageously returned with me to the torture chambers at Villa Grimaldi, which she somehow survived. Together with other Latin Americans who knew the tyrannies, they bear witness to the pattern and meaning of the propaganda and lies now aimed at undermining another epic bid to renew both democracy and freedom on the continent.

The disinformation that helped destroy Allende and give rise to Pinochet's horrors worked the same in Nicaragua, where the Sandinistas had the temerity to implement modest, popular reforms. In both countries, the CIA funded the leading opposition media, although

For the majority people of Latin America, the abandonados, the infamy and historical lesson of the first "9/11" have never been forgotten

WHOSE RIGHTS?

It is this new confidence of Venezuela's "invisible people" that has so inflamed those who live in suburbs called country club. Behind their walls and dogs, they remind me of white South Africans

they need not have bothered. In Nicaragua, the fake martyrdom of La Prensa became a cause for North America's leading liberal journalists, who seriously debated whether a poverty-stricken country of 3 million peasants posed a "threat" to the United States. Ronald Reagan agreed and declared a state of emergency to combat the monster at the gates. In Britain, whose Thatcher government "absolutely endorsed" US policy, the standard censorship by omission applied. In examining 500 articles that dealt with Nicaragua in the early 1980s, the historian Mark Curtis found an almost universal suppression of the achievements of the Sandinista government - "remarkable by any standards" - in favour of the falsehood of "the threat of a communist takeover".

The similarities in the campaign against the phenomenal rise of popular democratic movements today are striking. Aimed principally at Venezuela, especially Chávez, the virulence of the attacks suggests that something exciting is taking place; and it is. Thousands of poor Venezuelans are seeing a doctor for the first time in their lives, having their children immunised and drinking clean water. New universities have opened their doors to the poor, breaking the privilege of competitive institutions effectively controlled by a "middle class" in a country where there is no middle. In barrio La Línea, Beatrice Balazo told me her children were the first generation of the poor to attend a full day's school. "I have seen their confidence blossom like flowers," she said. One night in barrio La Vega, in a bare

room beneath a single lightbulb, I watched Mavis Mendez, aged 94, learn to write her own name for the first time.

More than 25,000 communal councils have been set up in parallel to the old, corrupt local bureaucracies. Many are spectacles of raw grassroots democracy. Spokespeople are elected, yet all decisions, ideas and spending have to be approved by a community assembly. In towns long controlled by oligarchs and their servile media, this explosion of popular power has begun to change lives in the way Beatrice described.

It is this new confidence of Venezuela's "invisible people" that has so inflamed those who live in suburbs called country club. Behind their walls and dogs, they remind me of white South Africans. Venezuela's wild west media is mostly theirs; 80% of broadcasting and almost all the 118 newspaper companies are privately owned. Until recently one television shock jock liked to call Chávez, who is mixed race, a "monkey". Front pages depict the president as Hitler, or as Stalin (the connection being that both like babies). Among broadcasters crying censorship loudest are those bankrolled by the National Endowment for Democracy, the CIA in spirit if not name. "We had a deadly weapon, the media," said an admiral who was one of the coup plotters in 2002. The TV station, RCTV, never prosecuted for its part in the attempt to overthrow the elected government, lost only its terrestrial licence and is still broadcasting on satellite and cable.

Yet, as in Nicaragua, the "treatment" of RCTV is a cause celebre for those in Britain and the US affronted by the

sheer audacity and popularity of Chávez, whom they smear as “power crazed” and a “tyrant”. That he is the authentic product of a popular awakening is suppressed. Even the description of him as a “radical socialist”, usually in the pejorative, wilfully ignores the fact that he is a nationalist and social democrat, a label many in Britain’s Labour party were once proud to wear.

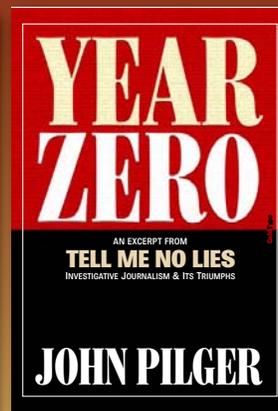
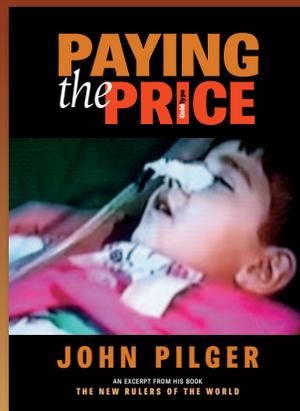
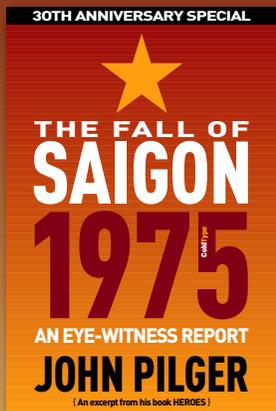
In Washington, the old Iran-Contra death squad gang, back in power under Bush, fear the economic bridges Chávez is building in the region, such as the use of Venezuela’s oil revenue to end IMF slavery. That he maintains a neo-liberal economy, described by the American Banker as “the envy of the banking world” is seldom raised as valid criticism of his limited reforms. These days, of course, any true reforms

are exotic. And as liberal elites under Blair and Bush fail to defend their own basic liberties, they watch the very concept of democracy as a liberal preserve challenged on a continent about which Richard Nixon once said “people don’t give a shit”. However much they play the man, Chávez, their arrogance cannot accept that the seed of Rousseau’s idea of direct popular sovereignty may have been planted among the poorest, yet again, and “the hope of the human spirit”, of which Roberto spoke in the stadium, has returned. **CT**

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*John Pilger’s latest book, **Freedom Next Time**, has just been published in paperback. This article was first published in *The Guardian* newspaper. His new movie is **The War on Democracy***

THE BEST OF JOHN PILGER



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