

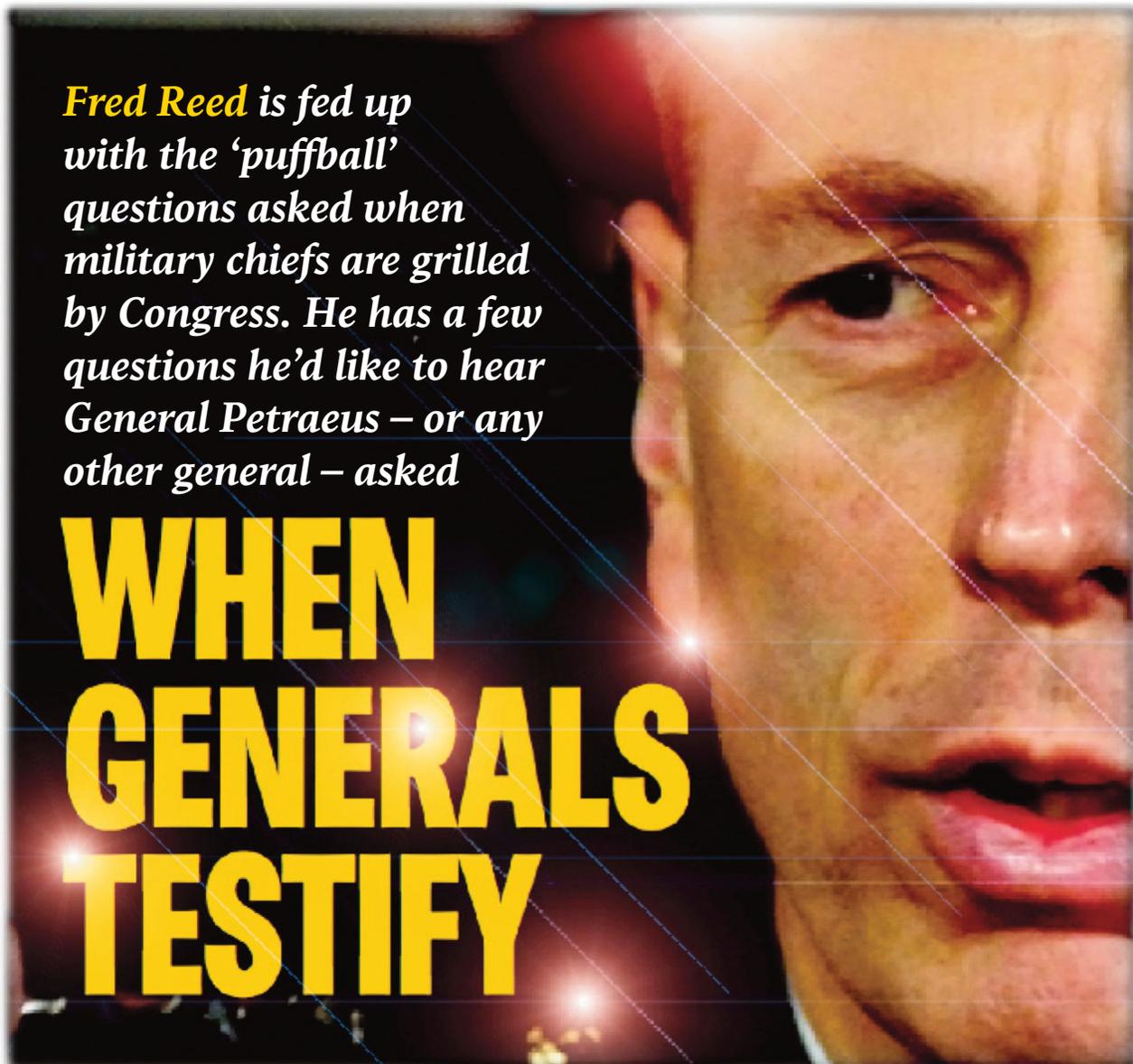
**INSIDE:** GUANTANAMO'S FORGOTTEN CHILD ● NO CHECKPOINTS IN HEAVEN ● THE OTHER MILITARY DRAFT ● CATCH 2,200 ● SHIT STORMS AND REALITY

# The ColdType READER

WRITING WORTH READING ● ISSUE 26 ● MAY 2008

*Fred Reed is fed up with the 'puffball' questions asked when military chiefs are grilled by Congress. He has a few questions he'd like to hear General Petraeus – or any other general – asked*

**WHEN  
GENERALS  
TESTIFY**



GENERAL DAVID H. PETRAEUS

# The <sup>ColdType</sup> READER



Editor: Tony Sutton  
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# WHEN GENERALS TESTIFY

**Fred Reed** is fed up with the ‘puffball’ questions Congress asks its military leaders, so he offers a few of his own

**W**henever I see that some dismal general will testify to Congress regarding the war against Iraq, I imagine the first paragraph of his Power Point presentation: “All metrics show a downsurge in the violence in Iraq, and a continuing improvement in indicators of the production of a better life. Next slide. The Iranians are aiding the enemies of America, and must be bombed. This is a recording.”

What solemn, fraudulent, emetic mummery. Congressmen will – do – ask the General puffball questions, after which they will do whatever the President tells them to do. I can make no criticism of this. It is the American way. Still, may I suggest a few questions I would like to see the General, any general, asked?

1) General, five years ago the Commander in Chief said that combat operations in Iraq had ended. Since this isn’t true, the Commander in Chief was either lying, delusional, or simply a fool. Which do you believe to be the case?

2) You have said on various occasions

that Iran is meddling in Iraq, that it is supplying weapons, fighters, and training to the warring factions. Others have charged that the United States is meddling in Iraq, that it is supplying weapons, troops, and training in Iraq. Which of these assertions do you believe to be the more accurate? Have you seen any evidence of American involvement?

3) You have expressed a commendable admiration for our soldiers, saying that they are the finest young men of our nation. Would you let your daughter date a black Pfc. with a GED? A kid named Gonzalez with tattoos?

4) Permit me a personal question, General. Have you ever said anything but “yes” to anyone who could affect your chances of promotion? Can you give us examples?

I have received a letter from a squad leader in Baghdad who suggests that always saying “yes” qualifies you as a streetwalker but not as a soldier. I am sure this isn’t true. That is, I am sure you could be a soldier as well. Will you explain to us why the sergeant is wrong? Can you give the Congress a reason to

**Would you let your daughter date a black Pfc. with a GED? A kid named Gonzalez with tattoos?**

**I am sure that you would not kill thousands of people you don't know on command of some nonentity, and then accept strange-looking medals for doing so. To rebuke those voices that say such ugly things, would you give us an example of a country you would not attack if ordered to?**

believe that anything other than your career matters to you?

5) Excuse me, but I have a question concerning your health. I know the sun is very bright in Baghdad. Might it be that when you were putting suntan lotion on your face, you somehow missed your nose? It seems much darker. The country cannot lightly afford to risk skin cancer in its officers.

6) General, years from now, when you loll in some sunny clime writing your memoirs, perhaps having served as a handsome and chiseled Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, tens of thousands of enlisted men will be living with colostomy bags or white canes or missing legs or the ruins of faces. Does this in any way bother you? On second thoughts, I withdraw the question as irrelevant. Pardon my foolishness, General.

7) I assume that you must have many qualifications for administering a counterinsurgency operation in the Middle East. Here I mean things other than being photogenic or a wizard with Power Point. For example, I am certain that you speak Arabic well, as do the Commander in Chief, President Cheney, and Condo Rice. For the record, will you confirm this?

8) Let me drop for a moment into the dry details of soldiering. No doubt this will be boring shop talk to many in this chamber, but I believe we can spare a moment. A constituent who served in Viet Nam wrote me with the following account of someone who has "taken a round" (that is the military phrase, I believe?) through the face. He says that teeth shatter, the jawbone dangles from the head with white stuff showing where it was attached, blood spurts from

the arteries in the top of the mouth, one eye bulges out from the concussion, and the man jerks his arms strangely and says "Kuh-kuh-kuh" until he dies from drowning in blood. This takes a few minutes, the sergeant says.

Do you believe the Public Affairs Office of the Pentagon is right in saying that squads should carry plastic bags for covering the man's face? So that reporters don't take pictures and give the public a misleading idea of the war?

9) Critics of the military say harsh and, I am sure, unjustified things, such as that generals are simply hired murderers and have no more honor or morality than hit men for the Mafia. I want you to understand that I do not for a moment believe this. I am sure that you would not kill thousands of people you don't know on command of some nonentity, and then accept strange-looking medals for doing so. To rebuke those voices that say such ugly things, would you give us an example of a country you would not attack if ordered to? Name something you would not do for another star?

10) Will you explain the surgical use of a five-hundred-pound bomb in a densely populated suburb?

11) General, if an Iraqi army attacked your home state in an endeavor to impose democracy on the United States, killed thousands of your fellow citizens, and left your daughter of seven years screaming as she died of burns, what would you do? Would you accept Islam with gratitude and embrace democracy? Or would you fight the invaders? Would you spend the rest of your life trying to kill as many of them as you could, in any way that you could? Just curious.

12) Some of your critics, sir – misin-

formed, I am sure – say that you send kids from small Southern towns to die while you work on your Power Point presentations. To put this foul canard to rest, would you tell us how much time you have spent in combat as compared to a rifleman on his fifth tour?

13) Finally, General, can you estimate the number of veterans in wheelchairs, blind, gutshot, lacking genitals, on crutches, having nightmares of when Jim Dog took a round through the lungs north of Vung Tau – guys of that sort, in the Disabled American Veterans, in expat bars around the world, in upcountry

Thailand and the middle of Mexico – who hate men like you with a dark intensity that makes them pull the arms off chairs when they think about it, so that even their friends back away, a hatred that would make it most unwise for you to be near?

Just asking. And thank you so much. For your testimony, I mean. **CT**

**Would you tell us how much time you have spent in combat as compared to a rifleman on his fifth tour?**

*Fred Reed has worked on staff for Army Times, The Washingtonian, Soldier of Fortune, Federal Computer Week, and The Washington Times. His web site is [www.fredoneverything.net](http://www.fredoneverything.net)*

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# SIXTY YEARS AFTER DEIR YASSIN

Unless Israel confronts the past it will continue to be viewed with revulsion and suspicion, says **Ronnie Kasrils**

**When I became involved in South Africa's liberation struggle, I became aware of the similarities with the Palestinian cause in the dispossession of land and birthright by expansionist settler occupation**

**A**s a 10-year-old growing up in Johannesburg, I celebrated Israel's birth 60 years ago. I unquestionably accepted the dramatic accounts of so-called self-defensive actions against Arab violence to secure the Jewish state. The type of indoctrination South African cartoonist Zapiro so bitingly exposes in his work, which recently raised the hackles of scribes such as David Saks of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies.

When I became involved in South Africa's liberation struggle, I became aware of the similarities with the Palestinian cause in the dispossession of land and birthright by expansionist settler occupation. I came to see that the racial and colonial character of the two conflicts provided greater comparisons than with any other struggle. When Nelson Mandela stated that we know as South Africans "that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians,"<sup>1</sup> he was not simply talking to our Muslim community, who can be expected to directly empathize, but to all South Africans precisely because of our

experience of racial and colonial subjugation, and because we well understand the value of international solidarity.

When I came to learn of the fate that befell the Palestinians, I was shaken to the core and most particularly when I read eye-witness accounts of a massacre of Palestinian villagers that occurred a month before Israel's unilateral declaration of independence. This was at Deir Yassin, a quiet village just outside Jerusalem, which had the misfortune to lie by the road from Tel Aviv. On April 9, 1948, 254 men, women and children were butchered there by Zionist forces to secure the road. Because this was one of the few such episodes that received media attention in the West, the Zionist leadership did not deny it, but sought to label it an aberration by extremists. In fact, however, the atrocity was part of a broader plan designed by the Zionist High Command, led by Ben Gurion himself, which was aimed at the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from the British mandate territory and the seizure of as much land as possible for the intended Jewish state.



**"Halim Eid saw a man shoot a bullet into the neck of my sister ... who was ... pregnant. Then he cut her stomach open with a butcher's knife"**

**The 12 March cartoon by South African cartoonist Zapiro that was later attacked by David Saks of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies and which sparked debate in the country.**

There are many accounts that corroborate the orgy of death at Deir Yassin, which went far beyond the Sharpsville massacre of 1960 that motivated me to join the African National Congress.<sup>2</sup> My reaction was: if Sharpsville had appalled me, could I be indifferent to the suffering at Deir Yassin?

Fahimi Zidan, a Palestinian child who survived by hiding under his parents' bodies, recalled: "The Jews ordered [us] ... to line up against the wall ... started shooting ... all ... were killed: my father ... mother ... grandfather and grandmother ... uncles and aunts and some of their children ... Halim Eid saw a man shoot a bullet into the neck of my sister ... who was ... pregnant. Then he cut her stomach open with a butcher's knife ... In another house, Naaneh Khalil ... saw a man take a ... sword and slash my neigh-

bor ..."<sup>3</sup>

One of the attacking force, a shocked Jewish soldier named Meir Pa'el, reported to the head of his Haganah command:

"It was noon when the battle ended... Things had become quiet, but the village had not surrendered. The Etzel [Irgun] and Lehi [Stern] irregulars ... started ... cleaning up operations ... They fired with all the arms they had, and threw explosives into the houses. They also shot everyone they saw ... the commanders made no attempt to check the ... slaughter. I ... and a number of inhabitants begged the commanders to give orders ... to stop shooting, but our efforts were unsuccessful ... some 25 men had been brought out of the houses: they were loaded into a ... truck and led in a 'victory parade' ... through ... Jerusalem

## BLOODY ANNIVERSARY

**That such barbarism was conducted by Jewish people a mere three years after the Holocaust must have been too ghastly to contemplate, as it would constitute a major embarrassment for the state of Israel**

[then] ... taken to a ... quarry ... and shot ... The fighters ... put the women and children who were still alive on a truck and took them to the Mandelbaum Gate. <sup>4</sup>

A British officer, Richard Catling, reported:

“There is ... no doubt that many sexual atrocities were committed by the attacking Jews. Many young school girls were raped and later slaughtered ... Many infants were also butchered and killed. I also saw one old woman ... who had been severely beaten about the head with rifle butts ...” <sup>5</sup>

Jacques de Reynier of the International Committee of the Red Cross met the “cleaning up” team on his arrival at the village:

“The gang ... were young ... men and women, armed to the teeth ... and [had] also cutlasses in their hands, most of them still blood-stained. A beautiful young girl, with criminal eyes, showed me hers still dripping with blood; she displayed it like a trophy. This was the ‘cleaning up’ team, that was obviously performing its task very conscientiously.”

He described the scene he encountered on entering the homes:

“... amid disemboweled furniture ... I found some bodies ... the ‘cleaning up’ had been done with machine-guns ... hand grenades ... finished off with knives ... I ... turned over ... the bodies, and ... found ... a little girl ... mutilated by a hand grenade ... everywhere it was the same horrible sight ... this gang was admirably disciplined and only acted under orders. <sup>6</sup>

The atrocity at Deir Yassin is reflective of what happened elsewhere. Israeli historian Ilan Pappé has meticulously

recorded 31 massacres, from December 1947 to January 1949. They attest to a systematic reign of terror, conducted to induce the flight of Palestinians from the land of their birth. As a result, nearly all Palestinian towns were rapidly depopulated and 418 villages were systematically destroyed.

As Israel’s first minister of agriculture, Aharon Cizling, stated in a 17 November 1948 Cabinet meeting: “I often disagree when the term Nazi was applied to the British ... even though the British committed Nazi crimes. But now Jews too have behaved like Nazis and my entire being is shaken.” <sup>7</sup> Despite these sentiments, Cizling agreed that the crimes should be hidden, creating a lasting precedent. That such barbarism was conducted by Jewish people a mere three years after the Holocaust must have been too ghastly to contemplate, as it would constitute a major embarrassment for the state of Israel, held-up as a “light unto nations;” hence the attempts to bury the truth behind a veil of secrecy and disinformation. What better way to silence enquiry than the all-encompassing alibi of Israel’s right of self-defense, condoning the use of disproportionate force and collective punishment against any act of resistance.

Precisely because Israel was allowed to get away with such crimes, it continued on its bloody path. According to Ilan Pappé, “Fifteen minutes by car from Tel-Aviv University lies the village of Kfar Qassim where, on 29 October 1956, Israeli troops massacred 49 villagers returning from their fields. Then there was Qibya in the 1950s, Samoa in the 1960s, the villages of the Galilee in 1976, Sabra and Shatila in 1982, Kfar Qana in 1999,

Wadi Ara in 2000 and the Jenin Refugee Camp in 2002. And in addition there are the numerous killings B'Tselem, Israel's leading human rights organization, keeps track of. There has never been an end of Israel's killings of Palestinians." <sup>8</sup>The slaughter of 1,500 Lebanese civilians in Israel's indiscriminate bombardment of that country in 2006; the daily deaths in the Palestinian territories, the 120 in Gaza in a week – including 63 on a single day – in March 2008, one third of whom were children, form part of the same bloody thread that links Israel's shameful past with that of today.

Israel will soon mark the 60th anniversary of its establishment. In so doing, Israelis and the Zionist supporters would do well to acknowledge the reasons why, for Palestinians and freedom-loving people throughout the world, there will be no cause to celebrate. Indeed, it will be a period of mourning and protest action; a time to recall the countless victims that lie in Israel's wake, as epitomized by the suffering inflicted on the inhabitants of Deir Yassin, the original site of which is ironically located just a stone's throw away from where the present day Holocaust memorial, Yad Vashem, was built.

Unless Israel confronts the past, as so many have attempted to do in South Africa, it will continue to be viewed with revulsion and suspicion. Israelis will continue to regard Arab life as worthless and will continue to live by the sword and deceit, feigning surprise when Palestinians violently respond. Without dealing with the agony it has caused there can be no healing and no solution. To do so is to create the basis for all life to be cherished and for Palestinians and Is-

raelis to live in peace, with justice. By being aware of the roots of the conflict, and pledging our solidarity, we South Africans can do our bit to help bring about a just solution and the freedom that Nelson Mandela referred to. I believe that South Africans like the cartoonist Zapiro are doing just that. **CT**

*Ronnie Kasrils is South Africa's Minister of Intelligence.*

### Notes

[1] Nelson Mandela, International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, Pretoria, 4 December 1997.

[2] See Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel*, Pantheon, 1988); David Hirst, *The Gun and the Olive Branch*, Faber and Faber, 2003; Benny Morris, *Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, Cambridge University Press, 2004); Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Oneworld Publications, 2006.

[3] David Hirst, *The Gun and the Olive Branch*, Faber and Farber, 2003, p. 249-50.

[4] *Yediot Aharonot*, April 1972. This letter only came to light with Pa'el's consent in 1972. David Hirst *ibid* p. 251.

[5] David Hirst, *ibid* and Report of the Criminal Investigation Division, Palestine Government, No. 179/110/17/GS, 13, 15, 16 April 1948. Cited in David Hirst, p. 250.

[6] David Hirst *ibid* and Jacques de Reynier, *A Jérusalem un Drapeau flottait sur la Ligne de Feu*, Editions de la Baconnière, Neuchâtel, 150, p. 71-6 and Hirst *ibid* p. 252.

[7] Tom Segev, *The First Israelis*, Owl Books, 1998, p. 26.

[8] Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Oneworld Publications, 2006, p. 258.

**Unless Israel confronts the past, as so many have attempted to do in South Africa, it will continue to be viewed with revulsion and suspicion. Israelis will continue to regard Arab life as worthless and will continue to live by the sword and deceit, feigning surprise when Palestinians violently respond**

# WALLS, TUNNELS AND HUMILIATION

Sometimes oppression is not violent, but subtle, says **Matts Svensson**

**First, he removes a pair of black shoes from the bag, changes and puts the dirty ones in the bag. Looks at his trousers, sees that they have not been dirtied. Wipes off the cane with a napkin**

**A** while ago there was a big enough opening in the wall for a car to pass through. Now it is closed. The place is almost empty of people. A young man walks towards me, passes me and disappears into a ditch. And he is gone.

I follow him down into the wide ditch. The ditch is four meters wide with dirty brown water. I see four large cement pipes leading to the ditch. Three of them are blocked with cement blocks.

The obstacles have been removed by the fourth one. It smells foul, it smells of sewer. I lose my balance and my right foot sinks into the sludge. I lean down and look into the cement pipe, getting my camera ready. I see a shadow at the end of the pipe, 15 meters away. I lift the camera but immediately hear a man call out, "Please, please, don't take any photo."

I see an old man coming through the tunnel. With his legs spread to either side he tries to hop along. Sometimes he supports himself on a cane that he drives into the sewer. In the other hand, he carries a little bag. He slips a little bit. When

he comes out of the tunnel, he looks at me, sees my camera and says, "Thank you." I follow him a few hundred meters.

First, he removes a pair of black shoes from the bag, changes and puts the dirty ones in the bag. Looks at his trousers, sees that they have not been dirtied. Wipes off the cane with a napkin. Tells me that he is going to visit his wife who is in hospital. She has been there for a few weeks. His wife was put in hospital when there was an opening in the wall. He tells me that he has always lived in Jerusalem but that the wall that now goes through the northern part shuts him out of the city. He lives in the Al Ram district. He is soon on his way to have as much time as possible with his wife before he has to return in the evening. "I hope the water hasn't risen by then," he says.

I go through the tunnel. Come up on the other side. See some young boys who climb through. They ask me what I think about the wall. Tell me that they feel humiliated. Say that they come to school dirty every day and are dirty

when they return home. The school on one side of the wall, the home on the other. Palestinians on both sides.

The wall separates Palestinians. Divides up the land. On a daily basis, they have to use a sewer drain to get to school, to work or to visit a sick loved one. Two young men that I photographed coming out of the tunnel ask me to stay for a while. They tell me that they have come through the tunnel to help their mother.

Their mother wears a black dress and carries a little brown handbag. I promise the men that I will not photograph. They carefully lift up her dress, almost carrying her through the tunnel. The water in the sewer is too deep, her feet drag in the water and she calls out. Soon, the three of them are back. One of the men says that they will have to try another time when the water is lower.

I arrived early in the morning. Most people from Al Ram use the tunnel to get to Jerusalem. They return in the afternoon, wanting to get back home before nightfall. There is a large closed gate in the wall, 10 meters wide, close to the sewer pipes. The gate has an advanced locking mechanism and can only be

opened by the occupation force, by young soldiers. Strangely enough, young children can squeeze through the gate because it has a 20 centimeter opening on one side. Some teenagers try, but they cannot squeeze through. For those under 15, there is a narrow opening. If you are older, you must use the sewer.

At first, I did not understand why the military has left a small opening in the gate. And I did not understand why the sewer tunnel remained open. After a few hours, I begin to see a pattern and in the pattern the answer probably lies.

In front of me I see the woman whose sons try to help her through the sewer, who gives up when the sludge is too deep, who wants to keep her dignity. I see the man who did not want to be photographed. The man who did not want his humiliation to be documented.

CT

*Mats Svensson, a former Swedish diplomat working on the staff of SIDA, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, is presently following the ongoing occupation of Palestine. He can be reached at [isbjorn2001@hotmail.com](mailto:isbjorn2001@hotmail.com)*

**Most people from Al Ram use the tunnel to get to Jerusalem. They return in the afternoon, wanting to get back home before nightfall**

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# NO CHECKPOINTS IN HEAVEN

**Ramzy Baroud** remembers his father's life of hunger, pain, homelessness, freedom-fighting, love, marriage and loss

**Expelled from his village at the age of 10, running barefoot behind his parents, he was instantly transferred from the son of a landowning farmer to a penniless refugee in a blue tent provided by the United Nations in Gaza**

I still vividly remember my father's face – wrinkled, apprehensive, warm – as he last wished me farewell 14 years ago. He stood outside the rusty door of my family's home in a Gaza refugee camp wearing old yellow pyjamas and a seemingly ancient robe. As I hauled my one small suitcase into a taxi that would take me to an Israeli airport an hour away, my father stood still. I wished he would go back inside; it was cold and the soldiers could pop up at any moment. As my car moved on, my father eventually faded into the distance, along with the graveyard, the water tower and the camp. It never occurred to me that I would never see him again.

I think of my father now as he was that day. His tears and his frantic last words: "Do you have your money? Your passport? A jacket? Call me the moment you get there. Are you sure you have your passport? Just check, one last time..."

My father was a man who always defied the notion that one can only be the outcome of his circumstance. Expelled from his village at the age of 10, running barefoot behind his parents, he was in-

stantly transferred from the son of a landowning farmer to a penniless refugee in a blue tent provided by the United Nations in Gaza. Thus, his life of hunger, pain, homelessness, freedom-fighting, love, marriage and loss commenced.

The fact that he was the one chosen to quit school to help his father provide for his now tent-dwelling family was a huge source of stress for him. In a strange, unfamiliar land, his new role was going into neighbouring villages and refugee camps to sell gum, aspirin and other small items. His legs were a testament to the many dog bites he obtained during these daily journeys. Later scars were from the shrapnel he acquired through war.

As a young man and soldier in the Palestinian unit of the Egyptian army, he spent years of his life marching through the Sinai desert. When the Israeli army took over Gaza following the Arab defeat in 1967, the Israeli commander met with those who served as police officers under Egyptian rule and offered them the chance to continue their services under Israeli rule. Proudly and willingly, my young father chose ab-

ject poverty over working under the occupier's flag. And for that, predictably, he paid a heavy price. His two-year-old son died soon after.

My oldest brother is buried in the same graveyard that bordered my father's house in the camp. My father, who couldn't cope with the thought that his only son died because he couldn't afford to buy medicine or food, would be found asleep near the tiny grave all night, or placing coins and candy in and around it.

My father's reputation as an intellectual, his obsession with Russian literature, and his endless support of fellow refugees brought him untold trouble with the Israeli authorities, who retaliated by denying him the right to leave Gaza.

His severe asthma, which he developed as a teenager was compounded by lack of adequate medical facilities. Yet, despite daily coughing streaks and constantly gasping for breath, he relentlessly negotiated his way through life for the sake of his family. On one hand, he refused to work as a cheap labourer in Israel. "Life itself is not worth a shred of one's dignity," he insisted. On the other, with all borders sealed except that with Israel, he still needed a way to bring in an income. He would buy cheap clothes, shoes, used TVs, and other miscella-

neous goods, and find a way to transport and sell them in the camp. He invested everything he made to ensure that his sons and daughter could receive a good education, an arduous mission in a place like Gaza.

But when the Palestinian uprising of 1987 exploded, and our camp became a battleground between stone-throwers and the Israeli army, mere survival became Dad's new obsession.

Our house was the closest to the Red Square, arbitrarily named for the blood spilled there, and also bordered the 'Martyrs' Graveyard'. How can a father adequately protect his family in such surroundings? Israeli soldiers stormed our house hundreds of times; it was always him who somehow held them back, begging for his children's safety, as we huddled in a dark room awaiting our fate. "You will understand when you have your own children," he told my older brothers as they protested his allowing the soldiers to slap his face. Our 'freedom-fighting' dad struggled to explain how love for his children could surpass his own pride. He grew in my eyes that day.

#### **Left alone**

It's been 14 years since I last saw my father. As none of his children had access

**Israeli soldiers stormed our house hundreds of times; it was always him who somehow held them back, begging for his children's safety, as we huddled in a dark room awaiting our fate**

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## MY FATHER

**Even a resilient fighter deserves a moment of peace**

to isolated Gaza, he was left alone to fend for himself. We tried to help as much as we could, but what use is money without access to medicine? In our last talk he said he feared he would die before seeing my children, but I promised that I would find a way. I failed.

Since the siege on Gaza, my father's life became impossible. His ailments were not 'serious' enough for hospitals crowded with limbless youth. During the most recent Israeli onslaught, most hospital spaces were converted to surgery wards, and there was no place for an old man like my dad. All attempts to transfer him to the better equipped West Bank hospitals failed as Israeli authorities repeatedly denied him the required permit.

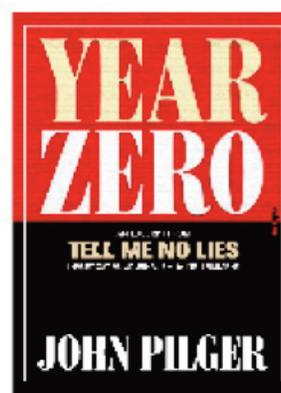
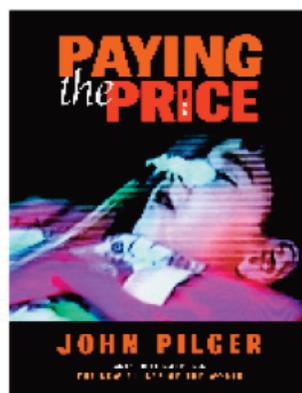
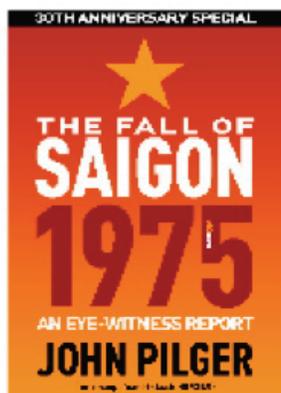
"I am sick, son, I am sick," my father cried when I spoke to him two days be-

fore his death. He died alone on March 18, waiting to be reunited with my brothers in the West Bank. He died a refugee, but a proud man nonetheless.

My father's struggle began 60 years ago, and it ended a few days ago. Thousands of people descended to his funeral from throughout Gaza, oppressed people who shared his plight, hopes and struggles, accompanying him to the graveyard where he was laid to rest. Even a resilient fighter deserves a moment of peace. **CT**

*Ramzy Baroud is an author and editor of PalestineChronicle.com. His work has been published in many newspapers and journals worldwide. His latest book is **The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People's Struggle** (Pluto Press, London). His website is [www.ramzybaroud.net](http://www.ramzybaroud.net)*

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# GUANTANAMO'S FORGOTTEN CHILD

**Andy Worthington** tells the sad story of Mohammed El-Gharani

Since last June, when Omar Khadr, a Canadian prisoner at Guantánamo, was first hauled up before a Military Commission – the novel system of “terror trials” conceived in the wake of the 9/11 attacks – he has rarely been out of the news. Just 15 years old at the time of his capture, Khadr’s treatment has been widely condemned, not just because the trial system is weighted in favor of the prosecution, and is empowered to accept secret evidence obtained through torture or coercion, but also because of his age. As his lawyers have pointed out, “No international criminal tribunal established under the laws of war, from Nuremberg forward, has ever prosecuted former child soldiers as war criminals.”

Omar Khadr is not, however, the only prisoner at Guantánamo who was just a child when he was captured. Almost entirely overlooked is Guantánamo’s youngest prisoner, Mohammed El-Gharani, who was just 14 when he was captured in October 2001. Unlike Omar, Mohammed is one of at least 120 prisoners who will almost certainly never face

charges, and who are left, instead, in severe isolation in Guantanamo, with no opportunity whatsoever to bring their cases to the attention of the wider public.

And yet Mohammed’s story is one of the saddest in the prison’s long and unjust history. Although he was born in Saudi Arabia, his parents are from Chad, so he was never granted citizenship, and was prevented from having the same opportunities as Saudi nationals.

## **Wanted to be a doctor**

He dreamed of becoming a doctor, but was not allowed to finish secondary school, and was selling religious paraphernalia to pilgrims attending the Hajj, when a Pakistani friend advised him to travel to Pakistan to learn how to repair computers so that he could establish a business in Saudi Arabia.

In order to pursue his dream, Mohammed visited the Chadian embassy, and exaggerated his age to obtain a passport. Only those aged 18 or over are allowed to travel without their parents, so he boldly declared that he was 20.

**Mohammed is one of at least 120 prisoners who will almost certainly never face charges, and who are left, instead, in severe isolation in Guantanamo, with no opportunity whatsoever to bring their cases to the attention of the wider public**

## CHILD SOLDIER

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**He was taken to a prison where, for 20 days, he was hung by his wrists, suspended so that only the tips of his toes touched the ground, and was beaten if he moved**

With a valid three-month visa for Pakistan, he took his savings and bought an airline ticket to Karachi.

Soon after arriving, in October 2001, he was praying in a mosque, when it was suddenly surrounded by police, who arrested everyone inside. Most were released, but he was taken to a prison where, for 20 days, he was hung by his wrists, suspended so that only the tips of his toes touched the ground, and was beaten if he moved.

He was then sold to the Americans, who were offering bounty payments of \$5,000 a head for “al-Qaeda and Taliban suspects,” and was transferred to the US prison at Kandahar airport in Afghanistan, where, like every other prisoner sent to the makeshift prison, he was subjected to systematic brutality.

Imprisoned in a barbed wire pen with five other prisoners, he was beaten during interrogations, and on several occasions had freezing cold water thrown over him during the night. He reported that one particular soldier “would hold my penis, with scissors, and say he’d cut it off.”

### **No preferential treatment**

He was then flown to Guantánamo, but unlike three Afghan boys (released in January 2004), who were held separately from the adult population, and treated with something approaching the appropriate care of juvenile prisoners, he has never received any preferential treatment as a juvenile, and has, instead, been subjected to torture and abuse as severe as almost any other prisoner.

He has been hung from his wrists on 30 occasions (an experience he described as worse than in Pakistan, because his

feet did not even touch the ground), and has also been subjected to a regime of “enhanced” techniques to prepare him for interrogation – including prolonged sleep deprivation, prolonged isolation and the use of painful stress positions – that clearly constitute torture.

On one occasion, a heavily-armoured riot squad – the Initial Reaction Force (IRF), used to quell even the most minor infringements of the rules – slammed his head into the floor of his cell, breaking one of his teeth, and on another occasion an interrogator stubbed out a cigarette on his arm.

As a result of this violence he has become deeply depressed, and has attempted to commit suicide on several occasions, by slashing his wrists, trying to hang himself, and, on one occasion, by running head-first into the wall of his cell as hard as he could.

Despite all his suffering, and the lack of any evidence against him, no attempt has been made to address the clear deterioration of his mental health, and he has been held in some of the prison’s harshest cell blocks, where prisoners are held, for 22 or 23 hours a day, in solid metal cells with no windows and no opportunity to socialize with their companions.

Although the violence against him continues unabated (he is regularly set upon by the IRF teams, because of his frustrations with the regime), he will almost certainly be released if the government of Chad engages in serious negotiations with the US government. In August 2007, lawyers from Reprieve, the legal action charity that represents Mohammed and 30 other Guantánamo prisoners, visited Chad to meet mem-

bers of his family, and to present his case to the government. They received assurances from President Deby and the Foreign Ministry that they would act on his behalf, but the negotiations appear to have stalled, in part because the government has been caught up in a well-publicized struggle against rebel forces.

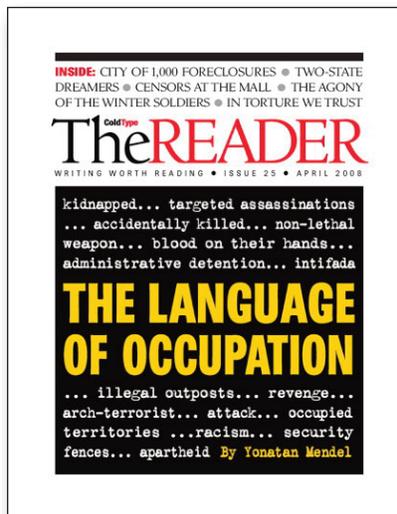
A representative of Reprieve is visiting Chad in an attempt to resurrect the struggle for Mohammed's freedom. He takes with him evidence that, when it comes to securing the release of prisoners, the most significant factors are public pressure and

diplomatic negotiations.

Last December, after two years of stonewalling on the part of the Americans, the Sudanese government secured the release of two of its innocent citizens, simply by refusing to give up. If it wishes, the government of Chad can do the same for Guantánamo's forgotten child. **CT**

*Andy Worthington is the author of **The Guantánamo Files: The Stories of the 774 Detainees in America's Illegal Prison** (Pluto Press). His web site is [andyworthington.co.uk](http://andyworthington.co.uk)*

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# INSIDE THE CAGE AT GUANTANAMO

David Swanson on the suffering of an innocent man

**Driven by fear instilled through training in the U.S. military, fear of monsters with superhuman powers, fear strong enough to make a team of armored storm troopers fear a legless man in a cage**

**W**he guards at Guantanamo are terrified. Even a man with no legs (amputated after being intentionally exposed to extreme cold by American guards in Afghanistan) is treated as a horrifying threat:

“The bandages wrapped around Abdul’s stumps were never changed. When he took them off himself, they were full of blood and pus. He showed the bandage to the guards and pointed to his open wounds. The guards ignored him. Later I saw how he tried to wash the bandages in his bucket of drinking water. But he could hardly move his hands, so he wasn’t able to. And even if he had, where would he have hung them up to dry? He wasn’t allowed to touch the fence. He wrapped his stumps back up in the dirty bandages.

“When the guards came to take him to be interrogated, they ordered him to sit with his back to the door and put his hands on his head. When they opened the door, they stormed in as they did with every other prisoner. They hit him on the back and pushed him to the

ground. Then they handcuffed and bound him so he could no longer move. Abdul howled in pain.”

A man with no legs? No, a terrorist with no legs, a mythical evildoing creature with no legs. Hatred? Yes. Bigotry? Yes. But driven by fear instilled through training in the U.S. military, fear of monsters with superhuman powers, fear strong enough to make a team of armored storm troopers fear a legless man in a cage.

The passage quoted above is from *Five Years of My Life: An Innocent Man in Guantanamo*, by Murat Kurnaz, and reading his account might begin to make the reader, too, view the caged prisoners as less than human, were it not for the skillful way in which Kurnaz intersperses descriptions of his pre-Guantanamo life in Germany.

Kurnaz made the mistake of traveling from Germany to Pakistan shortly after September 11, 2001. He has never been to Afghanistan, except in the custody of American guards who took him there from Pakistan on the way to Cuba. The Americans never alleged any particular

crime, but simply declared him an enemy combatant and took away five years of his life. A U.S. military kangaroo-court commission convicted him on two counts.

The first was having once been friends with a man who supposedly committed a suicide bombing long after Kurnaz was in Guantanamo and about which Kurnaz knew nothing.

The strangest part about that first count is that the alleged suicide bomber is alive and well back in Germany, has never been involved in anything of the sort, and has not himself been charged with anything.

The second count was of having accepted free food from a humanitarian group with which Kurnaz was working in Pakistan.

How that act made Kurnaz “the worst of the worst” is not clear. While the United States always knew that they’d paid \$3,000 to someone to turn Kurnaz in, in Pakistan, on the basis of no suspicion of anything, the tribunal concluded that he’d been arrested as an al Qaeda fighter in Afghanistan. At least that was the conclusion up until the moment the United States set him free, or the moment three years earlier when the United States decided he was innocent but allowed him to be tortured daily for three more years prior to release.

At Kandahar air base in Afghanistan, Kurnaz was deprived of food and sleep, routinely beaten, electro-shocked through his feet, threatened with drowning and his head held under water, and hung from the ceiling by his wrists until he lost consciousness. Kurnaz was in very good physical shape

prior to this ordeal, and survived it. He saw others die from these procedures. Kurnaz did not know at the time that the worst still lay ahead for him on a Caribbean island, and he had no idea where he was being taken when they loaded him on the plane for Guantanamo:

“They chained us together and herded us onto a plane. We were bound so tightly we couldn’t move a millimeter. Again, I thought they were taking us to an American military base in Turkey. What else was I supposed to think?”

“Sleep would have been the only consolation in such a situation. But the soldiers kept hitting us to keep us awake. I thought about the American movies I had seen in Bremen. Action flicks and war movies. I used to admire the Americans. Now I was getting to know their true nature.

“I say that without anger. It’s simply the truth, as I saw and experienced it. I don’t want to insult anyone, and I’m not talking about all Americans. But the ones I encountered are terrified of pain. They’re afraid of every little scratch, bacteria, and illness. They’re like little girls, I’d say. If you examine Americans closely, you realize this – no matter how big or powerful they are. But in movies, they’re always the heroes.”

### **Just like slave ships**

Brought to the New World in a transport reminiscent of slave ships, Kurnaz was placed in a small metal cage (six by seven feet) exposed to the sun, rain, spiders, snakes, and soldiers, on a lawless military base in Cuba. And he was better off than most of those around him.

“I know of a prisoner,” he wrote,

**Kurnaz was deprived of food and sleep, routinely beaten, electro-shocked through his feet, threatened with drowning and his head held under water, and hung from the ceiling by his wrists until he lost consciousness**

## TORTURE CHAMBER

**They told him they would amputate the little finger. They brought him to the doctor, and when he came back he had no fingers left. They had amputated everything but his thumbs**

“who complained of a toothache. He was brought to a dentist, who pulled out his healthy teeth as well as the rotten one. I knew a man from Morocco who used to be a ship’s captain. He couldn’t move one of his little fingers because of frostbite. The rest of his fingers were all right. They told him they would amputate the little finger. They brought him to the doctor, and when he came back he had no fingers left. They had amputated everything but his thumbs.”

Even in Cuba, one of the torture techniques employed is subjection to extreme cold inside a chilled metal box. Kurnaz provides an inside account of these experiences, and of the day-to-day life of solitary confinement, beatings, interrogations, and denial of adequate nutrition. Kurnaz was once kept awake for three weeks. He was given extensive stays in solitary. He was subjected to extremes of cold and heat. He was denied oxygen almost to the point of suffocation.

### **Hunger strike**

When guards trampled a Koran, the prisoners began a hunger strike and discovered that the general in charge did not want them to die. They discovered that they had some power, and they got organized. In the end, Kurnaz and others were force-fed, and the commander of Guantanamo was replaced with another (General Geoffrey Miller) who seemed not to care at all who lived or died. Prisoners once mixed feces and water and threw it on Miller’s face, and from that point on called him “Mr. Toilet.”

In this environment, Kurnaz found humanity among the prisoners, who shared the little food they were given and cared for each other. And in very

rare instances he found humanity in a couple of guards who spoke of their disagreement with what they were engaged in. One can only hope that every man and woman who has served as a guard at Guantanamo reads Kurnaz’s book and adds their voice to the growing chorus speaking truth to unspeakable power.

In Guantanamo, prisoners are sometimes told they are being released, given clothes, placed on airplanes, and then thrown back in their cages. So, Kurnaz was inclined to be skeptical when told of his impending release:

“I was brought to an interrogation room and chained to the floor. But no one came to ask me any questions. Hours later, two soldiers appeared and placed a telephone on the table.

“‘You’ll be getting a call,’ they told me.

“That made me curious. I didn’t know who the caller would be. An interrogator? My lawyer? Maybe the judge?

“More hours passed. What was going on here? Suddenly the phone rang, but no one came to help me.

“I couldn’t pick up the receiver with my hands and feet shackled, but the telephone kept ringing. I threw myself to the floor and tried to drag the table toward me with my feet. Kicking one of the table legs, I managed to dislodge the receiver and knock it down to the floor. I squirmed to get my head as close as possible to the handset. I could just hear a voice on the other end of the line.

“‘Hello? Hello?’

“‘Yes...’

“It’s me, Baher. You’re going to be released!’

“I know. How are you doing?’

“Murat, are you listening? You’re going to be released.’

“I know,’ I said. ‘They’re playing a nasty trick on you. How is your daughter doing?’

Yet he was released. And yet we do not all know his name. For five years our tax dollars paid guards to ask him his name and other basic questions endlessly, between beatings. And yet we do not all know his story or feel the shame of it.

All across the United States of America there are university departments that claim to teach philosophy and others that claim to teach politics, and yet there are not a million students and professors in Washington, D.C., every day demanding impeachment. How can this be? Can a German victim of our apathy shake us out of our Good-Germanism?

Can we hear the words of Patti Smith in her song about Kurnaz?

*Without Chains  
four long years  
was I a man  
dreaming in chains  
with the lights on  
a netherworld  
nothing to say  
thoughts impure  
at Guantanamo Bay*

*now I’m learning  
to walk  
without chains  
without chains  
without chains*

*born in Bremen  
played guitar  
a young apprentice*

*building ships  
loved and married  
heard the call  
is attaining wisdom  
a pursuit of fools?*

*journeyed to Pakistan  
to study Koran  
taken into custody  
no reason why  
then a prison camp  
no freedom to breathe  
branded an enemy  
an enemy*

*(chorus)*

*no fault was found  
yet do they believe  
then flown home  
a version of free  
chained to the floor  
muzzled and bound  
a last humiliation  
left to endure  
they say I walk  
strange  
that may be so  
it’s been a long time  
since I walked at all*

*now I’m learning  
to walk  
without chains  
to talk  
without chains  
to breathe  
without chains  
to pray  
without chains  
to live  
without chains  
without chains*

**For five years  
our tax dollars  
paid guards  
to ask him his  
name and other  
basic questions  
endlessly,  
between  
beatings.  
And yet we  
do not all know  
his story or feel  
the shame of it**

*David Swanson is  
the Washington  
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**CT** *dauidswanson.org*

# REALITY COMES TO SHANGRI-LA

**Don North** visits Tibet to find the facts about the Dalai Lama, the struggle for freedom and tarnished Olympic ideals

**With the ground sinking and rising as much as a foot in winter freeze, liquid nitrogen is pumped around the rail bed to keep it stable**

*“Wreathed in the romance of centuries, Lhasa, the secret citadel of the undying Grand Lama, has stood shrouded in impenetrable mystery on the Roof-of-the-world, alluring yet defying our most adventurous travelers to enter her closed gates.” – L. Austine Waddell (Lhasa and its Mysteries) 1905*

**A**s the 9:30 train from Beijing to Lhasa pulls out of Golmud, starting the long climb into Tibet, it passes through an archway with a debatable slogan in Chinese characters: “The railroad is to create happiness for the people of all nationalities.”

Crossing through the Tanggula pass at 16,640 feet into the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region, pure oxygen as a light mist pours into the coaches. Three diesel locomotives power the rapid ascent. It’s the highest rail line in the world. Mt. Everest is 29,000 ft. Young Chinese Army recruits filling three of the train cars gulp as they inhale oxygen from tanks provided for peckish passengers. They laugh at the novelty of breathing oxygen as a

diversion from the long trip rather than any health necessity. So many battalions of the Chinese Army have taken the new train line into Tibet there is a separate terminal for them at Lhasa station.

The railroad is an astonishing feat of engineering. Completed last July at a cost of \$4.5 billion, more than half of its 710 miles is built on ground constantly in flux, sometimes frozen sometimes not. With the ground sinking and rising as much as a foot in winter freeze, liquid nitrogen is pumped around the rail bed to keep it stable. The Beijing government describes the railway as the center piece of Western China development strategy to bring economic levels of those along China’s wealthy eastern seaboard.

“Jackie Chan and the Warriors of Xian” plays full time on the flat screen TV in each compartment. Breakfast of porridge and fried eggs is served for \$3 in the restaurant car. Through thick windows that block the intense ultra-violet rays, you watch the Tibetan tundra and grazing Yak herds and jagged peaks in the background rolling by. There is an unreal quality to the scenery as if painted

on a wide canvas. In the evening the mostly Chinese travelers hunched over card games toast “Ganbeii” as they quaff Tsing-Tsau beer for \$1.

### **After forty years Lhasa at last**

In 1963 as a young trekker journalist in Asia I taught English to Tibetan “Tulkus”, young Monks found to be reincarnations of deceased Llamas. It was at an ashram or school in Dalhousie, India that looked out over the high mountain peaks of Tibet to the north. It was run by a British Bhuddist Nun Freda Bedi. Many of the Tulkus had fled into exile with the Dalai Lama on March 31, 1959. Learning English they regaled me with mysterious tales of Tibet, planting a life-long fascination with the enigma of Tibet. It took more than 40 years to finally fulfill my youthful dreams of visiting Tibet.

Lhasa in early December was calm and serene in the warm winter sun. There were few Chinese or foreign tourists and colorful Tibetan pilgrims flocked into the city to circumambulate the imposing Potala Palace, home of the Dalai Lamas since the 13th Century. But there were whispers of gathering clouds. My tour guide had saved the life of a wealthy British mountain climber and was rewarded with a college education in England. After a few days he spoke freely of the anger of Tibetans toward what he considered exploitation of the Han Chinese.

Visiting the Drepung Monastery a few miles up a steep mountain from the city, he told me with great glee about an incident here in October when resident Monks celebrated the award of the US Congressional Gold Medal to the exiled

Dalai Lama.

Clashes between the monks and over 1,000 police who surrounded the monastery broke out. The monks learned of the award through YouTube. A week before my visit, the USS Kitty Hawk was refused docking in Hongkong at Thanksgiving in retaliation for President George Bush honoring the Dalai Lama at the White House. But there were few police or army in the streets and Tibetans who spoke English approached me constantly to chat about life in Lhasa and how the new train was affecting their lives.

“The Chinese now want to make Tibetan culture profitable rather than defunct like Chairman Mao did,” laughed one man who said he was an English teacher. Turning more serious, he complained of the railway bringing in thousands of Han Chinese settlers. He said he was angry about the restrictions and rules governing monks in the monasteries and constant demands that Holy Men denounce the exiled Dalai Lama. He was reflecting concerns expressed by the Dalai Lama recently that the new train enabled numbers of homeless people, the unemployed and prostitutes, to arrive in Lhasa from China, eroding the character of the city and marginalizing its Tibetan residents.

My tour guide had a more charitable view: “Many of the 2,000 Chinese who arrive by train every day come from Shichuan Province, one of the most populated areas in China, and are only trying to escape poverty. Tibet is a pressure valve for all the unemployed Chinese. Tibet may be paying the price for China’s problems, but those problems are not the fault of the people coming to Tibet to make a living. But our culture has been

**A week before my visit, the USS Kitty Hawk was refused docking in Hongkong at Thanksgiving in retaliation for President George Bush honoring the Dalai Lama at the White House**

**There is about as much chance that Beijing would consider independence for Tibet as Washington would sanction independence for Texas**

packaged for tourism. Business is booming, but we Tibetans do not benefit”

Shopping for souvenirs in the “Bokhara” at the heart of old Lhasa, I noticed most goods on sale were made in Beijing or Nepal. My guide conceded that the railroad and new roads to remote mountain areas gave pilgrims a better chance to visit Lhasa, but he noted the illiteracy rate is four times that of neighboring Sichuan province and there are fewer vocational schools per capita than in the rest of China.

### **China's historic claim to Tibet**

The Chinese consider Tibet to be a part of China, as Texas is to the United States. But the history of the Chinese state is complex. The non-Chinese territories that now make up the western third of the nation – the deserts of Muslim Xinjiang and the plateau of Tibet – were not conquered by Chinese, but by the Mongol empire that swept China in the 13th Century.

The Ming Dynasty took little interest in Tibet. When the Manchus conquered China in 1644, they too brought Tibet under Beijing's rule. When the Manchu dynasty was overthrown in 1911, Tibet experienced independence for the next 40 years. Then, when the Communists took power in 1949, they invaded Tibet claiming “what was once ours is ours forever.” There is about as much chance that Beijing would consider independence for Tibet as Washington would sanction independence for Texas. Even the Dalai Lama does not insist on independence.

“Through all ages Tibet has held a paramount position among those regions of the world which have been

popularly invested with a veil of mystery because they are inaccessible and unknown,” wrote Sir Thomas Holdrich in 1906. This infatuation with Tibet in the West puzzles the Chinese. Jiang Zemin, when he ruled China, complained that he could not understand why the West, where education in science and technology has developed to a high level, could have any truck with backward and superstitious Tibet.

Orville Schell, former Dean of Journalism at Berkeley, in his book, *Virtual Tibet*, explains why the West is enamored of Tibet. “It was the dream of Shangi-La itself that was at stake. For many Westerners who had allowed themselves to dream the dream of Tibet, Chinese rule represented a paradise lost.”

Schell's book traces the power of the Tibetan myth, the books, the movies, and Hollywood stars who have taken up Tibet's cause. “When James Hilton's 1933 novel, *Lost Horizon*, was released as a film in 1937, it was the apotheosis of Tibet as fantasy realm. With it, the notion of that land as the paradisiacal Shangi-La entered both the imagination and the vocabulary of Western popular culture, becoming one of the most powerful utopian metaphors of our time.”

Interviewing a Tibetan monk eight years ago who was an extra in the film *Seven Years in Tibet* starring Brad Pitt, Schell is told, “This movie portrays what used to be. Then, people might have been poor and dressed in skins and rags, but they were proud and happy. But now this old Tibet is completely lost, except for here on these sets. Under the Chinese, maybe some Tibetans have electricity and cars, but they have lost their dignity and identity.”

The Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, aged 72, now in his 14th reincarnation, perpetuates the image of Tibet by a careful combination of spirituality and political acumen. He keeps the dream alive. And the more the Chinese denounce him, call him a “splittist” and the more they chastise countries, such as Germany and the United States, for honoring him, the more they empower him. The Dalai Lama’s criticism of China’s actions in Tibet continue to be tempered with his insistence that opposition must be non-violent. His appeal that the Tibetan struggle be peaceful contributed to his winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989.

When the Dalai Lama dies, it is unlikely Beijing will allow monks to freely find a 15th incarnation in some humble household on the Tibetan plateau with a young boy who fits the mysteries. China will want to pick the next one. China’s long-term strategy, which recent violence may have reinforced, is to wait for the Dalai Lama to die in the belief it can control his successor.

In 1995, China arrested the Panchen Lama, the number two in Tibetan Buddhism, six year old Gedun Nyima. He has not been seen since, but many Tibetans told me they believe he has fled to India. China named another Tibetan youth Gyaltsen Norbu, the son of party members as the replacement and controls his education and public duties. He is described by Tibetans as the “Gya Panchen”, meaning Chinese Panchen.

Traditionally the Panchen Lama names a new Dalai Lama, which would give the Chinese government control over the present Dalai Lama’s succession. The controversy around China’s installation of a “patriotic” Panchen Lama

over the Dalai Lama choice or reincarnation has for many Tibetans come to epitomize China’s domination and even desecration of Tibetan Buddhism and upon the Dalai Lama’s passing will no doubt cause new trouble. The Dalai Lama has suggested he might return as two Dalai Lamas or choose his own successor or even come back as a woman.

Dennis Lupez Jr., in *Prisoners of Shagri-La*, notes that incarnate Lamas are being discovered more frequently in Europe and America. Recently even action film star Steven Seagal was identified as the reincarnation of a Tibetan lama.

“In this way Tibetans have literally incorporated foreigners into their patronage sphere through their own version of colonialism. Rather than taking control of a nation, Tibetans are building an empire of individuals who, inhabited from birth by the spirit of a Tibetan saint, become, in effect Tibetans, regardless of ethnicity.”

### **Violent protest erupts in Lhasa**

On Monday, March 10th open protests began in Lhasa to mark the 49th anniversary of the failed Tibetan revolt against the Chinese Communist occupation and the Dalai Lama’s flight into exile. Police blocked monks from the Drepung Monastery from marching into the city.

When protestors with Tibetan flags joined the monks, 15 were arrested. It was a fairly typical protest and police response, but tempers continued to build on rumors that monks had been beaten.

On Tuesday police stopped another protest by monks from the Sera Monastery. By Wednesday the monasteries were closed to visitors. Early Friday the

**Open protests began in Lhasa to mark the 49th anniversary of the failed Tibetan revolt against the Chinese Communist occupation and the Dalai Lama’s flight into exile**

**The Dalai Lama called for calm and said he was prepared to meet with Chinese leaders, stating that he wants autonomy, not independence for Tibet**

14th as the police confronted protests from monks at the monasteries, tourist eyewitnesses say they saw a Tibetan man wielding two knives jump up on a police vehicle shouting and slashing. The vehicle was upended and set on fire. A Swiss tourist said he saw an elderly Chinese man clawed off his bicycle and his head smashed with a large rock.

A crowd of about 100 protestors, including what tourists described as “five people in monks’ robes”, attacked Chinese restaurants and a mosque. During the riots looters set fire to a clothing store, burning to death five employees. Such militant, orchestrated violent protest is not typical in a Buddhist society and may indicate foreign coordination, although Chinese authorities have not identified ringleaders other than to vilify the Dalai Lama in exile.

While the center of Lhasa descended into chaos, vastly outnumbered police and firefighters beat a retreat. Authorities claim 19 Chinese were killed and over 600 injured. In spite of strict controls over the flow of information out of Tibet the Chinese government could no longer deny the violence spilling over into surrounding areas.

Riots spread to the neighboring province of Gansu with demonstrators storming a government office. In the Tibetan-populated areas across western China mostly peaceful protests erupted in 49 cities. Tibet’s government in exile has said 140 people were killed in the rioting, while China has claimed a total of 22 deaths, 19 of them in Lhasa. The Chinese government accused the Dalai Lama of orchestrating the riots to wreck Beijing’s Olympic games.

On March 20th in Dharamsala, India,

the Dalai Lama called for calm and said he was prepared to meet with Chinese leaders, stating that he wants autonomy, not independence for Tibet.

### **Countdown to the Olympics**

Looming over the conflict is the fast approaching Beijing Olympics. Human rights activists have long made it known that they intend to use the Olympics to draw global attention to the Chinese government’s record of human rights abuses.

At the torch lighting ceremony in Olympia, Greece, the first official event of the Olympics, protestors broke through heavy security to unfurl a banner showing the Olympic rings as handcuffs and tried to stop the torch’s relay as it was carried from the site. In May plans call for the torch to be carried through Lhasa and up to the summit of Mount Everest. Human rights activist Wei Jingsheng wrote in the *Washington Post* that Beijing risks this Olympics being remembered like the 1936 games in Berlin, as a public relations boost for an oppressive regime.

My friend Peter Arnett, who seems to have survived as many reincarnations as the Dalai Lama, is now a visiting Professor of Journalism at Shantou University in southern China.

Peter writes: “I noticed from the beginning my students were all too willing to accept the government side of the case, and referred to Tibetan rioters as terrorists. There is clearly a strong nationalist element to their thinking. Some Chinese faculty members fault the government for not being more aware of the potential for trouble in Tibet as the Olympics approach. They also believe that more should have been made of the

“unprovoked” Tibetan attacks on the Han Chinese businesses in Lhasa. All the Chinese around here seem to be putting the success of the Olympics above any requirement to resolve the Tibet issue by negotiations.”

On March 30th the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, became the first world leader to announce she would not attend the Olympics in Beijing. Donald Tusk, Poland’s Prime Minister and President Vaclav Klaus of the Czech Republic also announced a boycott.

“The leadership could be riding a real tiger with the Tibet issue,” says David Shambaugh, director of the China policy program at George Washington University. “Various and sundry non-governmental human rights activists smell blood, and they will all be using Tibet to press their causes.”

Shambaugh characterizes the government’s attempt to manage its image in the aftermath of Tibet violence as “heavy handed”— resorting to vilification of the Dalai Lama and questioning motives of foreign critics.

“The Chinese government is not particularly adept at public diplomacy, as they define it as external propaganda and pursue it as such.”

### **‘One world, one dream’**

The hopeful motto of the 2008 China Olympics – One World, One Dream – dominates the skyline of every city in China but may become a mockery unless China can effectively deal with world opinion that has been fired by the Tibet problems and extend to the question of Darfur, and domestic human rights issues, before and after the games.

Officials in Beijing seem to fear en-

hancing political autonomy in Tibet that could incite demands from dozens of other ethnic or religious groups in China.

An unprecedented appeal by a group of thirty Chinese intellectuals in the wake of the Tibetan protests has urged the government to rethink its response to protest movements.

The organizer, Beijing writer Wang Lixiong offered a novel suggestion: “The most efficient route to peace in Tibet is through the Dalai Lama, whose return to Tibet would immediately alleviate a number of problems.

Much of the current ill will is a direct result of the Chinese government’s verbal attacks on the Dalai Lama, who for Tibetan monks has an incomparably lofty status. To demand that monks denounce him is about as practical as asking that they vilify their own parents.”

China’s leaders under Deng Xiaoping, decided in 1989 that their put down of protests in Tiananmen Square and Tibet was worth suffering humiliation abroad. The difference now is that China wants to play a different role as hosts of the Beijing Olympics – the role of a modern country embracing the world.

“One world, one dream” is in jeopardy unless the leaders of China can effectively and openly deal with the growing demands for reform. **CT**

*Don North, a former war correspondent with ABC and NBC News in SE Asia and the Middle East, is working on documentaries **Return to Guazapa**, an analysis of the disastrous post revolution El Salvador, and **Return to Dieppe**, a perspective on Canada’s worst military debacle 65 years ago. North can be reached at [Dnorth6743@aol.com](mailto:Dnorth6743@aol.com)*

**Much of the current ill will is a direct result of the Chinese government’s verbal attacks on the Dalai Lama**

# SHITSTORMS AND REALITY

Why does the media get so upset when a politician actually tells the truth about America's heartland? asks **Joe Bageant**

**Obama's remarks were not in the least controversial and just plain boring in terms of content. Certainly not newsworthy**

There seems to be no end to the media mediocrity we must suffer in this country. Now we have the Obama Guns, God and Bitterness shit storm, with the shit pouring forth from the same media scuppers (scuppers are outlet sewage blowholes on the sides of ships) as usual: *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, CNN.com, the Associated Press, Fox News, Reuters, Politico, the Lou Dobbs Show, Hardball, Olbermann's Countdown, The Atlantic.com, The DailyKos, TalkingPointsMemo.

And all because Obama mentioned something we've known for at least a couple of decades now: That the government has been fucking over the nation's heartland towns and the "little guy" Americans inhabiting them.

To quote Obama: "You go into these small towns in Pennsylvania and, like a lot of small towns in the Midwest, the jobs have been gone now for 25 years and nothing's replaced them. ... And they fell through the Clinton administration, and the Bush administration, and each successive administration has said that

somehow these communities are gonna regenerate and they have not."

So what the hell else is new?

Then Obama adds: "And it's not surprising when they get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them or anti-immigrant sentiment or anti-trade sentiment as a way to explain their frustrations."

While not precisely correct, it's a good enough generalization for an American audience not really listening anyway. Obama's remarks were not in the least controversial and just plain boring in terms of content. Certainly not newsworthy.

Yet he had no sooner closed his mouth than this media-manufactured hell broke loose. "Oh my gawd," they screamed. "This guy has the unmitigated gall to suggest that their might be some bitterness out here in the lily white realms of Grant Wood, grange halls and Methodist church suppers! Right here in River City!" – where the combination of God rhetoric and Chamber of Commerce boosterism have managed to ban the word from public discourse. Even

the mention of it can be explosive, simply because there is so much of it stuffed inside working folks, inside the lockbox of denial that comes with being the citizen of a culture in collapse.

Put more simply, the self-serving “blogger-reporters” and Hillary Clinton media machine had managed to kick Obama in the balls from behind.

Along with the bitterness charges came the guns and God stuff. Well, we Red State rubes out here in the working world do own a lot of guns, though very few of us “cling” to them in the desperate sense the speech implied. As to what Obama described as our clinging to religion, we do not so much cling to it as it clings to us – as a vestige of our heritage. It’s neither a good nor bad thing in and of itself, but mighty damned useful to fearmongering politicians and the screen writers of television crime shows. Hell, even I made a few bucks writing about its nastier side in my book, *Deer Hunting With Jesus*.

### **Like swapping spit**

For me, listening to politicians talk, then listening to the media talk about politicians talking, rates right up there with swapping spit with a gingivitis victim. I do not like nor trust nor much listen to Hillary, McCain or Obama. And I wouldn’t vote for any of the three even if they knocked on my door bearing a bucket of smoked pork ribs and a bottle of Jack Daniels.

However, after hearing Obama’s March “race speech,” in Philadelphia, I can understand the Obama cult a little better. Although his speech was full of national clichés and meaningless soaring rhetoric, somehow it was still a god-

damned good one, and right on in my opinion. Maybe I liked it because, like the poverty victim he brought forth in typical Democratic Pity Party fashion, I too have eaten mustard and relish sandwiches growing up (or when lacking those condiments, plain sugar on white bread.) I loved the speech. But I still ain’t drinking the Kool-Aid.

In any case, Obama has proven you cannot even use the innocuous word ‘bitterness’ in conjunction with the national lie of white American culture. In the officially sanctioned media lexicon, Blacks can be angry, disillusioned and even bitter enough to burn down Watts. But the white race, being blessed by a Christian god and divine providence, never harbor bitterness in their hearts.

The reason the word ‘bitterness’ has caused such horror is because what is really going on out there is the sprouting seeds of class animosity. And no candidate or pontificating media mugwump dares touch that one because they are in the class that benefits from our classist society.

I’m from Winchester, Virginia, the very kind of place and people Obama was talking about when the rotten tomatoes started hailing down. So allow me to say this: we white members of the sweating class have been working alongside laboring immigrants, legal and illegal, for decades and have not been killing them with our personal arms in a rage of antipathy, in so far as I know. The reason, near as I can tell, is that we do not give a happy shit one way or another because most of us do not have interest or knowledge enough to fester on the topic. Nor the time. When we fester on stuff, it’s about making car payments

**The reason the word bitterness has caused such horror is because what is really going on out there is the sprouting seeds of class animosity**

## HOME TRUTHS

**No normal person can stand, much less relish, six more months of all this. But we will wallow in it all for the same reason a hog spends most of its life knee deep in shit**

and trying not to default on our mortgages. Working two and sometimes three jobs per household does not leave much time to develop political opinions, much less informed ones. I'd be willing to bet there is not a working class person within four blocks of where I now sit who has even heard of this media manufactured Obama fracas.

Yesterday Smokey, the apartment maintenance man next door, helped me haul a dead washing machine to the city dump. I asked him what he thought about the Obama thing.

"Huh?" he said.

He spoke for millions.

Nobody out here that I know particularly "hates niggers", blames Mexicans or is willing to use their personal firearms against any of those people, unless they find one of them crack crazed and coming in through a bedroom window at 2am, in which case there will be a loud boom, and the perp is gonna look like a pizza splattered up against the wall. Otherwise we just stand before the incompressible system that fucks us blind. And in that there is certain bitterness.

### **False drama**

Let's get to the nub of this thing here: Obama, Hillary and McCain are farting through silk while playing out their roles in our theatrical state's false drama called presidential elections, while smug and media sanctioned pundits snark from

the edge of the proscenium arc of politics, each hoping to draw enough attention to have his or her own proscenium in that national cathedral of the American consciousness – television.

Before too long this earth shaking "incident" will be drowned out by the escalating noise of the election year. Then even the election's hoopla will all be wiped away when Oprah Winfrey, in one of her ever grander spectacles of televised largess, gives away the city of Detroit to the sixth grade author of the most heart-rending essay on black poverty.

November is still six months away. No normal person can stand, much less relish, six more months of all this. But we will wallow in it all for the same reason a hog spends most of its life knee deep in shit. It has no other choice, it has plenty of company, and doesn't know any other way of life.

One of these days, when it comes to such things as the thundering non-controversy of Obama's remarks, the blogosphere and the media may start asking the right kinds of questions. The kind Smokey asked me after I explained the Obama controversy to him:

"Who the fuck cares?"

**CT**

*Joe Bageant is the author of **Deer Hunting With Jesus**. His essays are archived at [www.coldtype.net/joe.html](http://www.coldtype.net/joe.html) His web site is [www.joebageant.com](http://www.joebageant.com)*

**READ DAVID MICHAEL GREEN**

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# CATCH 2,200

**Tom Engelhardt** has nine propositions on the US air war against Iraq

**L**et's start with a few simple propositions. **First**, the further away you are from the ground, the clearer things are likely to look, the more god-like you are likely to feel, the less human those you attack are likely to be to you. How much more so, of course, if you, the "pilot," are actually sitting at a consol at an air base near Las Vegas, identifying a "suspect" thousands of miles away via video monitor, "following" that suspect into a house, and then letting loose a Hellfire missile from a Predator drone cruising somewhere over Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, or the tribal areas of Pakistan.

**Second**, however "precise" your weaponry, however "surgical" your strike, however impressive the grainy snuff-film images you can put on television, war from the air is, and will remain, a most imprecise and destructive form of battle.

**Third**, in human terms, distance does not enhance accuracy. The further away you are from a target, the more likely it is that you will have to guess who or what it is, based on spotty, difficult to interpret or bad information, not to speak

of outright misinformation; whatever the theoretical accuracy of your weaponry, you are far more likely to miscalculate, make mistakes, mistarget, or target the misbegotten from the air.

**Fourth**, if you are conducting war this way and you are doing so in heavily populated urban neighborhoods, as is now the case almost every day in Iraq, then civilians will predictably die "by mistake" almost every day: the child who happens to be on the street but just beyond camera range; the "terrorist suspect" or insurgent who looks, at a distance, like he's planting a roadside bomb, but is just scavenging; the neighbors who happen to be sitting down to dinner in the apartment or house next to the one you decide to hit.

**Fifth**, since World War II, air power has been the American way of war.

**Sixth**, since November 2001, the Bush administration has increasingly relied on air power in its Global War on Terror to "take out" the enemy, which has meant regular air strikes in cities and villages, and the no less regular, if largely unrecorded, deaths of civilians.

**However "precise" your weaponry, however "surgical" your strike, however impressive the grainy snuff-film images you can put on television, war from the air is, and will remain, a most imprecise and destructive form of battle**

## DEATH IN THE SKY

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**From the point of view of your actual enemies, you can't bomb, missile, and strafe often enough, because when you do so, you are more or less guaranteed to create their newest recruits**

**Seventh**, in Afghanistan and especially in Iraq (as well as in the tribal areas along the Pakistani border), the use of air power has been “surging.” You can essentially no longer read an account of a skirmish or battle in one of Iraq’s cities in which air power is not called in. This means (see propositions 1-4) a war of constant “mistakes,” and of regularly mentioned “investigations” into the deaths of “militants” and “insurgents” who, on the ground, seem to morph into children, women, and elderly men being pulled from the rubble.

**Eighth**, force creates counterforce. The application of force, especially from the air, is a reliable engine for the creation of enemies. It is a force multiplier (and not just for U.S. forces either). Every time an air strike is called in anywhere on the planet, anyone who orders it should automatically assume that left in its wake will be grieving, angry husbands, wives, sisters, brothers, relatives, friends – people vowing revenge, a pool of potential candidates filled with the anger of genuine injustice. From the point of view of your actual enemies, you can't bomb, missile, and strafe often enough, because when you do so, you are more or less guaranteed to create their newest recruits.

**Ninth**, U.S. air power has, in the last six and a half years, been an effective force in a war for terror, not against it.

### **Who's counting?**

What does this mean in practice? It means something simple and relentless; it means dead people you might not have chosen to kill, but that you are responsible for killing nonetheless – and even if you don't know that, or are un-

willing to acknowledge it, others do know and will draw the logical conclusions.

What does this mean in practice? Consider just a typical collection of some of the small reports on air strikes in Iraq that have slipped into our world, barely noticed, in recent days:

Six U.S.-allied Sunni fighters from the “Awakening” movement were reportedly killed in strikes by an AH-64 Apache helicopter on two checkpoints in the city of Samarra on March 22. (“The U.S. military denied the checkpoint it attacked... was manned by friendly members of the so-called awakening councils and said those killed were behaving suspiciously in an area recently struck by a roadside bomb... It... said the incident was under investigation... AP Television News footage of the aftermath showed awakening council members loading bodies into a pickup.”)

Fifteen people in a single family were reportedly killed by U.S. helicopters in the city of Baquba in northern Iraq on March 23rd. (“The US military forces were not available to comment on the reports...“)

In Tikrit, Saddam Hussein's hometown, five civilians, including a judge, Munaf Mehdi, were reportedly killed and ten wounded from strikes by “fixed-wing aircraft” in a “battle with suspected al-Qaeda Sunni Arab militants” on March 26. (“Preliminary assessment,” according to the U.S. military, “indicates that despite coalition forces' efforts to protect them, several civilians were injured or killed during the ensuing gun-battle.”)

According to the Iraqi police, a U.S. plane strafed a house in the southern

city of Basra, killing eight civilians, including two women and a child on March 29th.

According to Iraqi police sources, five people, including four policemen were killed and three wounded when U.S. helicopters struck the city of Hilla in southern Iraq. According to another report, two police cars were also destroyed and an ambulance fired upon.

A U.S. F/A-18 carried out a “precision strike” against a house in Basra, reportedly killing at least three civilians, two men and an elderly woman, while burying a father, mother, and young boy in the rubble on April 3rd. (“Coalition forces are unaware of any civilians killed in the strike but are currently looking into the matter,” the military said... Associated Press Television News showed cranes and rescue workers searching for survivors in the concrete rubble from the two-story house that was leveled in the Shiite militia stronghold of Qibla.”)

In most of these cases, the facts remain in dispute (if anyone, other than the U.S. military, even cares to dispute them); the numbers of dead may, in the end, prove inaccurate; and the equivalent of he says/she says is unlikely to be settled because, most of the time, no reporter will follow up or investigate. Such cases generally follow a pattern: The U.S. military issues a brief battle description in which so many militants/insurgents/terrorists have been taken out from the air; local officials or witnesses claim that the dead were, in part or whole, ordinary citizens; the U.S. military offers a denial that civilians were killed; if the story doesn't die, the military announces that an investigation is underway, which no one generally ever

hears about again. Only on rare occasions, in our world, do such incidents actually rise to the level of real news that anyone attends to.

There may be an Iraq Coalition Casualty Count website and an Iraq Body Count website, but there is no Afghan version of the same, nor is there a global body count ([www.gbc.com](http://www.gbc.com)) to consult on such War on Terror civilian deaths from the air.

Usually, when such events recur, there aren't even names to put with the dead bodies and the reports themselves drop almost instantaneously beneath the waves (of news) without ever really catching our attention. Even if you believe that ours is the only world that really matters, that we are the only people whose lives have real value, that doesn't mean such deaths won't matter to you in the long run.

After all, what we don't know, or don't care to know, others care greatly about. Who forgets when a loved one is suddenly killed in such a manner? Even if we aren't counting bodies in the air-war subsection of the President's Global War on Terror, others are. Those whom we think of, if at all, as “collateral damage” know just what's happened to them and to their neighbors. And they have undoubtedly drawn the obvious conclusions.

### **Our “strike weapons” and theirs**

Here's the sorry reality: Such occurrences in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere in the “arc” of territory that the Bush administration has, in a mere few years, helped set aflame are the norm. Our “mistakes,” that is, are legion and, in the process of making them, our planes,

**Those whom we think of, if at all, as “collateral damage” know just what's happened to them and to their neighbors. And they have undoubtedly drawn the obvious conclusions**

## DEATH IN THE SKY

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**One day, out of the blue, death arrives from the air. It arrives in a moment of ultimate terror. It kills innocent civilians who were simply living their lives**

drones, and helicopters have killed villagers by the score, attacked a convoy of friendly Afghan “elders,” and blown away wedding parties. For us, “incidents” like these pass by in an instant, but not for those who are on the receiving end.

The attacks of 9/11 are usually not placed in such a context. We consider ourselves special, even unique, for having experienced them. But think of them another way: One day, out of the blue, death arrives from the air. It arrives in a moment of ultimate terror. It kills innocent civilians who were simply living their lives.

This happened to us once in a manner so spectacular, so devastating as to make global headlines. But small-scale versions of this happen regularly to people in that “arc of instability” – and, if there were to be a global body count organization for such events, it would long ago have toted up a death toll that reached past that of September 11, 2001.

Let’s remember that, after 9/11, Americans, from the President on down, spent months, if not years in mourning, performing rites of remembrance, and swearing revenge against those who had done this to us. Do we not imagine that others, even when the spotlight isn’t on them, react similarly? Do we not think that they, too, are capable of swearing revenge and acting accordingly?

### **Air surge**

The above list of incidents covers just a couple of weeks in one embattled country – and just the moments that made it into minor news reports that I happened to stumble across. But if you read reports from Iraq carefully these days, few

describing U.S. military operations in that country seem to lack at least a sentence or two on air operations – on what is really a little noticed “air surge” over that country’s cities and especially the heavily populated slum “suburb” of eastern Baghdad, Sadr City (once known as Saddam City) largely controlled by Muqtada al-Sadr’s Mahdi Army militia. With perhaps two and a half million inhabitants, if it were a separate city, it would be the country’s second largest.

Here, for instance, are a few lines from a recent *Los Angeles Times* piece by Tina Susman on escalating fighting in Baghdad: “American helicopters fired at least four Hellfire missiles and an Air Force jet dropped a bomb on a suspected militia target... A U.S. military spokesman in Baghdad, Lt. Col. Steven Stover, rejected Iraqi allegations that U.S. airstrikes and gunfire have killed mainly civilians. ‘There might be some civilians that are getting caught, but for the most part, we’re killing the bad guys.’ ‘We’re very precise,’ he said, adding that many airstrikes had been called off when it was not possible to get a ‘clean hit’ that would avoid hitting noncombatants.” Or this from Sameer N. Yacoub of the Associated Press: “The U.S. military said one of its drones launched a Hellfire missile during the night at two gunmen shooting at government forces in a different part of Sadr City.” Or this: “Three US airstrikes in northeastern Baghdad have killed 12 suspected gunmen and wounded 15 civilians, Iraqi police and US military say.”

Each of these came out while this piece was being written, as did this: According to the AP, air strikes in a remote province of Afghanistan aimed at a war-

lord allied with the Taliban may have killed numerous civilians. (“Other provincial leaders said many civilians were killed in the hours-long clash, which included airstrikes in the remote villages of Shok and Kendal... U.S. officials and the Afghan Defense Ministry have denied that any civilians were killed.”)

Whatever happened in these latest air attacks, the deaths of civilians are not some sideline result of the War on Terror; they lie at its heart. If your care is safety – a subject brought up repeatedly by Senators who wanted to know from U.S. commander General David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker this week whether the surge had made “us” safer – then, the answer is: This does not make you safer.

### **Catch 2,200**

And yet, don’t expect this counterproductive way of war to end any time soon. After all, the Air Force already has underway its “2018 bomber,” due for delivery the same year that, according to the chief American trainer of Iraqi forces, Lt. Gen. James Dubic, the Iraqi army will theoretically be able to guard the country’s frontiers effectively. And don’t forget the 2018 bomber’s successor, “a true ‘next generation’ long-range strike weapon”

that “may be a traditional bomber or an exotic ‘system of systems,’ with features such as hypersonic speed.” Maybe by then, the Iraqis will actually be successfully defending their borders.

Until then, think of the U.S. air war for terror as a Catch 2,200 – every application of force from the air resulting in the creation of a counterforce on the ground, another kind of “strike weapon” for the future, while those collateral bodies pile ever higher. Perhaps, by 2018 or 2035, worldbodycount.com will be operative. **CT**

*Tom Engelhardt, who runs the Nation Institute’s Tomdispatch.com, is the co-founder of the American Empire Project. His book, **The End of Victory Culture** (University of Massachusetts Press), has been updated in a newly issued edition that deals with victory culture’s crash-and-burn sequel in Iraq.*

*[Note: The invaluable website Antiwar.com was especially invaluable this time around when it came to tracking news accounts of recent U.S. air attacks. Please note, though, that the dates given in the piece for the attacks are approximate. All I had were the datelines on news stories, which may not reflect the actual day of each attack.]*

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# THE OTHER MILITARY DRAFT

Joshua Frank meets a sailor who found himself in the army

**"The back door draft is real, for sure, but here we are being shipped off to Iraq to basically serve in the infantry. It's ridiculous"**

**T**here sure as hell is a draft going on," the passenger sitting next to me said begrudgingly as the flight attendant handed him a ginger ale on our way in to Los Angeles last week. "I signed up to be in the Navy, not the damn Army."

It will be his third deployment to Iraq in four years but his first to be served on shore. Thousands of Navy and Air Force personnel are now serving non-traditional roles in Iraq – posts they never signed up for.

Steven, who asked I not use his last name in print, said he's to receive six weeks of weapons training at a California Army base before being flown over to Iraq for a year-long deployment.

"We've all heard of the stop-loss policy, there's even a new movie about it, but few know about what else is happening in our armed forces right now," Steven explained. "The back door draft is real, for sure, but here we are being shipped off to Iraq to basically serve in the infantry. It's ridiculous."

The Department of Defense reports that sailors and Air Force members are

carrying out many different missions in Iraq, from traditional duties in the air and sea to construction jobs, medical operations, civil affairs, custom inspection, security and detention operations. Most are promised non-combat roles in Iraq, but many have found themselves to be in harm's way once they arrive.

In 2007 the Navy sent roughly 2,200 "individual augmentees", as the service calls them, to handle combat-related duties with Marine and Army units stationed in Iraq. As of early April, 2008, 92 Navy and 46 Air Force personnel had been killed in Iraq and Afghanistan, with those numbers sure to rise as the U.S. troop surge continues into its second year.

On March 31, 400 Navy reservists who had received training at military bases in Virginia were shipped back to Iraq. "The good news and bad news about this is that we are out doing things that our people weren't originally trained for," said Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. T. Michael Moseley in a speech last year.

Such a trend has increased over the past several years. In 2006, for example,

there were 4000 Air Force members in Iraq, but that number has jumped significantly. Now the Pentagon reports that over 6000 are to serve in the country by year's end.

"Technically, these combat-related assignments do not violate service members' contracts," said Lawrence Korb, who handled manpower as assistant secretary of defense during the Reagan administration. "But many ... are not volunteering for these jobs – they're being told to do them."

### Falling numbers

Military recruitment numbers across the board are dwindling, and as result all branches of the service are being overextended to maintain current troop levels in Iraq. Aside from combat-related roles, however, sailors and Air Force members have been deployed in order to protect

U.S. economic interests in the region – from oil pipelines to Halliburton's numerous reconstruction projects.

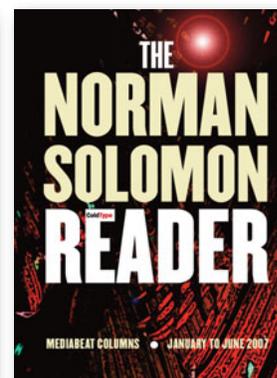
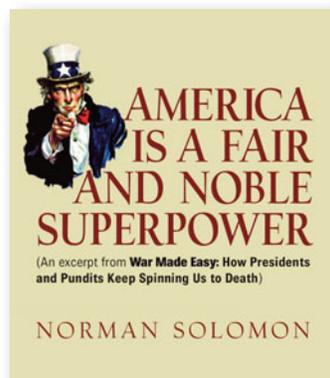
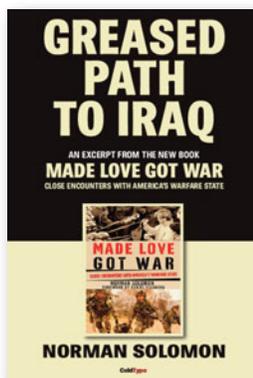
And that's what seems to have sailors like Steven irked at the troop surge and his new job in Iraq.

"It's a draft, plain and simple. I don't care what they call it," Steven told me as our plane landed at LAX. "I didn't sign up for the Navy to be in the Army. But I'm going because I don't feel I have a choice. I have children to feed and a mortgage to pay." **CT**

**"I didn't sign up for the Navy to be in the Army. But I'm going because I don't feel I have a choice"**

*Joshua Frank is co-editor of Dissident Voice and author of **Left Out! How Liberals Helped Reelect George W. Bush** (Common Courage Press, 2005), and along with Jeffrey St. Clair, the editor of the forthcoming **Red State Rebels**, to be published by AK Press in June 2008.*

## READ THE BEST OF NORMAN SOLOMON



<http://www.coldtype.net/solomon.html>

# THE UNBREAKABLE PROMISE

In a speech to South African students, **John Pilger** reminds us that we need to change the way we perceive the world

**"I looked around," he said, "and there in the ditch next to me was this bird-like woman, who suddenly pulled out a bottle of gin, took a swig, then went over the top and marched straight into the moving line of vehicles. It was the one of the bravest things I've seen"**

**O**n my wall in London is a photograph I have never grown tired of looking at. Indeed, I always find it thrilling to behold. You might even say it helps keep me going. It is a picture of a lone woman standing between two armoured vehicles, the notorious 'hippos', as they rolled into Soweto. Her arms are raised. Her fists are clenched. Her thin body is both beckoning and defiant of the enemy. It was May Day 1985 and the uprising against apartheid had begun.

The fine chronicler of apartheid, Paul Weinberg, took that photograph. He described crouching in a ditch at the roadside as the hippos entered Soweto. People were being shot with rubber bullets and real bullets. "I looked around," he said, "and there in the ditch next to me was this bird-like woman, who suddenly pulled out a bottle of gin, took a swig, then went over the top and marched straight into the moving line of vehicles. It was the one of the bravest things I've seen."

Paul's photograph brings to mind one of my favourite quotations. "The struggle

of people against power," wrote Milan Kundera, "is the struggle of memory against forgetting." Moments such as that woman's bravery ought to be unforgettable, for they symbolise all the great movements of resistance to oppression: in South Africa, the Freedom Charter, Nelson Mandela at the Rivonia Trial, the heroism of Steve Biko, the women who somehow kept their children alive on freezing hillsides in places like Dimbaza where they had been removed and declared redundant, and beyond, the Jews who rose against the Nazis in the Warsaw Ghetto and the Palestinians who just the other day smashed down the walls of their prison in Gaza.

Unforgettable? For some, yes. But there are those who prefer we celebrate a system of organised forgetting: of unbridled freedom for the few and obedience for the many; of socialism for the rich, and capitalism for the poor. They prefer that the demonstrable power of ordinary people is committed to what George Orwell called the memory hole. You may ask how we can possibly forget when we live in an information age?



**Defiant: Soweto, 1985 – A lone woman protests as the soldiers occupying her township roll by in military 'hippos.'**

PICTURE: PAUL WEINBERG

The answer to that is another question: Who are “we”? Unlike you and me, most human beings have never used a computer and never owned a telephone. And those of us who are technologically blessed often confuse information with media, and corporate training with knowledge.

These are probably the most powerful illusions of our times. We even have a new vocabulary, in which noble concepts have been corporatised and given deceptive, perverse, even opposite meanings. “Democracy” is now the free market – a concept itself bereft of freedom. “Reform” is now the denial of reform. “Economics” is the relegation of most human endeavour to material value, a

bottom line. Alternative models that relate to the needs of the majority of humanity end up in the memory hole. And “governance” – so fashionable these days – means an economic system approved in Washington, Brussels and Davos. “Foreign policy” is service to the dominant power. Conquest is “humanitarian intervention”. Invasion is “nation-building”.

### **Good guys and bad guys**

Every day, we breathe the hot air of these pseudo ideas with their pseudo truths and pseudo experts. They set the limits of public debate within the most advanced societies. They determine who are the good guys and who are the bad

**Most human beings have never used a computer and never owned a telephone. And those of us who are technologically blessed often confuse information with media, and corporate training with knowledge**

**We are constantly told that September 11, 2001, was a day that changed the world and – according to John McCain – justifies a 100-year war against America's perceived enemies**

guys. They manipulate our compassion and our anger and make many of us feel there is nothing we can do. Take the “war on terror”. This is an entirely bogus idea that actually means a war of terror. Its aim is to convince people in the rich world that we all must live in an enduring state of fear: that Muslim fanatics are threatening our civilisation.

In fact, the opposite is true. The threat to our societies comes not from Al Qaeda but from the terrorism of powerful states. Ask the people of Iraq, who in five years ago have seen the physical and social destruction of their country. President Bush calls this “nation-building”. Ask the people of Afghanistan, who have been bombed back into the arms of the Taliban – this is known in the West as a “good war”. Or the people of Gaza, who are denied water, food, medicines and hope by the forces of so-called civilisation. The list is long and the arithmetic simple. The greatest number of victims of this war of terror are not Westerners, but Muslims: from Iraq to Palestine, to the refugee camps of Lebanon and Syria and beyond.

We are constantly told that September 11, 2001, was a day that changed the world and – according to John McCain – justifies a 100-year war against America's perceived enemies. And yet, while the world mourned the deaths of 3,000 innocent Americans, the UN routinely reported that the mortality rate of children dead from the effects of extreme poverty had not changed. The figure for September 11th 2001 was more than 36,000 children. That is the figure every day. It has not changed. It is not news.

The difference between the two tragedies is that the people who died in

the Twin Towers in New York were worthy victims, and the thousands of children who die every day are unworthy victims. That is how many of us are programmed to perceive the world. Or so the programmers hope. In the information age, these children are expendable. In South Africa, they are the children of the evicted and dispossessed, children carrying water home from a contaminated dam. They are not the children in the gated estates with names like Tuscan. They are not covered by the theories of GEAR or NEPAD or any of the other acronyms of power given respectability by journalism and scholarship.

It seems to me vital that young people today equip themselves with an understanding of how this often subliminal propaganda works in modern societies – liberal societies: societies with proud constitutions and freedom of speech, like South Africa. For it says that freedom from poverty – the essence of true democracy – is a freedom too far.

### **Obligation and advantage**

In South Africa, new graduates have, it seems to me, both a special obligation and an advantage. The advantage they have is that the past is still vividly present. Only last month, the National Institute for Occupational Health revealed that in the last six years deadly silicosis had almost doubled among South Africa's gold miners. There are huge profits in this industry. Many of the miners are abandoned and die in their 40s – their families too poor to afford a burial.

Why is there still no proper prevention and compensation? And although Desmond Tutu pleaded with them, not

one company boss in any of the apartheid-propping industries ever sought an amnesty from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. They were that confident that for things to change on the surface, things would remain the same.

For young graduates these days, there is a temptation to set themselves apart from the conditions I have described and from the world some have come from. As members of a new privileged elite, they have an obligation, I believe, to forge the vital link with the genius of everyday life and the resourcefulness and resilience of ordinary people.

### **Finishing the job**

This will allow them, in whatever way you choose, to finish the job begun by Nelson Mandela and Steve Biko and the brave woman in the photograph. In a nutshell, it means standing by one's compatriots in order to bring true freedom to South Africa.

Those who led the struggle against racial apartheid often said no. They dissented. They caused trouble. They took risks. They put people first. And they were the best that people can be. Above all, they had a social and political imagination that unaccountable power al-

ways fears. And they had courage. It is this imagination and courage that opens up real debate with real information and allows ordinary people to reclaim their confidence to demand their human and democratic rights.

Oscar Wilde wrote: "Disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history, is man's original virtue". I read the other day that the South African police calculated that the number of protests across the country had doubled in just two years to more than 10,000 every year. That may be the highest rate of dissent in the world. That's something to be proud of – just as the Freedom Charter remains something to be proud of. Let me remind you how it begins: "We, the people of South Africa, declare that our country belongs to everyone...". And that, as Nelson Mandela once said, was the "unbreakable promise". Isn't it time the promise was kept? **CT**

*This is an edited version of an address in March 2008 by journalist and author **John Pilger** to graduating students at Rhodes University at Grahamstown, South Africa, which awarded him an honorary doctorate in literature. His latest book, **Freedom Next Time**, is now out in paperback*

**Those who led the struggle against racial apartheid often said no. They dissented. They caused trouble. They took risks. They put people first**

**READ THE BEST OF JOE BAGEANT**

<http://coldtype.net/joe.html>

# THE PAY FOR PERFORMANCE CHARADE

Profits are down, but not the bosses' salaries. They keep going up and up, says **Sam Pizzigati**

**The CEOs of the nation's 10 largest financial services companies, notes the *Times*, collected \$320 million in pay last year. The companies they led wrote off an astounding \$55 billion in mortgage losses**

**T**he *New York Times*, *USA Today*, the Bloomberg news service, and the *Wall Street Journal* have, over recent weeks, all reported their CEO pay figures for 2007, and the figures show the same old story. Top executive pay has once again ballooned – up 12 percent, on average, to \$12.1 million, says Bloomberg.

These averages still only hint at the vast sums pouring into CEO pace-setter pockets.

Merrill Lynch's John Thain, the *New York Times* reports, collected \$83.8 million for his labors in 2007. Oracle business software CEO Larry Ellison, adds *USA Today*, walked off with \$61.2 million in annual pay. But Ellison also cashed out stock options he had amassed over prior years – and pocketed another \$181.8 million in the process.

The latest CEO pay reports have also, once again, prompted still another round of analyst angst over Corporate America's continuing willingness to pay handsomely, even extravagantly, for poor executive performance.

“True links between pay and perform-

ance,” the *Times* observes, last year “remained scarce,” a reality the paper dubbed the “most irksome” aspect of this year's CEO pay numbers.

Evidence for that observation abounds. Residential construction giant KB Home, for instance, lost nearly a billion dollars in 2007. But company CEO Jeffrey Mezger somehow merited a \$6 million cash bonus.

Or how about Home Depot, where net income fell 23 percent in 2007 and compensation for the company's CEO, Steve Odland, rose 85 percent – to \$18 million. And don't forget Sprint Nextel CEO Gary Forsee. He retired under pressure at year's end, but not before garnering almost \$40 million in annual remuneration. He's now collecting a \$84,325 monthly pension.

Isolated cases? Hardly. The CEOs of the nation's 10 largest financial services companies, notes the *Times*, collected \$320 million in pay last year. The companies they led wrote off an astounding \$55 billion in mortgage losses.

In response to all this, commentators and reformers in the institutional in-

vestor community are demanding, for the umpteenth year in a row, that corporate boards do more to hold their top execs to the pay-for-performance fire.

“We’re not against pay,” declares Dennis Johnson, a heavyweight with Calpers, the powerful California pension fund. “But we are certainly against pay for failure, or for just showing up.”

Corporate board members, for their part, are vowing to clamp down.

“We get the message,” the top gun at the trade journal for corporate directors, Jeff Cunningham, told *USA Today*. “Directors are at the negotiating table with their CEOs, looking for very rational pay schemes; no funny business, no games – just pure performance-driven pay planning.”

In other words, next year nothing will change – because the annual hand-wringing over “pay for performance” obscures the real paycheck rot in Corporate America. Making sure that top execs only get paid for “performing” won’t end that root rot. We face a much bigger challenge: making sure that corporate paychecks recognize the contributions of all “performers.”

Corporations today seldom do that. Instead they recognize – and reward – only the executive suite contribution to corporate achievement. In 2007, U.S. worker average weekly wages increased by 3.6 percent. Average CEO take-homes, not counting stock-option cash-outs, soared over three times faster.

Reformers and commentators who insist on “pay for performance” at the executive level tend not to angst about this discrepancy.

Indeed, many reformers operate from the same assumption that guides corpo-

rate boards. They credit corporate success to executive success. They would consider a 10 percent CEO pay hike a fitting “pay for performance” reward at a company where shareholders saw a 10 percent on their investment – even if workers at that same enterprise received no pay increase at all.

In Corporate America’s current compensation calculus, in effect, only CEOs count. These CEOs need not prove that their personal labors have contributed more to corporate success than anyone else’s labors. If things go well, these top executives simply get all the credit – and all the big bucks.

And if things go poorly? In that case, top executives only get the big bucks.

### **Cinderella’s pillow cases**

The recession has not yet hit Manhattan, at least not that part of the city the super-rich call home. In 2008’s first quarter, sales of residential properties costing at least \$10 million bounded up 318 percent over similar sales one year earlier. Over 2008’s first three months, realtors registered four sales over \$30 million. In 2007, they only sold five \$30 million-plus properties the entire year. The jewel of the New York luxury residential scene: the new limestone 15 Central Park West, where condos are going for \$6,000 per square foot . . .

The recession has hit Beverly Hills. But only the car dealers, real estate agents, and boutique owners who cater to the super-rich seem to have noticed. Reuters recently surveyed luxury purveyors in the Los Angeles area and found definite signs of a consumption slowdown. Notes the general manager of one high-end local auto dealership: “Some

**We face a much bigger challenge: making sure that corporate paychecks recognize the contributions of all “performers.” Corporations today seldom do that. Instead they recognize – and reward – only the executive suite contribution to corporate achievement**

## ANOTHER WORLD

**"When you lose \$20 million from your \$100 million portfolio, you can still afford that new Bentley, but you're probably not in the mood to buy it."**

clients would have bought a Rolls-Royce and a Bentley every 12 months, but now they've cut it down to buying two cars in an 18-month period." But demand on other spending fronts remains strong. Customized Fitness Systems reports "business as usual." The company's specialty: home gyms that run \$1 million to install . . .

Over on the East Coast, the debate over whether luxury has become "recession-proof" appears to be heating up. The nation's two top luxury-magazine chains last year both saw ad pages increase, and one industry leader, *Robb Report* publisher David Arnold, scoffs at worries about a slowdown. For affluents with fortunes over \$30 million, says Arnold, "even a 5 percent loss doesn't really impact their lifestyle." But *Wall Street Journal* wealth beat reporter Robert Frank begs to differ. Only 50,000 Americans have that much wealth, he argues, "surely not enough to support 20 new luxury magazines and all the mass-luxury companies that fund them." Sums up Frank: "When you lose \$20 million from your \$100 million portfolio, you can still afford that new Bentley, but you're probably not in the mood to buy it."

Play-time – for the progeny of plutocrats – can be awfully expensive. In London, reports the *Sunday Times*, deep

pockets are shelling out \$34,000 for playhouses that feature stained glass windows and \$140,000 for bedrooms fully furnished in a Cinderella or Sir Galahad theme. Sheets and pillowcases come extra. Vikas Shah directs corporate strategy for one UK company that offers children's bedsheets with 22-carat gold sewn in. Pillowcases in this line run \$2,400 each. Explains Shah: "The level where people have liquid cash to spend on expensive home products is increasing year on year, and what people buy for their children is becoming more competitive, whether it's schools, toys, clothes, or bed linen."

"Inner London," the European Union statistics office reports, has become three-times wealthier than the rest of Europe, one reason why demand for traditional British butlers is ratcheting up to record levels. Nearly 2 million men and women, says the London-based Work Foundation, now labor in UK domestic service, the most since the Victorian Age. The big attraction: Top butlers can now make about \$150,000 a year. A four-week butler training course offered outside London now costs just under \$16,000. **CT**

Labor journalist **Sam Pizzigati** edits ***Too Much***, an online weekly available at [www.toomuchonline.org](http://www.toomuchonline.org).

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# DEATH BY STARVATION

**Fidel Castro** criticises America's policy of turning food into fuel

**M**ore than three billion people condemned to premature death from hunger and thirst. That is not an exaggerated figure, but rather a cautious one. I have meditated a lot on that in the wake of President Bush's meeting with U.S. automobile manufacturers.

The sinister idea of converting food into fuel was definitively established as an economic line in U.S. foreign policy on March 26.

A cable from the AP, the U.S. news agency that reaches all corners of the world, states verbatim:

"WASHINGTON, March 26 (AP). President Bush touted the benefits of 'flexible fuel' vehicles running on ethanol and biodiesel on Monday, meeting with automakers to boost support for his energy plans.

"Bush said a commitment by the leaders of the domestic auto industry to double their production of flex-fuel vehicles could help motorists shift away from gasoline and reduce the nation's reliance on imported oil.

"That's a major technological break-

through for the country,' Bush said after inspecting three alternative vehicles. If the nation wants to reduce gasoline use, he said "the consumer has got to be in a position to make a rational choice."

"The president urged Congress to 'move expeditiously' on legislation the administration recently proposed to require the use of 35 billion gallons of alternative fuels by 2017 and seek higher fuel economy standards for automobiles.

"Bush met with General Motors Corp. chairman and chief executive Rick Wagoner, Ford Motor Co. chief executive Alan Mulally and DaimlerChrysler AG's Chrysler Group chief executive Tom LaSorda.

"They discussed support for flex-fuel vehicles, attempts to develop ethanol from alternative sources like switchgrass and wood chips and the administration's proposal to reduce gas consumption by 20 percent in 10 years.

"The discussions came amid rising gasoline prices. The latest Lundberg Survey found the nationwide average for gasoline has risen 6 cents per gallon in the past two weeks to \$2.61."

**"Bush said a commitment by the leaders of the domestic auto industry to double their production of flex-fuel vehicles could help motorists shift away from gasoline and reduce the nation's reliance on imported oil"**

## THE COST OF FUEL

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**Although the president is talking of producing fuel derived from grass or wood shavings, anyone can understand that these are phrases totally lacking in realism**

I believe that reducing and moreover recycling all motors that run on electricity and fuel is an elemental and urgent need for all humanity. The tragedy does not lie in reducing those energy costs but in the idea of converting food into fuel. It is known very precisely today that one ton of corn can only produce 413 liters of ethanol on average, according to densities. That is equivalent to 109 gallons.

The average price of corn in U.S. ports has risen to \$167 per ton. Thus, 320 million tons of corn would be required to produce 35 billion gallons of ethanol.

According to FAO figures, the U.S. corn harvest rose to 280.2 million tons in the year 2005.

Although the president is talking of producing fuel derived from grass or wood shavings, anyone can understand that these are phrases totally lacking in realism. Let's be clear: 35 billion gallons translates into 35 followed by nine zeros!

Afterwards will come beautiful examples of what experienced and well-organized U.S. farmers can achieve in terms of human productivity by hectare: corn converted into ethanol; the chaff from that corn converted into animal feed containing 26% protein; cattle dung used as raw material for gas production. Of course, this is after voluminous investments only within the reach of the most powerful enterprises, in which everything has to be moved on the basis of electricity and fuel consumption. Apply that recipe to the countries of the Third World and you will see that people among the hungry masses of the Earth will no longer eat corn. Or something worse: lend funding to poor countries to produce corn ethanol based on

corn or any other food and not a single tree will be left to defend humanity from climate change.

Other countries in the rich world are planning to use not only corn but also wheat, sunflower seeds, rapeseed and other foods for fuel production. For the Europeans, for example, it would become a business to import all of the world's soybeans with the aim of reducing the fuel costs for their automobiles and feeding their animals with the chaff from that legume, particularly rich in all types of essential amino acids.

In Cuba, alcohol used to be produced as a byproduct of the sugar industry after having made three extractions of sugar from cane juice. Climate change is already affecting our sugar production. Lengthy periods of drought alternating with record rainfall, that barely make it possible to produce sugar with an adequate yield during the 100 days of our very moderate winter; hence, there is less sugar per ton of cane or less cane per hectare due to prolonged drought in the months of planting and cultivation.

I understand that in Venezuela they would be using alcohol not for export but to improve the environmental quality of their own fuel. For that reason, apart from the excellent Brazilian technology for producing alcohol, in Cuba the use of such a technology for the direct production of alcohol from sugar cane juice is no more than a dream or the whim of those carried away by that idea. In our country, land handed over to the direct production of alcohol could be much useful for food production for the people and for environmental protection.

All the countries of the world, rich

and poor, without any exception, could save millions and millions of dollars in investment and fuel simply by changing all the incandescent light bulbs for fluorescent ones, an exercise that Cuba has carried out in all homes throughout the country. That would provide a breathing space to resist climate change without killing the poor masses through hunger.

As can be observed, I am not using adjectives to qualify the system and the lords of the earth. That task can be excellently undertaken by news experts and honest social, economic and political scientists abounding in the world who are constantly delving into to the present and future of our species. A computer and the growing number of Internet networks are sufficient for that.

Today, we are seeing for the first time a really globalized economy and a dominant power in the economic, political and military terrain that in no way resembles that of Imperial Rome.

Some people will be asking themselves why I am talking of hunger and thirst. My response to that: it is not about the other side of the coin, but about several sides of something else, like a die with six sides, or a polyhedron with many more sides.

I refer in this case to an official news agency, founded in 1945 and generally well-informed about economic and social questions in the world: TELAM. It said, and I quote:

“In just 18 years, close to 2 billion people will be living in countries and regions where water will be a distant memory. Two-thirds of the world’s population could be living in places where that scarcity produces social and economic tensions of such a magnitude that

it could lead nations to wars for the precious ‘blue gold.’

“Over the last 100 years, the use of water has increased at a rate twice as fast as that of population growth.

“According to statistics from the World Water Council, it is estimated that by 2015, the number of inhabitants affected by this grave situation will rise by 3.5 billion people.

“The United Nations celebrated World Water Day on March 23, and called to begin confronting, that very day, the international scarcity of water, under the coordination of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), with the goal of highlighting the increasing importance of water scarcity on a global scale, and the need for greater integration and cooperation that would make it possible to guarantee sustained and efficient management of water resources.

“Many regions on the planet are suffering from severe water shortages, living with less than 500 cubic meters per person per year. The number of regions suffering from chronic scarcity of this vital element is increasingly growing.

“The principal consequences of water scarcity are an insufficient amount of the precious liquid for producing food, the impossibility of industrial, urban and tourism development and health problems.”

That was the TELEAM cable.

In this case I will refrain from mentioning other important facts, like the melting ice in Greenland and the Antarctic, damage to the ozone layer and the growing volume of mercury in many species of fish for common consumption.

**Some people will be asking themselves why I am talking of hunger and thirst. My response to that: it is not about the other side of the coin, but about several sides of something else, like a die with six sides, or a polyhedron with many more sides**

*Fidel Castro was, until recently, President of Cuba*

**CT**

# PLEASURES OF THE FLESH

If you care about hunger, eat less meat, advises **George Monbiot**

**The World Bank points out that "the grain required to fill the tank of a sports utility vehicle with ethanol ... could feed one person for a year"**

**N**ever mind the economic crisis. Focus for a moment on a more urgent threat: the great food recession which is sweeping the world faster than the credit crunch.

You have probably seen the figures by now: the price of rice has risen by three-quarters in the past year, that of wheat by 130%<sup>1</sup>. There are food crises in 37 countries. 100 million people, according to the World Bank, could be pushed into deeper poverty by the high prices<sup>2</sup>. But I bet you have missed the most telling statistic. At 2.1bn tonnes, last year's global grain harvest broke all records<sup>3</sup>. It beat the previous year's by almost 5%. The crisis, in other words, has begun before world food supplies are hit by climate change. If hunger can strike now, what will happen if harvests decline?

There is plenty of food. It is just not reaching human stomachs. Of the 2.13bn tonnes likely to be consumed this year, only 1.01bn, according to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), will feed people<sup>4</sup>.

I am sorely tempted to write another

column about biofuels. From April, sellers of transport fuel in the United Kingdom were obliged to mix it with ethanol or biodiesel made from crops. The World Bank points out that "the grain required to fill the tank of a sports utility vehicle with ethanol ... could feed one person for a year"<sup>5</sup>. Last year global stockpiles of cereals declined by around 53m tonnes<sup>6</sup>; this gives you a rough idea of the size of the hunger gap. The production of biofuels this year will consume almost 100m tonnes<sup>7</sup>, which suggests that they are directly responsible for the current crisis. In the *Guardian*, the transport secretary Ruth Kelly promised that "if we need to adjust policy in the light of new evidence, we will."<sup>8</sup> What new evidence does she require? In the midst of a global humanitarian crisis, we have just become legally obliged to use food as fuel. It is a crime against humanity in which every driver in this country has been forced to participate.

But I have been saying this for four years and I am boring myself. Of course we must demand that our governments scrap the rules which turn grain into the

fastest food of all. But there is a bigger reason for global hunger, which is attracting less attention only because it has been there for longer. While 100m tonnes of food will be diverted this year to feed cars, 760m tonnes will be snatched from the mouths of humans to feed animals<sup>9</sup>. This could cover the global food deficit 14 times. If you care about hunger, eat less meat.

While meat consumption is booming in Asia and Latin America, in the United Kingdom it has scarcely changed since the government started gathering data in 1974. At just over 1kg per person per week<sup>10</sup>, it's still about 40% above the global average<sup>11</sup>, though less than half the amount consumed in the United States<sup>12</sup>. We eat less beef and more chicken than we did 30 years ago, which means a smaller total impact. Beef cattle eat about 8kg of grain or meal for every kilogramme of flesh they produce; a kilogramme of chicken needs just 2kg of feed. Even so, our consumption rate is plainly unsustainable.

In his magazine *The Land*, Simon Fairlie has updated the figures produced 30 years ago in Kenneth Mellanby's book *Can Britain Feed Itself?* Fairlie found that a vegan diet grown by means of conventional agriculture would require only 3m hectares of arable land (around half the current total)<sup>13</sup>. Even if we reduced our consumption of meat by half, a mixed farming system would need 4.4m hectares of arable fields and 6.4 million hectares of pasture. A vegan Britain could make a massive contribution to global food stocks.

But I cannot advocate a diet I am incapable of following. I tried it for about 18 months, lost two stone, went as white

as bone and felt that I was losing my mind. I know a few healthy-looking vegans and I admire them immensely. But after almost every talk I give, I am pestered by swarms of vegans demanding that I adopt their lifestyle. I cannot help noticing that in most cases their skin has turned a fascinating pearl grey.

What level of meat-eating would be sustainable? One approach is to work out how great a cut would be needed to accommodate the growth in human numbers. The UN expects the population to rise to 9bn by 2050. These extra people will require another 325m tonnes of grain<sup>14</sup>. Let us assume, perhaps generously, that politicians like Ms Kelly are able to "adjust policy in the light of new evidence" and stop turning food into fuel. Let us pretend that improvements in plant breeding can keep pace with the deficits caused by climate change. We would need to find an extra 225m tonnes of grain. This leaves 531m tonnes for livestock production, which suggests a sustainable consumption level for meat and milk some 30% below the current world rate. This means 420g of meat per person per week, or about 40% of the UK's average consumption.

This estimate is complicated by several factors. If we eat less meat we must eat more plant protein, which means taking more land away from animals. On the other hand, some livestock is raised on pasture, so it doesn't contribute to the grain deficit. Simon Fairlie estimates that if animals were kept only on land that's unsuitable for arable farming, and given scraps and waste from food processing, the world could produce between a third and two thirds of its current milk and meat supply<sup>15</sup>. But this

**While 100m tonnes of food will be diverted this year to feed cars, 760m tonnes will be snatched from the mouths of humans to feed animals. This could cover the global food deficit 14 times**

## GRAINS OF TRUTH

**Pigs and chickens feed more efficiently, but unless they are free range you encounter another ethical issue: the monstrous conditions in which they are kept**

*George Monbiot's new book, **Bring On The Apocalypse**, was published last month. This essay originally appeared in London's **Guardian** newspaper.*

system then runs into a different problem. The FAO calculates that animal keeping is responsible for 18% of greenhouse gas emissions. The environmental impacts are especially grave in places where livestock graze free<sup>16</sup>. The only reasonable answer to the question of how much meat we should eat is as little as possible. Let's reserve it – as most societies have done until recently – for special occasions.

For both environmental and humanitarian reasons, beef is out. Pigs and chickens feed more efficiently, but unless they are free range you encounter another ethical issue: the monstrous conditions in which they are kept. I would like to encourage people to start eating tilapia instead of meat. It's a freshwater fish which can be raised entirely on vegetable matter and has the best conversion efficiency – about 1.6kg of feed for 1kg of meat – of any farmed animal<sup>17</sup>. Until meat can be grown in flasks, this is about as close as we are likely to come to sustainable flesh-eating.

Re-reading this article, I see that there is something surreal about it. While half the world wonders whether it will eat at all, I am pondering which of our endless choices we should take. Here the price of food barely registers. Our shops are better stocked than ever before. We perceive the global food crisis dimly, if at all. It is hard to understand how two such different food economies could occupy the same planet, until you realise that they feed off each other. **CT**

### Notes

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10. The British government gives a total meat purchase figure of 1042g/person/week for 2006.

<http://statistics.defra.gov.uk/esg/publications/efs/datasets/UKHHcons.xls>

11. There's a discussion of global average figures here:

<http://envirostats.info/2007/09/18/0406/>

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13. Simon Fairlie, Winter 2007-8. Can Britain Feed Itself? *The Land*.

14. Based on the current population of 6.8bn consuming 1006mt of grain.

15. Simon Fairlie, forthcoming. Default livestock farming. *The Land*, Summer 2008.

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# SINCE I GAVE UP HOPE, I FEEL BETTER

**William Blum** wonders what happened to the 20th century dreams of humankind's glorious future

*"More than any time in history, mankind now faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness, the other to total extinction. Let us pray that we have the wisdom to choose correctly."*

-- Woody Allen

**F**ood riots, in dozens of countries, in the 21st century. Is this what we envisioned during the post-World War II, moon-landing 20th century as humankind's glorious future? It's not the end of the world, but you can almost see it from here.

American writer Henry Miller (1891-1980) once asserted that the role of the artist was to "inoculate the world with disillusionment". So just in case you – for whatever weird reason – cling to the belief/hope that the United States can be a positive force in ending or slowing down the new jump in world hunger, here are some disillusioning facts of life.

On December 14, 1981 a resolution was proposed in the United Nations General Assembly which declared that "education, work, health care, proper nourishment, national development are

human rights". Notice the "proper nourishment". The resolution was approved by a vote of 135-1. The United States cast the only "No" vote.

A year later, December 18, 1982, an identical resolution was proposed in the General Assembly. It was approved by a vote of 131-1. The United States cast the only "No" vote.

The following year, December 16, 1983, the resolution was again put forth, a common practice at the United Nations. This time it was approved by a vote of 132-1. There's no need to tell you who cast the sole "No" vote.

These votes took place under the Reagan administration.

Under the Clinton administration, in 1996, a United Nations-sponsored World Food Summit affirmed the "right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food". The United States took issue with this, insisting that it does not recognize a "right to food". Washington instead championed free trade as the key to ending the poverty at the root of hunger, and expressed fears that recognition of a "right to food could lead to lawsuits from poor nations seeking aid

**It's not the end of the world, but you can almost see it from here.**

**While we're fighting for hopeless causes, let's throw in the demand that corporations involved in driving the cost of oil through the roof – and dragging food costs with it – must either immediately exhibit a conspicuous social conscience or risk being nationalized, their executives taken away in orange jumpsuits, handcuffs, and leg shackles**

and special trade provisions.<sup>1</sup>

The situation of course did not improve under the administration of George W. Bush. In 2002, in Rome, world leaders at another U.N.-sponsored World Food Summit again approved a declaration that everyone had the right to “safe and nutritious food”. The United States continued to oppose the clause, again fearing it would leave them open to future legal claims by famine-stricken countries.<sup>2</sup>

Along with petitioning American leaders to become decent human beings we should be trying to revive the population control movement. Birth rates must be radically curbed. All else being equal, a markedly reduced population count would have a markedly beneficial effect upon global warming and food and water availability (not to mention finding a parking spot and lots of other advantages).

People, after all, are not eating more. There are simply more/too many people. Some favor limiting families to two children. Others argue in favor of one child per family. Still others, who spend a major part of each day digesting the awful news of the world, are calling for a limit of zero. (The Chinese government recently announced that the country would have about 400 million more people if it wasn't for its limit of one or two children per couple.<sup>3</sup>)

And while we're fighting for hopeless causes, let's throw in the demand that corporations involved in driving the cost of oil through the roof – and dragging food costs with it – must either immediately exhibit a conspicuous social conscience or risk being nationalized, their executives taken away

in orange jumpsuits, handcuffs, and leg shackles.

The same for other corporations and politicians involved in championing the replacement of food crops with bio-fuel crops or exploiting any of the other steps along the food-chain system which puts bloated income ahead of putting food in people's mouths. We're not speaking here of weather phenomena beyond the control of man, we're speaking of men making decisions, based not on people's needs but on pseudo-scientific, amoral mechanisms like supply and demand, commodity exchanges, grain futures, selling short, selling long, and other forms of speculation, all fed and multiplied by the proverbial herd mentality – a system governed by only two things: fear and greed; not a rational way to feed a world of human beings.

The *Wall Street Journal* reports that grain-processing giant Archer-Daniels-Midland Co. said its quarterly profits “jumped 42%, including a sevenfold increase in net income in its unit that stores, transports and trades grains such as wheat, corn and soybeans. ... Some observers think financial speculation has helped push up prices as wealthy investors in the past year have flooded the agriculture commodity markets in search of better returns.”<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, the French Agriculture Minister warned European Union officials against “too much trust in the free market. We must not leave the vital issue of feeding people to the mercy of market laws and international speculation.”<sup>5</sup>

It should be noted that the price of gasoline in the United States increases

on a regular basis, but there's no shortage of supply. There are no lines of cars waiting at gas stations. And demand has been falling as financially-strapped drivers cut back on car use.

### **Intelligence agents without borders**

When Andreas Papandreu assumed his ministerial duties in 1964 in the Greek government led by his father George Papandreu, he was shocked to discover an intelligence service out of control, a shadow government with powers beyond the authority of the nation's nominal leaders, a service more loyal to the CIA than to the Papandreu government.

This was a fact of life for many countries in the world during the Cold War, when the CIA could dazzle a foreign secret service with devices of technical wizardry, classes in spycraft, vital intelligence, unlimited money, and American mystique and propaganda. Many of the world's intelligence agencies have long provided the CIA with information about their own government and citizens.

The nature of much of this information has been such that if a private citizen were to pass it to a foreign power he could be charged with treason.<sup>6</sup>

Leftist Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa declared in April that Ecuador's intelligence systems were "totally infiltrated and subjugated to the CIA," and accused senior Ecuadoran military officials of sharing intelligence with Colombia, the Bush administration's top (if not only) ally in Latin America.

The previous month missiles had been fired into a camp of the Colombian FARC rebels situated in Ecuador

near the Colombian border, killing about 25. One of those killed was Franklin Aisalla, an Ecuadorean operative for the group.

It turned out that Ecuadorean intelligence officials had been tracking Aisalla, a fact that was not shared with the president, but apparently with Colombian forces and their American military advisers. "I, the president of the republic, found out about these operations by reading the newspaper," a visibly indignant Correa said. "This is not something we can tolerate." He added that he planned to restructure the intelligence agencies so he would have greater direct control over them.<sup>7</sup>

The FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) is routinely referred to in the world media as "Marxist", but that designation has not been appropriate for many years.

The FARC has long been basically a criminal organization – kidnappings for ransom, kidnappings for no apparent reason, selling protection services to businesses, trafficking in drugs, fighting the Colombian Army to be free to continue their criminal ways or to revenge their comrades' deaths.

But Washington, proceeding from its declared ideology of "If you ain't with us, you're against us; in fact, if you ain't with us you're a terrorist", has designated FARC as a terrorist group. Every stated definition of "terrorist", from the FBI to the United Nations to the US criminal code makes it plain that terrorism is essentially a political act.

This should, logically, exclude FARC from that category but, in actuality, has no effect on Washington's thinking. And now the Bush administration is threat-

**Why is McCain regularly referred to as a "war hero"? He was shot down and captured and held prisoner for more than five years. What's heroic about that? In most other kinds of work, such a record would be called a failure**

## ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

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**Can anyone say with any kind of precision how the price of gasoline at the pump is arrived at each day?**

*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. His web site is [www.killinghope.org](http://www.killinghope.org)*

ening to add Venezuela to its list of “nations that support terrorism”, following a claim by Colombia that it had captured a computer belonging to FARC after the attack on the group's campsite in Ecuador.

A file allegedly found on the alleged computer, we are told, suggests that the Venezuelan government had channeled \$300 million to FARC, and that FARC had appeared interested in acquiring 110 pounds of uranium.<sup>8</sup> What next? Chavez had met with Osama bin Laden at the campsite?

Amongst the FARC members killed in the Colombian attack on Ecuador were several involved in negotiations to free Ingrid Betancourt, a former Colombian presidential candidate who also holds French citizenship and is gravely ill. The French government and Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez have been very active in trying to win Betancourt's freedom. Individuals collaborating with Chavez have twice this year escorted a total of six hostages freed by the FARC into freedom, including four former Colombian legislators.

The prestige thus acquired by Chavez has of course not made Washington ideologues happy. If Chavez should have a role in the freeing of Betancourt – the FARC's most prominent prisoner – his prestige would jump yet higher. The raid on the FARC camp has put an end to the Betancourt negotiations, at least for the near future.

The raid bore the fingerprints of the US military/CIA – a Predator drone aircraft dropped “smart bombs” after pinpointing the spot by monitoring a satellite phone call between a FARC leader and Chavez. A Colombian Defense Min-

istry official admitted that the United States had provided his government with intelligence used in the attack, but denied that Washington had provided the weapons.<sup>9</sup> The *New York Times* observed that “The predawn operation bears remarkable similarities to one carried out in late January by the United States in Pakistan.”<sup>10</sup>

So what do we have here? Washington has removed a couple of dozen terrorists (or “terrorists”) from the ranks of the living without any kind of judicial process. Ingrid Betancourt continues her imprisonment, now in its sixth year, but another of Hugo Chavez's evil-commie plans has been thwarted. And the CIA – as with its torture renditions – has once again demonstrated its awesome power: anyone, anywhere, anytime, anything, all laws domestic and international be damned, no lie too big.

### **"After such knowledge, what forgiveness?" T.S. Eliot**

Barack Obama's pastor, Jeremiah Wright, held a press conference at the National Press Club in Washington on April 28, during which he was asked about his earlier statement that the US government had invented the HIV virus, which causes AIDS, as a means of genocide against people of color”.

Wright did not offer any kind of evidence to support his claim. Even more important, the claim makes little sense. Why would the US government want to wipe out people of color?

Undoubtedly, many government officials, past and present, have been racists, but the capitalist system at home and its imperialist brother abroad have no overarching ideological or realpolitik need

for such a genocide. During the seven decades of the Cold War, the American power elite was much more interested in a genocide of “communists”, of whatever color, wherever they might be found. Many weapons which might further this purpose were researched, including, apparently, an HIV-like virus. Consider this: On June 9, 1969, Dr. Donald M. MacArthur, Deputy Director, Research and Engineering, Department of Defense, testified before Congress:

Within the next 5 to 10 years, it would probably be possible to make a new infective microorganism which could differ in certain important aspects from any known disease-causing organisms. Most important of these is that it might be refractory [resistant] to the immunological and therapeutic processes upon which we depend to maintain our relative freedom from infectious disease.<sup>11</sup>

Whether the United States actually developed such a microorganism and what it did with it has not been reported. AIDS was first identified by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 1981. It's certainly possible that the disease arose as a result of Defense Department experiments, and then spread as an unintended consequence.

If you think that our leaders, as wicked as they are, would not stoop to any kind of biological or chemical warfare against people, consider that in 1984 an anti-Castro Cuban exile, on trial in a New York court, testified that in the latter part of 1980 a ship traveled from Florida to Cuba with “a mission to carry some germs to introduce them in Cuba to be used against the Soviets and against the Cuban economy, to begin what was called chemical war, which

later on produced results that were not what we had expected, because we thought that it was going to be used against the Soviet forces, and it was used against our own people, and with that we did not agree.”<sup>12</sup>

It's not clear from the testimony whether the Cuban man thought that the germs would somehow be able to confine their actions to only Russians. This was but one of many instances where the CIA or Defense Department used biological or chemical weapons against Cuba and other countries, including in the United States against Americans, at times with fatal consequences.<sup>13</sup>

### **Breaking the media barrier**

“You take that framework of people feeling locked out, shut out, marginalized, disrespected, and you go from Iraq to Palestine to Israel, from Enron to Wall Street, from Katrina to the bungling of the Bush administration, to the complicity of the Democrats in not stopping him on the war, stopping him on the tax cuts ... If the Democrats can't landslide the Republicans this year, they ought to just wrap up, close down, emerge in a different form. You think the American people are going to vote for a pro-war John McCain who almost gives an indication he's the candidate of perpetual war, perpetual intervention overseas?”

Thus spaketh Ralph Nader as he announced his presidential candidacy to a national audience on NBC's Meet the Press in February. The next day his words appeared in the *Washington Post*, *Kansas City Star*, Associated Press, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, *International Herald Tribune*, and numerous other publi-

## HEADER IN HERE

cations, news agencies, and websites around the world. And other parts of his interview were also repeated, like this in the *Washington Post*: “Let's get over it and try to have a diverse, multiple-choice, multiple-party democracy, the way they have in Western Europe and Canada.”

This is why Ralph Nader runs for office. To get our views a hearing in the mainstream media (which we often, justifiably, look down upon but are forced to make use of), and offer Americans an alternative to the tweedledumb and tweedledumber political parties and their cookie-cutter candidates with their status-quo-long-live-the-empire souls. Is Nader's campaign not eminently worthwhile? But as always, he faces formidable obstacles, amongst which is what H. L. Mencken once observed: “The men the American people admire most extravagantly are the most daring liars; the men they detest most violently are those who try to tell them the truth.”

Here are a couple of campaigns to contribute time and money to:

Ralph Nader – <http://www.vote-nader.org/>

Cindy Sheehan, running for Congress in San Francisco against Nancy “Impeachment is off the table” Pelosi – <http://www.cindyforcongress.org> **CT**

*William Blum is the author of:*

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

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### NOTES

[1] *Washington Post*, November 18, 1996

[2] Reuters news agency, June 10, 2002

[3] *Washington Post*, March 3, 2008

[4] "Grain Companies' Profits Soar As Global Food Crisis Mounts", *Wall Street Journal*, April 30, 2008, p.1

[5] *Washington Post*, April 27, 2008, p.13

[6] William Blum, *Killing Hope*, pages 217-8

[7] *New York Times*, April 21, 2008

[8] *New York Times*, March 4, 2008

[9] *Agence France Presse*, March 24, 2008

[10] *New York Times*, April 21, 2008

[11] Hearings before the House Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, "Department of Defense Appropriations for 1970"

[12] Testimony of Eduardo Victor Arocena Perez, on trial in Federal District Court for the Southern District of New York, transcript of September 10, 1984, pp. 2187-89.

[13] William Blum, *Rogue State*, chapters 14 and 15

**READ TOM ENGELHARDT**

<http://coldtype.net/tom.html>

# WHY WE CAN'T TRUST THE BUSINESS PRESS

Will the media ever get around to telling the truth about what's happening to our economy? asks **Danny Schechter**

**T**here seems to be a race on between journalists and historians for which profession will become the most revisionist. Daily reporting is supposed to be the first draft of history but if you rely on it, you may find that history is a mystery with the real story buried beyond all recognition. One day's story is followed by the next day's totally different take mirroring the volatility of what they cover.

Take the coverage of financial news. With the economy's decline, it is now considered one the leading genres in the news business. We have more of it than ever. There are three 24 hour cable stations monitoring every blip in the ups and mostly downs in the markets. Thomson Reuters and AP now compete with Murdoch's DowJones to get the news to us first. PBS has a Nightly Business Report. NPR does Marketplace. There are endless magazines and corporate news websites. All the networks have experts.

Every newspaper has a business section even though most Americans care

more about how the economic implosion is impacting on Main Street than Wall Street.

All of these outlets have relatively small audiences of high income viewers. The typical CNBC viewer has a net worth of \$2.7 million, with an average income of \$156,000, according to Monroe Mendelsohn Research. Measuring only viewers watching from home, Nielsen puts the CNBC viewer's income at \$73,000, compared with an average cable viewer's income of \$48,000. For many of these outlets, demographics is destiny – they cover the news of, for and by the elite.

## **In dispute**

Despite the proliferation of these outlets and their information overload, some key recent developments are in dispute.

Case in point: is there a recession? For months, the government was denying that one was on the way even though economists at leading investment banks said last November that it was already here. The press was filled with commentators discussing whether

**is there a recession? For months, the government was denying that one was on the way even though economists at leading investment banks said last November that it was already here**

## DEVIOUS MEDIA

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**In a culture that promotes consumption through a news media that does more selling than telling, it's not acceptable to discourage spending**

it could be “staved off,” accepting government claims as fact, a practice we see repeatedly in war coverage.

Now, in April, after the dreadful declines of every indicator in the first quarter, a reluctant media is admitting it now that an authority figure like Federal Reserve Chairman confirmed that the R-word was real.

The Comedy Channel's Stephen Colbert summed up months of media yo-yoing in a few short sentences: “It is not a recession. It's a correction. CORRECTION, it is a recession.”

Only the *Oakland Tribune* bothered to explain how a recession is even authoritatively determined, reporting:

“The truth is, nobody knows. The responsibility for declaring the stages of the business cycle is informally held by that most dreaded of concepts – a committee of economists – The Business Cycle Dating Committee of the National Bureau of Economic Research....:

“This body assesses the health of the economy with an in-depth analysis of many indices, but they take their time doing so.

“If the NBER did the D.C. weather forecast,” the Trib explained, “here's how it would work. The bureau would gather precipitation data from every neighborhood, then interview residents to make sure the data are accurate. After much deliberation, it would tell us it had rained last month.”

So much for the full-of-themselves “experts.” You may not have needed a weatherman to make this recession call what with mounting job loses, price hikes, and nearly a trillion dollars of major bank “write-downs” of subprime loans. It seems clear the economy is in

the basement and heading lower. The Federal Reserve Bank has now intervened seven times to lower interest rates and “inject” new “liquidity” with hundreds of billions of dollars with no effect to date.

The reality is bleak, yet most of the news media seems to be tethered to a mission to pump up confidence – perhaps to support advertisers – mostly ignoring the realists and critics and instead playing up the prognostications of perennial optimists who have been consistently wrong in their predictions..

In a culture that promotes consumption through a news media that does more selling than telling, it's not acceptable to discourage spending. Throughout the boom of the subprime bonanza, media outlets took in millions for commercials by predatory lenders and credit card companies.

### **What caused the collapse?**

What about the causes of the current collapse? Is this just the natural recurrence of to be expected business cycles? Many media pundits lean towards to what economist John Kenneth Galbraith first labeled “the conventional wisdom.”

What explanations there have been in long takeouts in the back pages of the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* on the complexities of unregulated mortgage based securities sold through so called asset-backed structured investment vehicles They have avoided explaining why most media outlets took so long to expose what increasingly looks like “sub-crime” ponzi schemes as it became clear there were no real assets to be found.

In other words, the housing bubble was engineered, encouraged by federal policies and then not regulated. Hundreds of billions were pocketed to make the rich richer while banks report giant losses and three million families face foreclosure. This helped 10% of the population end up with 70% of the wealth. Was this inevitable?

No way. This fraud was not just committed by predatory mortgage brokers who generated false appraisals, gave out no-doc loans, and misrepresented mortgage terms. The blue chip banks who bought up what is now seen as “toxic waste” knew what they were doing. Greed was the driver as they feverishly acquired highly rated mortgage paper and quickly resold it to other financial institutions. Wall Street was collectively orchestrating this Enron-dwarfing scheme and so far has been rewarded, not investigated, prosecuted or jailed.

### **Facts about the bail-out**

Then there was the Fed’s bailout of Bear Stearns. Even now, do we know the full story of what it was about? At first it appeared, and was reported, as an unusual bailout of just one ailing bank.

Quickly pundits started disagreeing about what else was going on. One economist I spoke to, Michael Hudson, once with Chase, and more recently an advisor to Dennis Kucinich, (and an expert interviewed in my film *In Debt We Trust*) said it was really a bailout of the much larger firm, JP Morgan Chase, because if Bear went bankrupt, Morgan would follow because the two were so “entangled.”

Yet when Congress investigated two weeks later, another explanation was of-

fered by Federal Reserve Bank officials who said they intervened not to just bail Bear but to save the whole financial system.

Some of the best reporting is not to be found not in the financial press but on websites and blogs run by angry former bankers and savvy investors.

“Judging from the media reports, it seems that the assertive presentations by the perps, um participants, in the deal were not met with aggressive questioning by the assembled Congressmen,” commented the anonymous blogger of the well-informed Naked Capitalism website.

He critiqued “priceless moments in self-delusion and dissembling artful presentation” and suggested that the bankers on hand (minus Treasury Secretary Paulson, who this blogger reminds us, as most of the press has not, had been a staffer to Nixon aide John Erlichman, and had arranged to avoid the hearing by disappearing to China at that very moment.)

The bankers, he writes, mounted what he called a “Rashomon Defense.”

“As in Kurosowa’s masterwork, certain basic elements are not in dispute: in the movie, a rape; in the financial world, (a rape?) an unprecedented commitment on the Fed’s part that appears to be well beyond its authority. . . .

“In both performances, the witnesses tell stories that simply cannot be reconciled. The SEC insists Bear had sufficient capital. Bear CEO Schwartz maintains there was no action he could have taken to save the firm. (Fed Officials) Bernanke and Geithner claimed that the deal was necessary to preserve the financial system because Bear was going to have to

**Some of the best reporting is not to be found not in the financial press but on websites and blogs run by angry former bankers and savvy investors**

**"It is somewhat surprising," Larry Elliott, economics editor of London's *Guardian* observed recently, "that there is not already rioting in the streets, given the gigantic fraud perpetrated by the financial elite at the expense of ordinary Americans"**

file for bankruptcy (they indicated the big worry was the credit default swaps). (JP Morgan CEO) Dimon said his firm is sound and the fact that he did the deal means he thought it was good for shareholders."

Whatever the truth, this fascinating dissection makes it clear that the superficial reporting we get does not go deeply enough into the real deals that are going down. There is far too little context and background.

### **Obtuse reporting**

Not only that, the reporting is often so obtuse that most people can't understand it, as the satirists of *The Onion* observed when they nailed the Bear Stearns coverage, summing it up with this headline:

*"JPMorgan Chase Acquires Bear Stearns In Tedious-To-Read News Article"*

Their story skewered most of the reporting on Bear Stearns because it was written in "obscure legal jargon that can only be described in the most mind-numbingly dense and unreadable way" by readers who "saw its value depreciate almost as quickly as readers' interest in this story."

They blasted the coverage for "bogging down the news for anyone who might be remotely interested in grasping what the fuck is going on."

Well, what the fuck is going on?

Sometimes you have to seek out reporting from other countries to find out. "It is somewhat surprising," Larry Elliott, economics editor of London's *Guardian* observed recently, "that there is not already rioting in the streets, given the gigantic fraud perpetrated by the fi-

nancial elite at the expense of ordinary Americans."

Here's a prediction: now that former Reagan advisor Kevin Phillips is coming out with a new book, *Bad Money: Reckless Finance, Failed Politics, and the Global Crisis of American Capitalism*, which legitimizes what I and other critics more to his left have been saying, the arguments I have been making here and in other outlets will move from being considered contentious to being considered conventional and then dismissed because isn't it all obvious.

"My summation," Phillips writes, "is that American financial capitalism, at a pivotal period in the nation's history, cavalierly ventured a multiple gamble: first, financializing a hitherto more diversified U.S. economy; second, using massive quantities of debt and leverage to do so; third, following up a stock market bubble with an even larger housing and mortgage credit bubble; fourth, roughly quadrupling U.S. credit-market debt between 1987 and 2007, a scale of excess that historically unwinds; and fifth, consummating these events with a mixed fireworks of dishonesty, incompetence and quantitative negligence."

Don't hold your breath for the "money honeys" on CNBC to frame the story this way. **CT**

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# CREEPING FASCISM

While passing through an airport, **Hal O'Boyle** realises how far his country has traveled down the road to totalitarianism

**I**t is much easier not to notice the advance of fascism in America if you never travel through a major airport. It's impossible to ignore, however, if you do. A recent round trip in and out of the U.S. reminded me that most of the mechanisms for a fascist police state are securely in place. They run with the efficiency, common sense, and compassion you would expect from the sponsor of crack outfits like the IRS, BATF, and FEMA.

The TSA [Transportation Security Administration] agent was checking passports and boarding passes. She was sarcastic, condescending, and passively hostile to passengers from whom she demanded documents arranged for her convenience. There was no strip search or arrest. But the idea of Strip Search and Arrest hovered over her like a guardian angel. She tossed four passports and tickets into a sloppy pile on the table. The soccer mom was traveling with three children, carrying one, and a ton of gear. Two 3ft tall girls stood close to her. "If you match those up you save everybody a lot of time," the TSA agent snapped loud

enough for all to hear. Then she folded her arms and waited for the woman to put her papers in order. The woman fumbled nervously assembling her stuff to the agent's liking.

A TSA colleague cut to the front of the line with two people who were desperately late for a flight. "I ain't gonna be rushed like that," the agent said, confirming the vital importance of her duty as passport/ticket checker number two. The latecomers waited with the rest of us for the woman with the three little kids to get her documents together. Finally, tickets and passports matched, the agent gave the woman a big, sarcastic, "Wasn't that easier?" The flustered mother smiled weakly and agreed before she went through to the scanning area. The rest of us waited patiently, biting our tongues.

As mom and the kids headed off to be searched, scanned, and frisked, I imagined them approaching the massive steel door to a grass shack. You might think slamming shut an open, democratic society is something that happens suddenly after a military coup or invasion. But that's not the case at all. Hellhole police states

**You might think slamming shut an open, democratic society is something that happens suddenly after a military coup or invasion. But that's not the case at all**

## LAND OF THE FREE?

**Fascism is hardly noticeable until one day you stumble over one of the little wires stretched everywhere over the landscape of a police state. Suddenly you are on the ground. You struggle for breath. The boot on the back of your neck is holding your face in the mud**

*Hal O'Boyle is the author of Democracy: The Painted Whore. His web site is [www.the-extremist.com](http://www.the-extremist.com)*

arise slowly over time, and most often with a majority of voters, or at least a majority of counted votes, supporting them. The treatment Americans now tolerate at airports is the fascist oppression that will spread like a cancer throughout our lives if we don't do something about it soon.

Hitler was elected. But once in office, he created the policies that all fascist dictatorships require. These are policies that are already in place, or can be put in place quickly, in the U.S. today.

An incomplete list includes, in rough order of appearance: bogus threats to the security of the nation, foreign war, secret prisons, laws that suspend basic rights, a paramilitary force, arbitrary arrests and detentions, infiltration of political groups, widespread general surveillance, tight controls on money, criminalization of speech, targeting of opposition leaders, and general civilian disarmament. It is at airports today that we can most clearly see these policies fully implemented.

**False threats?** Terrorists are everywhere. Even so, you are much more likely to be stung to death by insects than to be killed by terrorists.

**Search warrant?** You will be able to talk to a supervisor after you walk through the we-can-see-you-naked-machine.

**Paramilitaries?** TSA agents carry guns and tasers, a big step up from the equipment they used to use at the carwash.

**Arrests and detentions?** Ask if they think you are hiding a rifle in your wallet. You will probably be allowed to go home after the strip search and interrogation in the tiny gray room.

**Control of your money?** Take a briefcase full of cash through a checkpoint.

Kiss it good-bye. See Arrests and Detentions above.

**Forbidden speech?** While waiting at the boarding gate sing this to the Beach Boys tune *Barbara Ann* "Bomb, bomb, bomb, . . . . bomb bomb I am." See Arrests and Detentions.

**Surveillance?** You're kidding, right? You think you're alone in that stall? Wrap your lunch box in duct tape while you're in there. See Arrests and Detentions.

**Civilian disarmament?** Explain to the nice TSA men that you have a license to carry your pistol and you want to sit in the "armed" section. See Arrests and Detentions.

Many who have noticed these policies slowly spreading into the fabric of American life are sounding the alarm. The alarm is going largely unheeded, however, because of the gradual way societies transform. Fascism is hardly noticeable until one day you stumble over one of the little wires stretched everywhere over the landscape of a police state. Suddenly you are on the ground. You struggle for breath. The boot on the back of your neck is holding your face in the mud. You wonder why nobody notices or tries to help you.

Fascism isn't inevitable, however. Americans have the means and system to defeat it. There is still time to return to the principles that made the United States the world's model for freedom and prosperity. Unfortunately it won't be as simple as replacing the corrupt Republican fascist in the White House with a corrupt Democratic fascist.

Avoiding fascism will require a return to the principles of small government, honest money, free markets and individual liberty. We either embrace these ideas or see Arrests and Detentions above. **CT**

# WAR IN THE HOUSE OF LABOUR

**Susan Rosenthal** on a violent confrontation between medical unions

**T**he American medical system ruins people's lives for profit. Fortunately, union organizing drives in the medical industry are enjoying a higher-than-average rate of success. Unfortunately, two major health workers' unions, the California Nurses Association (CNA) and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), are at war – a term used by both sides. CNA accuses SEIU of making deals with management that hurt workers, and SEIU accuses CNA of sabotaging its union drives.

This is a real battle. The CNA website posts a sign on its home page, "Had it with SEIU? Work for a REAL union." To protest the CNA, hundreds of SEIU members physically stormed the Labor Notes conference in Detroit on April 12.

Cynics view this war as reason to dismiss all unions, but that's a huge mistake. Workers need unions to counter the relentless greed of business. Employers, politicians and the mainstream media consistently attack unions because even the worst ones block bosses from having complete control of the work-

place. Statistics show that unionized workers are more likely to have medical coverage, pension benefits and protection from sexual harassment and wrongful dismissal. Areas with more unions enjoy higher wages, longer life spans, lower infant death rates, better education and less poverty.

## The issues

American unions were so powerful in the 1930s that employers needed Washington's help to crush them. Today, after decades of union busting, fewer than eight percent of private-sector workers are in unions, the lowest rate in over a century. Moreover, the remaining unions have been transformed from fighting organizations controlled by workers to bureaucratic organizations dominated by middle-class professionals. For most Americans, the result has been a steady decline in working and living standards.

The battle between SEIU and CNA arose in the context of renewed efforts to defend workers' rights and centers on three disputes over how to organize:

- Should medical facilities be organ-

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## UNION UNREST

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ized wall-to-wall (SEIU includes all health workers) or by trade (nurses in one union and support staff in another)? Wall-to-wall, or industrial, unions have more power to fight management than craft-based unions. However, in practice, workers organize as best they can in the particular circumstances they face.

● Another concern is whether management should be involved in the process of union certification. Labor-management collaboration is generally opposed because it favors management. However, every union contract is a form of labor-management collaboration. SEIU and CNA differ in where to draw the line between acceptable and unacceptable degrees of collaboration.

● The third issue is the extent to which unions should be controlled from the top-down or the bottom-up. A rank-and-file rebellion inside SEIU, United Health Workers-West (UHW) is pushing for more democracy through one-member-one-vote. CNA is using this split to press its case that SEIU is a business union that doesn't represent workers' interests. However, UHW also condemns CNA for its top-down sabotage of SEIU union drives. Instead of debating these issues in a way that would benefit all workers, the leaders of SEIU and CNA are conducting a divisive turf war that is harming the entire labor movement.

### **Taking sides**

In any conflict, there is pressure to take sides. Supporters of CNA insist that it is a more progressive and democratic union than SEIU. The leaders of CNA talk left and have taken a public role in fighting for national medicare. However,

in Ohio and on other occasions, CNA leaders have gone over the heads of SEIU rank-and-file workers to dictate what should happen in a particular workplace. That's not democratic.

Those who favor SEIU point to its proud history of organizing immigrant workers (Janitors for Justice) and supporting social reforms. However, top leaders in SEIU have also functioned undemocratically. The split inside SEIU was provoked when head office moved to silence debate within the union.

Recent labor coverage has favored CNA, especially after busloads of SEIU members stormed the recent Labor Notes conference. A good example is Steve Early's article in *Counterpunch* (<http://www.counterpunch.org/early04152008.html>). Early begins by calling SEIU protestors a "rowdy, punch-throwing, rent-a-mob."

I was inside (and later outside) the Labor Notes banquet hall when SEIU members tried to break through the doors. Such tactics must be condemned, but this was no "rent-a-mob." Most were ordinary union members, including families with small children, most looking poor and many of them Black. I am certain they boarded those buses to defend their union; and if they knew they were going to be in a fight they would have left the kids at home. One SEIU member died of a heart attack, and another union militant suffered a head wound.

This tragedy was created by the leaders of both unions, who are pitting their members against one another.

I attended several meetings at Labor Notes, where activists from SEIU and CNA expressed their grievances against

each other's unions. I concluded that both sides have legitimate concerns. At the end of his article, Early acknowledges the same, by favorably quoting a member of UHW, "Many participants, who can fairly be described as members of the labor left and generally suspicious of top union leaders, were actually very sympathetic to the SEIU's grievance against CNA surrounding the events in Ohio."

Sadly, Early concludes by returning to his condemnation of SEIU as the moral loser of the latest round in a continuing battle. However, he never mentions why the Labor Notes conference was attacked.

Labor Notes invited the President of CNA to be the keynote speaker at its conference banquet. By promoting CNA, Labor Notes invited the rage of SEIU.

To preserve good relations with both unions, Labor Notes should have invited representatives from both unions to speak and encouraged organized debate on the issues that divide them. Instead, Labor Notes made the same mistake that most of the left is making – taking the liberal position of choosing between right and left bureaucrats.

In any union, leaders should be supported ONLY so far as they represent the interests of the rank-and-file. By this measure, the leaders of SEIU and CNA both fail because their ongoing battle has crippled organizing efforts at several sites, to the benefit of management. The alternative is to stand up for rank and file unity, for class solidarity.

### **Class-divided unions**

Today's labor unions are cross-class organizations, being both working-class

organizations of self-defense and part of the management system of capitalism. Most union members are working-class (the rank and file), while most union officials are salaried professionals who negotiate with employers to set the terms of exploitation. Turf wars for union recognition arise from this class conflict.

Because most unions are run like businesses, from the top down, more members means more money and more power for union bureaucrats. They want this power to gain more leverage at the negotiating table. That's why leaders of different unions compete to represent a workplace or group of workers instead of pooling resources and cooperating. Inter-union rivalry is usually justified by claims that one union is better at representing workers than the other. However, divisions between unions only weaken the ability of all workers to stand up to management.

Over the past few decades, rank-and-file workers in different industries have pushed for more militant and democratic unions controlled by members, from the bottom up. Such worker self-organization is opposed by bureaucrats because their power to negotiate with management rests on their ability to control the ranks. Struggles for rank-and-file control of unions offer a different kind of power, one that rests on the ability of workers to stop production. Because all workers have similar concerns, worker-controlled organizations have the potential to unite workers across divisions of union, workplace and industry and do what bureaucrats have never been able to achieve: build a labor movement strong enough to reverse decades of defeats and concessions.

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## UNION UNREST

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During the Labor Notes conference, as accusations flew between CNA and SEIU, Patricia Campbell of the Independent Workers Union of Ireland (IWE) said. "You must stop fighting among each other and unite. You need to kick out the bureaucrats in both your unions. That's the only way you can advance your struggle for patients' and workers' rights."

She is right. In each workplace, rank-and-file workers must decide how they organize: whether in wall-to-wall groupings or by trade; and the extent to which they collaborate with management and with other unions. Free and full debate must be encouraged, with votes binding on all. Such self-organization is critical to build workers' confidence and create unions powerful enough to win real gains.

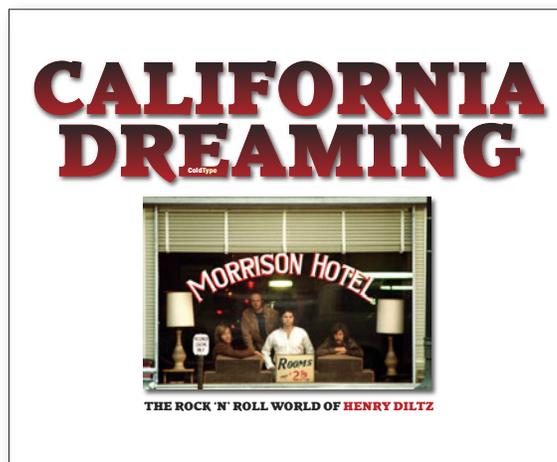
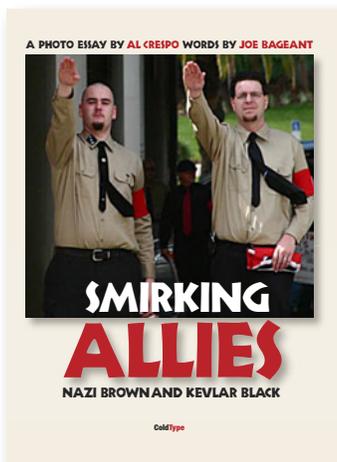
Of course, people make mistakes in

any process, but that is no reason to deny them the right to decide what happens at work and in their lives.

Right or wrong, and regardless of their intentions, no union official has the right to IMPOSE policy on rank-and-file workers without their consent. This is just as true for CNA as it is for SEIU. To move forward, workers in SEIU and CNA must build on-the-ground unity, based on common class concerns. **CT**

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## Something in the air

Giant 'climate change kills' WDM inflatable plane flies above Trafalgar Square during a demonstration against air travel. Campaigners from the World Development Movement were raising awareness of the dangers that flying causes to the planet and demanding that the climate change law includes emissions from aviation in its reduction targets.

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