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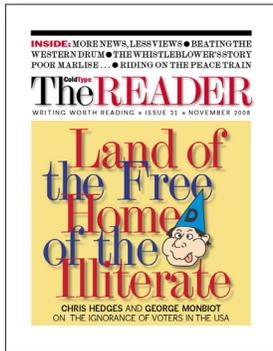
WRITING WORTH READING ● ISSUE 31 ● NOVEMBER 2008

Land of  
the Free  
Home  
of the  
Illiterate



**CHRIS HEDGES AND GEORGE MONBIOT**  
ON THE IGNORANCE OF VOTERS IN THE USA

# The <sup>ColdType</sup> READER



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## ISSUE 31 | NOVEMBER 2008

- |     |  |                     |
|-----|--|---------------------|
| 3.  | <b>COVER STORY: AMERICA THE ILLITERATE</b>         | Chris Hedges        |
| 6.  | <b>COVER STORY: THE TRIUMPH OF IGNORANCE</b>       | George Monbiot      |
| 9.  | <b>WHAT CHANGE IN AMERICA REALLY MEANS</b>         | John Pilger         |
| 14. | <b>MY MICHELLE MOMENT</b>                          | David Michael Green |
| 21. | <b>THE MEDIA AND THE BANKING BAILOUT</b>           | David Manning       |
| 27. | <b>FIXING THE FINANCIAL CRISIS IS NOT SO EASY</b>  | Danny Schechter     |
| 30. | <b>HURWITT'S EYE</b>                               | Mark Hurwitt        |
| 31. | <b>MORE NEWS, LESS VIEWS</b>                       | Greg Philo          |
| 33. | <b>RIDING ON THE PEACE TRAIN</b>                   | Stacey Warde        |
| 38. | <b>TRY THESE ON YOUR CIA BRIEFER, MR OBAMA</b>     | Ray McGovern        |
| 41. | <b>KILLING IS KILLING, WHATEVER YOU CALL IT</b>    | Robert Fisk         |
| 43. | <b>BEATING THE WESTERN DRUM</b>                    | Antony Lowenstein   |
| 45. | <b>ISRAEL BARS VISIT TO A DAUGHTER'S GRAVE</b>     | Jonathan Cook       |
| 47. | <b>AN UNFORGETTABLE MOMENT</b>                     | Uri Avnery          |
| 51. | <b>GREED, CAPITALISM AND THE DEATH OF THE USSR</b> | William Blum        |
| 54. | <b>POOR MARLISE . . .</b>                          | Edward S. Herman    |
| 58. | <b>HOW BUSH'S INVASION BOOSTED BURMA'S JUNTA</b>   | Sherwood Ross       |
| 60. | <b>OBAMA, WEDDING BOMBS AND GOOD NEWS</b>          | Fred Reed           |

# America the illiterate

Forget Red vs. Blue – It's the Educated vs. People-Easily-Fooled-by-Propaganda, writes **Chris Hedges**

**W**e live in two Americas. One America, now the minority, functions in a print-based, literate world. It can cope with complexity and has the intellectual tools to separate illusion from truth. The other America, which constitutes the majority, exists in a non-reality-based belief system. This America, dependent on skillfully manipulated images for information, has severed itself from the literate, print-based culture. It cannot differentiate between lies and truth. It is informed by simplistic, childish narratives and clichés. It is thrown into confusion by ambiguity, nuance and self-reflection. This divide, more than race, class or gender, more than rural or urban, believer or nonbeliever, red state or blue state, has split the country into radically distinct, unbridgeable and antagonistic entities.

There are over 42 million American adults, 20 percent of whom hold high school diplomas, who cannot read, as well as the 50 million who read at a fourth- or fifth-grade level. Nearly a third of the nation's population is illiterate or barely literate. And their numbers are growing by an estimated 2 million a year. But even those who are supposedly literate retreat in huge numbers into this image-based existence. A third of high school graduates, along with 42 percent of college graduates, never

read a book after they finish school. Eighty percent of the families in the United States last year did not buy a book.

The illiterate rarely vote, and when they do vote they do so without the ability to make decisions based on textual information. American political campaigns, which have learned to speak in the comforting epistemology of images, eschew real ideas and policy for cheap slogans and reassuring personal narratives. Political propaganda now masquerades as ideology. Political campaigns have become an experience. They do not require cognitive or self-critical skills. They are designed to ignite pseudo-religious feelings of euphoria, empowerment and collective salvation.

## Public ecstasy

Campaigns that succeed are carefully constructed psychological instruments that manipulate fickle public moods, emotions and impulses, many of which are subliminal. They create a public ecstasy that annuls individuality and fosters a state of mindlessness. They thrust us into an eternal present. They cater to a nation that now lives in a state of permanent amnesia. It is style and story, not content or history or reality, which inform our politics and our lives. We prefer happy illusions. And it works because so much of the American electorate, including those who should

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**They are hostages to brands. Brands come with images and slogans. Images and slogans are all they understand. Many eat at fast food restaurants not only because it is cheap but because they can order from pictures rather than menus**

know better, blindly cast ballots for slogans, smiles, the cheerful family tableaux, narratives and the perceived sincerity and the attractiveness of candidates. We confuse how we feel with knowledge.

The illiterate and semi-literate, once the campaigns are over, remain powerless. They still cannot protect their children from dysfunctional public schools. They still cannot understand predatory loan deals, the intricacies of mortgage papers, credit card agreements and equity lines of credit that drive them into foreclosures and bankruptcies. They still struggle with the most basic chores of daily life from reading instructions on medicine bottles to filling out bank forms, car loan documents and unemployment benefit and insurance papers. They watch helplessly and without comprehension as hundreds of thousands of jobs are shed. They are hostages to brands. Brands come with images and slogans. Images and slogans are all they understand. Many eat at fast food restaurants not only because it is cheap but because they can order from pictures rather than menus. And those who serve them, also semi-literate or illiterate, punch in orders on cash registers whose keys are marked with symbols and pictures. This is our brave new world.

Political leaders in our post-literate society no longer need to be competent, sincere or honest. They only need to appear to have these qualities. Most of all they need a story, a narrative. The reality of the narrative is irrelevant. It can be completely at odds with the facts. The consistency and emotional appeal of the story are paramount. The most essential skill in political theater and the consumer culture is artifice. Those who are best at artifice succeed. Those who have not mastered the art of artifice fail. In an age of images and entertainment, in an age of instant emotional gratification, we do not seek or want honesty. We ask to be indulged and entertained by clichés, stereotypes and mythic narratives that tell us we can be whomever we want to be, that we live in the greatest country on Earth, that

we are endowed with superior moral and physical qualities and that our glorious future is preordained, either because of our attributes as Americans or because we are blessed by God or both.

The ability to magnify these simple and childish lies, to repeat them and have surrogates repeat them in endless loops of news cycles, gives these lies the aura of an uncontested truth. We are repeatedly fed words or phrases like yes we can, maverick, change, pro-life, hope or war on terror. It feels good not to think. All we have to do is visualize what we want, believe in ourselves and summon those hidden inner resources, whether divine or national, that make the world conform to our desires. Reality is never an impediment to our advancement.

#### **Minimum standard**

The *Princeton Review* analyzed the transcripts of the Gore-Bush debates, the Clinton-Bush-Perot debates of 1992, the Kennedy-Nixon debates of 1960 and the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858. It reviewed these transcripts using a standard vocabulary test that indicates the minimum educational standard needed for a reader to grasp the text. During the 2000 debates George W. Bush spoke at a sixth-grade level (6.7) and Al Gore at a seventh-grade level (7.6). In the 1992 debates Bill Clinton spoke at a seventh-grade level (7.6), while George H.W. Bush spoke at a sixth-grade level (6.8), as did H. Ross Perot (6.3). In the debates between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon the candidates spoke in language used by 10th-graders. In the debates of Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas the scores were respectively 11.2 and 12.0. In short, today's political rhetoric is designed to be comprehensible to a 10-year-old child or an adult with a sixth-grade reading level. It is fitted to this level of comprehension because most Americans speak, think and are entertained at this level. This is why serious film and theater and other serious artistic expression, as

well as newspapers and books, are being pushed to the margins of American society. Voltaire was the most famous man of the 18th century. Today the most famous “person” is Mickey Mouse.

In our post-literate world, because ideas are inaccessible, there is a need for constant stimulus. News, political debate, theater, art and books are judged not on the power of their ideas but on their ability to entertain. Cultural products that force us to examine ourselves and our society are condemned as elitist and impenetrable. Hannah Arendt warned that the marketization of culture leads to its degradation, that this marketization creates a new celebrity class of intellectuals who, although well read and informed themselves, see their role in society as persuading the masses that “Hamlet” can be as entertaining as “The Lion King” and perhaps as educational. “Culture,” she wrote, “is being destroyed in order to yield entertainment.”

“There are many great authors of the past who have survived centuries of oblivion and neglect,” Arendt wrote, “but it is still an open question whether they will be able to survive an entertaining version of what they have to say.”

#### **Unmoored from reality**

The change from a print-based to an image-based society has transformed our nation. Huge segments of our population, especially those who live in the embrace of the Christian right and the consumer culture, are completely unmoored from reality. They lack the capacity to search for truth and cope rationally with our mounting social and economic ills. They seek clarity, entertainment and order. They are willing to use force to impose this clarity on others, especially those who do not speak as they speak and think as they think. All the

traditional tools of democracies, including dispassionate scientific and historical truth, facts, news and rational debate, are useless instruments in a world that lacks the capacity to use them.

As we descend into a devastating economic crisis, one that Barack Obama cannot halt, there will be tens of millions of Americans who will be ruthlessly thrust aside. As their houses are foreclosed, as their jobs are lost, as they are forced to declare bankruptcy and watch their communities collapse, they will retreat even further into irrational fantasy. They will be led toward glittering and self-destructive illusions by our modern Pied Pipers—our corporate advertisers, our charlatan preachers, our television news celebrities, our self-help gurus, our entertainment industry and our political demagogues – who will offer increasingly absurd forms of escapism.

The core values of our open society, the ability to think for oneself, to draw independent conclusions, to express dissent when judgment and common sense indicate something is wrong, to be self-critical, to challenge authority, to understand historical facts, to separate truth from lies, to advocate for change and to acknowledge that there are other views, different ways of being, that are morally and socially acceptable, are dying. Obama used hundreds of millions of dollars in campaign funds to appeal to and manipulate this illiteracy and irrationalism to his advantage, but these forces will prove to be his most deadly nemesis once they collide with the awful reality that awaits us. **CT**

*Chris Hedges, a Pulitzer prize-winning reporter, is a Senior Fellow at the Nation Institute. His latest book is “Collateral Damage: America’s War Against Iraqi Civilians”*

**As their houses are foreclosed, as their jobs are lost, as they are forced to declare bankruptcy and watch their communities collapse, they will retreat even further into irrational fantasy**

# The triumph of ignorance

George Monbiot tells why morons succeed in US politics

**The US has the world's best universities and attracts the world's finest minds. It dominates discoveries in science and medicine. Its wealth and power depend on the application of knowledge. Yet, uniquely among the developed nations (with the possible exception of Australia), learning is a grave political disadvantage**

**H**ow was it allowed to happen? How did politics in the US come to be dominated by people who make a virtue out of ignorance? Was it charity that has permitted mankind's closest living relative to spend two terms as president? How did Sarah Palin, Dan Quayle and other such gibbering numbskulls get to where they are? How could Republican rallies in 2008 be drowned out by screaming ignoramuses insisting that Barack Obama is a Muslim and a terrorist? <sup>1</sup>

Like most people on this side of the Atlantic I have spent my adult life mystified by American politics. The US has the world's best universities and attracts the world's finest minds. It dominates discoveries in science and medicine. Its wealth and power depend on the application of knowledge. Yet, uniquely among the developed nations (with the possible exception of Australia), learning is a grave political disadvantage.

There have been exceptions over the past century: Franklin Roosevelt, Kennedy and Clinton tempered their intellectualism with the common touch and survived; but Adlai Stevenson, Al Gore and John Kerry were successfully tarred by their opponents as members of a cerebral elite (as if this were not a qualification for the presidency). Perhaps the defining moment in the collapse of intelligent politics was Ronald Reagan's

response to Jimmy Carter during the 1980 presidential debate. Carter – stumbling a little, using long words – carefully enumerated the benefits of national health insurance. Reagan smiled and said “there you go again” Good”.<sup>2</sup> His own health programme would have appalled most Americans, had he explained it as carefully as Carter had done, but he had found a formula for avoiding tough political issues and making his opponents look like wonks.

It wasn't always like this. The founding fathers of the republic – men like Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, John Adams and Alexander Hamilton – were among the greatest thinkers of their age. They felt no need to make a secret of it. How did the project they launched degenerate into George W Bush and Sarah Palin?

## **Ignorant politicians, ignorant people**

On one level this is easy to answer. Ignorant politicians are elected by ignorant people. US education, like the US health system, is notorious for its failures. In the most powerful nation on earth, one adult in five believes the sun revolves around the earth; only 26% accept that evolution takes place by means of natural selection; two-thirds of young adults are unable to find Iraq on a map; two-thirds of US voters cannot name the three branches of govern-

ment; the maths skills of 15 year-olds in the US are ranked 24th out of the 29 countries of the OECD<sup>3</sup>.

But this merely extends the mystery: how did so many US citizens become so dumb, and so suspicious of intelligence? Susan Jacoby's book *The Age of American Unreason* provides the fullest explanation I have read so far. She shows that the degradation of US politics results from a series of interlocking tragedies.

One theme is both familiar and clear: religion – in particular fundamentalist religion – makes you stupid. The US is the only rich country in which Christian fundamentalism is vast and growing.

Jacoby shows that there was once a certain logic to its anti-rationalism. During the first few decades after the publication of *The Origin of Species*, for example, Americans had good reason to reject the theory of natural selection and to treat public intellectuals with suspicion. From the beginning, Darwin's theory was mixed up in the US with the brutal philosophy – now known as Social Darwinism – of the British writer Herbert Spencer. Spencer's doctrine, promoted in the popular press with the help of funding from Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller and Thomas Edison, suggested that millionaires stood at the top of a scala natura established by evolution. By preventing unfit people from being weeded out, government intervention weakened the nation. Gross economic inequalities were both justifiable and necessary<sup>4</sup>.

Darwinism, in other words, became indistinguishable to the public from the most bestial form of laissez-faire economics. Many Christians responded with revulsion. It is profoundly ironic that the doctrine rejected a century ago by such prominent fundamentalists as William Jennings Bryan is now central to the economic thinking of the Christian right. Modern fundamentalists reject the science of Darwinian evolution and accept the pseudoscience of Social Darwinism.

But there were other, more powerful,

reasons for the intellectual isolation of the fundamentalists. The US is peculiar in devolving the control of education to local authorities. Teaching in the southern states was dominated by the views of an ignorant aristocracy of planters, and a great educational gulf opened up. "In the South", Jacoby writes, "what can only be described as an intellectual blockade was imposed in order to keep out any ideas that might threaten the social order."<sup>5</sup>

### Keeping the South stupid

The Southern Baptist Convention, now the biggest Protestant denomination in the US, was to slavery and segregation what the Dutch Reformed Church was to apartheid in South Africa. It has done more than any other force to keep the South stupid. In the 1960s it tried to stave off desegregation by establishing a system of private Christian schools and universities. A student can now progress from kindergarten to a higher degree without any exposure to secular teaching. Southern Baptist beliefs pass intact through the public school system as well. A survey by researchers at the University of Texas in 1998 found that one in four of the state's public school biology teachers believed that humans and dinosaurs lived on earth at the same time<sup>6</sup>.

This tragedy has been assisted by the American fetishisation of self-education. Though he greatly regretted his lack of formal teaching, Abraham Lincoln's career is repeatedly cited as evidence that good education, provided by the state, is unnecessary: all that is required to succeed is determination and rugged individualism. This might have served people well when genuine self-education movements, like the one built around the Little Blue Books in the first half of the 20th century, were in vogue. In the age of infotainment it is a recipe for confusion.

Besides fundamentalist religion, perhaps the most potent reason why intellectuals struggle in elections is that intellectualism has been equated with subversion.

**One theme is both familiar and clear: religion – in particular fundamentalist religion – makes you stupid. The US is the only rich country in which Christian fundamentalism is vast and growing**

**Hypocrisy of this magnitude has to be respected. It compares favorably with the motto on automobile license plates of the state of New Hampshire made by prisoners: "Live Free or Die"**

The brief flirtation of some thinkers with communism a long time ago has been used to create an impression in the public mind that all intellectuals are communists. Almost every day men like Rush Limbaugh and Bill O'Reilly rage against the "liberal elites" destroying America.

The spectre of pointy-headed alien subversives was crucial to the election of Reagan and Bush. A genuine intellectual elite – like the neocons (some of them former communists) surrounding Bush – has managed to pitch the political conflict as a battle between ordinary Americans and an over-educated pinko establishment. Any attempt to challenge the ideas of the right-wing elite has been successfully branded as elitism.

Obama has a good deal to offer America, but none of this will come to an end if he wins. Until the great failures of the US education system are reversed or religious

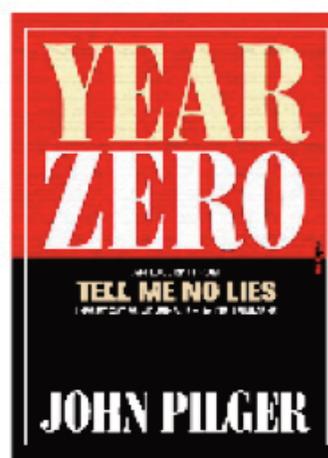
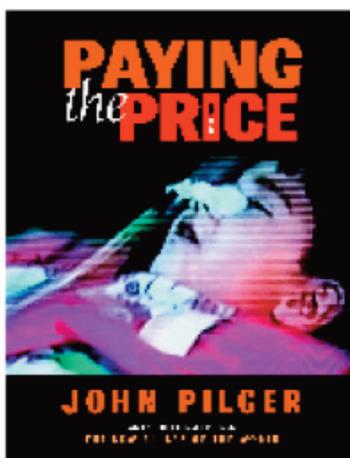
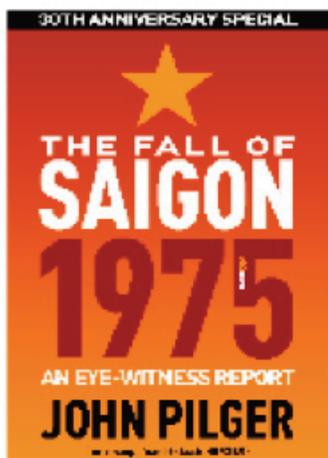
fundamentalism withers there will be political opportunities for people, like Bush and Palin, who flaunt their ignorance. **CT**

**References:**

1. For a staggering display of ignorance and bigotry, see: <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=IPgoVCg4AEQ>
2. You can see this exchange at <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=px7aRIhUkHY&feature=related>
3. All these facts are contained in Susan Jacoby, 2008. *The Age of American Unreason: dumbing down and the future of democracy*. Old Street Publishing, London.
4. Susan Jacoby, *ibid*. Chapter 3.
5. Susan Jacoby, *ibid*. Page 57.
6. Susan Jacoby, *ibid*. Page 25.

*George Monbiot's latest book is Bring On The Apocalypse. This essay originally appeared in the Guardian newspaper*

## READ THE BEST OF **JOHN PILGER**



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# What change in America really means

Don't raise your hopes about Obama; his first actions don't suggest that much will change, says **John Pilger**

**M**y first visit to Texas was in 1968, on the fifth anniversary of the assassination of president John F. Kennedy in Dallas. I drove south, following the line of telegraph poles to the small town of Midlothian, where I met Penn Jones Jr, editor of the *Midlothian Mirror*. Except for his drawl and fine boots, everything about Penn was the antithesis of the Texas stereotype. Having exposed the racists of the John Birch Society, his printing press had been repeatedly firebombed. Week after week, he painstakingly assembled evidence that all but demolished the official version of Kennedy's murder.

This was journalism as it had been before corporate journalism was invented, before the first schools of journalism were set up and a mythology of liberal neutrality was spun around those whose "professionalism" and "objectivity" carried an unspoken obligation to ensure that news and opinion were in tune with an establishment consensus, regardless of the truth. Journalists such as Penn Jones, independent of vested power, indefatigable and principled, often reflect ordinary American attitudes, which have seldom conformed to the stereotypes promoted by the corporate media on both sides of the Atlantic. Read *American Dreams: Lost and Found* by the masterly Studs Terkel, who died the other day, or scan the surveys that unerringly

attribute enlightened views to a majority who believe that "government should care for those who cannot care for themselves" and are prepared to pay higher taxes for universal health care, who support nuclear disarmament and want their troops out of other people's countries.

Returning to Texas, I am struck again by those so unlike the redneck stereotype, Despite the burden of a form of brainwashing placed on most Americans from a tender age: that theirs is the most superior society in the history of the world, and all means are justified, including the spilling of copious blood, in maintaining that superiority.

That is the subtext of Barack Obama's "oratory". He says he wants to build up US military power; and he threatens to ignite a new war in Pakistan, killing yet more brown-skinned people. That will bring tears, too. Unlike those on election night, these other tears will be unseen in Chicago and London. This is not to doubt the sincerity of much of the response to Obama's election, which happened not because of the unction that has passed for news reporting from America since 4 November (e.g. "liberal Americans smiled and the world smiled with them") but for the same reasons that millions of angry emails were sent to the White House and Congress when the "bailout" of Wall Street was revealed, and because most Americans are fed up with war.

**Obama says he wants to build up US military power; and he threatens to ignite a new war in Pakistan, killing yet more brown-skinned people. That will bring tears, too. Unlike those on election night, these other tears will be unseen in Chicago and London**

## OBAMA HYPE

Joe Biden, is a proud warmaker and Zionist. Rahm Emanuel, who is to be the all-important White House chief of staff, is a fervent “neoliberal” devoted to the doctrine that led to the present economic collapse and impoverishment of millions

Two years ago, this anti-war vote installed a Democratic majority in Congress, only to watch the Democrats hand over more money to George W Bush to continue his blood fest. For his part, the “anti-war” Obama never said the illegal invasion of Iraq was wrong, merely that it was a “mistake”. Thereafter, he voted in to give Bush what he wanted. Yes, Obama’s election is historic, a symbol of great change to many. But it is equally true that the American elite has grown adept at using the black middle and management class. The courageous Martin Luther King recognised this when he linked the human rights of black Americans with the human rights of the Vietnamese, then being slaughtered by a liberal Democratic administration. And he was shot. In striking contrast, a young black major serving in Vietnam, Colin Powell, was used to “investigate” and whitewash the infamous My Lai massacre. As Bush’s secretary of state, Powell was often described as a “liberal” and was considered ideal to lie to the United Nations about Iraq’s non-existent weapons of mass destruction. Condoleezza Rice, lauded as a successful black woman, has worked assiduously to deny the Palestinians justice.

Obama’s first two crucial appointments represent a denial of the wishes of his supporters on the principal issues on which they voted. The vice-president-elect, Joe Biden, is a proud warmaker and Zionist. Rahm Emanuel, who is to be the all-important White House chief of staff, is a fervent “neoliberal” devoted to the doctrine that led to the present economic collapse and impoverishment of millions. He is also an “Israel-first” Zionist who served in the Israeli army and opposes meaningful justice for the Palestinians – an injustice that is at

the root of Muslim people’s loathing of the United States and the spawning of jihadism.

No serious scrutiny of this is permitted within the histrionics of Obamamania, just as no serious scrutiny of the betrayal of the majority of black South Africans was permitted within the “Mandela moment”. This is especially marked in Britain, where America’s divine right to “lead” is important to elite British interests. The once respected Observer newspaper, which supported Bush’s war in Iraq, echoing his fabricated evidence, now announces, without evidence, that “America has restored the world’s faith in its ideals”. These “ideals”, which Obama will swear to uphold, have overseen, since 1945, the destruction of 50 governments, including democracies, and 30 popular liberation movements, causing the deaths of countless men, women and children.

None of this was uttered during the election campaign. Had it been allowed, there might even have been recognition that liberalism as a narrow, supremely arrogant, war-making ideology is destroying liberalism as a reality. Prior to Blair’s criminal warmaking, ideology was denied by him and his media mystics. “Blair can be a beacon to the world,” declared the Guardian in 1997. “[He is] turning leadership into an art form.”

Today, merely insert “Obama”. As for historic moments, there is another that has gone unreported but is well under way – liberal democracy’s shift towards a corporate dictatorship, managed by people regardless of ethnicity, with the media as its clichéd façade. “True democracy,” wrote Penn Jones Jr, the Texas truth-teller, “is constant vigilance: not thinking the way you’re meant to think and keeping your eyes wide open at all times.” **CT**

*John Pilger’s latest book, Freedom Next Time, is now out in paperback. His new movie is The War on Democracy. This essay first appeared in the New Statesman*

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# The whistleblower tells her story

**Norman Solomon** on a spy with a conscience  
– pity the newspapers didn't take any heed of her story

**O**f course Katharine Gun was free to have a conscience, as long as it didn't interfere with her work at a British intelligence agency. To the authorities, practically speaking, a conscience was apt to be less tangible than a pixel on a computer screen. But suddenly – one routine morning, while she was scrolling through e-mail at her desk – conscience struck. It changed Katharine Gun's life, and it changed history.

Despite the nationality of this young Englishwoman, her story is profoundly American – all the more so because it has remained largely hidden from the public in the United States. When Katharine Gun chose, at great personal risk, to reveal an illicit spying operation at the United Nations in which the U.S. government was the senior partner, she brought out of the transatlantic shadows a special relationship that could not stand the light of day.

By then, in early 2003, the president of the United States – with dogged assists from the British prime minister following close behind – had long since become transparently determined to launch an invasion of Iraq. Gun's moral concerns were not unusual; she shared, with countless other Brits and Americans, strong opposition to the impending launch of war. Yet, thanks to a simple and intricate twist of fate, she abruptly found herself in a rare

position to throw a roadblock in the way of the political march to war from Washington and London. Far more extraordinary, though, was her decision to put herself in serious jeopardy on behalf of revealing salient truths to the world.

We might envy such an opportunity, and admire such courage on behalf of principle. But there are good, or at least understandable, reasons why so few whistleblowers emerge from institutions that need conformity and silence to lay flagstones on the path to war. Those reasons have to do with matters of personal safety, financial security, legal jeopardy, social cohesion and default positions of obedience. They help to explain why and how people go along to get along with the warfare state even when it flagrantly rests on foundations of falsehoods.

## **Memo from the NSA**

The e-mailed memorandum from the U.S. National Security Agency that jarred Katharine Gun that fateful morning was dated less than two months before the invasion of Iraq that was to result in thousands of deaths among the occupying troops and hundreds of thousands more among Iraqi people. We're told that this is a cynical era, but there was nothing cynical about Katharine Gun's response to the memo that appeared without warning on her desk-

**Thanks to a simple and intricate twist of fate, she abruptly found herself in a rare position to throw a roadblock in the way of the political march to war from Washington and London**

## SPY STORY

**“At the time,” she has recalled, “all I could think about was that I knew they were trying really hard to legitimize an invasion, and they were willing to use this new intelligence to twist arms, perhaps blackmail delegates, so they could tell the world they had achieved a consensus for war”**

top. Reasons to shrug it off were plentiful, in keeping with bottomless rationales for prudent inaction. The basis for moral engagement and commensurate action was singular.

The import of the NSA memo was such that it shook the government of Tony Blair and caused uproars on several continents. But for the media in the United States, it was a minor story. For the *New York Times*, it was no story at all.

At last, a new book tells this story. *The Spy Who Tried to Stop a War* packs a powerful wallop. To understand in personal, political and historic terms – what Katharine Gun did, how the British and American governments responded, and what the U.S. news media did and did not report – is to gain a clear-eyed picture of a military-industrial-media complex that plunged ahead with the invasion of Iraq shortly after her brave action of conscience. That complex continues to promote what Martin Luther King Jr. called “the madness of militarism.”

### Simple response

In a time when political players and widely esteemed journalists are pleased to posture with affects of great sophistication, Katharine Gun’s response was disarmingly simple. She activated her conscience when clear evidence came into her hands that war – not diplomacy seeking to prevent it – headed the priorities list of top leaders at both 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue and 10 Downing Street. “At the time,” she has recalled, “all I could think about was that I knew they were trying really hard to legitimize an invasion, and they were willing to use this new intelligence to twist arms, perhaps blackmail delegates, so they could tell the world they had achieved a consensus for war.”

She and her colleagues at the Government Communications Headquarters were, as she later put it, “being asked to participate in an illegal process with the ultimate aim of achieving an invasion in violation of

international law.”

The authors of *The Spy Who Tried to Stop a War*, Marcia and Thomas Mitchell, describe the scenario this way: “Twisting the arms of the recalcitrant [U.N. Security Council] representatives in order to win approval for a new resolution could supply the universally acceptable rationale.” After Katharine Gun discovered what was afoot, “she attempted to stop a war by destroying its potential trigger mechanism, the required second resolution that would make war legal.”

Instead of mere accusation, the NSA memo provided substantiation. That fact explains why U.S. intelligence agencies firmly stonewalled in response to media inquiries – and it may also help to explain why the U.S. news media gave the story notably short shrift. To a significant degree, the scoop did not reverberate inside the American media echo chamber because it was too sharply telling to blend into the dominant orchestrated themes.

While supplying the ostensible first draft of history, U.S. media filtered out vital information that could refute the claims of Washington’s exalted war planners. “Journalists, too many of them – some quite explicitly – have said that they see their mission as helping the war effort,” an American media critic warned during the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq. “And if you define your mission that way, you’ll end up suppressing news that might be important, accurate, but maybe isn’t helpful to the war effort.”

Jeff Cohen (a friend and colleague of mine) spoke those words before the story uncorked by Katharine Gun’s leak splashed across British front pages and then scarcely dribbled into American media. He uttered them on the MSNBC television program hosted by Phil Donahue, where he worked as a producer and occasional on-air analyst. Donahue’s prime-time show was cancelled by NBC management three weeks before the invasion – as it happened, on almost the same day that the revelation of the NSA memo became such a big media story

in the United Kingdom and such a carefully bypassed one in the United States.

Soon a leaked NBC memo confirmed suspicions that the network had pulled the plug on Donahue's show in order to obstruct views and information that would go against the rush to war.

The network memo said that the Donahue program would present a "difficult public face for NBC in a time of war." And: "He seems to delight in presenting guests who are antiwar, anti-Bush and skeptical of the administration's motives." Cancellation of the show averted the danger that it could become "a home for the liberal antiwar agenda at the same time that our competitors are waving the flag at every opportunity."

Overall, to the editors of American mass media, the actions and revelations of Katharine Gun merited little or no reporting – especially when they mattered most.

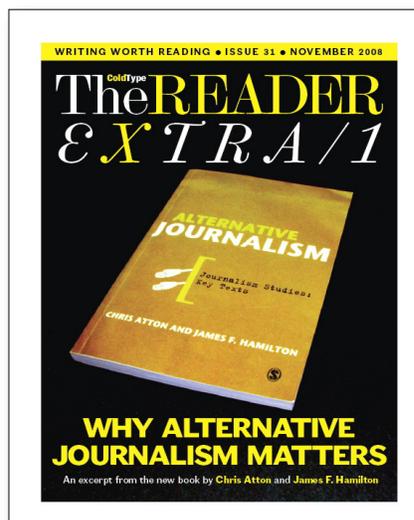
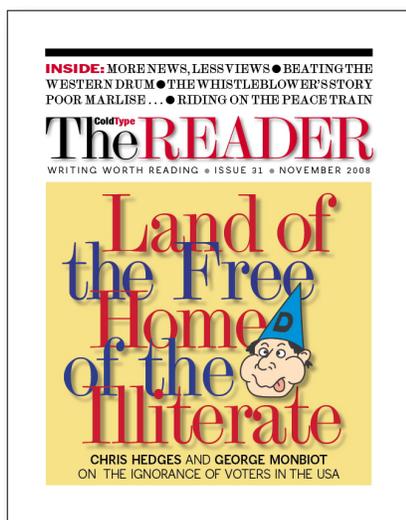
My search of the comprehensive Lexis-Nexis database found that for nearly three months after her name was first reported in the British media, U.S. news stories mentioning her scarcely existed.

When the prosecution of Katharine Gun finally concluded its journey through the British court system, the authors note, a surge of American news reports on the closing case "had people wondering why they hadn't heard about the NSA spy operation at the beginning." This book includes an account of journalistic evasion that is a grim counterpoint to the story of conscience and courage that just might inspire us to activate more of our own. **CT**

*This article was adapted from Norman Solomon's foreword to the new book by Marcia and Thomas Mitchell, "The Spy Who Tried to Stop a War: Katharine Gun and the Secret Plot to Sanction the Iraq Invasion."*

**To the editors of American mass media, the actions and revelations of Katharine Gun merited little or no reporting – especially when they mattered most**

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# My Michelle moment

For one day, **David Michael Green** feels proud to be American

**We talk a lot about democracy here, but I'm wondering how much of it I've ever actually witnessed in my lifetime**

**A**merican democracy is a tattered thing. One could devote a lifetime to describing its major failings, many of which are baked right into the institutional structure of the practice.

American democracy is a heartbreaking thing. To be a progressive, caring citizen of this country is to live a life of almost unmitigated disappointment and startling affronts to a compassionate moral code.

American democracy is a chimerical thing. In my half-century on this planet I'm not particularly sure it has ever quite shown up in any serious fashion.

To be an American means to suffer serious anguish, not only because of the horrifically stupid things your people can do, but precisely because of the unique potential of this country to do better. There actually is something to the idea of American exceptionalism, in ways that are completely antithetical to those used by regressives when they hijack the idea, but also in ways that progressives are often blinded to because of our laudable compulsion towards egalitarianism. But this country is unique in that it is founded on ideas, not geography or ethnicity or some other form of empty primordialist affinity. And that uniqueness still resonates today in the standards we hold for ourselves. To have violated them so egregiously of late is all the more devas-

tating than to have never held such standards at all, as is often the case elsewhere. To be American means not having the easy comfort of jaded cynicism to resort to when your government or your fellow citizens break your heart.

We talk a lot about democracy here, but I'm wondering how much of it I've ever actually witnessed in my lifetime. Sure, there were decisive elections in 1964, 1972, 1980, 1984 and 1994. Voters were presented with real alternatives in those races, and they went heavily one way, suggesting that the fundamental democratic principle of rule by the people was truly at work. But in every one of those cases, I would argue, there was massive deceit on the part of the winning team, to the extent that voters didn't really know what they were choosing after all.

## **Johnson's monstrous lie**

Lyndon Johnson campaigned as a guy who would never "send American boys off to fight a war that Asian boys should be fighting for themselves". But the reality of his Vietnam policy, which came slamming home less than a year after the election, could hardly have been more different from the promise he made as a candidate. In fact, it was a monstrous lie, since Johnson knew full well before the election what he was going to do in Vietnam. Then, not much

later, Richard Nixon used every dirty trick in the book to win in 1972. Both of these guys ultimately got caught and lost their presidencies because of their deceits. They got off easy. We did not.

Reagan began the onslaught of the new conservatism (aka the old regressivism) in 1980, a tradition which carries forward to this day, right through from his two elections and terms, the Gingrich abomination of the 1990s, and the Bush horror of this decade. Regressives won a lot of these elections hands-down, but in every case employed weapons of mass deception in order to fool voters into assisting economic elites in the picking of their own pockets.

I don't believe for a moment that George W. Bush cares about terrorism, or that he ever thought Iraq was a genuine threat.

I don't believe for a moment that Newt Gingrich was morally offended by Bill Clinton's lies about getting a blow-job in the White House.

I don't believe for a moment that Ronald Reagan cut taxes on the wealthy because he thought it would be good for the economy. Using racism, red-baiting, homophobia, xenophobia, bogus tax cuts, national security crises real and imagined, and horrid swiftboating smear tactics, regressives have been able to steal elections – literally, when they couldn't do it figuratively – by tricking voters into enabling the kleptocrats to come into power and grab everything not bolted to the floor. As well as the floor itself, if necessary.

### Stolen elections

And then, of course, added to these elections in which the people have spoken without actually knowing what they're saying, there have been the stolen national elections of 1960, 2000 and 2004, each of them, by definition, as genuine and powerful an abuse of democratic principles as one might imagine, and therefore as deep a body blow to the polity as could be construed. Put it all together, and it's enough to make a fella cry. As many of us have, on

many an occasion these last decades.

All of which could have ground the country into a despair and cynicism from which it would be impossible to emerge. But it didn't, and if it isn't too smarmy to regurgitate the word yet one more time (at least we won't have to hear 'maverick' anymore), in this election I saw an outpouring of hope the likes of which I can't remember in my lifetime. This was the most I've ever seen Americans engaged in the choice of who will manage our shared public domain, a function we've largely divorced ourselves from in a fashion so remarkable it was as if it was the government of some foreign land in question, and these were other people's lives at stake. According to one preliminary estimate, however, this election produced 136 million voters at the polls, or 64 percent of those eligible, the highest turnout since 1908.

Moreover, this was the most broadly emotional election I've ever seen. People were engaged in it at a very personal and profound level, and there were a lot of them. There was a radiance in the air about the election that was unique and powerful and pervasive. Everybody everywhere seemed to burst into tears on election night, whether they lived in America or not. People seemed unable to stop talking about it, before and after. I was sitting in a doctor's office examining room earlier in the week, rather impatiently overhearing the doc and another patient going on and on about election politics for fifteen minutes. After a while he finally comes into my room, whereupon he and I proceeded to go on and on about election politics for thirty minutes. Finally, his receptionist banged on the door to remind him that he had two other patients waiting. I had the feeling that this was not the first time that had happened in his office, and it certainly wasn't the first time I had observed ordinary, non-political-junkie citizens engaging deeply in this process. I've never before seen so many people so plugged in to their national politics. I'm pretty sure we can thank George

**Everybody everywhere seemed to burst into tears on election night, whether they lived in America or not. People seemed unable to stop talking about it, before and after**

## WHAT NEXT?

**what politicians like Reagan and Bush were masterful at was making those importunings from our darker angels seem legitimate. It was okay to feel like America was better than the rest of the world, and we should go out there and kick some ass on inconvenient brown people who happened to be sitting on top of our oil**

W. Bush for that, above all.

For this reason, and several others, I had a Michelle moment during election week. For the first time in a very long time, I felt a little pride about what my country was doing. This election felt to me like nothing so much as a reclaiming of our country from some truly evil predators who had hijacked it, and a restoration of democracy – and, really, sanity – to our political sphere. Of course, those notions can be overstated. There are still a lot of adherents to regressive politics in the mix. Quite a lot, actually, and many of them have big microphones, and many more listen to what those bloviators say. But the same notions can also be understated, as well. This is not likely to be a victory of just a single election.

The more subtle but also more powerful effects of a successful Obama presidency – and I have very high confidence that it will be the most successful presidency since FDR – will be to renormalize American political culture around a mix of classic and contemporary values of genuine virtue, and to bury forever the toxic ideological experiment in regressivism we’ve endured these last thirty years. The skill and dignity and seriousness of purpose that Obama will bring to the White House will quietly but massively enhance the damage to the right’s reputation that they’ve already well begun inflicting upon themselves. People will look back on this Cringe Decade and wonder – just as the rest of the world has been doing all through it – “What the hell were we thinking?”

The answer, of course, is that we weren’t. We were feeling, instead, and what we were feeling was frightened and selfish and small-minded. And what politicians like Reagan and Bush were masterful at was making those importunings from our darker angels seem legitimate. It was okay to feel like America was better than the rest of the world, and we should go out there and kick some ass on inconvenient brown people who happened to be sitting on top of our oil. It was okay to put a little chump change

in our pockets, even if it meant handing over massive debts from our little party today for our children to deal with tomorrow. It was okay to kill even pathetically small efforts at remediation for less privileged members of the society so that the middle class could put a few extra pennies in their pockets. And, worst of all, it was okay to remain willfully ignorant about what we were doing, its impacts, and why we were really doing these things. What’s more pathetic than a complicit marionette?

Perhaps that is finally all behind us. This election was not a landslide, but it was nevertheless absolutely a watershed. And, in fact, if you combine it with the results from the last election, in 2006, it does represent a landslide. However, not one favoring Democrats so much as rejecting Republicans. Not one favoring Obama so much as rejecting Bush. And not one favoring progressivism so much as rejecting regressivism. These are huge developments, especially for all of us now emerging from the desiccated wasteland, the carnage-strewn battlefield, the scorched earth landscape that has been eight years worth of Bush. But it is important not to over-interpret, and therefore misinterpret, what just happened. To begin with, consider that even in 2008, even in just about the worst year imaginable for the GOP, even with a charismatic leader like Obama running a letter-perfect campaign, even with an lousy opponent like McCain running a strategically inept campaign, even with Sarah Palin dragging down the ticket, and even with a once-in-a-century economic meltdown hitting right before the election – even with all that, Obama won with only a five to six percent margin of the popular vote. I’m sad to say it, but if we’re honest we’ll recognize that the second most astonishing thing about his victory – apart from a black man winning the American presidency – was how big it wasn’t.

That’s a sobering conclusion, which is just what it should be if we are to succeed going forward. The rest of the journey to a

restoration of progressive, and sane, American politics starts now, and it won't be an easy one. The good news is that Americans are in fact pretty liberal, even though they largely don't know it. The fact that they don't is a tribute to the marketing genius of the GOP Mad Men, who are of course merely hired guns for the plutocrats bathing in wealth all these decades now. But they're good at what they do. So, if you ask people to self-identify ideologically, many more will now say they are conservative than liberal.

However, oddly, nowadays many more will call themselves Democrats than Republicans. And even more tellingly, on issue after issue after issue – almost completely without exception – the majority of Americans take the liberal position when asked by pollsters, and usually by overwhelming numbers. We may not be Sweden, but we are a lot more liberal than we think we are, and than regressives want us to think we are. They have successfully turned the liberal brand into a pariah label, but they haven't been able to take the progressive tendencies out of our political culture.

#### **An end to torture**

Americans want the war in Iraq ended, and no more such nightmares. They want a national healthcare system. They want responsible environmental stewardship. They want to retain the Roe v. Wade abortion policy status quo. They want to end torture. They want good relations with our allies. They want fair tax policies and a fair distribution of wealth. And so on, and so on. These are liberals, any way you cut it, except by name. Again, this branding is certainly great testament to nefarious marketing genius, but, fortunately, does not actually represent the country's politics. In fact, Obama and the Democrats have a very good piece of material to work with if they seek to weave this center-left fabric into the garment of a new, broad, robust and genuinely popular progressive consensus in America.

Meanwhile, the second piece of good news from Election 2008 is the mirror opposite of the first. For every bit of hopefulness we may see on the left and among Democrats, there is disarray and disaster on the right. Even better yet, they don't really comprehend why. And, best of all, they have no remedy for what ails them.

Some of the Neanderthal set (with apologies to cavemen everywhere for the unflattering comparison) seem to at least have figured out that they have been demolished in the last two years. But, because they believe so fervently – one might say religiously, eh? – in their disastrous doctrines, they are completely unable to fathom what went wrong. The equation is actually as simple as it gets: They ruled. It sucked. It's over. What's hard to get about that? The problem, of course, is that giving up theological beliefs is never easy, especially when doing so comes attached with a whopping measure of embarrassment, guilt, shame and admission of stupidity.

And so, even in a campaign year when these regressives disassociated themselves completely from the most regressive president ever, they still have not made a break from their regressive politics, and can only stand back in shock and awe, trying to figure out why the rest of the country has now joined the rest of the world in doing so. Talk about your isolation. Red state politics nowadays have more in common with Russian authoritarianism, Chinese devotion to the public interest, Sudanese human rights, Iranian theocracy and North Korean militarism than with the rest of the world or even the rest of America. That ain't exactly the most fetching company to be keeping.

More importantly, though, where do they go from here? I see three choices for the Republican Party, each of which essentially represents a different form of suicide. It's sorta like, how do you want to go out? Pills? Gunshot? The rope?

One possibility for the GOP is to cling to the status quo. Things might actually improve slightly for them if they were to do

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## WHAT NEXT?

**The freaks who have been salivating over Sarah Palin couldn't even stand John McCain because he was too liberal for them. What can you say about people for whom Mike Huckabee is considered insufficiently right-wing?**

so, now that they can return to the role of carping critic, rather than having to actually take responsibility for governing. But probably not. They can continue to be obstreperous, as they have for two years now, using their minority caucus in the Senate to filibuster every piece of legislation the Democrats put forward. I wouldn't want to be in that gang if they do, however. Americans are seriously scared about the economy and healthcare and other major issues, and they want remedies. In a desert of starving people, how long do you think it would be before whiney losers standing on the tracks blocking the relief train had the living shit kicked out of them?

I'm sure Olympia Snow and Susan Collins, perhaps the two remaining moderates in the entire Republican Senate caucus, get this, and would either depart from such filibuster attempts or take the opportunity to depart from the GOP altogether. Now that Chris Shays got his pink slip, there will not be a single Republican from anywhere in New England in the new House of Representatives. I don't think that fact is lost on the two senators from Maine, and perhaps a few others like them.

### **Move to the right?**

A second alternative is to move to the right. Amazingly, many Republicans have been making the case that the GOP's problem was that it wasn't conservative enough. That Lil' Bush wasn't true enough to the principles of Ronald Reagan. Let's leave aside for the moment the fact that the myth of Reagan departs further from reality every day, and that Reagan himself was far less true to these much-vaunted principles than the faulty memories of regressives allow them to recall. More to the point is this: Do Americans want more tax cuts for the wealthy right now? More national debt? Spending cuts on popular programs? Less government safety net, just as the economy starts to resemble the surface of the moon? More corporate control and profiteering in our healthcare system? More wars based

on lies that diminish our security and claim the lives of our children? More alienation from the rest of the world? More torture? More regulation of our sexuality, our reproductive systems, our right to die with dignity? More intervention of blowhard hypocrite religion-mongers in our political sphere? More corruption? More ignoring, and indeed exacerbation, of looming environmental catastrophe?

Not conservative enough? Are these guys kidding? What is the number of their drug dealer, man? Where do they score such great hallucinogens?!?! I'm jealous, dude. I haven't been that high since I saw Blue Oyster Cult play in 1973.

Finally, what remains, then, as a third option would likely be viable for the party itself, yet still represents existential suicide. Imagine a dead body propped up in a chair, sitting in the corner, largely ignored except for the increasingly foul smell. The GOP could return to the days of Rockefeller and Ford, end the hijacking by the radical right, and become once again a moderate-conservative party.

Of course, this presumes that the radicals in the party who control it so completely – to the extent that there really isn't a rivalry with moderates anymore, chiefly because there aren't really moderates left there with whom to fight – that these folks would relinquish the vehicle they've commandeered. Fat chance of that happening, Me Bucko.

The freaks who have been salivating over Sarah Palin couldn't even stand John McCain because he was too liberal for them. What can you say about people for whom Mike Huckabee is considered insufficiently right-wing? Do you see these troops lining up to march fervently behind the milquetoast moderation of Dick Lugar? Do you see the twenty-three percent of Texans who still think that Barack Obama is a Muslim skipping a week's worth of losing Lotto tickets so that they can send a campaign contribution to their new hero, Arlen Specter?

Of course not. More importantly, though, even if they took this tack, doing so would effectively destroy the GOP's entire *raison d'être*. It's a mistake of profound magnitude to see Republicans as some sort of normal party, the purpose of which is to aggregate the passions and policy preferences of a great mass of citizens. The truth is that it is, instead, a vehicle for kleptocrats whose only real purpose is to loot the country as completely and as rapidly as possible.

### Legions of shock troops

Since these already wealthy members of the plutocracy represent the narrowest share of the population, they've always had to create a scenario in which they could surreptitiously attract legions of shock troops to assist them and enable their pirating. Hence, god, gays and guns. Hence racism, xenophobia, foreign bogeymen and national chauvinism.

What's crucial to remember is that the party is a shell, and a shell game. Take away the looting, and the animating purpose of the whole affair is expelled like air rushing madly out of a freshly blown tire. All that's left is that body propped up in the corner.

In short, I see nowhere for the GOP to go looking forward. I predicted two years ago that the party could actually cease to exist in rather short order, and I think that is even more likely now.

Finally, in addition to the upsides of improved Democratic Party fortunes and a Republican Party falling to pieces, there are other huge positive developments emanating from what transpired this week and this decade – too many to elaborate on here. But there is one, in particular, that is worthy of mentioning, particularly because it is both general and truly radical – in the literal sense of going to the root – and therefore has the capacity to indirectly affect so many specific issue areas.

The high point of the 2008 campaign, for me, was Obama's Philadelphia speech on race. I liked the content of his remarks very much, but what I really appreciated most

was the tone of the speech. If any politician in my lifetime has spoken to the American public with such intelligence and maturity, or has given remarks that demanded such sophistication and thoughtfulness of his or her listeners, I don't remember it. Maybe Jimmy Carter did, or Bobby Kennedy – I don't know. I do know at least that it has been a very, very long time indeed. If Obama can continue, going forward, to do this over and over again, using the bully pulpit that only a president has, and that a charismatic president has especially, he can raise the level of discourse in this country dramatically. Simply by framing and discussing issues in these terms, he will force the press and the opposition and the public to follow along. As was the case with his race speech, this could result in advancing the dismal state of our national dialogue from one which chiefly features two-dimensional dumbed-down cardboard characterizations, to another which is built around more honest representations of our political realities.

The effects this change in tone might have across the board could be remarkable, especially since the entire regressive program is so heavily dependent on ignorant citizens imbibing simplified and emotionalized characterizations of complex, multi-sided and nuanced issues. Imagine, to take just one example, if we could finally talk about the Middle East in terms transcending the white hats (Israel) versus black hats (the rest) paradigm that so readily facilitates our foolish and destructive policymaking there.

Imagine if we could be allowed to think seriously and intelligently about America's place in the world, starting with the realization that we spend more on 'defense' than all other countries in the entire world – that's about 195 of them combined! – despite the absence of any existing serious threat to our security. Imagine if we could talk intelligently and knowledgeably about how our economic system compares to those in Europe, for example, and what

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**Race relations will again change dramatically with the existence of the first black president, much more in this psychological and cultural sense than in a legislative sense.**

our policy choices mean in terms of quality of life for Americans. What if we could acknowledge that the polarization of wealth in this country ranks us down along with banana republics throughout the world?

Sometimes the most powerful and profound political changes in a society are the subtlest and quietest in their evolution. Race relations in America, for example, were clearly changed by civil rights legislation. But they were even more affected by the change in consciousness, often generational, that turned racist attitudes from de rigueur to unacceptable in polite society. Indeed, it is arguable that the legislation and the judicial rulings could never have transpired without the less tangible psychological changes preparing the ground for them.

Race relations will again change dramatically with the existence of the first black president, much more in this psychological and cultural sense than in a legislative sense. But I raise the question more as an example of a broader possibility than to focus specifically on race. If Obama's style of governance can demand more of the media and more of the public in terms of a sophisticated processing of our politics, this can only be good news for progressives in America. The dirty little secret of the right is that a thinking public is a death sentence for their lies. Ten minutes of Limbaugh makes that abundantly clear to anyone with half a brain.

#### **Wary of the future**

Looking ahead, there are surely some reasons to be wary about what comes next.

There are many indicators to suggest that neither boldness nor serious progressivism are part of Barack Obama's DNA, though there are also numerous others to suggest just as emphatically that they are. But that's for the months and years to come. The new president will have plenty of opportunities to disappoint us, though hopefully he'll decline to avail himself of very many.

In the meantime, there is so much to celebrate and for which to be thankful. It starts, of course, with the end of the Reagan/Bush/Cheney/DeLay/Scalia/Rove regressive nightmare, and it would be more than enough, frankly, if it simply ended right there. But it doesn't. We have a new president coming to office who represents our society's very best in almost every respect. And this is so because we, the owner's of this democracy, reached back into our history to remember and locate the best within ourselves in order to make that happen. Emerging from so many years of political darkness – so many moments of utter astonishment at the evil my country was practicing, so much heartache from the destruction done in our name, so much hopelessness after thirty years of Reaganism-Bushism – emerging from these shadows and tentatively poking my head out into the light, one thought kept recurring to me over and over again last Tuesday:

It was a good day to be alive. **CT**

*David Michael Green is a professor of political science at Hofstra University in New York. More of his work can be found at his website [www.regressiveantidote.net](http://www.regressiveantidote.net) and at [www.coldtype.net/green.html](http://www.coldtype.net/green.html)*

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# The media and the banking bailout

**David Manning** asks how much responsibility the Irish media must bear for the country's current financial crisis

**T**owards the end of a recent edition of the Irish TV current affairs programme 'Nightly News with Vincent Browne', the host asked one of his guests, almost rhetorically, whether the media have some responsibility for the artificial inflation of property prices in their promotion of the market through property supplements and advertising. His guest agreed that to some extent the media did play a part in that hyping.

In the closing moments the same guest commented on the front page of the next day's *Irish Times*, an 'extraordinary juxtaposition' of an image of Minister for Finance Brian Lenihan, who had just struck a deal to underwrite the bad debts of Ireland's major financial institutions to the tune of €400 billion, looking somewhat 'haunted', while just beneath, an advertisement for an Irish-based bank displayed its current lending rates. Browne responded, "Well that's the way things go." [Nightly News with Vincent Browne, TV3, 30/09/08]

And with that the corporate media concluded the audit of its performance during the boom years. No failure on its part, whether it be the promoting of over valued property or irresponsible lending practices, could now prevent them from striking a populist tone in the face of a systematic failure. It is apparently irrelevant that these same institutions were instrumental

in bringing about this crisis. Retrospect is after all only for 'old lefty whingers' – the conventional wisdom tells us there are no solutions to found in looking backwards.

## The media and big business

Ireland's national banks are creaking under the global credit crunch, as lenders make clear their suspicions of the banking sector's as yet unknown level of exposure to the deflating property bubble. According to Morgan Kelly, Professor of Economics, University College Dublin, "Irish banks are currently owed €110 billion by builders and developers. Of every €100 that Irish residents have deposited in banks, €60 has been lent for property speculation." Media analysis shares the blame for this predicament between the central boom profiteers, banks and developers.

What is not referred to is the symbiotic relationship between the corporate media and big business, a relationship that put newspapers and media outlets at the virtual helm of the property boom titanic. In July 2006 for instance the *Irish Times* bought the property website *MyHome.ie* for €50 million. Three months earlier Tony O'Reilly's Independent News & Media acquired *PropertyNews.com*, the "largest internet property site on the island of Ireland." Along with their competitors, the *Irish Times* and *Irish Independent* promoted

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the sale and purchase of vastly over valued properties to consumers – invariably under the disingenuous presumption that property value is a function of time.

The fraudulent mythology of never-ending property value increase has been perpetuated by the media for over a decade, with few notable exceptions. In 2005 the *Irish Independent's* Con Power reporting from a seminar attended by over 200 leading property professionals predicted: “The average Dublin house price will hit the €750,000 mark or higher in 2015” [Average Dublin house in 2015 to hit €750,000, *Irish Independent*, June 2, 2005]

Around the same time the *Irish Times's* Edel Morgan speculated: “One can only surmise what the average millionaire will be able to buy in Dublin in another nine years. A pokey one-bed apartment in the outer suburbs? Or maybe a townhouse on a new development bought under the local authority’s affordable housing scheme? Will the semi-d become the preserve of the multimillionaire while only the super rich will afford the luxury of living detached?”<sup>6</sup>

In the face of advancing realities this fanciful indulgence was to be short-lived and as the bubble wheezed, the rhetoric began to lose its bluster, though still clinging to its underlying theme.

In 2006 RTE broadcast ‘Future Shock – Property Crash’, a documentary discussing the possibility and likely consequences of a property crash, undermining completely the rhetoric of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ landings – a contrived framing that simply suggested a return to ground level, obscuring the probability of negative equity. The media reaction was vehement.

Journalist Alan Ruddock likened the documentary makers to super-villain and sociopath Lex Luthor. Writing in the *Irish Independent*, which it should be noted, co-sponsors the ‘glittering’ Irish Property Awards, he claimed that RTE had “broadcast fear in the market”:

“RTE did its bit on Monday night to kill the property market. And, if its own logic

is correct, kill the economy too. Set to a soundtrack of gloom, Futureshock told us we were doomed. There were some caveats, but the message was relentless: the Irish property market, which has enjoyed a spectacular boom, is now stagnant.

“Instead of being a sane and salutary warning that prices fall as well as rise, that property booms end and that a crash is a possibility, it became an exercise in fear endorsed and promoted by the national broadcaster.”

Clíodhna O’Donoghue assured readers that “if (and that is a big ‘if’) the market is going to crash it will do so in a patchy, selective way which will not impact to any great degree on many of the existing homes in Ireland.” [Clíodhna O’Donoghue, *Irish Independent*, April 20 2007]

The *Irish Times* simply referred to RTE’s ‘lurid’ predictions.

Three months later the *Independent* was forced to concede that the “RTE programme on property crash likelihood ‘was not biased’.” The Irish Auctioneers and Valuers Institute’s complaint to the Broadcasting Complaints Commission “claiming that the programme had not been impartial and had a detrimental affect on the property market” had been rejected. [Gareth Morgan, *Irish Independent*, August 11 2007]

In fact the predictions made by the makers of ‘Futureshock Property crash’ were far less severe than what we are presently witnessing.

The *Irish Times's* Assistant Editor Fintan O’Toole commented in interview with MediaBite on this issue: “RTE are one of the few media outlets that don’t take property advertising. It’s not a simple one plus one equation, though it is undoubtedly true that if not the choice of subject, but the prominence that is given a certain subject has to be related to the direct interests of the media outlets themselves. There is no question that almost all of the Irish media for the last 10-15 years has had a crucial economic stake in a rising property market. Because property advertising is very lucra-

tive and is a very important part of what makes the Irish media tick. It's not that a newspaper like the Irish Times will not publish things that say 'this is a bubble'. It has published a number of pieces and very authoritative pieces, but in a sense it's where are those pieces going to appear. How are they related to the broader agenda, in terms of how we understand our society at the moment? So I'm not saying there is an absolute mechanical relationship between certain interests and what appears, but I am saying that the relationship exists. People need to understand this, it is not a council of despair – well you know there is nothing you can do about this. A critical understanding of how the media works is one in which people understand the kind of relationships that are involved and how to read and see that it is not necessarily an objective and accurate reflection of everything that is important to Irish society.”

Unfortunately even tempered admissions such as this on the direct interests of the media in the buoyancy of the property market are rarely hinted at in print.

#### **Discussing the Market – a 'procession of the powerful'**

A recent analysis (*See full article on Page 27 of this issue*) by Greg Philo of the Glasgow University Media Group titled 'More News, Less Views' rejected by the *Guardian* on the grounds that “it would be read as a piece of old lefty whingeing about bias” commented: “News is a procession of the powerful. Watch it on TV, listen to the Today programme and marvel at the orthodoxy of views and the lack of critical voices. When the credit crunch hit, we were given a succession of bankers, stockbrokers and even hedge-fund managers to explain and say what should be done. But these were the people who had caused the problem, thinking nothing of taking £20 billion a year in city bonuses. The solution these free market wizards agreed to, was that tax payers should stump up £50 billion (and rising) to fill up the black holes in the bank-

ing system. Where were the critical voices to say it would be a better idea to take the bonuses back?”

As with the property crash, the property boom was also a procession of the powerful. Mainstream media debates were invariably dominated by those with financial vested interests. For example, when the government was considering changes to stamp duty in order to artificially bolster property prices in late 2007 the *Irish Business Post* “asked six experts for their views on whether now is the time for the government to reform the tax”. [Stamp duty: the debate rages on] The response was overwhelmingly in favour of what should now be considered a failed policy. Those experts were:

- Chief Economist with Friends First
- President of the Irish Auctioneers and Valuers Institute
- Economic research officer at the Economic and Social Research Institute
- Economist with Douglas Newman Good
- Chief Economist at the Sherry FitzGerald Group
- Lecturer in economics at the Cairnes School of Business and Public Policy at NUI Galway

In November last year, when the *Irish Times* canvassed the views of property experts, or as they are more casually known property dealers, developers and investors, “to find out what they expect will happen over the next 12 months.” They consulted:

- Managing director, CBRE
- Investments director, Lisney
- Managing director, Savills HOK
- Managing director, Sherry FitzGerald
- Managing director, Ballymore
- Chief executive, IPUT
- Director, Finnegan Menton

Predictably, these 'experts' were unanimously upbeat about the future of the property market. [Focus on prime locations and bargains, *The Irish Times*, 28/11/2007]

The mainstream corporate media's reli-

**As with the property crash, the property boom was also a procession of the powerful. Mainstream media debates were invariably dominated by those with financial vested interests**

**As the cracks appeared in the property market, and analysts predicted further drops, journalists became even more irate, nudging potential buyers towards the credit abyss**

ance on “people that have an agenda”, specifically people that have the ‘capacity’ to influence reporting for their own financial gain, consequently then, people and institutions that are unlikely to have readers interests at heart, means that the infrequent protestations to the contrary are essentially drowned out: “The disproportionate influence and power which the property sector wields explains the prominence of, and support for, the calls for reductions in stamp duty received in the media during the election campaign.” [Noel Whelan, *Wealthy sectors will gain most from stamp duty changes*, 8/12/07][19]

### **Denial at the precipice**

The *Irish Independent*'s Brendan O'Connor wrote a landmark piece in July 2007 ‘The smart, ballsy guys are buying up property right now’ still revered for its unintentional satire: “Tell you what, I think I know what I'd be doing if I had money, and if I wasn't already massively over-exposed to the property market by virtue of owning a reasonable home. I'd be buying property. In fact, I might do it anyway.” [Brendan O'Connor, July 29 2007]

As the cracks appeared in the property market, and analysts predicted further drops, journalists became even more irate, nudging potential buyers towards the credit abyss: “The faint-hearted agonise over buying, hoping that prices will fall further. But don't wait. Buy now, don't listen to the doomsayers. [Kevin O'Connor, *The Irish Times*, 24/01/08]

“We all got such a fright last year, that we huddled up in the far corner of the field waiting for the sheepdog to herd us towards the gate. Well the property gate is open again. Not quite as wide open as it had been before, but open nevertheless. So let's get moving. You can never buy at the wrong time.” [Isabel Morton, *The Irish Times*, 24/04/2008][22]

In March 2008 Brian McDonald wrote in the *Independent*, “If I was to give advice to people, I would say, go out and buy some

property now. It's great value.” [Brian McDonald, March 15 2008]

In April the *Sunday Independent* relayed word from leading estate agent Peter Wyse that “the time to buy is now. There is certainly great value in the market at the minute but it doesn't mean people can dilly dally.” [*Sunday Independent*, 06/04/08][24]

In May the *Irish Independent*'s business section offered advice from Ken MacDonald of Hooke MacDonald estate agents: “Ken cuts to the chase by saying “in fact I would have no hesitation recommending any friends of mine to buy at the present time because with the sharp reduction in new starts, it is inevitable that there will be a shortage of supply in Dublin in the very near future”.”

The journalist responded: “OK Ken, I'm convinced. I'll take two. Now, if I could just get a mortgage...” [May 22 2008][25]

Journalists were forced to compete against the rising tide with ever more contradictory cognitive dissonance, as the market and the intangible ‘confidence’ dissolved: “We know the market has taken a hit. No one knows how far that hit is going to go but it won't last forever. This time next year will be a really good time to buy, just before the market starts getting stronger again.” [Niamh Horan, *Irish Independent*, 25/05/08][26]

As prices tumbled the mantra adapted, and the focus was now on ‘rising rents’ to provide the impetus to buy: “The cost of renting has risen by 6.6 per cent in the last 12 months, according to a survey published today. The Daft.ie report says that as property prices fall and rents rise, it is now more attractive to buy a house than to rent in certain areas. [Patrick Logue, *Survey shows 6.6% rise in rents* 27/11/2007]

“The decision of first-time buyers to defer purchases has seen a boom in the rental market, with rents rising to an all-time average high of €1,400 a month nationwide.” [Charlie Weston, *Irish Independent*, 28 November 2007]

Niall O'Grady, head of marketing at Per-

manent TSB, said: “there’s little surprise in the figures for October which confirm that there was little spark in the market during the traditionally strong autumn selling season. Clearly potential purchasers remain cautious and demand is sluggish.”

He said people’s reluctance to buy in the current market was beginning to impact on the rental sector “where rents are rising steadily in response to strong demand.”

In fact, rents were actually falling, as Conor McCabe of *Dublin Opinion* evidenced at the time: “Three weeks after the *Irish Times* and *Irish Independent* announced Dublin rental demand at an all-time high, 68% of properties surveyed remain unoccupied. The sample of 200 properties from Daft.ie was taken on 29 November 2007. Of those 200 ads, 26 have since dropped their asking price. Only three have increased their asking price.” [Conor McCabe, Dublin rents and the myth of demand: three weeks on, 22/12/2007]

Morgan Kelly noted in 2006 that compared with income, rents have fallen since 2000, while house prices have risen by more than 30%. It was clear even in 2006, to economic experts at least, if not journalists, that “the fact rents have fallen shows conclusively that our housing boom is a bubble.”

### **A flawed system**

Despite assurances from the liberal media that ‘the overriding duty of [the media and] journalists is to readers, Vincent Browne’s audible reflection is the limit of any internal audit we can expect from the media. Just as with the banks and the developers and the other ‘risk takers’ out there – the ‘institutional memory’ has not been altered by this obvious display of the bankruptcy of the system. The system, studiously defended by the likes of David McWilliams (one of the few consistent critics of groundless faith in the property market), does not learn from its mistakes in the conventional sense, it simply learns to profit from them.

Across the Atlantic, as Wall Street await-

ed a taxpayer solution to its self inflicted economic crisis, the *New York Times* reported: “Even as policy makers worked on details of a \$700 billion bailout of the financial industry, Wall Street began looking for ways to profit from it. Financial firms were lobbying to have all manner of troubled investments covered, not just those related to mortgages. Nobody wants to be left out of Treasury’s proposal to buy up bad assets of financial institutions.

“The definition of Financial Institution should be as broad as possible,” the Financial Services Roundtable, which represents big financial services companies, wrote in an e-mail message to members on Sunday. The group said a wide variety of institutions as varied as mortgage lenders and insurance companies should be able to take advantage of the bailout, and that these companies should be able to sell off any investments linked to mortgages.”

Thus those institutions which grossly profited from the sub-prime economic crime, ultimately weakening the global ability to actively challenge the impending crisis of Global Warming, are forcing the tax payer in one way or another to buy up their bad debt – and as with Bradford and Bingley in the UK the remaining profitable sectors will remain in private hands.

Along with the majority of the US Congress many in the Irish media have now taken to striking a more populist tone. Fintan O’Toole’s piece in the 30th September edition of the *Irish Times* ‘There is no such thing as private enterprise’ is almost right on the money, putting to one side the unconvincing linkage to the recent Lisbon Treaty referendum.

However the argument is essentially an uncontextualised exercise in pointing out the obvious; which embodies the corporate media’s reckless disregard for self examination and reform. It is, along with the banking bailout, a propaganda bailout. The media, a major driver of perpetuating the ‘flawed’ system, absolves itself of responsibility.

**Just as with the banks and the developers and the other ‘risk takers’ out there – the ‘institutional memory’ has not been altered by this obvious display of the bankruptcy of the system. The system does not learn from its mistakes in the conventional sense, it simply learns to profit from them**

The social contract promised by the media, to provide “reports that are honest, accurate and comprehensive; and analysis that is informed, fair and based on the facts” is declared null and void in retrospect. The truth is only current; yesterday’s news becomes tainted by tomorrow’s realities

“Private enterprise” is tapping us on the shoulder and saying, “by the way, there was a hidden clause in the social contract that says you’re responsible for my screw-ups.” [Fintan O’Toole, the *Irish Times*, 30/09/08]

The media meanwhile is tapping us on the shoulder saying “If you remember all that stuff we used to say about house prices climbing forever, just forget about it! It never happened.”

#### An unfulfilled social contract

The social contract promised by the media, to provide “reports that are honest, accurate and comprehensive; and analysis that is informed, fair and based on the facts” is declared null and void in retrospect. The truth is only current; yesterday’s news becomes tainted by tomorrow’s realities.

George Monbiot wrote recently in the *Guardian*, “corporate welfare is a consistent feature of advanced capitalism,” the only thing that has changed is that the state “has been forced to confront its contradictions.” The contradiction of ‘free market’ ideology being that bad debt, the other less publicised consequence of risk, is underwritten by the state, while profit is retained by the private sector.

He cites Stephen Slivinski’s estimate “that in 2006 the [US] federal government spent \$92bn subsidising business. Much of it went to major corporations like Boeing, IBM and General Electric.”

An excellent insight, from one of the

few mainstream journalists to have slipped through the ‘natural selection’ of the corporate news structure, but with one glaring omission – news media are also beneficiaries of corporate welfare, even the most avowedly liberal ones. Perhaps to a much lesser degree and perhaps more often than not indirectly, but they are beneficiaries nonetheless:

“What are the elite media, the agenda-setting ones? The *New York Times* and CBS, for example. Well, first of all, they are major, very profitable, corporations. Furthermore, most of them are either linked to, or outright owned by, much bigger corporations, like General Electric, Westinghouse, and so on.” [Noam Chomsky, *What Makes Mainstream Media Mainstream*, October 1997]

Following the announcement of the €400 billion taxpayer sponsored banking bailout the lead editorial in the *Irish Times*, Ireland’s most respected broadsheet, read: “It would be foolish of the banks to act in bad faith on this matter given the scale of the risks that the Government has exposed tax payers to in order to safeguard them. And in time they must be held to account for their own role in creating this crisis.”

Who will hold the media to account for their part in creating this crisis? **CT**

*David Manning is editor of Media Bite, the Dublin-based media watchdog.  
www.mediabite.org*

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# Fixing the financial crisis is not so easy

**Danny Schechter** highlights five problems that will block government success

**M**ost Americans know the phrase, “if it ain’t broke don’t fix it.” In the good times, when the economy boomed and Wall Street prospered, it looked like nothing was broke. The free market, we were told, was working like magic ensuring prosperity and progress.

But then it happened, out of sight and out of mind, an upward trajectory turned in the other direction. In what was for many an unbelievable chain of events, markets started melting down, banks began writing down portfolios clogged with asset-backed securities that had no assets behind them. Confidence shattered. Suddenly, believers in unregulated transactions realized something was very, very wrong.

Alan Greenspan was “shocked” and said he was wrong to support deregulation of financial markets. As headlines conjured up breadlines and recession, with “something worse” threatening, the government was pressed to act.

Over a year later, after eight interest rate cuts, with one more promised, and the injection of trillions into credit markets and banks worldwide, little has changed. Markets are volatile and trending down while banks are still not lending despite frequent projections of massive unemployment and stagflation.

At the same time, we live in a coun-

try that believes that whenever there are problems, there must be solutions. And in the case of the financial crisis, there is no shortage of proposals especially because the whole system – if not capitalism itself – seems at risk. (Even the *New York Times* ran an editorial on “Rescuing Capitalism.”) This is not a situation that inspires confidence in token reforms and minor adjustments. There seems to be a consensus that this crisis is systemic and structural even as the candidates reduce it all to tax policy.

That hasn’t stopped the government from dipping into its tool bag and throwing everything it has at the problem – bailouts on an unprecedented scale, including, now, of insurance companies and auto lenders. There have been pro-business rule changes even partial nationalizations of banks, mortgage companies, and insurance combines.

Together, the Treasury Department and the Federal Reserve Bank seem to be fighting on every front. They appear to be giving away money. Is it working?

“Scarcely a day goes by with out some dramatic new initiative,” writes the *New Yorker’s* financial columnist James Suriwieski, “even as market chaos makes each new idea soon seem like ancient history.”

Why is that? Surely the people in command are smart, savvy and know the system well. What are they missing? They

**One of the more unsettling trends in recent years has been the increasing militarization of local police forces in response to protest activities unrelated to terrorism**

**“To rebuild economic health in the United States, you need a serious recession that will last several years. The patient that got drunk on credit growth needs to go into rehabilitation. To give him more alcohol, the way the Fed and the Treasury propose to do, is the wrong medicine”**

now know its broke (and many of them are broke too) but they can't seem to fix it.

Here are five views on what they are getting wrong.

### **I. THE SYSTEM NEEDS TO COLLAPSE**

That's the view of a perennial bear investor Marc Fabor who “thinks the market was primed for a technical rally but is not keen on the long-term prospects for the US economy:

“The governments in this world have no other option but to print money. That will lead down the road to inflation,” Faber said. “You don't need to be an economist graduated from Harvard to know we're already in a recession. They will just put white paint on a crumbling building....

“To rebuild economic health in the United States, you need a serious recession that will last several years,” he said. “The patient that got drunk on credit growth needs to go into rehabilitation. To give him more alcohol, the way the Fed and the Treasury propose to do, is the wrong medicine.”

### **2. CONSUMERS ARE NOT SPENDING**

Bloomberg reports: “The big concern is that households, spooked by the turmoil in financial markets, will cut back rapidly and sharply, plunging companies into bankruptcy and deepening a recession that many economists say has already begun.

“If we did have a quick cut in spending, it could turn a pretty nasty recession into possibly the worst downturn we've seen in the postwar period,” says Michael Feroli, a former Federal Reserve official now at JP-Morgan Chase & Co.

### **3. MORAL HAZARD: THEY ARE BAILING OUT THE WRONG PEOPLE**

There is something fundamentally wrong in rewarding the people who are responsible for the problem. Worries William Buitner, a financial historian at the London School of Economics, that this will lead to more collapses in the future: “by boosting the incentives for future reckless lending to

elephantinesquely large financial enterprises.

Unless not only the existing shareholders of the banks benefiting from these capital injections but also the holders of the banks' unsecured debt (junior and senior) and all other creditors of the bank (with the possible exception of retail depositors up to some appropriate limit) are made to pay a painful penalty for investing in excessively risky if not outright dodgy ventures, we are laying the foundations of the next systemic crisis, even as we are struggling to escape from the current one.”

The bailout was sold deceptively. A *New York Times* investigation found it was intended to foster bank consolidation, not loans. Journalist Sam Smith wrote:

### **4. FINANCIAL SCAMMERS AND CRIMINALS ARE GOING UNPUNISHED**

The FBI announced that it lacks the staff to fully investigate the pervasive crimes on Wall Street.

### **5. GOOD PEOPLE ARE LEAVING IN DISGUST**

Some of the best and the brightest are giving up, rejecting businesses based on flimflams and deceptive marketing. Two years ago, a very successful investor, Andrew Ladhe, started returning money to his investors. “Our entire banking system is a complete disaster,” he wrote. “In my opinion, nearly every major bank would be insolvent if they marked their assets to market.”

In October 2008 he closed his firm all together explaining: “Recently, on the front page of Section C of the *Wall Street Journal*, a hedge fund manager who was also closing up shop (a \$300 million fund), was quoted as saying, “What I have learned about the hedge fund business is that I hate it.” I could not agree more with that statement. I was in this game for the money. The low hanging fruit, i.e. idiots whose parents paid for prep school, Yale, and then the Harvard MBA, was there for the taking. These people who were (often) truly not worthy of the education they received (or supposedly

received) rose to the top of companies such as AIG, Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers and all levels of our government. All of this behavior supporting the Aristocracy only ended up making it easier for me to find people stupid enough to take the other side of my trades. God bless America.”

These are just five reasons why “the quick fixers” are unlikely to succeed. Notes Harpers, we a need more than tinkering. They call for a fundamental reconstruction at a time when we are also “menaced by dwindling energy supplies and accelerating climate change.”

Also, the Captain Ahab's in charge

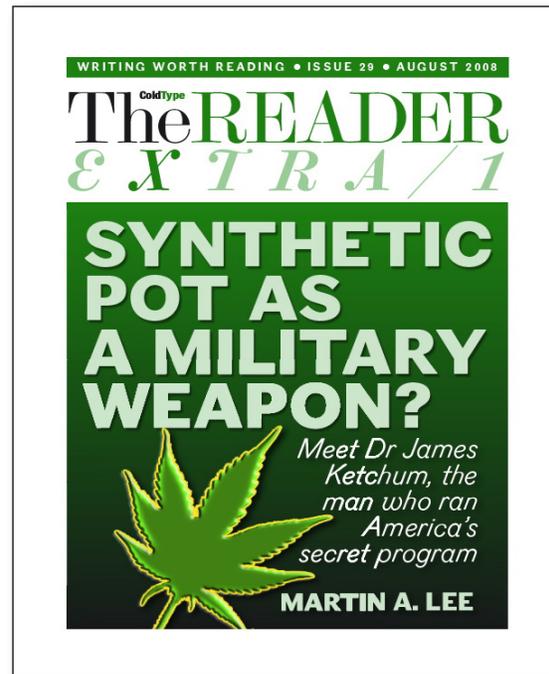
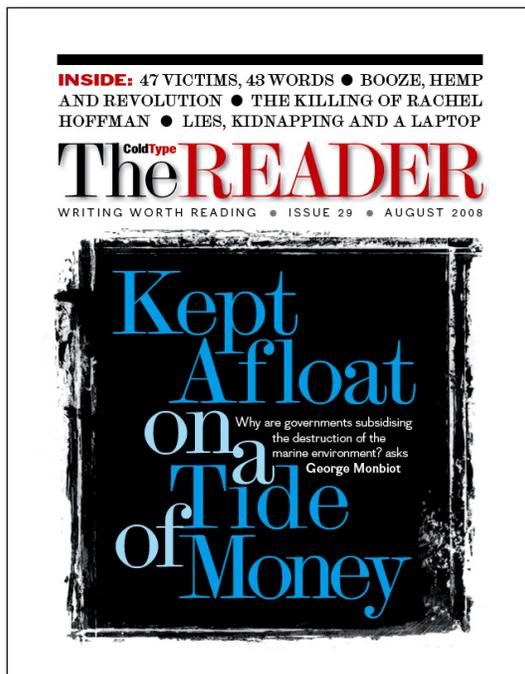
should admit defeat and step down as was suggested by this comment on a financial website: “Perhaps Bernanke and Greenspan should see if there is an opening for the captain of the Exxon Valdees, job requirements: asleep at the switch.”

Still to be answered: can the system be saved from itself? **CT**

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“Perhaps Bernanke and Greenspan should see if there is an opening for the captain of the Exxon Valdes, job requirements: asleep at the switch.”

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**Market goes down - Federal Gov't. Bails Out Wall St. with Taxpayer's Money!**



**Market goes back up again  
- this time Wall St. shares  
the Profit & Gratefully  
Pays Back the Taxpayer!**



# More news, less views

**Greg Philo** shows how the media amplifies the voice of the powerful and ignores the voices of the rest of us

*This article was originally sent to London's Guardian newspaper for its comments page. It shows how public debate on political issues is narrowed on the most influential media because of the absence of critical voices – whether the issue is the financial crisis or world conflicts such as in Israel/Palestine. New polling evidence from YouGov and the GUMG, suggests that this is not at all what the public wants. The article was rejected by the Guardian on the grounds that 'it would be read as a piece of old lefty whingeing about bias'. But there is more at stake than this. There is a deep crisis of legitimacy both for politicians and broadcasters, in that many people do not feel properly represented. There is also great public confusion over issues such as the reasons for world conflict and the nature of the present economic crisis. Until recently there has been very little debate about the consequences of the free market policies which were promoted by political and economic elites. As Naomi Klein has pointed out, the global budget crisis may be used as a rationale for deep cuts in social programmes. At present the Conservative Party is ahead in the polls. But do voters really understand what it would mean 'to balance the government's books' and 'reduce its debt'? There is little discussion of such issues in broadcast media or of possible alternatives. Re-structuring the ownership of the economy in favour of the mass of the*

*population is apparently off the agenda. Nationalisation has come to mean the privatisation and selling of valuable assets, while losses are socialised. We are offered various forms of the free market discussed mostly by bankers, stockbrokers and the economic experts and politicians who have delivered the crisis. But the closure of debate will only increase public frustration and the sense that broadcasters have abandoned their duty to inform their audience.*

## More News, Less Views

**N**ews is a procession of the powerful. Watch it on TV, listen to the Today programme and marvel at the orthodoxy of views and the lack of critical voices. When the credit crunch hit, we were given a succession of bankers, stockbrokers and even hedge-fund managers to explain and say what should be done. But these were the people who had caused the problem, thinking nothing of taking £20 billion a year in city bonuses. The solution these free market wizards agreed to, was that tax payers should stump up £50 billion (and rising) to fill up the black holes in the banking system. Where were the critical voices to say

**Do voters really understand what it would mean 'to balance the government's books' and 'reduce its debt'? There is little discussion of such issues in broadcast media or of possible alternatives. Re-structuring the ownership of the economy in favour of the mass of the population is apparently off the agenda**

**When Northern Rock was nationalised, TV news showed us pictures of British Leyland and the old problem ridden car industry. Never mind that it was actually privately owned when most of the problems occurred and that company policy had been to distribute 95% of profits as dividends to shareholders, rather than to invest in new plant and machinery. This is all lost in the mists of history**

*Greg Philo is a professor and senior staff member of the Glasgow University Media Group [www.gla.ac.uk/centres/mediagroup](http://www.gla.ac.uk/centres/mediagroup) He is the author, with Mike Berry, of *srael and palestine: Competing Histories*; and, with David Miller, *Bad News From Israel**

it would be a better idea to take the bonuses back? Mainstream news has sometimes a social-democratic edge. There are complaints aired about fuel poverty and the state of inner cities. But there are precious few voices making the point that the reason why there are so many poor people is because the rich have taken the bulk of the disposable wealth. The notion that the people should own the nation's resources is close to derided on orthodox news. When Northern Rock was nationalised, TV news showed us pictures of British Leyland and the old problem ridden car industry. Never mind that it was actually privately owned when most of the problems occurred and that company policy had been to distribute 95% of profits as dividends to shareholders, rather than to invest in new plant and machinery. This is all lost in the mists of history and what is conveyed is the vague sense that nationalisation is a "bad thing". We showed how this affects public understanding by asking a sample of 244 young people in higher education (aged 18–23) about the great spate of privatizations which had taken place in the 1980s. We asked whether the industries involved had in general been profitable or unprofitable. Actually, the major ones of gas, electricity, oil and telecommunications were both profitable and major sources of revenue to the state, but nearly 60% of the sample thought that the industries had been losing money. This is especially poignant now that energy prices are being jacked up and the foreign owners of many of these companies are not interested in passing on their windfall profits to the British people. Countries such as China, Venezuela and even Russia keep key industries very firmly in state hands, but where are the critical voices in broadcasting here, who are given space to raise these arguments? They can be heard in the outer reaches, occasionally on Question Time, Channel 4 News or Newsnight. But is this what the population want? At the start of the Iraq war we had the normal parade of generals and military experts,

but in fact, a consistent body of opinion then and since has been completely opposed to it. We asked our sample whether people such as Noam Chomsky, John Pilger, Naomi Klein and Michael Moore should be featured routinely on the news as part of a normal range of opinion. Seventy three per cent opted for this rather than wanting them on just occasionally, as at present.

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict is another area of great imbalance in the views that are heard. Our study of the main TV news output showed that pro-Israeli speakers were featured about twice as much as Palestinians. This year BBC News covered Israel's 'birthday' of 60 years since the setting up of the state. This was also the anniversary of what, from the Palestinian perspective, was the great disaster when they were forced from their homes and land. Israel's superior public relations machine meant they set the agenda on broadcast news. The Palestinians were featured, but rather less and as a sort of afterthought. As a presenter on BBC's Today programme put it, "Today Israel is 60 years old, and all this week we have been hearing from Israelis about what it means to them". Quite so.

We commissioned YouGov to ask a sample of 2086 UK adults whether they thought that more coverage should be given to the Israeli point of view, or more to the Palestinians, or equal for both. Nearly twice as many people thought that the Palestinians should have the most as compared with the Israelis, but the bulk of the replies (72%) were that both should have the same. Only 5% of the population supported what the broadcasters have actually been doing in the main news output. Politicians and broadcasters say they are worried about a growing lack of interest in politics especially amongst the young. Our work shows there is no lack of interest in lively critical debate. The problem is that a news which largely features the views of two political parties with very similar free market policies at home, and an international agenda which follows America, does not provide this. **CT**

# Riding on the Peace Train

**Stacey Warde** joins commuters and political activists on their early-morning journey to San Diego

I hate traveling the holidays. It's safer to stay home. I'm tired, cranky. One thing, though, keeps me feeling OK about hitting the road while suffering the rush of frenzied shoppers and the maddening, marauding stupidity of being in a hurry: A trainload of supporters for Ohio Congressman Dennis Kucinich, a Democratic presidential candidate, will leave with me early in the morning, making a pitch for "Strength through Peace on Earth," a solid holiday message.

Amtrak's Pacific Surfliner, Train 774, leaves the San Luis Obispo station daily at 6:45 a.m., and rolls south to its final stop in San Diego. My stop, Santa Ana, a frequent destination for me, close to the home where I grew up and where my parents still live. I buy my tickets online but pick them up at the station a day before departure to avoid the rush. A volunteer at the SLO station directs me to an automated ticket dispenser. The place is already a madhouse. With his help, I punch some buttons and activate the machine. My information comes up on the screen.

"You're Stacey Warde?" asks the volunteer above the din, peering over my shoulder, as if he knows me.

"Yeah." I turn to look him over, making sure he isn't going to sucker punch me. I don't know why I feel this way, when people seem to know who I am before I know

who they are. I've never in my life felt as paranoid or careful as I have in the last seven years of dictatorial rule from the far right. But fear has its deleterious affect on a nation whose leaders have no regard for humanity. It turns us into monsters and begins with a sudden mistrust and soon we're cowering or cutting peoples' throats. This guy appears harmless.

"I'm David," he says and as he puts his hand out I remember him, a filmmaker from Morro Bay who's worked on the Texas Legacy Project, interviewing the Lone Star state's best-known politicians. We talk about the Peace Train that is supposed to arrive in San Luis Obispo later this the afternoon with Dennis Kucinich and his supporters, who will then walk a short distance to Mitchell Park for a rally, before leaving in the morning for a run to Los Angeles, where the crew will get off Train No. 774 at L.A.'s Union Station and gather for another rally on Olvera Street.

I think about attending the Mitchell Park rally but have too much to do to prepare for the next day's journey. I'd love to hear Kucinich even though I'm not inspired to consider him a viable candidate for toppling the Old Guard in Washington. Still, I hold Kucinich in high regard for being the only politician with the balls to read in Congress the articles of impeachment against Dick Cheney, who should have been arrested a

**Fear has its deleterious affect on a nation whose leaders have no regard for humanity. It turns us into monsters and begins with a sudden mistrust and soon we're cowering or cutting peoples' throats**

## CALIFORNIA DREAMING

**Open meadows spread down to the Pacific Ocean where only the well-heeled are free to roam; and graffiti-filled corridors pass in flashes through the train windows, where L.A.'s homeless pitch their filthy mattresses and try to catch a few winks between passing trains and roaming thugs**

long time ago. If I can't make the rally, I figure, I'll have the opportunity to talk to him directly on the train.

"So, is Kucinich really going to be on the train today?" I ask.

"He was supposed to, but he couldn't make it," David says. "His brother died unexpectedly and he had to cancel the trip. But the peace ride's still going on."

A Kucinich fan interrupts our conversation. "Is Dennis going to be on the next train?" David explains the sudden tragedy.

"Oh, that's too bad," the man responds, and adds with a wink and a laugh, "maybe his wife could take his place."

David informs the man that she's where she's supposed to be, by her husband's side. Kucinich's wife, a tall striking, statuesque redhead, has been a big draw for Kucinich, and supporters will be quick to tell you how beautiful she is. The man walks away, disappointed.

I look at David and we both shake our heads.

"The train's great, isn't it?" I say, glad to have my tickets and parking pass in hand.

David leans in closely and says: "The revolution is taking place in the café cars on trains all across the country."

"What?"

"The revolution, it's in the café cars, on every train across the country. The old men, listen to them. They talk about overthrowing the government. They're disgusted with Bush. They've had it; they've had enough."

I've sat in on a few parties myself in café cars, so I know what he's talking about. People have a way of speaking their minds after they've had a few drinks on the train. Maybe this ride with rebels would be just the thing, even without Kucinich.

At 5:30 a.m., I'm on the road, the full moon infusing the early dawn with a warm purplish luster, and pulling at me like an unquenchable woman. I don't want to go, yet the possibility of riding on the Peace Train compels me, lures me away from the comfort of home and a warm bed. I hope to

find something new – political enlightenment. At the train station, the holiday travelers jam themselves into the ticket line, and sit restlessly on benches or mill around the train, waiting for the doors to open. A big crowd, the largest of any I've seen yet at the start of the line, gather to board the train.

Are these all the Kucinich people? Is he that popular?

### **Avoiding the freeways**

Traveling by train, you can relax, and avoid the aggravation of driving L.A. freeways. You meet unusual people, watch flush-cheeked mothers pound Bud Lights as their children scramble up and down the aisles, screeching and panting, pushing on doors, while old men eye young women sitting alone with their computers and iPods, heads bobbing to the music in their earphones, oblivious to all except for the occasional dude who struts the aisle and nods and smiles at everyone.

Every day the Pacific Surfliner from San Luis Obispo to San Diego rolls furiously along as commuters dig into purses and bags, pull out food and drink, books and magazines, bottles for their babies, cell-phones, computers, every contrivance you can imagine, and settle in for the scenic ride, a movie on the laptop, the adventure of meeting someone new, or simply to take a long nap.

It's a swirl of activity from start to finish, with stops and starts, and people getting on and off and making small talk, or running down to the café car to buy alcohol and get spun while the Amtrak train lumbers along the beautiful and terrifying California landscape: Open meadows spread down to the Pacific Ocean where only the well-heeled are free to roam; and graffiti-filled corridors pass in flashes through the train windows, where L.A.'s homeless pitch their filthy mattresses and try to catch a few winks between passing trains and roaming thugs.

Riding Amtrak, you get to peek into people's lives and backyards. For some rea-

son, commuters speak more freely on the train than on the street. They actually look you in the eye, even if they don't always smile. Thugs, gang-bangers, businessmen, college students, harried mothers, and bemused elderly couples ride the train. Surfer dudes and chicks, voters and congressmen, old men talking about revolution, they all ride the train. People speak their minds on the train.

When I don't feel like talking, I peer into people's backyards, some tricked out for horses and trails, others broken down with the detritus of suburban living – rusty cans, plastic, scrap metal and sunken, unused cars. You see all the neighborhoods with their tired streets, and their residents – homeboys, suited businessmen, children kicking their hopes with balls and hoops and bicycles, the American Dream. Our rail system, as neglected and raggedy as she is, is the best way to travel in the U.S. and is probably the only truly democratic space in the whole country. It's no wonder our federal government hasn't given the public railways the uplift they so desperately need.

### **Broke and hopeless**

In the eight years that George W. Bush has governed, I've never been more broke, or felt more hopeless and restless for change. I'm convinced that something went dreadfully wrong in the U.S. when Bush took over. Nothing has been the same since. Our world took a turn for the worst. My quality of life has deteriorated to the point of despair and hope feels remote. I'm ready for a radical change. I'd like to see the Old Guard get the boot. I'd like to see Bush and Cheney stuffed upside down inside of a dunking tank for a taste of their own medicine. But I doubt that Kucinich will be the one to do it for us, even though I like his guts.

Dennis Kucinich quickly found a solid base of support in SLO County, connecting with progressives like Sandra Marshall, publisher of Information Press and with

individuals who support HopeDance Magazine – independent, homegrown publications. They advocate sustainable and peace-driven solutions to local and global problems. They're often at the frontlines of protest against violence, consumerism, war and corporate-driven values that promote greed, consumption and waste. Their efforts are a stark contrast to the money and pervasive cowboy conservatism that dominate here.

Kucinich had planned to make his pitch to this small but active band of supporters seeking to stop the war in Iraq, impeach Bush and Cheney, and end our addiction to oil. The *L.A. Times* has variously described him as a “far-left” Democrat, whose policies and ideas verge on the “absurd,” and who is a believer in “UFOs.”

As soon as the train pulls out of the San Luis Obispo station the conductor begins his round, walking through each car to check tickets and destinations. Outside, thin clouds turn pink as the moon yields its evening glower to the rising sun. Children gaze in wonder as their parents fluff the morning newspaper. The distant fields turn golden. I fight the urge to sink into my seat and nod off for some much-needed rest. But I'm too curious. I've at least got to take a look at the Kucinich crew, if not mix with them.

I peer up and down the train looking for signs of progressive liberals. They're not as easy to spot as you might imagine. Liberals can be as elusive as conservatives. You never know which you're going to meet. I look for the obvious signs: books with liberal titles or magazines like the *New Yorker*, the *Nation*, and best yet, T-shirts that show the faces of Bush and Cheney behind bars with the words, “I have a dream.” I look for progressives carrying hemp bags, wearing rainbow-colored shirts, munching on veggies and covered with buttons, mottos and pithy political statements. I'm disappointed when none materialize.

A few grey-haired folk wearing red long-sleeved shirts with white lettering pass me

**I peer up and down the train looking for signs of progressive liberals. They're not as easy to spot as you might imagine. Liberals can be as elusive as conservatives**

## CALIFORNIA DREAMING

**By the time we reach Guadalupe, the train is nearly full with the same familiar, sad faces of this earlier Depression, full of hope and despair**

and enter through the doors of the forward cars: “Kucinich for President... Get on Board the Peace Train!” I can see through the windows of the doors more red shirts, placards and blue balloons, and the flurry of activity I’d expect of a political rally. Each time the doors open, the raucous noise of political hubbub can be heard: “Bush,” “Cheney,” “Iraq,” “Impeachment,” “Peace.”

The conductor offers a hint of recognition as he comes to collect my ticket. “Oh, hey,” he says, “how you doing today?”

“Great,” I answer as he pulls my ticket.

“Santa Ana station,” he says, placing a colored tag above my seat.

“Hey,” I say, “are the Kucinich people on the train this morning?”

“Yeah,” he responds, turning his head to the forward cars, “they added two cars to accommodate them.”

“Can I go up there and sit with them?”

“Sure can,” he says. “Have a good trip.”

Before venturing forward, I run downstairs to buy a cup of coffee from the café car. I half expect to see old men plotting another grassroots American Revolution but instead observe a pretty young woman listening politely to a loud, overweight and overbearing, red-in-the-face alcoholic woman nursing a can of beer, ranting about late trains, and unfaithful, abusive boyfriends. The pretty one nods and doesn’t say a word. It’s too goddamn early to be that drunk and riled, I think. As I listen, another woman, who has already met a few of the Kucinich travelers, takes her place in line behind me and says she has trouble pronouncing his name: “Kook-an-itch? I still can’t say it right.”

“It’s Koo-SIN-itch,” I respond.

I return to my seat where I pop open a travel-sized bottle of Bailey’s and spike my coffee, sitting back, taking in the sights, sipping, satisfied, unconcerned with Kucinich or his supporters, wishing the dreamy moment of quiet isolation and the sweet alcohol flavor of my morning coffee will last forever. As we roll along, I peer out the window at the open spaces of south SLO

County. The green and loamy sea of ag land beyond Grover Beach and below the Nipomo Mesa reminds me of an era captured by photographer Dorothea Lange and author John Steinbeck, when California had become a place of golden dreams for the poor and uprooted, and people dwelled in hovels or dilapidated cars, attempting to create new lives. By the time we reach Guadalupe, the train is nearly full with the same familiar, sad faces of this earlier Depression, full of hope and despair.

At each stop, Kucinich believers carrying their placards, balloons, a harmonica, and noisemakers rustle themselves off the train to meet people of like mind who have come to meet them at the local station and hug and briefly chat, to spread the good and bad news, and show some love before the conductor politely waves his arm and urges them back: “OK, gotta keep her rolling folks. Time to get back on the train.”

### **Cynial snort**

In America, fear rules. I’ve noticed this in friends who feel so completely demoralized by our current political crises that they can’t move. They refuse any longer to hope in leadership that values human life, or makes policies that benefit not just the rich few but the entire commonwealth. They’ve given up and turned all their hopes into one long cynical snort: We’re fucked! It’s over for the United States.

Oddly, Kucinich represents the other side of this very same cynicism that has turned him into an afterthought and an amusing anecdote in Election 2008. To many, he’s an annoying little man with as much substance as anyone who believes in UFOs. Yet, he speaks in a voice familiar to my own (although I can’t say I’ve ever seen a UFO). He speaks truth to power. He confronts the corporate brokers of trade, thought and production, telling them that their polluting and plundering of the world’s limited resources will come to an end. He promotes peace rather than war as the best means to national security, pros-

perity and good health. He dares imagine a world without war, where people actually intend good, rather than ill. He puts civility back into public discourse. But in America he's a pariah.

The moment I enter the Kucinich car, the air is immediately fresher, easier to breathe, better circulated than the commuter car I've been occupying. It's an older, woodsy, more luxurious car with plenty of leg space. Right away I make friends with a woman who introduces me to Bill, "the significant other" of Jeeni Criscenzo, president of the North County San Diego chapter of Progressive Democrats of America who helped organize the Peace Train run from Oakland to Oceanside, where Kucinich, Bill later informs me, was to meet with American troops and win their confidence, to show them, like any good American, that he supports them. Bill takes immediate interest in my visitation, tucking a copy of the *Rogue Voice* under his arm. He tells me Jeeni couldn't make the trip because of illness and he's taken her place. We try to talk but he's too busy with the demands of the rally, getting on and off the train, shaking hands and wishing people well. It's a frenzy of singing, blowing, hooting and rushing to the next stop.

Between stops, as the train churns on again, a string of red shirts tromps through the aisle of each car, up and down the train, blowing their noisemakers, wishing commuters a Merry Christmas and singing "Peace Train" by Cat Stevens, who now goes by Yusuf Islam and experienced America's appreciation for Muslim converts when the feds refused him entry into the U.S., told him to get back on the plane and go back where he came from: *Now I've been happy lately, Thinking about the good things to come, And I believe it could be, Something good has begun....* The irony of Yusuf's lyrics escapes me, yet I'm sure, as much as I embrace their passion, I won't be joining the chorus: *Peace train sounding louder, Ride on the peace train. Hoo-ah-eeh-ah-hoo-ah. Come on the peace train....*

I'm caught in a whirlwind of activity and foot traffic, turning this way and that, as campaigners rush through the narrow aisles in their busyness to spread the Kucinich message, jumping on and off the train, running errands, and buying coffee. In the bustle, Bill hands me a Kucinich button, which I self-consciously pin to my sweater, thinking now I'm no longer an objective observer. I'm a participant. The button feels like a giant beetle on my chest. I'm not used to wearing them and like to show my support in other ways.

I try not to be too loud with my person when it comes to politics. To avoid the jostle I stand away from the aisle, taking a place between seats, and suddenly I'm introduced to people in the forward part of the car. "Everybody, this is Stacey. He writes for a magazine."

"Ooh, maybe Stacey would like to lead us in a song!" I stare, horrified, at the woman who wants me to lead choir, while other eager faces wait for my reply. "Uh, yeah, no you don't want me to lead." I note the disappointed responses and know that I'm still not quite part of the group. I'm an observer, participating from a distance, knowing that when I leave the train, I'll wonder if my vote really makes a difference, whether those who support Dennis Kucinich or any of his sensible solutions will continue to press for reforms and progressive ideas when he drops from the race, or whether they will lose heart and turn bitter and never vote again....

When I return to my seat, I know it's over for me. I can't do it, and remove the Kucinich button from my sweater. At the Union Station in Los Angeles, the ralliers scramble for their belongings, whooshing themselves and their balloons and placards off the train for the march to Olvera Street for their next extended stop. As the train leaves the station, it's no longer the Peace Train but Amtrak's Pacific Surfliner again, next stops Fullerton, Anaheim, Santa Ana.... I drift off for a much-needed nap haunted by thoughts of Hillary. **CT**

**Bill hands me a Kucinich button, which I self-consciously pin to my sweater, thinking now I'm no longer an objective observer. I'm a participant. The button feels like a giant beetle on my chest**

**Stacey Warde** is editor of the *Californian Literary* monthly, *Rogue Voice*, and a 2006 recipient of the *In Character* award for best editorial and opinion on human virtue. He can be reached at [swarde@roguevoice.com](mailto:swarde@roguevoice.com).

# Try these on your CIA briefer, Mr Obama

Ray McGovern on the questions the President-Elect should be expecting at his next daily briefing

**Obama is no shrinking violet. Just the same, it may be useful to warn him not to succumb to the particular brand of “shock and awe” that can be induced by ostensibly sexy intelligence and color the reactions of briefees – even presidents. I have seen it happen.**

**A**fter a week lecturing at Kansas State University and in Kansas City, Missouri, and environs, I could not shake the feeling that what Kansas and Missouri need most is the equivalent of Radio Free Europe, which was so effective in spreading truth around inside Eastern Europe during the Cold War. (Truth in advertising: during the late Sixties, I served for two years as substantive liaison officer between the RFE and Washington.)

So I was amused while still in Kansas to get a call from Mike Caddell of “Radio Free Kansas” asking me for an interview. Broadcasting from rural northeastern Kansas, Caddell does his own part in spreading truth around and has garnered quite a respectable audience.

Most of his fellow Kansans are malnourished on the right-wing media gruel that helps re-elect enablers like see-no-evil Republican Sen. Pat Roberts. As chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Roberts did President George W. Bush’s bidding by hiding the fact that the attack on Iraq was based on “false pretences.” That’s the phrase used by current chairman Jay Rockefeller (D-WVA) to describe the bogus intelligence used to “justify” the war, when he announced the bipartisan findings of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

Caddell called me on Friday, expressing

excitement at the beginning of daily intelligence briefings of President-Elect Barack Obama by the CIA. Aware that I helped prepare the *President’s Daily Brief* for Presidents Nixon and Ford, and that I conducted one-on-one *PDB* briefings of Reagan’s most senior advisers during the latter’s administration, Caddell asked me to tape a telephone interview to run on his show. He suggested that I focus on what I would tell President-Elect Barack Obama if I were Mike Morell, CIA’s Director of Intelligence, whom CIA Director Michael Hayden has assigned to brief Obama daily.

What fun, I thought. On more sober reflection, it seemed more useful to prepare questions of the kind President-Elect Obama might wish to ask Morell, since the briefings are supposed to be a two-way street. Obama is no shrinking violet. Just the same, it may be useful to warn him not to succumb to the particular brand of “shock and awe” that can be induced by ostensibly sexy intelligence and color the reactions of briefees – even presidents. I have seen it happen.

The president-elect needs to start asking hard questions. Now.

Here are some he might want to select from for the next briefing:

1 – The lead story in a recent *New York Times* undercuts the claims of Georgia’s President

Mikheil Saakashvili that he was acting in self-defense when he ordered his troops to fire artillery and rockets at the city of Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia on the night of August 7-8. The *Times*' information comes from international monitors of the highly respected Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and, oddly, is much closer to the Russian version of what happened.

**Task:** A two page memo on who started the fighting and why

**Deadline:** Nov 12

2 – As you are aware, a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) produced last November concluded that Iran's work on the nuclear-weapons part of its nuclear development program was suspended in mid-2003. National Intelligence Council director, Thomas Fingar repeated that judgment publicly on Sept. 4, 2008.

I want to know how that squares – or doesn't – with the claim by Norman Podhoretz, just hours after the NIE's key judgments were made public, that Iran is "hell-bent on developing nuclear weapons," and why Podhoretz would go on to charge that the intelligence community was trying to "undermine George W. Bush." I notice, incidentally, that Defense Secretary Robert Gates has parroted Podhoretz' "hell-bent" phraseology, and that your boss, Michael Hayden, has also publicly volunteered his "personal opinion" that this is so.

**Task:** A memo updating the judgments of the Nov. 07 NIE, as necessary

**Deadline:** Nov. 14

3 – My aides have been telling me that, when speaking of the recent decrease in violence in Iraq, I have been mis-overestimating, so to speak, the success of the "surge" while mis-underestimating factors like the sectarian cleansing in Baghdad, the decision to pay Sunnis not to shoot at U.S. forces, and the decision by Muqtada al-Sadr to hold Shia fire pending the with-

drawal of U.S. forces, which the Shia see as just a matter of time.

**Task:** A memo ranking the reasons for the downturn in violence in order of relative importance. It should address all these factors; it should also explain why the U.S. has several thousand more troops in Iraq now than were there before the insertion and subsequent withdrawal of our "surged" troops.

**Deadline:** Nov. 19

4 – Confusion reigns with respect to what is likely to happen when U. S. forces withdraw from Iraq. The notion that administration officials know better what to expect than the Iraqis themselves strains credulity. It has become increasingly clear that the Iraqi government and people believe they can handle whatever comes, once we depart, and that they consider the large U.S. troop presence part of the problem, not the solution. And I remember Generals Abizaid and Casey testifying to Congress in the fall of 2006 – just before the president decided to "surge," that an infusion of additional troops would simply postpone the day when Iraqi political leaders would recognize that they have to work things out among themselves.

**Task:** A memo addressing why the Iraqis are more relaxed about a U.S. troop withdrawal than most U.S. officials and pundits.

**Deadline:** Nov. 21

5 – No outsiders have been able to prevail in Afghanistan. What makes us think the U.S. can change that history?

**Task:** A formal National Intelligence Estimate on prospects for Afghanistan

**Deadline:** January 9, 2009

6 – Nuclear nonproliferation: The UN's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) recently proposed a nuclear-free zone as the best way to prevent the spread of nu-

**Confusion reigns with respect to what is likely to happen when U. S. forces withdraw from Iraq. The notion that administration officials know better what to expect than the Iraqis themselves strains credulity.**

## PRESIDENTIAL QUESTIONS

**Is it likely that China, India, and other key countries regard the invasion of Iraq as the first resource war of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?**

clear weapons in the Middle East. I want to know why this familiar proposal never seems able to get off the ground. What are the obstacles?

**Task:** A memo addressing this in historical perspective

**Deadline:** Nov 26

7 – Peak Oil: the juncture at which demand keeps growing sharply while supply stag-nates/recedes. Some say we are already there. What does the intelligence community think? Related question: Is it likely that China, India, and other key countries regard the invasion of Iraq as the first resource war of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

**Task:** A memorandum addressing these questions

**Deadline:** Dec 1

8 – My advisers tell me that senior intelligence officials, including the principal deputy to National Intelligence Director Mike McConnell, have been briefing the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), a creature of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

**Task:** Please ask McConnell to let my staff know what other policy advocacy institutes his subordinates have briefed.

**Deadline:** Nov. 10

9 – Mike, one of my aides has read carefully through the memoir of your former boss, ex-CIA director George Tenet, who speaks very highly of you. The memoir reader got the clear impression you were one of Tenet's protégés; for example, he appointed you personal briefer to President George W. Bush.

The next two questions are for you, Mike:

(1) Tenet told his British counterpart, Sir

Richard Dearlove, on July 20, 2002 at CIA Headquarters that the intelligence on Iraq was being "fixed around the policy" of regime change." (I refer, of course, to the so-called "Downing Street Minutes" recording Dearlove's briefing of British Prime Minister Tony Blair and others at 10 Downing Street on July 23, 2002. I'm told that Blair himself has acknowledged that the minutes are authentic.) Did you know, Mike, that the intelligence was being "fixed?"

(2) Tenet also says in his memoir that you "coordinated the CIA review" of Colin Powell's speech at the U.N. on Feb. 5, 2003. Your comment?

Do not take this personally, Mike. But with all due respect, you will be able to understand why I would like to start with a fresh slate. Please inform your management that I would prefer an intelligence briefer untainted by the debacle on Iraq. Add that I am offended that they would send me someone so closely associated with George Tenet, the consummate "fixer," representing the antithesis of the kind of honest intelligence analysis I shall require.

Do not forget to pass along to your successor the requests I have made. Admittedly, some of the tasks carry tight deadlines, but surely your analysts are already at work on these front-burner issues.

Thank you. And best of luck if we do not meet again. **CT**

*Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, the publications arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. His career as a CIA analyst spanned seven administrations and included responsibility for chairing NIEs, as well as preparing and presenting the President's Daily Brief. He is now a member of the Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).*

# Killing is killing whatever you call it

‘Collateral damage’ or ‘targeting killing’:  
the effect is the same, says **Robert Fisk**

All kinds of horrors flop on to my Beirut doormat. There’s *The Independent’s* mobile phone bill, a slew of blood-soaked local Lebanese newspapers – “Saleh Aridi’s blood consolidates [Druze] reconciliation”, was among the goriest of the past few days – and then there are files from the dark memory lane through which all Middle East history has to pass.

The repulsive Baath party archives of Saddam Hussein are the latest to find a place on my coffee table, all marked “Secret”, unpublished – though they formed the basis for the old man’s trial and for his depraved hanging by the Iraqi government more than two years ago. I reprint them now without excuse, for they have a bitter taste in the “new” Iraq and in the “new” Afghanistan about which we still fantasise as we send more Nato troops into Asia’s greatest military graveyard.

The documentary evidence of Saddam’s brutal inquiry into the killings at the Shia Muslim village of Dujail in 1982 provides frightening, fearful testament to the earnestness and cruelty of totalitarianism, the original files of Saddam’s mukhabarat security services in their hunt for the men who tried to assassinate the Iraqi dictator more than a quarter of a century ago. Saddam was then the all-powerful leader of a nation at war with Iran – an eight-year

conflict that would cost the lives of more than a million Muslims on both sides – and whose most ruthless enemies were members of the Iranian-supported Al-Dawa Party (including a certain Nouri al-Maliki). Saddam’s closest allies at this time were the Gulf oil sheikhdoms – and the United States, which was sending military supplies, chemical precursors and satellite reconnaissance photographs to Baghdad to assist Saddam in his war against Iran, a nation he had invaded two years earlier.

On his passage through Dujail, Saddam’s heavily armed convoy was attacked by 10 villagers armed with Kalashnikov rifles. All were killed at the time or hunted down and murdered later. In their subsequent investigations, however, the mukhabarat – in this case operating under the ominous title of the “Regime Crimes Liaison office” – were able to use the system of tribe and sub-tribe in Dujail to tease out the names of everyone associated with the attackers.

The patriarchal lineage – wherein all males carry their father’s, grandfather’s, and great-grandfather’s names, sometimes back eight generations – enabled the secret police to trace the male line of entire families and thus to liquidate them all. Their womenfolk were tortured, many of them raped. The men were butchered. One grandfather lost all his sons and grandsons. His “treacherous” family line came to an

**On his passage through Dujail, Saddam’s heavily armed convoy was attacked by 10 villagers armed with Kalashnikov rifles. All were killed at the time or hunted down and murdered later**

## SEEKING REVENGE

**When US troops massacre Iraqi civilians in Haditha because their buddy has been murdered, what is the difference between their revenge and that of Saddam?**

end. The ruthlessness of Saddam's "Crimes Liaison Office" comes across in their surviving reports.

"Subject/Information Report

We were assigned by the party to submit the names of the opposing and malignant members of the treacherous Al-Dawa Party . . .

"A comrade's greeting. Dun Shakir to the Comrade Member of the State Command. Subject/Security report: Through the fact that the criminals from Al-Dawa Party have attacked our Great Commander the Secretariat of the State, the Striving Comrade Saddam Hussein, we raise the names of the hostile families that are against the party and revolution, knowing that we already raised several reports and surveys on these criminals whose names are below."

And there follows a sheaf of files listing the accused families and their menfolk. Of the Al-Tayyar sub-tribe of the Abu Haideri tribe of Dujail, for example, there is a great grandfather called Abdullah with three children – Asad, Mohammed and Suheil – who themselves have nine children – Sabri, Ali, Nayif, Jasim, Hassan, Qadir, Kabsun, Yasin and Hani. Saddam's secret police fell upon their sons: Ammar, Abdel Salam, Qasim, Sahib, Sa'ad, another Qasim (son of Qadir), Hashim, Ali, a second Ali (son of Yassin) and Thamir.

All of the latter were executed on Saddam's orders. So was another of Jasim's other sons – Nabil – and four more of Hassan's sons – Hussein (who was indeed involved in the assassination attempt on Saddam) and Fatih and Salim and Mohammed and Mahmoud. Five more of their first cousins – Ahmed, Abdullah, Mohammed, Mahmoud and Abbas – were also done to death. Thus

only one male issue of great-grandfather Abdullah's entire family escaped Saddam's execution squads. But these were just the male children of one family. Saddam's murderers were after many more. The investigators at Saddam's trial noticed one telling trait among his secret police officers. If they were reporting an execution, they would scribble their signature. If they were sending intelligence information, they would sign their names in full. After the fall of Saddam, of course, it was not difficult to match up the full names with the scribbled signatures.

### **Any difference?**

But now I ask a question. When US troops massacre Iraqi civilians in Haditha because their buddy has been murdered, what is the difference between their revenge and that of Saddam? When a Taliban attack on Nato forces in Afghanistan provokes a US air strike on a village and leaves women and children torn to pieces in the ruins – this now seems the inevitable result – what is the difference between those innocent deaths and the destruction of the families of Abdullah's grandchildren in Dujail?

Yes, I know that Saddam's thugs selected the relatives of his enemies and we merely kill anyone in the area of our enemies. And yes, I grant you the outcome is not the same. The Iraqi dictator was hanged in Baghdad in 2006, cursed by his hooded Shia "Al-Dawa" executioners as he stood on the scaffold. For us, there will be no hangings.

*Robert Fisk is Middle East correspondent for London's Independent newspaper. His latest book is*

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# Beating the Western drum

Blogging gives a voice to citizens around the world, but why do their views often go unheard in the west? asks **Antony Lowenstein**

**D**uring the recent war between Georgia and Russia, bloggers on both sides of the conflict provided searing accounts of atrocities and manoeuvres unseen by western journalists. In a country such as Russia the space for alternative and critical views are rare. The war showed an authoritarian regime's narrative being challenged by a handful of insiders and outsiders. The government-run media looked staid by comparison.

This was merely the latest example of bloggers beating mainstream journalists at their own game. Online media have exploded in western nations, challenging decades-old business models and forcing reporters to answer questions about their methods and sources. But in repressive states, blogs and websites have become essential sources of information on topics – from women's issues to sexual orientation, dating rituals to human rights – routinely shunned by channels for official propaganda.

These openings for citizens in the non-western world to be heard are far more empowering than the equivalent outlets in our own societies. But how often do we hear these voices in the west?

September 11, for example, should have been the perfect opportunity for the western media to listen to the grievances of the Muslim world. Alas, with notable excep-

tions, indigenous voices were excluded then and still remain largely absent from the pages of the world's leading papers. It is as if only a western journalist's filter can validate such perspectives.

## Hearing local voices

In 2007 I travelled to Iran, Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Cuba and China to speak to dissidents, bloggers, writers, politicians and ordinary citizens about how the internet is changing their countries. I wanted to gauge their interests, desires, frustrations and attitudes towards each other and the west. My new book, *The Blogging Revolution*, is a chance for these local voices to reveal how the web has democratised their minds – although it also reflects the fact that the vast majority of global netizens prefer online dating and downloading pirated films and music to challenging political orthodoxy.

Also addressed is whether multinationals such as Google, Yahoo, Microsoft and Cisco have played a part in assisting net filtering and censorship in China, Cuba and the Middle East. On the eve of the Beijing Olympic Games, Naomi Klein wrote that western firms were essential in “authoritarian communism – central planning, merciless repression, constant surveillance – harnessed to advance the goals of global capitalism.”

How much do we know about Yahoo's

**On the eve of the Beijing Olympic Games, Naomi Klein wrote that western firms were essential in “authoritarian communism – central planning, merciless repression, constant surveillance – harnessed to advance the goals of global capitalism.”**

## OTHER VOICES

**After the Beijing Games, Chinese bloggers fiercely debated the economic direction the country should take over the coming years. It was a far more robust debate than one would expect from coverage of China in the west, where the emphasis is always on rampant nationalism**

or Google's willingness to modify their behaviour to please paranoid officials? I discovered that the western executives of these companies have been more than comfortable with allowing their Chinese counterparts to self-censor thousands of sensitive keywords; far more than just "democracy" and "Falun Gong". Moreover, they are ignoring disturbing developments such as Yahoo China's decision earlier this year to post images of wanted Tibetans on its home page after the Lhasa uprising.

### **Democratic force**

An important question the book poses is whether the web is an automatic democratiser, as is widely assumed in western media circles. The general consensus, across the globe, was that political and military meddling by Washington and London was making the job of real democrats much more difficult.

As one blogger told me in Tehran: "Most of the people I know are in favour of reform, not revolution, because people are too tired to experience another revolution." I found the same message echoed throughout the countries I visited: the desire to experience incremental change without foreign involvement.

Take China. It has 250 million internet users – now the largest online community in the world, far surpassing America – based in both the cities and rural areas. Politics is often the furthest thing from their minds, but connecting with friends has become an essential part of life. I met very few bloggers who wanted to discuss anything political and most expressed general satisfaction with the regime's economic policies. No great desire for "democratisation" there.

Mica Yushu, a blogger in Shanghai, told me that most of her middle-class friends didn't crave political change. "We use the internet mostly for entertainment, sharing information, earning money or other fun,"

she said. The sight of darkened internet cafes across the country was something to behold, with thousands of users gaming, watching soft-core pornography, blogging and instant messaging.

A recent study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project found that the vast majority of China's web users expressed support for Beijing managing or controlling the internet, including the banning of "pornographic" sites. This is not to say that the Chinese desire authoritarian rule; but while they want change, curbing corruption and ensuring essential services are their top priorities, not the advances in human rights the west puts at the top of the agenda.

After the Beijing Games, Chinese bloggers fiercely debated the economic direction the country should take over the coming years. It was a far more robust debate than one would expect from coverage of China in the west, where the emphasis is always on rampant nationalism. One anonymous blogger noted – after sarcastically praising the country's free-market reforms as the "best system seen not just in Chinese history, but also in humankind's" – that greater political development could only come with a "basic welfare system." Such discussions on a massive scale were impossible in China before the internet. Equally important debates are occurring in every country I visited.

Allowing people to speak and write for themselves without a western filter is one of the triumphs of blogging. The online culture, disorganised and disjointed in its aims, is unlike that of any previous social movement. While some want the right to criticise their leaders, others simply want the ability to flirt and listen to subversive tunes. That is revolutionary for much of the world. **CT**

*Antony Loewenstein is a Sydney, Australia, based journalist, blogger and author of *The Blogging Revolution**

# Israel bars visit to a father's grave

A Jewish militia killed Salam Qupty's father 60 years ago, but she's never been allowed to lay a wreath, says **Jonathan Cook**

**S**alwa Salam Qupty clutches a fading sepia photograph of a young Palestinian man wearing a traditional white headscarf. It is the sole memento that survives of her father, killed by a Jewish militia during the 1948 war that established Israel.

"He was killed 60 years ago as he was travelling to work," she said, struggling to hold back the tears. "My mother was four months pregnant with me at the time. This photograph is the closest I've ever got to him."

Six decades on from his death, she has never been allowed to visit his grave in Galilee and lay a wreath for the father she never met. This month, after more than 10 years of requests to the Israeli authorities, she learnt that officials are unlikely ever to grant such a visit, even though Mrs Qupty is an Israeli citizen and lives only a few miles from the cemetery.

Government sources said allowing the visit risks encouraging hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees to claim a right to return to the villages from which they were expelled in 1948. As Israel celebrated its 60th Independence Day with street parties this summer, Mrs Qupty was marking two related anniversaries: the Nakba, or catastrophe, and her father's death in the early stages of the war.

"I am a twin of the Nakba," she said from her home in Kafr Kana, close to Nazareth.

"I was born at the very moment when most of my people lost everything: their homes, their land, their belongings, their livelihoods. In my case I lost my father, too."

Faris Salam was killed in late March 1948, shortly before Israel's establishment. On the day he died, Salam left his village of Malul, west of Nazareth, to catch a bus to his job on the railways in Haifa.

"Those were dangerous times," Mrs Qupty said. "My family were even afraid to go and collect water from the village well because Jews would shoot at them from their positions up in the hills."

When the bus drove into an ambush, Salam and the driver were shot dead and several other passengers injured. He was buried in Malul, but four months later the 800 inhabitants were forced to flee when they came under sustained attack from the Israeli army. Mrs Qupty's mother sought sanctuary in Nazareth, where she gave birth to Salwa days later. Soon the army declared Malul a military zone and blew up all the homes, sparing only two churches and the mosque. The Christian cemetery, where Salam is buried, was enclosed by a military base named Nahlal.

For the past 12 years, Mrs Qupty has been trying to find a way to visit the grave and say a few words to the father she never knew. "As I get older, the fact that I never met him and that I haven't seen where he

**After more than 10 years of requests to the Israeli authorities, she learnt that officials are unlikely ever to grant such a visit, even though Mrs Qupty is an Israeli citizen and lives only a few miles from the cemetery.**

## A DAUGHTER'S TALE

**To the bemusement of the Israeli soldiers on guard, she sometimes throws a bouquet of flowers over the fence.**

**Jonathan Cook** is a writer and journalist based in Nazareth, Israel. His latest books are "Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East" (Pluto Press) and "Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair" (Zed Books). His website is [www.jkcook.net](http://www.jkcook.net). This article originally appeared in *The National*, published in Abu Dhabi

is buried gets harder to bear," she said. "I want him to know that I exist and that I miss him. Is that too much to ask?"

Over the years she has lobbied members of the Israeli parliament, written to the defence ministry and sent countless letters to the local media – to little avail.

"The nearest I can get to him is looking through the base's perimeter fence at a forest that hides my view of the cemetery," she said. To the bemusement of the Israeli soldiers on guard, she sometimes throws a bouquet of flowers over the fence. On one occasion, she said, she found the courage to approach the base's gate and asked to be let in. An officer told her to address a formal request to the defence ministry. "But I'm not going there with a gun, only with a bunch of flowers," she said.

This month a government spokesman finally responded, calling Mrs Qupty's request to visit her father's grave a "complex" matter that had been referred to the defence minister, Ehud Barak, for a final decision. Ministry officials were reported to have decided that her visit should be blocked on the grounds that other Palestinians who seek to return to the villages from which they or their ancestors were expelled in 1948 might use it as legal precedent.

During the war, 750,000 Palestinians fled from more than 400 villages, all of which were subsequently levelled. Most of the refugees ended up in camps in neighbouring Arab states. Unlike them, however, Mrs Qupty's mother managed to remain inside the borders of the new Jewish state, along with about 100,000 other Palestinians, and eventually received citizenship.

Today there are 1.2 million Palestinian citizens of Israel, one fifth of the country's population. Of those, one quarter are internal refugees, or officially classified as "present absentees": present in Israel in terms of citizenship but absent in terms of legal redress over their forced removal from their homes.

Isabelle Humphries, a British scholar who has interviewed many families ex-

pelled from Malul, pointed out that the refugees' Israeli citizenship conferred on them no more rights to access their former village than refugees living abroad.

"Most cannot make even short visits to the ruins of the villages, to their places of worship or their graves. Often the lands of the destroyed village have been declared military zones or are now in the private hands of Jewish communities."

Ms Humphries said Israel had repeatedly used the excuse that making any concessions to individual refugees would open the floodgates to the return of all the refugees.

"If Israel were to admit that internal refugees have rights to the land and property confiscated in 1948, policymakers know that it would draw further attention to Israel's continuing refusal to recognise the rights of refugees outside the state."

Mrs Qupty, a social worker supervising children in protective custody, said her work had increased her understanding of the trauma that the events of 1948 had done to Palestinians.

"My mother was left with nothing after the war. I was born in a tiny room in Nazareth and we lived there for many years. My older brother and two sisters had to be placed in religious institutions because she did not have the means to care for them. We grew up hardly knowing each other."

For several years after the war, her grandfather secretly returned to Malul by donkey to grow crops on his land, though he was fined when he was caught doing so. On a few occasions Mrs Qupty accompanied him, but never saw the cemetery where her father is buried. "By the time I was old enough to understand what had happened to my father, the military base had been built over the cemetery."

Finally convinced that Israel is unlikely ever to concede a visit, Mrs Qupty said she would turn to the courts. But human rights lawyers regard her chances of success as slim. The Supreme Court rarely overturns government decisions taken on security grounds. **CT**

# An unforgettable Moment

**Uri Avnery** remembers the fateful moment when Egypt's Anwar Sadat flew to Jerusalem to make peace with Israel

**W**hen I told this to Anwar Sadat, he laughed: "The moment the door of your airplane opened, all Israelis held their breath. I live on a main street in Tel-Aviv, and at that moment I looked out at the street below. It was totally empty. Nothing moved, except one cat which was probably hurrying home to the television."

31 years have now passed since that moment, one of the greatest in our lives.

Through the eyes of an Israeli, this is how it looked: Egypt and Israel were in a state of war. In the previous 30 years, four major campaigns had been fought, with thousands of Israelis and tens of thousands of Egyptians killed and maimed. The hatred between the two peoples was deep and bitter. Gamal Abd-al-Nasser, Sadat's predecessor, had been officially designated as "the Egyptian Tyrant", whose effigy Israeli children used to put on bonfires. Radio Cairo's incitement against Israel was vicious. Only four years earlier, the Egyptians had launched a surprise attack against Israel and dealt us a heavy blow.

And here, without any prelude, was the Egyptian president standing up in his Parliament and announcing that he intended to fly to Jerusalem and make peace. Many did not believe their ears. The Israeli Chief of Staff thought it was a trap. No one took it seriously.

And here he was. The unbelievable was happening before our eyes. A date to remember: November 17, 1977. The entire Israeli leadership stood in a row on the tarmac. The Egyptian airplane landed and slowly taxied towards the red carpet. The stairs were attached. For a moment the atmosphere was surreal. And then the door opened, and there stood the Egyptian leader, slim, erect and solemn. Israeli army buglers sounded the salute. An unforgettable moment.

I have looked for a historical parallel and found none. It could even be compared with the first steps of man on the moon.

Anwar Sadat had done something that was without precedent.

I remembered this event in a topical context, separate from its political significance. I was sitting with a group of friends discussing, as usual, the chances of peace. Somebody said that the negotiations would not bear fruit if we could not change the attitude of most Israelis to the Palestinians. Another doubted that this would be possible and added that even a serious crisis would not help - after a crisis everybody returns to their original opinion as if nothing has happened.

I said that most opinions of people are not based on rational thought, but on emotion. If there is a contradiction between the two, then logical thought is subordinated

**Here, without any prelude, was the Egyptian president standing up in his Parliament and announcing that he intended to fly to Jerusalem and make peace. Many did not believe their ears. The Israeli Chief of Staff thought it was a trap**

## CHANGING HISTORY

**Flying over Mount Ararat in Turkey he was struck by the idea: why not go to Jerusalem and speak directly to the Israelis at home?**

to the existing emotional pattern. Therefore, in order to really change a person's opinion, one has to address his emotions, too.

I needed a real example, and that's where Sadat came in.

Sadat did it. He had addressed the emotions of every Israeli.

This bold deed was the shock to the emotions and consciousness, without which the peace with Egypt would not have been possible. Sadat captured the hearts of a whole people. Emotional attitudes that had been frozen for decades melted like butter in the midday sun, clearing the path for a completely different way of looking at things. People who hated the Egyptians - and, indeed, all Arabs - liked him on sight. From this moment on he could talk to the Israeli public and persuade it - they hung on his lips.

Until that moment, there was a complete consensus in Israel that we must not, under any circumstances, "give up" the Sinai Peninsula. That this would amount to national suicide. That we would lose our essential "strategic depth". Moshe Dayan, then serving as Defense Minister and national idol, declared that he "preferred Sharm-al-Sheikh without peace to peace without Sharm-al-Sheikh". Nobody was ready to give up the Sinai oil fields. The Labor Party ministers had built a large settlement bloc in North Sinai, centered on a new town, Yamit, considered our most beautiful and well-planned. And Sadat himself was known to have collaborated with the Nazis in World War II and to have spent time in prison for that.

Now, practically overnight, all this was wiped out. Who needs Sinai, who needs Sharm-al-Sheikh (and who remembers today that the place was known in Israel at the time as "Ophira"?), who needs the oil, who needs Yamit - when we can have peace instead? All was gone. All was evacuated. Nothing remained but the pictures of Tzachi Hanegbi's ridiculous last stand on a tower and Meir Kahane's unfulfilled prom-

ise to die in a bunker.

Without a doubt, Sadat was a genius. He had a specifically Egyptian wisdom, the 6000-year old wisdom of a people who have seen it all and lived through it all. That does not mean that he did not make serious mistakes, that he did not entertain illusions, that he did not say quite foolish things together with very wise things, sometimes in the same breath.

But no one who met him face to face could avoid the feeling that they were in the presence of a historic figure.

### **Arriving at the decision**

How did he arrive at his decision? As he told me (and many others), he had an almost mystic illumination. He was on his way back from a visit to the Romanian ruler. He had posed to his host two questions: Can one believe Menachem Begin? Will Begin be able to carry out his decisions? Nicolae Ceaucescu answered both questions in the affirmative.

Flying over Mount Ararat in Turkey he was struck by the idea: why not go to Jerusalem and speak directly to the Israelis at home?

That is a nice story. But it does not cover all the facts. Sadat was neither naïve nor a gambler. Before he took his fateful step, he had secret negotiations with Begin. The Egyptian deputy prime minister, Hassan Tohami, was sent to Morocco to meet with Moshe Dayan, Begin's foreign minister at the time. Dayan assured him unequivocally that Begin was prepared to give back all of Sinai, to the last grain of sand.

(When I published this long ago, it was denied by both sides. Recently, however, General Binyamin Gibli, Dayan's confidant, confirmed it on his deathbed.)

In simple words: Before the dramatic gesture, before the start of the official negotiations, Sadat knew that he would get back all the Egyptian territory occupied by Israel. He was walking on solid ground.

That is the reverse side of the coin, the Israeli side. Sadat's initiative would not

have succeeded without Menachem Begin.

When I saw the two standing together, it struck me that no two people could be more different.

Sadat was an impulsive person, a man with a wide vision. He was not interested in details. He believed in people. He was a quintessential Egyptian, a village boy with a dark complexion (inherited from his Sudanese mother).

Begin was a quintessential East European Jew. He never quite became an Israeli. He was a lawyer by temperament, a stickler for details, suspicious by nature.

But they shared one crucial trait: they were both very dramatic types. They loved the great gesture and believed in its effectiveness. They were very conscious of being actors on the stage of history. They both had a gift for touching the deepest emotions of people.

#### **Rigid ideology**

Unlike Sadat, Begin had a fixed and rigid ideology. It was expressed by a specific map of the Land of Israel, the one drawn by the British when they received their mandate over the country. It had nothing to do with the map of the Holy Land as depicted in the Bible, but it was adopted by Vladimir Jabotinsky and incorporated in the emblem of the Irgun underground army long before Begin took over its command.

According to this map, the land beyond the Jordan (today's Hashemite Kingdom) belongs to Eretz Israel, too, but Sinai does not. Neither do the Golan Heights. Therefore it was easy for Begin to give back Sinai, and, I believe, it would have been easy for him to give back the Golan, if events had not taken another turn.

But Begin was unable to give back the West Bank. Autonomy to the inhabitants - yes. Fair treatment of the Arabs there - why not? After all, it was Jabotinsky himself who had laid down that if the president of the Jewish state was a Jew, the prime minister should be an Arab - and vice versa. But withdraw from the West Bank? Out of

the question!

Sadat was certain that he could get Begin to agree to the establishment of a Palestinian state. Begin did indeed officially recognize the "Palestinian people", but added at once that what he meant was the "Arabs of Eretz Israel". The Egyptians later believed that Israel had betrayed their trust. Dayan resigned in protest when he realized that Begin had no intention of implementing the Palestinian aspect of the agreement. But anyone who knew Begin realized that he could not have behaved differently. (I spent some hours in an effort to explain to the Egyptian acting foreign minister, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, an extremely intelligent person, what Begin was, what his map of Eretz Israel signified and what "autonomy" meant in the Likud lexicon.)

The Palestinian issue was the stone of controversy which knocked the Egyptian-Israeli peace off course.

Deflected perhaps, but immensely successful nevertheless.

It is enough for an Israeli to imagine what would have happened if Sadat had not undertaken his historic journey. How many wars would have broken out? How many soldiers and civilians on both sides would have been killed or maimed? How many hundreds of billions would we have been compelled to spend on the defense of our Southern border?

One small example should suffice: a few days ago the Egyptian navy held an exercise, the largest in its history. The Hebrew newspapers dismissed it in a few lines. If there had been no peace, all alarms in Israel would have sounded. The Egyptian navy is larger than ours, and in the past has dealt us some very painful blows.

It was said at the time: this is Sadat's peace. It will disappear when he goes. We have given back all of Sinai, and tomorrow a new Egyptian Pharaoh will attack us. Well, Sadat was assassinated, and his successor is keeping the peace.

But much more important than even the change on the political map was the change

**How many wars would have broken out? How many soldiers and civilians on both sides would have been killed or maimed? How many hundreds of billions would we have been compelled to spend on the defense of our Southern border?**

## CHANGING HISTORY

**But Sadat proved one thing, which in my eyes is more important than anything else: one can change the emotional state of an entire people.**

on the psychological one. As Sadat himself used to say, the psychological dimension of the conflict is much more important than all the others put together.

True, Sadat did not succeed in getting the Israeli public to change its attitude towards the Arab world, and towards the Palestinian people in particular. The emotional opposition to that was too strong, and Begin's ideology reduced the momentum before it could reach the Palestinian issue. Also, the Israeli attitude towards the West Bank is unlike the attitude towards the Sinai desert. This part of the conflict is longer and deeper even than the bitter conflict with Egypt.

But Sadat proved one thing, which in my eyes is more important than anything else: one can change the emotional state of an entire people. One can cut the psy-

chological knot with one bold stroke. For that one needs leaders, on both sides. Such leaders can appear quite suddenly, in the most unexpected place and at the most unexpected time. Barak Obama could prove to be a kind of American Sadat.

Personally, my most emotional experience connected with the Sadat visit took place in Cairo. Begin had invited me, as the editor of a news magazine, to take part in the gala state dinner given by Sadat in his palace. During the meal, my former brigade commander introduced me to an Egyptian general who in 1948, as a young captain, had been in command of the position from where I was shot and seriously wounded.

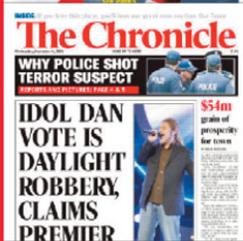
We shook hands.

**CT**

*Uri Avnery is an Irgun veteran turned Israeli peace activist*

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### SPECIAL RATES FOR PROGRESSIVE PUBLICATIONS

# Greed, capitalism and the death of the USSR

Superpowers should not be confused with democracies, writes **William Blum**

**G**reed is a hot topic now. Stock brokers and others involved in the current financial crisis are angrily accused of being greedy. *Time* magazine declared that the nation's current troubles were "the price of greed". "Blame greed," echoed the *Chicago Tribune*. But these establishment publications can't be taken too seriously. Like other believers in the system, they're convinced that greed is a built-in, valuable, and necessary feature of capitalism and capitalist man, that it's indispensable for motivating entrepreneurs, and that it results in all manner of innovation and invention.

During the years of the Cold War, this was a key element of the interminable discussions cum arguments between defenders of free enterprise and defenders of socialism; the arguments still continue, although most people now think that history has answered the question – capitalism has won. "The end of history", leading conservative Francis Fukuyama called it in his well-received book in 1992. He asserted that we couldn't expect to find a better way to organize society than the marriage of liberal democracy and market capitalism. Subsequent world movements such as anti-globalization and political Islam caused Fukuyama to have some second thoughts about whether history had actually come to an end. (He also came to renounce the

war in Iraq which he had initially embraced on the premise that it would bring the joys of liberal democracy and market capitalism to the benighted Iraqi people.)

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the boys of Capital have chortled in their martinis about the death of socialism. Until recently, the word had been banned from polite conversation (now achieving new notoriety as a term of political insult). And no one seems to notice that every socialist experiment of any significance in the twentieth century was either bombed, invaded, or overthrown; corrupted, perverted, or destabilized; or otherwise had life made impossible for it, by the United States.

## Not one left alone

Not one socialist government or movement – from the Russian revolution to the Vietnamese communists to the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, from Communist China to Salvador Allende in Chile to the FMLN in Salvador – not one was permitted to rise or fall solely on its own merits; not one was left secure enough to drop its guard against the all-powerful enemy abroad and freely and fully relax control at home. It continues today with Washington's attempts to subvert the governments of Venezuela and Bolivia, and, of course, still, forever, Cuba.

Imagine that the Wright brothers' first

**Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the boys of Capital have chortled in their martinis about the death of socialism. Until recently, the word had been banned from polite conversation**

## ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

**Unlike capitalism, whose volatility is legendary, as each day's headlines remind us anew, the Soviet system with its government ownership of the means of production and its command economy, whatever its other defects, remained relatively stable and uniform**

experiments with flying machines had all failed because the automobile interests had sabotaged each test flight. And then, thanks to the auto companies' propaganda, the good and god-fearing folk of the world looked upon this, took notice of the consequences, nodded their collective heads wisely, and intoned solemnly: Man shall never fly.

It's widely assumed that the Soviet Union demise resulted from gross shortcomings intrinsic to its socialist system, that the economy somehow imploded from its inherent contradictions. But all the shortcomings and contradictions that could have been found in the Soviet system in 1990 could have as well been found in 1980, or 1970, or 1960. Unlike capitalism, whose volatility is legendary, as each day's headlines remind us anew, the Soviet system with its government ownership of the means of production and its command economy, whatever its other defects, remained relatively stable and uniform. The question is thus: What happened in the late 1980s in the Soviet system to cause it to unravel? I believe that the best answer to the question lies in the person of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, who came to power in 1985.

Gorbachev's long-time and ardent ambition was to model the Soviet Union after a West European social democracy and have the country accepted as such by the Europeans. That's the principal reason he put an end to the Soviet military involvement in Afghanistan; and why he instituted his historic economic and political changes at home (with their unintended consequences), and relinquished control over Eastern Europe without resorting to military force. The war in Afghanistan certainly had its effects, financially and psychologically, upon the people of the Soviet Union, and is commonly cited as a major cause for the nation's breakup. But the same can be said even more so of the effect of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq upon the American people, millions of whom have marched

against the wars, yet none of this has led to an American withdrawal from either place; not even close. Superpowers should not be confused with democracies.

**Ayn Rand's social philosophy: Let the strong prevail, let the weak pay for their weakness**

"I made a mistake in presuming that the self-interests of organizations, specifically banks and others, were such that they were best capable of protecting their own shareholders and their equity in the firms. ... So the problem here is [that] something which looked to be a very solid edifice and, indeed, a critical pillar to market competition and free markets, did break down. And I think that, as I said, shocked me."

A remarkable admission from Alan Greenspan, former chairman of the Federal Reserve, long-time opponent of government regulation of the corporate world, and friend and devoted follower of Ayn Rand, the selfishness guru who turned the emulation of two-year olds into a philosophy of life. "I have found a flaw," said Greenspan, referring to his economic philosophy. "I don't know how significant or permanent it is. But I have been very distressed by that fact."

Greenspan was induced into these admissions by tough questioning from congressmen at a hearing called in October to deal with the financial crisis. There was a time when Greenspan was looked upon as a guru by a largely unquestioning and unchallenging congress and media, no matter how dubious or obscure his pronouncements. He could have passed at times for Chauncey Gardener, the main character of the book and film "Being There". Gardener, brought to life by Peter Sellers, was a simple man with very simple thoughts and behavior, who might have been considered to be borderline "retarded", but fortuitous circumstances and the deference toward him by those of insufficient intellect and/or courage resulted in him being thought of as brilliant by people in high positions.

There was one noteworthy exception to this delicate treatment of Greenspan. In July 2003, Rep. Bernie Sanders of Vermont faced the Fed chairman across the table at a congressional hearing and said:

“Mr. Greenspan, I have long been concerned that you are way out of touch with the needs of the middle class and working families of our country, that you see your major function in your position as the need to represent the wealthy and large corporations ... I think you just don’t know what’s going on in the real world. ... You talk about an improving economy, while we have lost 3 million private sector jobs in the last two years. Long-term unemployment has more than tripled. ... We have a \$4 trillion national debt. 1.4 million Americans have lost their health insurance. Millions of seniors can’t afford prescription drugs. Middle class families can’t send their kids to college because they don’t have the money to do that.”

“Congressman,” Greenspan replied, “we have the highest standard of living in the world.”

“No, we do not,” insisted Sanders. “You go to Scandinavia, and you will find that people have a much higher standard of living, in terms of education, health care and decent paying jobs. Wrong, Mister.”

Not accustomed to having to defend his profundities, Greenspan could do no better than to counter with: “We have the highest standard of living for a country of our size.”<sup>8</sup>

This was quite a comedown from “in the world”, and inasmuch as the only countries of equal or larger population are China and India, with Indonesia being the fourth largest, Greenspan’s point is rather difficult to evaluate.

The idea that the United States has the highest standard of living in the world is one that is actually believed by numerous grownups in America, and most of them believe that this highest standard applies across the board. They’re only minimally conscious of the fact that whereas they’ve made extremely painful sacrifices to send a child to university, and they often simply can’t come up with enough money, and even if they can the child will be very heavily in debt for years afterward, in much of Western Europe university education is either free or eminently affordable; as it is in Cuba and was in Iraq under Saddam Hussein.

The same lack of awareness about superior conditions in other countries extends to health care, working hours, vacation time, maternity leave, child care, unemployment insurance, and a host of other social and economic benefits.

In short, amongst the developed nations, the United States is the worst place to be a worker, to be sick, to seek a university education, to be a parent; or, in the land of two million incarcerated, to exercise certain rights or be a defendant in court.

To which the Chauncey Gardeners of America, including the one who used to sit in the Federal Reserve and the one presently sitting in the Oval Office, would say: “Duh! Whaddaya mean?”

*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*

**Amongst the developed nations, the United States is the worst place to be a worker, to be sick, to seek a university education, to be a parent; or, in the land of two million incarcerated, to exercise certain rights or be a defendant in court**

**WRITE FOR COLDTYPE**

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# Poor Marlise . . .

Her old allies are now attacking the Tribunal and portraying the Serbs as victims, writes **Edward S. Herman**

I was sorely tempted to write to Marlise Simons and offer her my sympathies: “Marlise, if only the villains in this case were Serbs, what a fine front page article you could have had here!”

Marlise Simons, the *New York Times*'s main reporter on the Milosevic trial and International Criminal Trial for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), has had a difficult year. Perhaps most painful was the disclosure that in 1999 the Kosovo Albanian KLA sent as many as 300 captive Serbs to Albanian to be killed and their internal organs “harvested” for sale abroad, a matter barely mentioned in the *New York Times* (see below). I was sorely tempted to write to Marlise Simons and offer her my sympathies: “Marlise, if only the villains in this case were Serbs, what a fine front page article you could have had here!”

She and her paper did have a windfall with the arrest of former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and his transfer to the Hague for trial in July (18-21), which was exploited to a maximum with nine by-lined Simons articles, multi-day front page coverage, a stream of pictures of grieving (or capture-celebrating) victim family members, and the usual complete absence of any critical context on either Bosnian history or the nature and record of the ICTY. (For an analysis of Simons' sorry record and background on the issues at stake, see Herman and Peterson, *Marlise Simons on the Yugoslavia Tribunal: A Case Study in Total Propaganda Service*, ZNet, March, 2004 (ColdType readers can find it at

[www.coldtype.net/herman.html](http://www.coldtype.net/herman.html)); for reviews of the role of the ICTY, John Laughland, *Travesty* [Pluto: 2007] and Michael Mandel, *How America Gets Away With Murder* [Pluto: 2004]; for a broader analysis of the issues, Herman and Peterson, *The Dismantling of Yugoslavia: A Study in inhumanitarian intervention – and a Western liberal left intellectual and moral collapse*, *Monthly Review*, Oct. 2007).

Simons and the *Times* have adhered closely to the establishment narrative on the issues involved in the wars and dismantlement of Yugoslavia, including the good-evil dichotomy, steady demonization of the evil (Serbs), gullibility, suppression of inconvenient facts, and high praise for the work of the ICTY. Simons had a very flattering article on the ICTY prosecutor, Carla Del Ponte back in 2002 (*The Saturday Profile: On War Criminals' Trail, an Unflagging Hunter*, *New York Times*, February 9, 2002), and throughout the Milosevic trial Simons reported Del Ponte's claims (and those of her PR associate Florence Hartmann), on an almost daily basis and without the slightest trace of skepticism. (This was helped along by simply ignoring some of Del Ponte's more egregious acts and statements, such as her appeals for public support of the ICTY by making strong public claims of the guilt of people on trial, and her statement that she would not pursue alleged NATO

## HIDING THE TRUTH

war crimes in bombing Serbia because she takes NATO's word for it that they didn't do anything illegal – she was “very satisfied that there was no deliberate targeting of civilians or unlawful military targets by NATO during the bombing campaign”; any that happened were “genuine mistakes.”).

But Simons' old friend Del Ponte has written a book, thus far published only in Italy, entitled *La Caccia: Ioei criminali di guerra* (i.e., “*The Hunt: Me and the War Criminals*”), co-authored with Chuck Sudetic, which makes several dramatic claims that would be highly newsworthy for a non-party-line and minimally honest Newspaper of Record. For one thing, it claims that U.S. pressure steered the ICTY away from Croatian, Muslim and Kosovo war criminals, and that NATO non-cooperation and the ICTY's dependence on NATO for “the rest of the Tribunal's work” (i.e., pursuing Serbs) made any investigation and indictment of NATO officials politically impossible.

Her hypocrisy and self-deception here are massive, but it is still interesting to see her now admit the political basis of the ICTY's allowable work. Simons and the *Times* have never explored this crucial subject, and of course never reviewed John Laughland's and Michael Mandel's books that discuss the issues involved here in detail. (Laughland's *Travesty*, fully demonstrates the ICTY's corruption of judicial procedure; Mandel in *How America Gets Away With Murder* shows compellingly that the ICTY was a political arm of NATO and was designed to facilitate war, not peace—or justice).

More spectacular than her admission of politicization, Del Ponte reports in her book the point noted earlier – that the Kosovo Albanian KLA was involved in a program of sending Serbs, mostly seized civilians, to an Albanian location where “doctors extracted the captives' internal organs,” which were sent off for sale. She estimates that 300 kidnapped Serbs were so treated. (For a partial non-authorized translation of

Del Ponte's account, Harry de Quetteville, “Serb prisoners were stripped of their organs in Kosovo war,” *Daily Telegraph*, April 11, 2008). This was done at the very time UN and NATO forces were deploying to Kosovo as the “humanitarian intervention” war was ending in 1999. Human Rights Watch has found “serious and credible allegations” on the organ-extraction and sale issue in a series of reports, but Del Ponte claims that here again, as with NATO's possible war crimes, it was difficult to get a serious investigation and process underway on the matter.

The *New York Times* has mentioned this charge only once, in a single sentence deep in an article on another subject, in which the charge is dismissed with contempt by KLA terrorist and high-ranking Kosovo Albanian official Ramush Haradinaj (Dan Bilefsky, “Ex-Soldier May Go From The Hague's Docket to Kosovo's Ballot,” *New York Times*, July 12, 2008).

The dismissal by the ICTY of the case against Haradinaj, as well as one against Bosnian Muslim leader Naser Oric, also presented a problem for defenders of the ICTY as an independent and genuinely judicial enterprise, with the result that these cases were kept virtually out of sight during the same period in which the Karadzic case got enormous publicity. Haradinaj had been indicted and brought to the Hague in 2005, but was allowed to return to Kosovo to campaign for high office although an indicted war criminal! This was in the same time frame in which the very sick Milosevic was refused permission to go to Moscow for medical treatment, with a Russian guarantee of return. (He died in prison two weeks after this ICTY denial of medical attention.).

Both Haradinaj and Oric were not only leaders of organizations that killed large number of Serb civilians, in contrast with Karadzic and Milosevic they were both hands-on killers – which added to the likelihood that an unbiased court would have given them long prison sentences.

**Laughland's *Travesty*, fully demonstrates the ICTY's corruption of judicial procedure; Mandel in *How America Gets Away With Murder* shows compellingly that the ICTY was a political arm of NATO and was designed to facilitate war, not peace—or justice**

**The double standard on proof of command responsibility and the laughably limited scope of the original indictment of this major war criminal fully confirm the ICTY's role as a political instrument and its process as a "travesty"**

Haradinaj was the leader of the Black Eagles, which kidnapped and killed hundreds of Serbs and Kosovo Albanians who cooperated with Serbia, but he was found not guilty on any count – Bilefsky mentions that “lawyers and judges on the court complained that witness intimidation had been widespread,” but he fails to mention that a number of potential witnesses against Haradinaj were murdered, and he doesn’t point out that the ICTY judges failed once again to find guilt based on a “joint criminal enterprise” in a trial of a non-Serb. That ICTY-originated concept is apparently confined to usage against the ICTY-NATO target population.

The Oric case is even more interesting because he openly bragged about his participation in the massacre of Srebrenica-area Serbs to Canadian *Toronto Star* reporter Bill Schiller and Washington Post reporter John Pomfret, and showed both of them videos of some of his Serb victims. (Schiller, *Fearsome Muslim Warlord Eludes Bosnian Serb Forces*, *Toronto Star*, July 16, 1995; Pomfret, *Weapons, Cash and Chaos Lend Clout to Srebrenica's Tough Guy*, *Washington Post*, Feb. 16, 1994.) Although there was this kind of evidence, and although Oric openly claimed to Schiller that he had participated in the killing of 114 Serbs in a single episode, it took the ICTY till 2003 to indict him, and he was then indicted for only six killings carried out between September 1992 and March 1993, not by him but by his subordinates. The implication that he was not responsible for mass killings after March 1993, with Srebrenica declared a “safe area” in April 1993, is contrary to well established facts.

More recently, the Bosnian Muslim Ibran Mustafic, who had been a member of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Parliament and was president of the Executive Board of the Srebrenica Municipal Assembly, published a book, *Planirani Chaos* (Planned Chaos), which gives a great deal of evidence in support of the claim that Oric “is a war criminal without a par” (in Mustafic’s words).

Mustafic was scheduled to give testimony in the Oric trial, but after he argued with the prosecution that it failed to charge Oric with his real crimes, in the end the judges decided not to let him testify. Neither Schiller nor Pomfret were called as witnesses to testify before the ICTY on the Oric case, and their articles were not entered into the evidence. French General and former UN military commander in Bosnia, Philippe Morillon, who had been a prosecution witness in the Milosevic trial, had stated there that the Srebrenica killings of July 1995 were a “direct reaction” to the Oric massacres of earlier years, was not called as a witness during the Oric trial.

Oric was then found guilty, not of killing anybody but having failed to control his subordinates, and was freed with only a two-year sentence, having spent three years at the Hague. This was followed by a further ICTY court decision that threw out his conviction and two-year sentence on ground of inadequate proof of Oric’s knowledge of what his subordinates were doing. The double standard on proof of command responsibility and the laughably limited scope of the original indictment of this major war criminal fully confirm the ICTY’s role as a political instrument and its process as a “travesty.”

Just as Marlise Simons had ignored Naser Oric in earlier years, so with these trials of exoneration, the Times’s coverage was confined to a short July 4, 2008 blurb taken from Agence France Presse, *Bosnia: Ex-Commander Is Cleared*. Ibran Mustafic’s book and testimony has of course never been mentioned in the paper.

Another development that Marlise Simons has had to dodge is the 2007 publication of a book by Florence Hartmann, *Peace and Punishment*, which, like Del Ponte’s book, accuses the Western powers of having politicized the work of the ICTY, specifically in having blocked the capture and trial of Radovan Karadzic – a claim consistent with Karadzic’s allegation of a deal with Richard Holbrooke. Even more

interesting is Hartmann's claim that when Del Ponte was prosecutor of the Rwanda Tribunal (ICTR), which she was assigned to along with her service at the ICTY, the United States ordered her to drop any investigations and charges against the Tutsi army and Paul Kagame, a U.S. client. She refused and was fired. Earlier, when Louise Arbour was ICTR prosecutor, her staff had found strong evidence that Kagame and associates had organized the shooting down of the Hutu president's plane on April 6, 1994, the act which initiated the escalated killings in Rwanda. Arbour had followed U.S. orders and closed down the investigation. Del Ponte refused to do that and was removed.

This was never disclosed in the *New York Times* when it happened, and Marlise Simons and company are not about to give Hartmann's confirmation of this highly important story any publicity today. It does not fit the established bias. As I have discussed elsewhere and often, when a strong party line forms within the U.S. establishment, as is true as regards both the dismantling of Yugoslavia and the Rwanda killings, the *New York Times* regularly cooperates, with the result that it performs as a

propaganda agency of the state in a fashion similar to Pravda's service to the Soviet authorities. This was the case as regards, e.g., the non-existent 1981 Bulgarian-KGB plot to murder the Pope, the U.S. sponsorship of Pakistan's dictators and help to Bin Laden and the anti-Soviet Afghan resistance in the 1980s, Saddam's threatening (but non-existent) "weapons of mass destruction" in 2003, Iran's nuclear menace today (devoid of nuclear weapons), as well as NATO's phony "humanitarian intervention" to deal with a non-existent Serb "genocide" in Bosnia and Kosovo. It is a great Paper of Record, helping manufacture consent to the policies of the imperial state whose record it keeps with meticulous care and dependable selectivity. **CT**

*Edward S. Herman is Professor Emeritus of Finance at the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, and has written extensively on economics, political economy and the media. Among his books are Corporate Control, Corporate Power, The Real Terror Network, Triumph of the Market, Manufacturing Consent (with Noam Chomsky) and Imperial Alibis (South End Press)*

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# How Bush's invasion boosted Burma's junta

The occupation of Iraq has shown the world's worst dictators that they need not fear the United States, writes **Sherwood Ross**

**The despotism in Burma, like Bush's criminal war against Iraq, is a textbook study in human folly that cries out for international solution**

**B**esides wrecking Iraq and killing a million people, President Bush's illegal invasion has given a boost to military dictators around the world.

"The idea, popular in the nineteen-nineties, that the world may intervene in countries whose governments show no regard for human life is now seen as reflecting Western arrogance," writes George Packer in the *New Yorker* magazine. Packer refers specifically to Burma but militarists globally have followed the U.S. assault on Iraq closely. Many dictators consider George Bush to be a man after their own heart – and he proves it by showering them with weapons.

According to Rachel Stohl, a senior analyst at the Center for Defense Information(CDI), "the U.S. is sending unprecedented levels of military assistance to countries that it simultaneously criticizes for lack of respect for human rights and, in some cases, for questionable democratic processes."

"The occupation of Iraq has been a boon to the Burmese generals," Packer writes. It has deprived the U.S. of any moral authority it once had. And neighbors China and India – motivated by selfish economic concerns – look the other way at the Burmese junta's horrendous human rights abuses. China's approach, Packer says, "has be-

come the standard." Chinese businessmen are plowing investment funds into Burma and China's dictators are selling arms to their Burmese counterparts. China and India are also competing for contracts to explore offshore oil and gas and to build a gas pipeline across Burma, Packer writes.

China even tried to prevent the United Nations Security Council from discussing Burma and when a U.N. envoy said he planned to discuss the prospect of talks between the junta and opposition political leader Aung San Suu Kyi, under house arrest, at a meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Burmese Prime Minister threatened to walk out. The U.N. envoy's talk was cancelled.

## **Study in human folly**

The despotism in Burma, like Bush's criminal war against Iraq, is a textbook study in human folly that cries out for international solution. Both reflect how calloused militaries ravage innocent civilian populations because there is no real "law and order" on much of planet Earth.

Since seizing control in 1962, military officers have installed themselves in most of Burma's top government posts, operating with absolute contempt for the well-being of the nation's 50-millions. Arbitrary arrests, torture, the use of child labor, and total suppression of political freedom are the

norm. Starvation is common. The junta's failure to aid the survivors of last May's cyclone that killed 130,000 people or to allow Western aid into the country makes the Bush response to hurricane-struck New Orleans appear positively benevolent.

"American policy toward Burma has been to isolate the regime through sanctions," Packer writes. "This policy has been pursued as a moral response to a deplorable government, without much regard for its effectiveness." And he adds, "the alternative policy – economic engagement along the lines of Burma's neighbors – has also failed. Every year, the junta grows stronger while the country sinks deeper into poverty."

#### Generals don't ace

"Sanctions are a joke," one Western diplomat stationed in Rangoon told Packer. "They're just a pressure release. The generals don't care what the rest of the world thinks about them, because they don't think about the rest of the world. What they care about is their financial and physical security." FYI, Transparency International ranks Burma as the second most corrupt regime in the world, after Somalia.

The only bright spot for U.S. policy in Burma is the State Department's American Center in Rangoon, crowded with Burmese reading Western literature. Packer credits two State Department officials, Thomas Pierce and Kim Penland, for expanding the Center's library, plus starting a political discussion class, a training workshop for journalists, a literature book club, and a debate club. "In a country where the law forbids unauthorized meetings of more than five people, none of this could have happened anywhere outside the gates of the Center," Packer writes.

The lesson of Burma is the UN needs a standing army to step into a country and guarantee honest elections, and, when necessary, even to depose a junta. The lesson of Iraq is that the UN needs a mechanism to prevent jingoists like Bush from making a war in behalf of financial interests, in this case the western oil firms and the U.S. military-industrial complex. Diplomat Heraldo Munoz, Chile's permanent representative to the United Nations, is quoted in the November 15th New York Times as writing in his book "A Solitary War" that "Americans do not recognize the value of the United Nations in assuring the United States' central role in the world."

As psychologist Michael McCullough writes in his book "Beyond Revenge" (Jossey-Bass), "By acting as the world's policeman, the United Nations was supposed to be the strong supranational government that could prevent warfare between nations. However, the UN's ability to stop nations from attacking each other has been hamstrung by the fact that any member of the UN Security Council (which includes the most militarily powerful nations in the world) can veto any proposed UN military action that it views as a threat to itself or one of its allies."

"Until the UN becomes strong enough to stop violence between nations before it gets out of hand, or until some stronger form of supranational governance comes along, violence between nations, spawned and nurtured by feelings of vengefulness, will likely continue to be a fact of life," McCullough adds. **CT**

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**"Sanctions are a joke. They're just a pressure release. The generals don't care what the rest of the world thinks about them, because they don't think about the rest of the world. What they care about is their financial and physical security"**

**WRITE FOR THE COLDTYPE READER**

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# Obama, wedding bombs & good news

**Fred Reed** reads the newspapers and decides there's a better way to spend his time

**I read that the world has gone euphoric over Precedent O'Bama. Simultaneously, O'Bama wants to send more troops to Afghanistan. I'll give euphoria two more weeks**

I'm going to slit my wrists. I've been reading the news again. I always want to slit my wrists when I do that. I know, I know: I'll get encouragement from readers. OK, then, I won't, just to spite them. Ha. One story says that Americans owe some bizarre sum on the credit card and god knows how much on the McMansion and on the five-hundred horsepower riding mower with a mini-combine, backhoe attachment, and satellite GPS for mowing the half acre. I think I'm supposed to feel sorry for them. Actually I think they are a persuasive argument for eugenics.

I don't get it. What is wrong with these idiots? Debt is easy to avoid. Herewith some blinding wisdom: If you can't pay for it, don't buy it. You saw it here first, a percipient contribution to economic theory. Works like a charm, too. Or how about this? Don't buy more house than you can live in. Move over, Keynes, Ricardo, here I come. Another story is about how banks are all unhappy because they've got bad loans. A probing question if I may (characteristic of this column): Who made the bad loans? Permit me another searing insight. If you lend money to people who can't pay it back, they won't. I know, I know, a difficult concept. Not something a Wall Street banker would know.

Thank god America isn't a third-world country. In Mexico, the radio station of the

local university, and other commie fronts, grouse about *la impunidad*, impunity, meaning that high-ranking criminals never get punished. You know, like the *GQ*-cover psychopaths who brought about the savings-and-loan scandal, or Milken, Boesky, and Levine, or Enron, and now the impoverishment of half the planet. But what can you expect? Mexico is a very corrupt country.

What I think is, we need a mass hanging. But no. The culprits will just reshuffle into the administration of Precedent O'Bama and remain attached, tick-like, to the withering federal dugs. The rats in the rafters may not be savory, but they look out for each other.

But on to matters of more import than whether we have anything to eat. I read that the world has gone euphoric over Precedent O'Bama. Simultaneously, O'Bama wants to send more troops to Afghanistan. I'll give euphoria two more weeks. His chief virtues are that he isn't Bush and isn't McCain. When you have to choose between two candidates of whom each is worse than the other, you can bet life ain't gonna be ham hocks and home fries.

Next, I see that the military has bombed another wedding in Afghanistan, killing forty-one. I guess it's because civilians are easier to kill. They don't hide very well. Usually they are unarmed.

Anyway, on BBC World News I saw some gringo colonel, maybe called Greg Julian, explaining that it was the Taliban's fault when America bombs weddings. Most likely the plane had Taliban pilots. Recruiting is getting difficult, and I guess the Air Force has to take just about anybody. But it wasn't the fault of the military. In thirty years of covering the Pentagon, the military never did anything wrong. That's a pretty good record. I know because they told me.

Anyway, Colonel Julian was impressive. He clearly had the makings of a future chief of staff. He was good-looking, delivered the word from corporate in grammatical English, and had the unnerving wholesomeness of a Christian Boy Scout. Definitely JCS material, depending only on his PowerPoint technique. He explained that the military goes to great lengths to avoid bombing weddings, that wedding-avoidance is practically an obsession, and they would try to keep from doing it too much in the future. I reckon it must have made any survivors feel good.

Funny, I too try to avoid bombing weddings, but I'm a lot more successful at it, despite a much smaller budget.

Now, I don't want to sound cynical or anything. Still, I'd like to know how the good colonel would look at things if his daughter, if he has one, were having her wedding and kerblooey! Daughter and forty members of the family and close friends suddenly become clotting goo over a fifty-yard radius and the bombers say, "We're sorry, kind of, but that wedding looked just like a troop concentration." Troop concentrations always feature a woman in a white dress holding flowers. It's what they teach at West Point.

Stray memory: I read once that bin Laden said he wanted to suck the US into long drawn-out losing wars to bankrupt the country and end its influence over the Moslem world. I don't know why I thought of that. I need to focus better.

On to jollier topics, specifically federal porn. I find in *Der Spiegel Online* that Ger-

many has decided against strip-search x-rays at airports. It's because Germany carries civil liberties and privacy to impractical extremes whereas we, more realistic, know that the most innocent-looking girl probably has a bomb hidden in her skivvies. Those cheesecake scanners doubtless cost only a million bucks each, a song, times all the gates in all the airports in the world. This establishes pretty clearly that no economic interest is involved.

I bet the guys at TSA (Tits Scanners, and Ass) fight over the job of monitoring that screen. Hooboy. Especially as resolution increases. (Pressing research idea: Are color x-rays doable? Bombs probably come in different colors.) Maybe the government could recoup the cost by selling instant prints on request when some hot-ticket babe from a cheerleading squad comes through. Her boyfriend might want them. The rest could go to marketing at cellulite reduction outfits.

Yet more glad tidings. A while back I read where the Chinese did their first space-walk. On another page it said that as usual the Chinese economy had grown at twelve percent or some such number, and then I found a website talking about how China was buying up all the natural resources of Africa. The US can't because it doesn't have any money. It owes it all to China. And that's because we borrowed from Beijing to make kinky nekkid-women scanners for ill-bred affirmative-action re-treads at Homeland Security to look at, and bombs to drop on Afghanistan. Which doesn't make sense, because Afghanistan was pretty much rubble from the start. It's always been rubble.

I wish we had adult leadership like China has. And now I hear that NSA is buying *Bride* magazine. Sounds like they're hunting. Hey, stay single, or wear Kevlar and disperse quickly. (OK, I may have made that part up. I'm not sure.)

I can't take any more of this. I really am going to slit my wrists. I swear it. Anyone need A-Positive? Send a bucket. **CT**

**He explained that the military goes to great lengths to avoid bombing weddings, that wedding-avoidance is practically an obsession, and they would try to keep from doing it too much in the future. I reckon it must have made any survivors feel good**

**Fred Reed** has worked on staff for *Army Times*, *The Washingtonian*, *Soldier of Fortune*, *Federal Computer Week*, and *The Washington Times*. He has worked as a police writer, technology editor, military specialist, and authority on mercenary soldiers. His web site is [fredoneverything.net](http://fredoneverything.net)

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