

ColdType 12

ISSUE ONE

WRITING WORTH READING



The SPIES who CAME IN *from the* **HOT TUB**

BY TOM ENGELHARDT

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE – **PETER LENNON: THE ROCKY ROAD TO DUBLIN**

JEFF ARCHER: WRESTLING MATCH OF THE CENTURY – ALMOST!

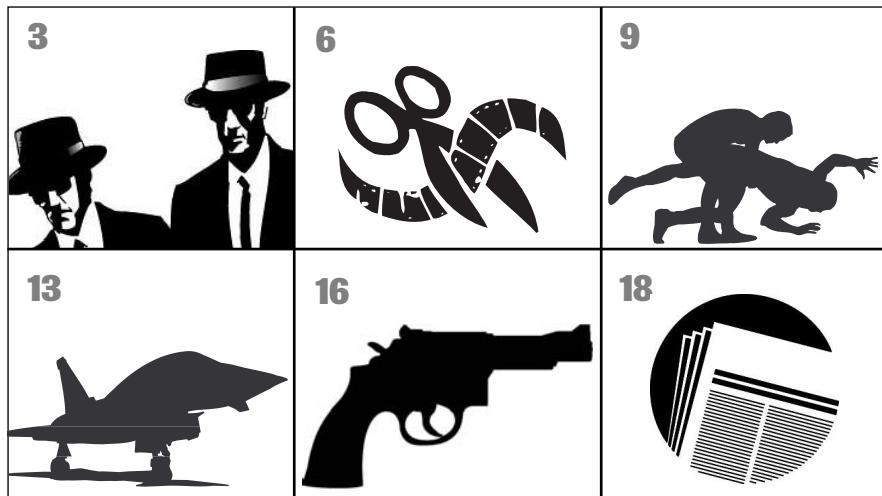


MIKE WHITNEY: INCINERATING IRAQIS – THE NAPALM

COVER-UP / TARIQ ALI: WHEN WAR COMES HOME

DAVID EDWARDS: IN THE SERVICE OF A MACHINE

ColdType/2



Issue 1

Welcome to the first issue of ColdType/2, an e-magazine designed to complement the longer pdf-format essays we publish each month on our website ColdType.net

I hope you enjoy the six pieces in this first issue.
Please feel free to comment and make suggestions to me at the e-mail address below.

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TOM ENGELHARDT

The spies who came in from the hot tub

Like so much else in our moment, it contravened laws the U.S. had once signed onto, pretzeled the English language, went directly to the darkside, was connected to various administration lies and manipulations that preceded the invasion of Iraq, and was based on taking the American taxpayer to the cleaners.

I'm talking about a now-notorious Bush administration "extraordinary rendition" in Italy, the secret kidnapping of a radical Muslim cleric off the streets of Milan in early 2003, his transport via U.S. airbases in Italy and Germany to Egypt, and there, evidently with the CIA station chief for Italy riding shotgun, directly into the hands of Egyptian torturers. This was but one of an unknown number of extraordinary-rendition operations – the estimate is more than 100 since September 11, 2001, but no one really knows – that have been conducted all over the world and have delivered terror suspects into the custody of Uzbeki, Syrian,

Egyptian, and other hands notorious for their use of torture. It just so happens that this operation took place on the democratic soil of an ally that possessed an independent judiciary, and that the team of 19 or more participants, some speaking fluent Italian, passed through that country not like the undercover agents of our imagination, but, as former CIA clandestine officer Melissa Boyle Mahle told Reuters, "like elephants stampeding through Milan. They left huge footprints."

Those gargantuan footprints – and some good detective work by the Italian police based on unsecured cell phones (evidently from a batch issued to the U.S. diplomatic mission in Rome), hotel bills, credit card receipts, and the like – have given us a glimpse into the unexpectedly extravagant "shadow war" being conducted on our behalf by the Bush administration through the Central Intelligence Agency. So let me skip the normal discussions of kidnappings, torture, or whether we violated Italian sov-

ColdType/2

ereignty, and just concentrate on what those footprints revealed. If the President's Global War on Terror has been saddled with the inelegant acronym GWOT, the Italian rendition operation should perhaps be given the acronym LDVWOT or La Dolce Vita War on Terror.

Of course, if Vice President Dick Cheney could say of administration tax cuts, "We won the [2002] midterms. This is our due"; if House Majority Leader Tom DeLay could charge his transatlantic airfare to Great Britain on an American Express card issued to lobbyist Jack Abramoff, and food and phone calls at a Scottish golf-course hotel on a credit card issued to Washington lobbyist, Edwin A. Buckham; if Halliburton could slip a reputed \$813 million extra in "costs" into a contract to provide logistical support for U.S. troops (including "\$152,000 in 'movie library costs' [and] a \$1.5 million tailoring bill"); then why shouldn't the Spartan warriors of the intelligence community capture a few taxpayer bucks while preparing a kidnapping in Italy?

Here's what we know at present about this particular version of La Dolce Vita:

- The CIA agents took rooms in Milan's 5-star hotels, including the Principe di Savoia ("one of the world's most luxuriously appointed hotels") where they rang up \$42,000 in expenses; the Westin Palace, the Milan Hilton, and the Star Hotel Rosa as well as similar places in the seaside resort of La Spezia and in Florence, running up cumulative hotel bills of \$144,984.
- They ate in the equivalent of 5-star restaurants in Milan and elsewhere, evi-

dently fancying themselves gourmet undercover agents.

- As a mixed team – at least 6 women took part in the operation – men and women on at least two occasions took double rooms together in these hotels. (There is no indication that any of them were married – to each other at least.)
- After the successful kidnapping was done and the cleric dispatched to sunny Egypt, they evidently decided they deserved a respite from their exertions; so several of them left for a vacation in Venice, while four others headed for the Mediterranean coast north of Tuscany, all on the taxpayer dole.
- They charged up to \$500 a day apiece, according to Craig Whitlock of the Washington Post, to "Diners Club accounts created to match their recently forged identities"; wielded Visa cards (assumedly similarly linked to their fake identities); and made sure they got or used frequent flier miles. (The Diner's Club, when queried by Tomdispatch, refused to comment on any aspect of the case.) Our master spies "rarely paid in cash," adds Whitlock, "gave their frequent traveler account numbers to desk clerks and made dozens of calls from unsecure phones in their rooms."
- To move their captive in comfort – for them – they summoned up not some grimy cargo plane but a Learjet to take him to Germany and a Gulfstream V to transport him to Egypt, the sorts of spiffy private jets normally used by CEOs and movie stars.

You would think that our representatives in Congress, reading about this in

their local newspapers, might raise the odd question about the rich-and-famous lifestyles of our secret agents. So far, however, despite the well-reported use of taxpayer dollars to fund trysts, vacations, and the good life, nary a peep on the subject has come from Congress; nor has anyone yet called for the money to be returned to the American people.

Now, because a Milan prosecutor had the temerity to issue arrest warrants for thirteen of our high-flying spies and to seek warrants for another six of them – the great majority are officially “on the run” and assumedly have been pulled out of Europe by the Agency. The CIA station chief who headed the operation had even bought a retirement house near Turin. “That he thought he could live out his golden years in Italy,” reports Tracy Wilkinson of the Los Angeles Times, “is another indication of the impunity with which he and the others felt they were operating, Italian prosecutors say.”

A small tip for Interpol investigators: If any of these agents are still at large in Europe, I wouldn’t be checking out obscure safe-houses. The places to search are top-of-the-line hotels, Michelin-recommended restaurants, and elite vacation spots across the continent.

When evaluating the CIA’s actions in Italy, you might consider the Agency’s mission statement as laid out at its website: “Our success depends on our ability to act with total discretion... Our mission requires complete personal integrity... We accomplish things others cannot, often at great risk... We stand by one another and behind one another.” Or you might simply

adapt an ad line from one of the few credit cards the team in Milan seems not to have used: The nightly cost of a room in Milan’s Hotel Principe di Savoia, \$450; the cost of a Coke from a mini-bar in one of its rooms, \$10; the cost of leasing a GulfstreamV for a month, \$229,639; that feeling of taking the American taxpayer for a ride, priceless.

*Tom Engelhardt, who runs the Nation Institute’s Tomdispatch.com (“a regular antidote to the mainstream media”), is the co-founder of the American Empire Project and the author of *The End of Victory Culture, a history of American triumphalism in the Cold War*. Special thanks go to Nick Turse for his typically invaluable research aid. This essay was originally published on the tomdispatch.com website*



PETER LENNON

The rocky road to Dublin

In 1967 Peter Lennon argued in his celebrated documentary, "Rocky Road to Dublin", that Ireland needed liberating from the Irish. Thirty seven years later, Ireland is ready to hear the message.

By 1967 my Irish Republican aspiration for freedom from the English had transmogrified into a realization that what my country really needed was freedom from the Irish, who had by then ruled (three quarters of) the country for 45 years. A junior correspondent for the *Guardian* in Paris, I decided to go back home and make a feature length documentary to reveal what had gone wrong with our new republic.

With the renowned French nouvelle vague cameraman, Raoul Coutard, as a kind of Exocet missile, we got child, priest and patriot to reveal themselves on camera (years before Michael Moore).

The result was *Rocky Road to Dublin*.

At this point, Ireland, along with the Sovi-

et Union, had probably the most repressive ideological apparatus of book and film censorship in the world. Clerical remote controlled censorship filed foreign influence mercilessly – even dementedly. There was virtually no film or publishing industry.

We listed, against a tolling bell, some of those authors who had had a publication banned in Ireland: William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, Scott Fitzgerald, JD Salinger, Jean-Paul Sartre, John Steinbeck, HG Wells, Samuel Beckett, Brendan Behan, Patrick Kavanagh, Sean O'Casey, John McGahern, George Bernard Shaw, and as a spice, Jomo Kenyatta.

The Irish establishment took one, brief look at *Rocky Road*, and suffocated it for 37 years. No Irish cinema would screen it and there was never any question that RTE (Irish public service television) would either. RTE was totally submissive to the church (as were most Irish politicians). Indeed, at the point where only about 18 people had seen it at a private screening, RTE, on its Late Late Show,

dealt the hammer blow by warning the nation that this unseen film was backed by “communist money.” In fact, it was entirely funded by an American businessman friend of mine.

One has to be wary of being “fair” to regimes whose apparatus for being unfair permanently exceeds one’s own by 10,000 times. But in fairness – or out of sympathy with my repressed countrymen – I have to say that Rocky Road was a pretty indigestible item. Instead of the model of freedom and decency the republic took itself to be, it is described in one scene by Irish writer Sean O’Faolain as: “A society without moral courage, constantly observing a self-interested silence, never speaking in moments of crisis and in constant alliance with an obscurantist, repressive, regressive and uncultivated church.”

Reinforcing the claim that the church was “uncultivated”, the Archbishop of Dublin, never realizing that the camera could be used as a weapon, lent me an idiotic singing and dancing priest who warbles the Chattanooga Shoe Shine Boy to women in a tuberculosis hospital. Long after the same priest delivered a homily to camera on the desirability of celibacy, we discovered he was sleeping with his young house keeper, an orphan who had herself been a victim of earlier sexual abuse. Venal as well as idiotic.

Though there was little chance Rocky Road would be distributed in Ireland, in 1968 I entered it for that year’s Cannes Film Festival, and it was selected to represent the country that had rejected it – much to the bewilderment of the Irish establishment.

The May student revolt closed down the festival after a few days, but Rocky Road,

with its theme of “what do you do with your revolution once you’ve got it?” was adopted by the French students, brought to Paris and shown in the Sorbonne amphitheaters, under siege by riot police.

Even though Ireland had practically no film industry, it did have an international film festival, to be held in Cork that October. There seemed no way it could wriggle out of accepting an Irish film which had been selected for Cannes and had picked up excellent reviews from Cahiers du Cinéma, Positif, Paris MATCH, the New York Times, and the International Herald Tribune.

Well almost no way. It was rejected as an official entry on the farcical grounds that it had already been screened in Dublin – to a grand total of 18 people.

But Cork still had a problem and the film censor could not help them. I had been careful not to have any sex in the film and the censor himself delivered his verdict to me in an endearing phrase: “Since there is no sex in the film Peter, there is nothing I can do against you”.

After tight negotiations, Cork gave us a lunchtime slot, but on a day when all the critics and journalists were invited to free oysters and Guinness in Kenmare, 30 miles away. Virtually no one turned up. We hired a hotel conference room the next day and screened it again. The scandal encouraged a cinema manager to run it in Dublin for a few weeks, then it was buried again.

Then, in 2004, with a Dublin production company, Loopline Films, I got financial assistance from the Irish Film Board to restore Rocky Road and to tell its story in a new documentary, *The Making of Rocky Road*. The great Raoul Coutard came out of retirement

ColdType/2

to share his experience of working on an “evolutionary” film, a category no film dictionary records. This time we had no trouble getting it into the Cork Film Festival.

The successful suffocation of Rocky Road for nearly four decades is an illustration of the fact that in a brainwashed community you don’t need formal censorship laws to smother a film. With no experience of film being used in this way, the press wrote as if it wasn’t a proper film at all. “Why should any film manager be expected to show this insulting stuff in a proper cinema?” they asked.

It would be nice to be able to say that we eventually liberated ourselves from clerical oppression. In fact it was the church itself which eroded its own powerbase when it was revealed in the 1990s as an accomplice to decades of sexual and bizarre physical abuse by priests, nuns and Christian brothers in orphanages and industrial schools – and, indeed, ordinary local parishes.

Even then, the thoroughness of the church’s crushing authority was confirmed when it was able, even in such a small country, simply to transfer pedophiles and rapists from one parish to another without legal consequences. There was confirmation, too, of the depth of its psychological hold when no other institutions would confront the church or entertain the notion of “clerical crime”.

The growth of television and its direct access to communities outside Ireland, where respectable people were seen to assume that divorce, contraception and abortion were normal civil rights, made the censorship of discussion of these issues in international films increasingly absurd. The arrival of video gradually ensured that controls were bypassed.

Sean O’Faolain was given the task of reforming the procedures for book censorship. The permitted reform was timid: instead of books being banned forever they were only banned for 12 years. Still, he helped unleash on the country a tide of classics which had already achieved a sell-by date.

But when the church was finally forced to compensate its victims, the old subservient alliance between the people and the church revealed its weasel roots again.

In 2002, using a shameless legalistic ploy, the church claimed that, as controllers of the school system, the state shared the church’s culpability. They negotiated a deal by which only a quarter of the financial penalties fell to them. The other three-quarters would be met by “the state” – in other words, the taxpayer.

The government also slipped in another sweetener: religious orders were granted indemnity from civil prosecution.

Jaysus, what did you expect?

Peter Lennon was born in Dublin and reported from Paris for the Guardian throughout the sixties. During the seventies he worked in London on the Sunday Times and the Listener before rejoining the Guardian in 1989. He has had short stories published in the New Yorker and Atlantic Monthly. His film Rocky Road to Dublin, which he wrote and directed, was selected for the Cannes Film Festival of 1968. He is married with two grown children. Copyright © Peter Lennon, 21-04-2005. This essay was originally published on the web site open демocracy.net



JEFF ARCHER

The wrestling match of the century – almost

As a youngster in Rhode Island, I had three boyhood sports idols: baseball player Ted Williams; basketball player Bob Cousy; and professional wrestler Killer Kowalski.

Kowalski was a bad guy. Everybody hated him but me. He cheated; complained to the referee; ruthlessly beat the hell out of his opponent after he jumped him when the match was over; and played every dirty trick in the book. I thought he was great.

At about the age of 14 or 15, I stopped watching professional wrestling. After all, there were rumors that it was "fake."

In the early 1990s, by mistake, I began to watch wrestling again. I was painting my kitchen and was about to come down from the ladder when pro wrestling came on the TV and change the station. I had too much paint on the brush and decided to keep painting.

The broadcaster announced that Bob Backlund was making a comeback. When I finally came down from the perch, the

match was over. A nondescript Backlund won a lackluster match. Something was fishy. Wrestling never was this mundane.

The following week, I watched again. This time, the mild-mannered Backlund went berserk in the ring. For the next few weeks, officials tried to put a straight jacket on him, but he just became crazier.

Then, an insane Backlund announced he was running for president. Great stuff.

At the time, I published a monthly magazine called *The Alternative*. It was similar in content to my current column. We never endorsed anybody for any office, but I could not let the Backlund thing ride.

I wrote to the World Wrestling Federation and told them my magazine would endorse Backlund. They called me and sent out a publicity person to discuss the issue. We endorsed Backlund and the WWF and wrestling publications picked up on it. It was great publicity for all.

Along the way, I began to learn of the inside goings-on of pro wrestling. Some of

ColdType/2

the guys held post-graduate degrees and after retirement became authors, poets, comedians or artists of note. I was intrigued about the sociological aspect of wrestling and pitched the idea of a book to my publisher. At first, he was very hesitant, but, eventually, he succumbed.

If I was to write a book on wrestling, Killer Kowalski would be my first interview. Within a few months of my first speaking to Kowalski (first name Walter), we were close friends. He made several trips from Boston to San Diego and spent time with me at my house. He is a giant of a man at 6'7" and 285 pounds. He is also a very warm and giving human being who displays no pretense.

On his first visit, we had to go to a sports shop to purchase a shirt for him to wear in a photo shoot. When we entered the shop, the owner, about 60 years old, just stared. Kowalski went to the shirt rack and the owner asked me, "Is that who I think it is?" I said, "Probably." He then approached Kowalski and said, "Hi. What an honor. I used to watch you wrestle when you still used the name Vladek." Kowalski stated, "Thanks. Where are the double extra-larges?" The owner then went to his employees and pointed to Kowalski and said, "That guy's a legend." Kowalski never let fame or notoriety go to his head.

I was warned that my radical politics may not fit well with Kowalski, so I kept quiet about political matters. My advisors were wrong. Within a few hours, Kowalski stated his love of nature and the environment. He often said, "Nature will devour mankind."

He was proud that he single-handedly

de-segregated many hotels in the south in the 1950s. When he and the late black star Bobo Brazil walked into a hotel late at night and Kowalski loudly stated, "My name is Killer Kowalski. I am a professional wrestler and this is my friend Bobo Brazil. We will have a room here tonight," not one clerk turned them down. Maybe because Brazil was about the same size as Kowalski, but the hotel still became integrated, even if for one night only.

Now came the issue of Iraq. One day, Kowalski was looking at some of my material and saw a picture of Saddam Hussein. "Humph," he uttered. I did not know what was coming next. He then continued, "I'd like to meet that guy." "Why?" I asked. "Because I would like to shake his hand and apologize to him for the U.S. destroying his country. We had no right to do that."

This first statement about Iraq came in about 1998, so Kowalski was talking about the first Gulf War. I knew he and I would have no problem talking politics.

By September 1998, my book, *Theater in a Squared Circle ... The Mystique of Professional Wrestling*, was completed. The publisher was putting the final work on design. Kowalski came for a week to visit me. This time, he looked at a map of Iraq and said, "Let's go to Iraq." I was amazed and asked, "What?" He repeated himself.

Kowalski then said we should assemble a bunch of wrestlers and go to Iraq to perform on a friendship mission. I told him first of the illegality of such a venture and also the implications that if we pulled it off it would be a great embarrassment to the U.S. government: a bunch of pro wrestlers

touring the country that was the U.S. enemy number one. Kowalski did not waver. We now had a plan.

In December 1998, in San Diego, we held a booksigning for the launch of Theater. Assembled were a bunch of professional wrestlers from different time periods and various federations. All had national notoriety. All had committed to go to Iraq. I will give a short description of each and his specialty:

Lanny "The Genius" Poffo: He wrestled for years as Leaping Lanny Poffo, a good guy. Then, the World Wrestling Federation (WWF) changed him to a bad guy (heel) and he became The Genius. His character was that of a gay poet. In real life, Poffo is a published poet who has recited poetry at Shakespeare festivals in England.

Bryan Walsh: He was a good guy for five years in the WWF. The All-American boy who held up good U.S. values. Colonel Nizar Hussein: His role was that of an Iraqi champion who was Saddam Hussein's nephew. He also wrestled under the name of Tiger Khan during his career.

Killer Kowalski: The most hated wrestler of his era, a career that began in 1947 and ended in 1977. He was nine times world champion and is still a household name in Australia and South Africa. He had to be escorted to the ring by Australian soldiers for his own safety because his gimmick appeared so real to the fans. After the booksigning, Kowalski went back to Boston. Walsh, after going back to Massachusetts, relocated to the west coast and lived with me for four months. Poffo kept in contact. We began to plan the Iraq trip.

Along the way, the Honky Tonk Man

showed his interest in going to Iraq. Big Bill Anderson, a recently-retired star would come and bring a half dozen of the young wrestlers he was training in his school. Kowalski would be a guest referee and the honored former world champion. We had an impressive roster by any professional wrestling standard.

Colonel Nizar Hussein would be the winner of the main event. He would wrestle Walsh (who would use the name Phil Clinton). Their roles would be reversed: Hussein being the fan favorite in Baghdad and Walsh the heel.

We now had to approach the Iraqi government and see what it thought of the idea. An Iraqi-American friend of mine who frequently visited his family in Baghdad consented to bring the proposal to Iraqi authorities.

In 1999, he delivered the proposal. They said it sounded okay, but they needed more information and a script. I wrote the script and a short bio of the wrestlers. Colonel Nizar Hussein would beat Phil Clinton with the "flying Scud," a leaping move off the top rope after a grueling 15-minute match. The Honky Tonk Man would use the same gimmick as he did in the U.S.: an Elvis Presley impersonator. The Genius would read poetry in the ring and then wrestle an opponent. Anderson's aspirants would be on the undercard.

When my friend returned to Baghdad in 2000, the officials who read the script approved it but said it must still be okayed by other authorities.

By 2001, all the authorizations were in order. We were to travel to Amman, Jordan and there we would be met by Iraqi drivers

ColdType/2

who would take us to the Hotel Al-Rashid in Baghdad. We were to wrestle five times in one week: in Baghdad and surrounding areas, such as Fallujah. The matches would be free of charge for the spectators. The final event would be in Iraq's national stadium that seated about 100,000 people. There had been a regime change in the U.S., so Walsh had to scrap the Phil Clinton guise and change his moniker to George Weed.

On this side of the world, we began fund-raising within the Iraqi communities of San Diego and Detroit. We assumed that by 2002 or early 2003, we would be traveling to Iraq. Then, the news started changing. More and more missile attacks in the "no-fly zone" were occurring. More civilians were being killed. The talk of war was increasing. By the beginning of 2002, we speculated that we could be in the middle of the stadium in Baghdad and an errant U.S. missile could blow up the joint. Especially if the U.S. deemed us traitors. It would not be the first time that such an incident had occurred.

By mid-2002, it became evident that there would be no wrestling tour of Iraq. My friend traveled to Baghdad and told the officials that we considered such an event too dangerous for everybody. They agreed and thanked us for even thinking of putting on such a show.

I must say that those wrestlers who consented to travel to Iraq had great courage and integrity. I thank Killer Kowalski for bringing up such a radical idea that even I would not have considered prior to his suggestion. There are too few Killer Kowalskis and Lanny Poffos and Bryan Walishes in

this world. When it came time for them to stand up for their principles, even under the threat of being ostracized, they did.

There are a few ironies of this story. In Baghdad, prior to the illegal invasion of 2003, we could have gone anywhere and been treated with respect, even though we were from the country that destroyed Iraq in 1991 and had imposed a strangling embargo on the country. Today, if a dozen U.S. citizens, pro wrestlers or otherwise, walked down virtually any Baghdad street, they would either be shot or kidnapped. So much for liberating the country. The beautiful stadium in which we were to have held the grand finale of the tour in Baghdad is no longer in use. U.S. tanks destroyed it in 2003 when they used it as a permanent parking lot. Today, it is a mass of ruts and holes.

And, the soccer stadium in Fallujah where we would have performed, is now a mass graveyard. During the U.S. attack on the city in April 2004, more than 600 civilians were killed and the stadium had to be converted to a burial ground. I think the citizens would have preferred wrestling.

Jeff Archer runs the malcomlagouche.com website, on which this essay was first published



MIKE WHITNEY

Incinerating Iraqis: The napalm cover-up

"You smell that? Do you smell that? Napalm, son. Nothing else in the world smells like that. I love the smell of napalm in the morning. You know, one time we had a hill bombed, for twelve hours. When it was all over I walked up. We didn't find one of 'em, not one stinkin' dink body. The smell, you know that gasoline smell, the whole hill. Smelled like... victory." - Robert Duvall, "Apocalypse Now" (1979)

A few weeks ago the UK Independent ran an article that confirmed the US had "lied to Britain over the use of napalm in Iraq." (6-17-05) Since then, not one American newspaper or TV station has picked up the story even though the Pentagon has verified the claims. This is the extent to which the American "free press" is yoked to the center of power in Washington. As we've seen with the treatment of the Downing Street Memo, (which was reluctantly reported five weeks after it appeared in the British

press) the air-tight American media ignores any story that doesn't embrace their collective support for the war. The prospect that the US military is using "universally reviled" weapons runs counter to the media-generated narrative that the war was motivated by humanitarian concerns (to topple a brutal dictator) as well as to eliminate the elusive WMDs. We can now say with certainty that the only WMDs in Iraq were those that were introduced by foreign invaders from the US who used them to incinerate the indigenous people who dared to resist.

"Despite persistent rumors of injuries among Iraqis consistent with the use of incendiary weapons such as napalm," the Pentagon insisted that "US forces had not used a new generation of incendiary weapons, codenamed MK77, in Iraq." (UK Independent)

The Pentagon lied.

Defense Minister, Adam Ingram, admitted that the US had misled the British high

ColdType/2

command about the use of napalm, but he would not comment on the extent of the cover up. The use of firebombs puts the US in breach of the 1980 Convention on Certain Chemical Weapons (CCW) and is a violation the Geneva Protocol against the use of white phosphorous, "since its use causes indiscriminate and extreme injuries especially when deployed in an urban area."

Regrettably, "indiscriminate and extreme injuries" are a vital part of the American terror-campaign in Iraq; a well-coordinated strategy designed to spawn panic through random acts of violence.

It's clear that the military never needed to use napalm in Iraq. Their conventional weaponry and laser-guided technology were already enough to run roughshod over the Iraqi army and seize Baghdad almost unobstructed. Napalm was introduced simply to terrorize the Iraqi people, to pacify through intimidation. Cheney, Rumsfeld and Negroponte are old hands at terrorism, dating back to their counterinsurgency projects in Nicaragua and El Salvador under Ronald Reagan. They know that the threat of immolation serves as a powerful deterrent and fits seamlessly into their overarching scheme of rule through fear. Terror and deception are the rotating parts of the same Axis, the two imperatives of the Bush-Cheney foreign policy strategy.

The US also used napalm in the siege of Falluja as was reported in the UK Mirror ("Falluja Napalmed", 11-28-04) The Mirror said, "President George Bush has sanctioned the use of napalm, a deadly cocktail of polystyrene and jet-fuel banned by the United Nations in 1980, will stun the

world.... Reports claim that innocent civilians have died in napalm attacks, which turn victims into human fireballs as the gel bonds flames to flesh... Since the American assault on Falluja there have been reports of 'melted' corpse, which appeared to have napalm injuries."

"Human fireballs" and "melted corpses," these are the real expressions of Operation Iraqi Freedom not the bland platitudes issuing from the presidential podium.

Dr. Khalid ash-Shaykhli, who was the head of the Iraqi Ministry of Health in Falluja, reported to Al Jazeera (and the Washington Post, although it was never reported) that "research, prepared by his medical team, prove that the US forces used internationally prohibited substances, including mustard gas, nerve gas, and other burning chemicals in their attacks on the war-torn city."

Dr Shaykhli's claims have been corroborated by numerous eyewitness accounts as well as reports that "all forms of nature were wiped out in Falluja"... as well as "hundreds, of stray dogs, cats, and birds that had perished as a result of those gasses." An unidentified chemical was used in the bombing raids that killed every living creature in certain areas of the city.

As journalist Dahr Jamail reported later in his article "What is the US trying to Hide?" "At least two kilometers of soil were removed.....exactly as they did at Baghdad Airport after the heavy battles there during the invasion and the Americans used their special weapons."

So far, none of this has appeared in any American media, nor have they reported that the United Nations has been rebuffed

twice by the Defense Dept. in its call for an independent investigation into what really took place in Falluja. The US simply waves away the international body as insignificant while the media conveniently omits it from their coverage.

We can assume that the order to use napalm (as well as the other unidentified substances) came straight from the office of Donald Rumsfeld. No one else could have issued that order, nor would they have risked their career by unilaterally using banned weapons when their use was entirely gratuitous. Rumsfeld's directive is consistent with other decisions attributed to the Defense Secretary: like the authorizing of torture at Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib; the targeting of members of the press; and the rehiring of members of Saddam's Secret Police (the Mukhabarat) to carry out their brutal activities under new leadership. Rumsfeld's office has been the headwaters for most of the administration's treachery. Napalm simply adds depth to an already prodigious list of war crimes on Rumsfeld's résumé.

On June 10, 2005 numerous sources reported that the "U.S. Special Operations Command hired three firms to produce newspaper stories, television broadcasts and Internet web sites to spread American propaganda overseas. The Tampa-based military headquarters, which oversees commandos and psychological warfare, may spend up to \$100 million for the media campaign over the next five years." (James Crawley, Media General News Service) It's clear that there's no need for the Defense Dept. to shore up its operations in the US where reliable apparatchiks can be count-

ed on to obfuscate, omit or exaggerate the coverage of the war according to the requirements of the Pentagon. The American press has been as skillful at embellishing the imaginary heroics of Jessica Lynch and Pat Tillman as they have been in concealing the damning details of the Downing Street Memo or the lack of evidence concerning the alleged WMDs. Should we be surprised that the media has remained silent about the immolation of Iraqis by American firebombs?

The US "free press" is a completely integrated part of the state-information system. Their meticulously managed message has been the only part of the entire Iraqi debacle that hasn't suffered the ill effects of the bunglers in Washington. From Dana Milbank to Judith Miller, from FOX News to CNN, from Tom Friedman to Tom Brokaw, they have been a steadfast ally to the powerbrokers they serve; providing the diversions, omissions and cheerleading that are required to keep the public acquiescent during a savage colonial war. Given the scope of their culpability for the violence in Iraq, it's unlikely that the use of napalm will cause any great crisis of conscience. Their deft coverage has already facilitated the deaths of tens of thousands of innocent people. A few more charred Iraqis shouldn't matter.

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TARIQ ALI

The war comes home

Ever since the occupation of Iraq there were very few in Britain who imagined that the hellish developments that unfolded in an Arab country might be a vision of their own future. London is, of course, not Baghdad and what has happened here is nothing compared to the savage chaos in Iraq, but the war has come home to haunt Tony Blair and his government in what could become New Labour's nightmare scenario.

Two days ago, on July 21, there were new explosions in London, reminding people that even though there were no casualties, we were back to the times of the Irish troubles. There is today, like then, a great deal of uncertainty in the air. A leaked intelligence report published in the Financial Times confirms that the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine have acted as a trigger to unleash a wave of terrorism from within the Muslim heartlands in Britain. Apart from the pro-Israel, neo-con mimics (usually ex-leftists) and unashamed apolo-

gists for Blair in the print media, this is now the common sense of the country. The Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, in more thoughtful mode, linked the attacks to the long Western occupation of the oil-rich Arab East.

Yesterday (July 22) the police captured and publicly executed a South Asian man on an underground train in South London. He turned out to be an innocent Brazilian. Mark Whitby, who witnessed the killing, provided genuine first-hand testimony to BBC News 24:

"I saw an Asian guy. He ran on to the train, he was hotly pursued by three plain clothes officers, one of them was wielding a black handgun. As [the suspect] got onto the train I looked at his face, he looked sort of left and right, but he basically looked like a cornered rabbit, a cornered fox. He looked absolutely petrified and then he sort of tripped, but they were hotly pursuing him, [they] couldn't have been any more than two or three feet behind him at this time

and he half tripped and was half pushed to the floor and the policeman nearest to me had the black automatic pistol in his left hand. He held it down to the guy and unloaded five shots into him."

Blair's Britain is now in a mess, thanks to Blair. There is one immediate and one medium-term solution to the crisis. Britain must withdraw its troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. It should do so not because it is under terrorist pressure, but because these interventions were wrong in the first place.

Secondly, there needs to be a moratorium on religion. Blair and his hand-picked Cabinet have encouraged single-faith schools and turned to religion to help fill the vacuum created by a neo-liberal society and a culture obsessed with consumerism and celebrity life-styles. What is required is a high quality state education system which provides the same education to rich and poor, Christian or Jewish or Muslim children. Over one-third of British state schools are religious and the National Secular Society has published figures that reveal Labour permitting 40 more non-religious state secondaries be taken over by the Church of England in the last four years, with another 54 about to go. Given this, it is impossible to deny the same rights to other religions. Matters are not helped by the fact that Blair's Education Secretary, a member of Opus Dei, has stressed that the 'bombs' will not stop her encouraging the formation of more single-faith schools.

The media has been parading 'good' Muslims on the TV screens who have been arguing that violence is not advocated in the Koran and therefore the bombers are wrong. The implication here is that if the

Koran permitted such actions it would be fine. In fact there are many readings of the Koran as of the Old Testament. There are both pacifist and violent sections. Establishing a religious criteria is, in these circumstances, counter-productive.

There is a paralysis inside Parliament. Atavistic political structures have insulated the Blair regime from public opinion. The first-past-the-post electoral system is an affront to democratic functioning. The conformism and timidity of the opposition parties have played a vital role in reinforcing Blair's weightless hegemony. This is reflected by a neutered public television service which rarely allows programs outside the narrow parliamentary spectrum to achieve a hearing.

It is time for Blair to go. He took a calculated risk when he decided to back Bush and US foreign policy. He proclaimed proudly that in order to defeat Saddam Hussein a 'blood price would have to be paid.' It is being paid by tens of thousands of Iraqi dead and now by innocent Londoners. A British Colonel has been charged with committing crimes in Iraq. If we were to apply the norms of the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal, it is the politicians who gave the orders and justified the war who should also be in the dock as real war criminals.

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DAVID EDWARDS

In the service of a machine

The American philosopher Henry David Thoreau wrote: "Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth. I sat at a table where were rich food and wine in abundance, and obsequious attendance, but sincerity and truth were not; and I went away hungry from the inhospitable board." (Thoreau, *Walden And Civil Disobedience*, Penguin, 1986, p.379)

How often do we go away hungry from the media board, and for the same reasons? What a dismal experience it is to spend twenty minutes leafing through a two-inch wedge of newsprint on a Saturday morning, finding almost nothing of human interest but plenty that offends and grates.

Why is the media, for all its high-tech sophistication, wealth and power, so bland, so empty, so dull? The answer is that its capacity for sincerity and truth is fundamentally compromised by the profit motive at its heart. What can a system based on unrestrained greed possibly have to say about a world crucified by greed? How can it afford to

make sense, to talk about what really matters? Does the corporate system want us inspired, enlivened, mobilized? Or does it want us trudging around in the same old circles of relentless production and consumption, with the promise of satisfaction always just up ahead, just one more purchase away?

The average journalist may mean well. But the average journalist is inevitably diminished by the profit-making media Moloch, as Norman Mailer has observed: "There is an odour to any Press Headquarters that is unmistakable... The unavoidable smell of flesh burning quietly and slowly in the service of a machine." (Norman Mailer, *The Time Of Our Time*, Little Brown, 1998, p.457)

Newly-retired CBS news anchor Dan Rather can now talk openly about this moronic inferno: "It's fear that keeps journalists from asking the toughest of the tough questions. One finds oneself saying: 'I know the right question, but you know what, this is not exactly the right time to ask it.'" (Greg Palast, 'Dan Rather conks out,' *Noseweek*, April 2005)

Alas, while still inside the system, Rather infamously declared: "George Bush is the president, he makes the decisions, and, you know, as just one American, he wants me to line up, just tell me where." (Quoted, Howard Zinn, *Terrorism and War*, Seven Stories Press, 2002, p.58)

Anyone writing for the mainstream simply that certain things are not allowed. It is as though an invisible force were cramping the mind – we know we *can* write this or that if we like, but we know what the consequences will be. It takes one slip to be labeled 'extreme' and written off. A journalist friend wrote to us recently: "You must see the reaction in a newsroom when one mentions Chomsky or Pilger. They run the other way, and I can see they are afraid by the look on their faces. Fact is that once you understand and admit what you are doing, you can't continue with it. When I mentioned Chomsky, one person commented, 'Oh, he's way out there.' 'Way out where?' I asked." (Email to Media Lens, July 8, 2005)

And there is always a long line of people willing to take our place and to respect the boundaries ("What nonsense! No one has ever told me what to write!"). And remember, leading commentators are paid vast sums for doing very little. How else are they to make this kind of money? How much better to let someone else ask the tough questions and instead seek job security in bland observations, trivia and obfuscation.

Senior media figures on the mainstream 'left' are where they are because they know how to play this game. The idea is to talk a good fight, to elicit applause from the 'left', but also quiet nods of acceptance from the media gatekeepers, the people they are sup-

posed to be challenging. A key talent is to appear passionately radical while subtly indicating that one is not 'extreme', that the rules of the media club are accepted. The first rule of media club is: Don't talk about the inherent contradiction of a corporate 'free press'. The second: Rule one does not exist. The third: Do not discuss the existence or non-existence of rules one and two.

Our society often has minimal respect for systems of thought produced by much older, non-Western cultures. But these philosophies often provide acute insights into the art of being honest. How many modern professional journalists would recognize the crucial importance of the following advice?: "As if they were stones on a narrow slippery path, you should clear away all ideas of gain and respect, for they are the rope of the devil. Like snot in your nose, blow out all thoughts of fame and praise, for they serve only to beguile and confuse." (Geshe Wangyal, *The Door of Liberation*, Wisdom Books, 1995, p.88)

In a high profile piece for the Guardian's comment section, John Kampfner, recently appointed editor of the New Statesman, sends all the right signals: "Shortly after 9/11, I laid a wager with a colleague about when the serious media would tire of the new seriousness. It did not take long – I think it was a couple of weeks before the broadsheets (or whatever they are called now) were publishing in-depth pieces about Nigella Lawson and domestic deification. The national conversation had resumed." (Kampfner, 'Challenge, don't emote,' The Guardian, July 26, 2005)

This is the kind of banter that normally fills the media sections of newspapers, being written primarily for fellow journalists. It is criti-

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cal of the media, but not in any serious way. Poking gentle fun at the broadsheets as loveable rogues signals that Kampfner is ‘nuanced’, ‘measured’, ‘balanced’. To focus on the tired old complaint that even the broadsheets like to wallow in trivia is an alternative to focusing on real issues – the fact that the corporate media system is inherently corrupt, irresponsible and dangerous. After all, Noam Chomsky’s opening comments on the same theme might be along these lines: “A properly functioning system of indoctrination has a variety of tasks, some rather delicate. One of its targets is the stupid and ignorant masses. They must be kept that way, diverted with emotionally potent oversimplifications, marginalized and isolated.” (Chomsky, Deterring Democracy, Hill and Wang, 1992, p.369)

But then Chomsky (here paraphrasing comments made by elite intellectuals) is describing exactly the effect of Kampfner’s article, the opening paragraph included.

Equally vital for success on the mainstream ‘left’, Kampfner declares a passionate commitment to truth, radical challenge and change: “One of the great challenges of anyone who seeks change – journalist, politician or other – is to deal with anger and frustration, to know when to turn up the temperature and when not... good journalism of the left (I apply the definition in its widest ‘liberal’ context) must always challenge. It should never accept the status quo or take answers from officialdom at face value.”

Is dealing with anger really one of the “great challenges” of anyone seeking political change today? Or is this a banal diversion, a liberal herring to replace serious analysis of concentrated power and the problems it creates?

Kampfner insists the status quo should never be accepted at face value. But he presents this as a kind of clarion call to “good journalism”, with the implicit suggestion that it might be heeded. There is no sense whatever that Kampfner is writing about and from a fundamentally mendacious system of media power that has evolved precisely to filter out serious challenges and good journalism. Imagine if a Soviet journalist had written in the newspaper Pravda under Stalin: “Soviet journalism must always challenge. It should never accept the status quo or take answers from officialdom at face value.”

Would we not have considered this a sham, at best an irrelevant denial of reality?

Kampfner explains the kind of challenges he has in mind: “At a time of high anxiety, how should the less pliant end of the media behave? It is easiest to define first what its role should not be – bland reassurance. My impression of the past couple of weeks is that some newspapers have adopted several of the characteristics of the prime minister himself. They have known when and how to emote, to good effect. They have allowed a combination of hubris and naivety to get the better of rational judgment...”

Anyone looking for coherent argument flowing from the need to challenge the status quo now finds themselves lost in trivia:

“Public transport-using readers and listeners are more open about expressing their fears than car-driving media commentators. The stoicism that was largely a media-political construct is already turning to frustration.”

Kampfner recognizes some of the achievements of the New Statesman under his predecessor, Peter Wilby:

“We reported before, during and after the

war the misgivings of the senior intelligence operatives, police chiefs, military chiefs, diplomats and politicians. This was based on evidence, not on the anti-Americanism of which we were accused.”

This was mostly down to the articles written by John Pilger – courageous and honest work surrounded on every side by media title-tattle.

Having declared his radical credentials, while instantly muddying the waters, Kampfner now sends the all-important signals to the gatekeepers. Blair’s refusal to engage in a serious debate about “what went wrong in Iraq” has prolonged the problem, he insists: “Voters were not as ready to ‘move on’ as he claimed. And yet both sides bear their responsibilities for the dialogue of the deaf.”

This again communicates ‘nuanced’ and ‘measured’ to the people that matter. What could be more ‘balanced’ than recognizing the ‘failings’ on both sides – that is, on the side of war criminals responsible for mass killing, and of the anti-war opponents who tried to stop them?

Last August, Kampfner went further still, writing in the Guardian that “a truce” should be called over Blair’s “botched war”: “Blair has belatedly to acknowledge some mistakes over Iraq. His critics should then agree, as the boss would say, to ‘move on.’” (Kampfner, ‘Brown blew it. So stop moaning and start talking,’ The Guardian, August 23, 2004)

In his latest article, Kampfner says of Blair: “Sure, most level-headed people around him would now privately accept that the Iraq war was a terrible mistake, but they would ask, quite reasonably, in which circumstances it would be justified in the future to take military action against a sovereign state either for

humanitarian or security reasons. These debates have yet to be engaged in properly.”

After all the lies, all the cynicism, all the unrelenting misery and carnage, the invasion of Iraq was a “mistake”. Not a vast crime, not an atrocity, but a mistake. As Chomsky observed many years ago: “*their* terror and violence are crimes, *ours* are statecraft or understandable error”. (Chomsky, op. cit, p.380)

The real issue, then, is not how on earth Blair can still be in office rather than in jail, or what this tells us about our ‘democracy’. It is not how to stop the diabolic slaughter in Iraq, how to replace the illegal US-UK occupation with a solution acceptable to Iraqis. Instead, the “level-headed people” around Blair – state officials also complicit in major war crimes – ask, “quite reasonably”, when it might be proper for them to launch another attack in the future.

What could be more vital than a debate of this kind, when popular opinion has so recently and so casually been dismissed as utterly irrelevant by our political masters? This from the editor of the country’s premier ‘left’ magazine.

All around the country the gatekeepers will have received Kampfner’s message loud and clear.

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WRITING WORTH READING
FROM AROUND THE WORLD