

**INSIDE:** TAX THE RICH! • PORTRAITS OF GREED  
• THE NEW DEVIL'S ISLAND • EDUCATION AT  
GUNPOINT • DEATH SQUADS V. DEMOCRACY

# The ColdType READER

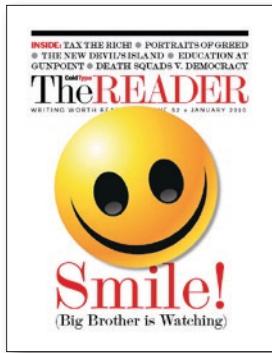
WRITING WORTH READING • ISSUE 52 • JANUARY 2011



# Smile!

(Big Brother is Watching)

# The READER



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# Brave New Dystopia

**Chris Hedges** warns of a future that is moving quickly to a state of repressive corporate totalitarianism

The two greatest visions of a future dystopia were George Orwell's *1984* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. The debate, between those who watched our descent towards corporate totalitarianism, was who was right. Would we be, as Orwell wrote, dominated by a repressive surveillance and security state that used crude and violent forms of control? Or would we be, as Huxley envisioned, entranced by entertainment and spectacle, captivated by technology and seduced by profligate consumption to embrace our own oppression? It turns out Orwell and Huxley were both right. Huxley saw the first stage of our enslavement. Orwell saw the second.

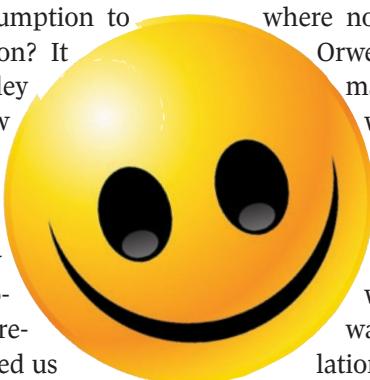
We have been gradually disempowered by a corporate state that, as Huxley foresaw, seduced and manipulated us through sensual gratification, cheap mass-produced goods, boundless credit, political theater and amusement. While we were entertained, the regulations that once kept predatory corporate power in check were dismantled, the laws that once protected us were rewritten and we were impoverished. Now that credit is drying up, good jobs for the working class are gone forever and mass-produced goods are unaffordable,

we find ourselves transported from *Brave New World* to *1984*. The state, crippled by massive deficits, endless war and corporate malfeasance, is sliding toward bankruptcy. It is time for Big Brother to take over from Huxley's feelies, the orgy-porgy and the centrifugal bumble-puppy. We are moving from a society where we are skillfully manipulated by lies and illusions to one where we are overtly controlled.

Orwell warned of a world where books were banned. Huxley warned of a world where no one wanted to read books.

Orwell warned of a state of permanent war and fear. Huxley warned of a culture diverted by mindless pleasure. Orwell warned of a state where every conversation and thought was monitored and dissent was brutally punished. Huxley warned of a state where a population, preoccupied by trivia and gossip, no longer cared about truth or information. Orwell saw us frightened into submission. Huxley saw us seduced into submission. But Huxley, we are discovering, was merely the prelude to Orwell. Huxley understood the process by which we would be complicit in our own enslavement. Orwell understood the enslavement. Now that the corporate coup is over, we stand naked and defenseless. We are beginning to under-

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We busy ourselves buying products that promise to change our lives, make us more beautiful, confident or successful as we are steadily stripped of rights, money and influence

stand, as Karl Marx knew, that unfettered and unregulated capitalism is a brutal and revolutionary force that exploits human beings and the natural world until exhaustion or collapse.

“The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake,” Orwell wrote in 1984. “We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power. Not wealth or luxury or long life or happiness: only power, pure power. What pure power means you will understand presently. We are different from all the oligarchies of the past, in that we know what we are doing. All the others, even those who resembled ourselves, were cowards and hypocrites. The German Nazis and the Russian Communists came very close to us in their methods, but they never had the courage to recognize their own motives. They pretended, perhaps they even believed, that they had seized power unwillingly and for a limited time, and that just round the corner there lay a paradise where human beings would be free and equal. We are not like that. We know that no one ever seizes power with the intention of relinquishing it. Power is not a means; it is an end. One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution in order to establish the dictatorship. The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power.”

The political philosopher Sheldon Wolin uses the term “inverted totalitarianism” in his book *Democracy Incorporated* to describe our political system. It is a term that would make sense to Huxley. In inverted totalitarianism, the sophisticated technologies of corporate control, intimidation and mass manipulation, which far surpass those employed by previous totalitarian states, are effectively masked by the glitter, noise and abundance of a consumer society. Political participation and civil liberties are gradually surrendered. The corporation state, hiding behind the smokescreen of the public relations industry, the entertainment industry and the tawdry materialism of a consumer

society, devours us from the inside out. It owes no allegiance to us or the nation. It feasts upon our carcass.

The corporate state does not find its expression in a demagogue or charismatic leader. It is defined by the anonymity and facelessness of the corporation. Corporations, who hire attractive spokespeople like Barack Obama, control the uses of science, technology, education and mass communication. They control the messages in movies and television. And, as in *Brave New World*, they use these tools of communication to bolster tyranny. Our systems of mass communication, as Wolin writes, “block out, eliminate whatever might introduce qualification, ambiguity, or dialogue, anything that might weaken or complicate the holistic force of their creation, to its total impression.”

### Irrelevant cranks

The result is a monochromatic system of information. Celebrity courtiers, masquerading as journalists, experts and specialists, identify our problems and patiently explain the parameters. All those who argue outside the imposed parameters are dismissed as irrelevant cranks, extremists or members of a radical left. Prescient social critics, from Ralph Nader to Noam Chomsky, are banished. Acceptable opinions have a range of A to B. The culture, under the tutelage of these corporate courtiers, becomes, as Huxley noted, a world of cheerful conformity, as well as an endless and finally fatal optimism. We busy ourselves buying products that promise to change our lives, make us more beautiful, confident or successful as we are steadily stripped of rights, money and influence. All messages we receive through these systems of communication, whether on the nightly news or talk shows like “Oprah,” promise a brighter, happier tomorrow. And this, as Wolin points out, is “the same ideology that invites corporate executives to exaggerate profits and conceal losses, but always with a sunny face.” We have been entranced, as Wolin writes, by “continuous

technological advances” that “encourage elaborate fantasies of individual prowess, eternal youthfulness, beauty through surgery, actions measured in nanoseconds: a dream-laden culture of ever-expanding control and possibility, whose denizens are prone to fantasies because the vast majority have imagination but little scientific knowledge.”

Our manufacturing base has been dismantled. Speculators and swindlers have looted the US Treasury and stolen billions from small shareholders who had set aside money for retirement or college. Civil liberties, including habeas corpus and protection from warrantless wiretapping, have been taken away. Basic services, including public education and health care, have been handed over to the corporations to exploit for profit. The few who raise voices of dissent, who refuse to engage in the corporate happy talk, are derided by the corporate establishment as freaks.

Attitudes and temperament have been cleverly engineered by the corporate state, as with Huxley’s pliant characters in *Brave New World*. The book’s protagonist, Bernard Marx, turns in frustration to his girlfriend Lenina:

“Don’t you wish you were free, Lenina?” he asks.

“I don’t know that you mean. I am free, free to have the most wonderful time. Everybody’s happy nowadays.”

He laughed, “Yes, ‘Everybody’s happy nowadays.’ We have been giving the children that at five. But wouldn’t you like to be free to be happy in some other way, Lenina? In your own way, for example; not in everybody else’s way.”

“I don’t know what you mean,” she repeated.

### **Crumbling facade**

The façade is crumbling. And as more and more people realize that they have been used and robbed, we will move swiftly from Huxley’s *Brave New World* to Orwell’s *1984*. The public, at some point, will have

to face some very unpleasant truths. The good-paying jobs are not coming back. The largest deficits in human history mean that we are trapped in a debt peonage system that will be used by the corporate state to eradicate the last vestiges of social protection for citizens, including Social Security. The state has devolved from a capitalist democracy to neo-feudalism. And when these truths become apparent, anger will replace the corporate-imposed cheerful conformity. The bleakness of our post-industrial pockets, where some 40 million Americans live in a state of poverty and tens of millions in a category called “near poverty,” coupled with the lack of credit to save families from foreclosures, bank repossessions and bankruptcy from medical bills, means that inverted totalitarianism will no longer work.

We increasingly live in Orwell’s Oceania, not Huxley’s The World State. Osama bin Laden plays the role assumed by Emmanuel Goldstein in “1984.” Goldstein, in the novel, is the public face of terror. His evil machinations and clandestine acts of violence dominate the nightly news. Goldstein’s image appears each day on Oceania’s television screens as part of the nation’s “Two Minutes of Hate” daily ritual. And without the intervention of the state, Goldstein, like bin Laden, will kill you. All excesses are justified in the titanic fight against evil personified.

The psychological torture of Pvt. Bradley Manning – who has now been imprisoned for seven months without being convicted of any crime – mirrors the breaking of the dissident Winston Smith at the end of “1984.” Manning is being held as a “maximum custody detainee” in the brig at Marine Corps Base Quantico, in Virginia. He spends 23 of every 24 hours alone. He is denied exercise. He cannot have a pillow or sheets for his bed. Army doctors have been plying him with antidepressants. The cruder forms of torture of the Gestapo have been replaced with refined Orwellian techniques, largely developed by government psychologists, to turn dissidents like Manning into vegetables. We break souls as well as bod-

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ies. It is more effective. Now we can all be taken to Orwell's dreaded Room 101 to become compliant and harmless. These "special administrative measures" are regularly imposed on our dissidents, including Syed Fahad Hashmi, who was imprisoned under similar conditions for three years before going to trial. The techniques have psychologically maimed thousands of detainees in our black sites around the globe. They are the staple form of control in our maximum security prisons where the corporate state makes war on our most politically astute underclass – African-Americans. It all presages the shift from Huxley to Orwell.

"Never again will you be capable of ordinary human feeling," Winston Smith's torturer tells him in 1984. "Everything will be dead inside you. Never again will you be capable of love, or friendship, or joy of living, or laughter, or curiosity, or courage, or integrity. You will be hollow. We shall squeeze you empty and then we shall fill you with ourselves."

#### Era of oppression

The noose is tightening. The era of amusement is being replaced by the era of repression. Tens of millions of citizens have had their e-mails and phone records turned over to the government. We are the most monitored and spied-on citizenry in human history. Many of us have our daily routine caught on dozens of security cameras. Our proclivities and habits are recorded on the Internet. Our profiles are electronically generated. Our bodies are patted down at airports and filmed by scanners. And public service announcements, car inspection stickers, and public transportation posters

constantly urge us to report suspicious activity. The enemy is everywhere.

Those who do not comply with the dictates of the war on terror, a war which, as Orwell noted, is endless, are brutally silenced. The draconian security measures used to cripple protests at the G-20 gatherings in Pittsburgh and Toronto were wildly disproportionate for the level of street activity. But they sent a clear message – DO NOT TRY THIS. The FBI's targeting of antiwar and Palestinian activists, which in late September saw agents raid homes in Minneapolis and Chicago, is a harbinger of what is to come for all who dare defy the state's official Newspeak. The agents – our Thought Police – seized phones, computers, documents and other personal belongings. Subpoenas to appear before a grand jury have since been served on 26 people. The subpoenas cite federal law prohibiting "providing material support or resources to designated foreign terrorist organizations." Terror, even for those who have nothing to do with terror, becomes the blunt instrument used by Big Brother to protect us from ourselves.

"Do you begin to see, then, what kind of world we are creating?" Orwell wrote. "It is the exact opposite of the stupid hedonistic Utopias that the old reformers imagined. A world of fear and treachery and torment, a world of trampling and being trampled upon, a world which will grow not less but more merciless as it refines itself." **CT**

*Chris Hedges is a senior fellow at The Nation Institute. His newest book is "Death of the Liberal Class," an excerpt from which appeared recently at [www.coldtype.net](http://coldtype.net)*

**READ THE BEST OF TOM ENGELHARDT**  
<http://coldtype.net/tom.html>

# Happy New Year, 2030

**David Michael Green** delivers a message from your boss 25 years hence

**G**ood Morning, Worker Bees! Happy New Year!

And what a year it promises to be, too! We have lots of hard work in store for you. More than ever!

Now that our two-generation-long program of economic restructuring has finally made it to full fruition, I feel it only right and proper to celebrate our achievement with you by recapitulating the events of this greatest historical process in our country's history.

Normally, of course, plutocrats such as myself would be loath to reveal such secrets to those whom we exploit so thoroughly. If this was the late eighteenth century, perhaps you'd even rise up and sweep us away in some sort of revolution.

Alas, that is hardly a concern anymore, for at least a half-dozen good reasons.

For one thing, we've made sure that all of you are stuck in a state of perpetual economic precariousness (at best). This has made you as docile as lambs. No one dares rock the boat, lest the mere scrap of an allowance we grant you in exchange for your labors were to vanish in a puff of smoke. We hold you hostage and demand your acquiescence. You give it to us.

Second, we know everything you think

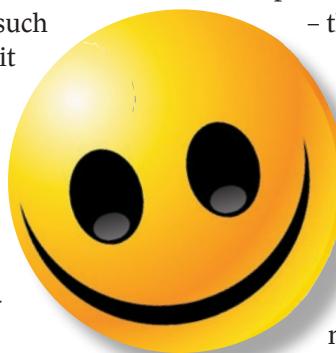
before you think it, anyhow, because our American Stasi Service is so powerful and omnipresent. If you were stupid enough to even utter the 'R' word, your well-trained child or spouse will have you turned in before you finish your sentence, and we'll have you in chains thirty seconds later. Try building a revolutionary movement under those conditions, pal.

Even if you could, we have some very nasty riot police ready to go if we see you on the streets without proper authorization. These

cops actually are no different than you – they're just given a slightly bigger food ration than the rest of you proles. We find that one can get human beings to do almost anything using these conditions. And, be assured, we do.

Of course, revolution is the furthest thing from your mind anyhow, because we've turned worship of the existing class structure into this society's religion, and we've made quite fervent little parishioners of you all, haven't we? Some fools doubted this could be done, but we knew back in the 70s that if one could twist Jesus the socialist – who talks in bold print about money-changers and camels going through eyes of needles – into a champion of greedy capitalism, one could sell anything. And we

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**Coupled to the new plutocrat-serving orthodoxy of the Purchased Party we added a hallucinatory hagiography of Ronald J. Christ, The Patron Saint of Tax Giveaways**

did. We've also supplemented your excellent cultural programming with some very potent pharmaceuticals to keep you nice and docile. You have much to be angry and depressed about, but your happy pills keep you properly focused. We like that.

Finally, we don't worry about you conducting some sort of revolution, because we've made sure that you've never even heard of such a concept. You have the worst education that we could possibly imagine, and trust me, our imaginations are quite fertile. You've never heard of revolutions, or economic classes, or slave revolts or labor unions or any other such claptrap. If you've never heard of it before, it's almost impossible for you to conceive of it on your own. By erasing history we have restarted history. And this time it's going to play out in a lot more controlled fashion than it did even last time.

### Incapable of response

And so my dear sheeple, no, as a matter of fact, I don't worry about divulging the truth to you about what we've done these last fifty years. You won't understand it any more than you understand what I'm saying now. And even if you did, you are completely incapable of mounting any sort of response to the pitiless and intractable system we have created. Even if you could, we would crush you instantly, grind you into hamburger, and feed you to our pet piranha.

So, here's what happened.

We (by which I mean us nice folks in the owning class) suffered through fifty years of the New Deal-inspired liberal America. It sucked. Instead of having nearly all the national wealth concentrated into the hands of the few of us, as had been the case for at least the century or so since America's industrial revolution, we possessed only most of it. Unthinkable! Traitors like both Roosevelts, Kennedy and Johnson enacted progressive policies that resulted in a vast diminishment of our concentration of wealth, that created a massive middle class for the first time in American history, and that provided

a modicum of relief for the poor. It wasn't Sweden, I assure you (not that you'd know what I mean by that anyhow), but it was a big change from our glory days.

Even worse, these liberal bastards advanced an egalitarian ethos which sold the public on the idea that everyone should share in the benefits of economic growth, and that banana-republic-style concentration of wealth in the hands of a few oligarchs was not healthy for society at large, not healthy for democracy, and not healthy for 99 percent of the nation. That's a dangerous set of ideas. Next stop is communism, buddy.

So we decided that enough was enough, and we came up with a plan.

The first step was to capture one of the only two viable political parties in America. That wasn't exactly difficult. The Republicans were already halfway there. All that was left was to buy-off the old-school moderates who had come to terms with the New Deal and crush any of those who couldn't be bought. This process was begun in the 1980s and accelerated in the subsequent two decades, to the point where by 2010 the concept of a moderate Republican more or less only existed as some bizarre notional idea anymore, like string theory in physics. Coupled to the new plutocrat-serving orthodoxy of the Purchased Party we added a hallucinatory hagiography of Ronald J. Christ, The Patron Saint of Tax Giveaways. All had to give praise to The Lord Gumby, and all did, yea, for generations hence.

It was also important to capture the other party as well (not to mention maintaining the absence of any viable third or fourth choices), and this was likewise duly accomplished. It was slightly tougher to take over the party of FDR and LBJ, but in the end not really so hard. The trick was to find some dolled-up whores with lots of charisma and let them do the work. There was this guy named Clinton, and another called Obama, who played their parts quite skillfully. Many devoted Democrats loved these DINOs, though they couldn't exactly say why.

Didn't matter in the end. By the time we were finished, voters could choose between the Party of Wall Street or the Other Party of Wall Street. Guess which one they picked?

Our assault on your wallets – and, indeed, even upon your health and longevity – was as sophisticated in its execution as it was thorough in its strategy. That's why we understood from the beginning that it was necessary to control the cognitive landscape of the country at the same time we were driving effective electoral choice down to zero. People had to understand – albeit, not consciously – that there were no choices at all, and that any apparent ones they might perceive were inherently lacking in legitimacy and therefore dangerous to adopt.

There were many implications to this imperative. To start with, there had to be some pseudo-intellectual air cover for the sacking of the body politic. We thus created 'think' tanks like the Heritage Foundation or the American Enterprise Institute, and funded them lavishly. We would have told them precisely what their studies were to conclude, but in fact we never needed to. They knew their purpose in life, and they knew who signed their paychecks.

A new media also had to be created, and we were spectacularly successful at this. Right-wing ranters on the radio had enormous appeal to those who hadn't yet been dumbed down enough not to be angry, but were sufficiently idiotic not to know the source of their consternation. To those we added a network of television and radio outlets that were supposedly mainstream and dispassionate, but in fact were driving a corporate agenda from top to bottom, and were joined at the hip with the Republican Party. Those of you who are old enough will remember this as Fox News. Today, of course, we just call it the Daily Instruction Network. In any case, another crucial aspect to this process was the pressure that these outlets placed upon the so-called mainstream media to conform to the corporatism. Along with the ceaseless pull of profit, and the constant battering of the media as

supposedly possessed of a liberal bias, we got them to self-censor what pathetically little authentic reporting there had ever once been in that domain.

It was also necessary to get people to hate government (except when we didn't want them to, of course), so that they could never see it as a solution to the obvious problems that beset them individually and collectively. Hating a government that you simultaneously adore when it dons military uniforms and slaughters foreigners is manifestly absurd, of course, but you'd be surprised how illogical people can be, especially when you incentivize stupidity with some little carrot here or some little stick there. Anyhow, if you say that "government is the enemy" enough times – despite the fact that you're always talking about the joys and wonders of democracy, which is, um, a system in which people pick their government – the public will indeed grow to hate their own government. Better yet, just in case some fool was still left somewhere, running around talking about regulation or taxing rich people or single-payer health care, all you have to do is shout "Big government!" and you've shot it down completely. Needless to say, we did.

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### Fear helps

Incessant fear can also be quite handy when it comes to quietly looting 300 million people, so we made sure there was plenty of that. Fear of evil foreign leaders was always handy. Never mind that they had almost always been on the CIA's payroll for decades. Never mind that we secretly did business with them at the same time the government was publicly demonizing them and imposing embargos and sanctions for other folks. Never mind that these bogeymen were pathetic, two-bit, local-yokel bully boys compared to a Hitler, Stalin or Mao. No matter. If you say it loud enough and often enough, everybody falls into line pretty quickly. Plus, it's easy to instantly smash any naysayers to bits just by questioning their patriotism.

Brown people also make pretty good di-

**By packing all your jobs off to Mexico, and then China and India, and later Africa, we put you firmly under the heavy jackboot of economic insecurity**

visionary demons. Or anyone else who's a bit different. Women. Muslims. Gays. Immigrants. The homeless. Whatever. All we basically had to do was make them lower in stature than you all and then trash them endlessly. Not only did that make you feel gratified, having someone you could stand over and piss down on, it also kept you from noticing the sea of oligarchical urine in which you were yourself drowning at that very same moment. Very effective stuff. Public manipulation for fun and profit. Psych 101. Easy and amusing. You can't imagine the laughs we had.

From there it was generally just a matter of incessant squeezing. We sold you a ridiculously counterintuitive bunch of bullshit about the joys of 'free trade'. You went for it, and we made obscene amounts of money by shrinking labor costs down to nothing and pocketing the difference in profits. More importantly, by packing all your jobs off to Mexico, and then China and India, and later Africa, we put you firmly under the heavy jackboot of economic insecurity. That's a dividend that has never stopped paying off very handsomely, ever since.

#### **Tax cuts – ours, not yours**

Once we had you sinking economically, we could sell you on whatever supposed remedy du jour we decided to hawk next. Tax cuts, which actually ultimately increased your taxes and cut ours, seemed like a life-boat to a struggling middle class. In fact, they produced massive deficits, which we could then use to sell you on the necessity of slashing your meager safety net programs like Social Security and Medicare. We also got you to line up behind us as we not only

smashed unions, but even the pensions that union workers had earned over the span of entire lifetimes. You didn't say a word as we let infrastructure crumble and defunded education. We told you that none of that stuff could be afforded anymore. It never occurred to you to ask why millionaires and billionaires and corporations essentially no longer paid taxes. Or why it was necessary for your country to spend a sum equal to that of every other country in the world – combined – on a massive military that essentially had no enemies.

You went for it. All. And every time we gave you a chance to say no at the ballot box, you instead begged us for more.

And so we cut and we chopped, and we slashed and we burned. Mostly, though, we just looted and pillaged.

With your help, of course. Thanks for that. It was so much cleaner and quicker and more thorough that way.

All in all, I think you would have to agree that we came up with a pretty successful little program for taking the money that used to be in your pockets and sticking it in ours.

That is, you would have to agree had we not rendered you too ignorant, too brain-washed, too frightened, too prejudiced, too distracted, too sick, too doped up and too dead to notice.

Sorry about all that.

We just wanted your money.

Thanks, Fool.

**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).

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# The ‘Total Control Society’ is here

The government and corporations are introducing new technology that will enable them to keep an even closer eye on what you’re doing, writes **John W. Whitehead**

*“In the future, whether it’s entering your home, opening your car, entering your workspace, getting a pharmacy prescription refilled, or having your medical records pulled up, everything will come off that unique key that is your iris. Every person, place, and thing on this planet will be connected [to the iris system] within the next 10 years.” – Jeff Carter, CDO of Global Rainmakers*

The US government and its corporate allies are looking out for you – literally – with surveillance tools intended to identify you, track your whereabouts, monitor your activities and allow or restrict your access to people, places or things deemed suitable by the government. This is all the more true as another invasive technology, the iris scanner, is about to be unleashed on the American people.

Iris scanning relies on biometrics, which uses physiological (fingerprint, face recognition, DNA, iris recognition, etc.) or behavioral (gait, voice) characteristics to uniquely identify a person. The technology works by reading the unique pattern found on the iris, the colored part of the eyeball. This pattern is unique even among indi-

viduals with the exact same DNA. It is read by projecting infra-red light directly into the eye of the individual.

The perceived benefits of iris scan technology, we are told, include a high level of accuracy, protection against identity theft and the ability to quickly search through a database of the digitized iris information. It also provides corporations and the government – that is, the corporate state – with a streamlined, uniform way to track and access all of the information amassed about us, from our financial and merchant records, to our medical history, activities, interests, travels and so on. In this way, iris scans become de facto national ID cards, which can be implemented without our knowledge or consent. In fact, the latest generation of iris scanners can even capture scans on individuals in motion who are six feet away. And as these devices become more sophisticated, they will only become more powerfully invasive.

At the forefront of this effort is the American biometrics firm Global Rainmakers Inc. (GRI), which has partnered with the city of Leon – one of the largest cities in Mexico – to create “the most secure city in the world.” GRI plans to achieve this goal by installing iris scanners throughout the city, thus cre-

**In fact, the latest generation of iris scanners can even capture scans on individuals in motion who are six feet away. And as these devices become more sophisticated, they will only become more powerfully invasive**



**The goal of the corporate state, of course, is to create a total control society – one in which the government is able to track the movements of people in real time and control who does what, when and where**

ating a virtual police state in Leon.

The eye scanners, which can scan the irises of 30-50 people per minute, will first be made available to law enforcement facilities, security check-points, police stations, detention areas, jails and prisons, followed by more commercial enterprises such as mass transit, medical centers and banks and other public and private locations. As the business and technology magazine *Fast Company* reports:

"To implement the system, the city is creating a database of irises. Criminals will automatically be enrolled, their irises scanned once convicted. Law-abiding citizens will have the option to opt-in."

However, as *Fast Company* points out, soon no one will be able to opt out:

"When these residents catch a train or bus, or take out money from an ATM, they will scan their irises, rather than swiping a metro or bank card. Police officers will monitor these scans and track the movements of watch-listed individuals. 'Fraud, which is a \$50 billion problem, will be completely eradicated,' says Carter. Not even the 'dead eyeballs' seen in *Minority Report* could trick the system, he says. 'If you've been convicted of a crime, in essence, this will act as a digital scarlet letter. If you're a known shoplifter, for example, you won't be able to go into a store without being flagged. For others, boarding a plane will be impossible.'"

Mark my words: the people of Leon, Mexico, are guinea pigs, and the American people are the intended control subjects.

In fact, iris scanning technology is already being implemented in the US. For example, the Department of Homeland Security ran a two-week test of the iris scanners at a Border Patrol station in McAllen, Texas, in October 2010. That same month, in Boone County, Missouri, the sheriff's office unveiled an Iris Biometric station purchased with funds provided by the US Department of Justice. Unknown by most, the technology is reportedly already being used by law enforcement in 40 states throughout the country.

There's even an iPhone app in the works that will allow police officers to use their iPhones for on-the-spot, on-the-go iris scanning of American citizens. The manufacturer, B12 Technologies, has already equipped police with iPhones armed with facial recognition software linked to a statewide database which, of course, federal agents have access to. (Even Disney World has gotten in on the biometrics action, requiring fingerprint scans for anyone entering its four Orlando theme parks. How long before this mega-corporation makes the switch to iris scans and makes the information available to law enforcement? And for those who have been protesting the whole-body imaging scanners at airports as overly invasive, just wait until they include the iris scans in their security protocol. The technology has already been tested in about 20 US airports as part of a program to identify passengers who could skip to the front of security lines.)

The goal of the corporate state, of course, is to create a total control society – one in which the government is able to track the movements of people in real time and control who does what, when and where. In exchange, the government promises to provide security and convenience, the two highly manipulative, siren-song catchwords of our modern age

Again, as *Fast Company* reports:

"For such a Big Brother-esque system, why would any law-abiding resident ever volunteer to scan their irises into a public database, and sacrifice their privacy? GRI hopes that the immediate value the system creates will alleviate any concern. 'There's a lot of convenience to this – you'll have nothing to carry except your eyes,' says Carter, claiming that consumers will no longer be carded at bars and liquor stores. And he has a warning for those thinking of opting out: 'When you get masses of people opting-in, opting out does not help. Opting out actually puts more of a flag on you than just being part of the system. We believe everyone will opt-in.'"

So who's the real culprit here? While we all have a part to play in laying the foundations for this police state – the American people due to our inaction and gullibility; the corporations, who long ago sold us out for the profit they could make on us; the federal government, for using our tax dollars to fund technologies aimed at entrapping us; lobbyists who have greased the wheels of politics in order to ensure that these technologies are adopted by government agencies; the courts, for failing to guard our liberties more vigilantly; the president, for using our stimulus funds to fatten the pockets of technology execs at the expense of our civil liberties – it's Congress that bears the brunt of the blame. Our so-called elected representatives could and should have provided oversight on these technologies in order to limit their wide-spread use by corporations and government agencies. Yet they have done nothing to protect us from the encroaching police state. In fact, they have facilitated this fast-moving transition into a suspect society.

Ultimately, it comes back to power, money and control – “how it is acquired and maintained, how those who seek it or seek to keep it tend to sacrifice anything and everything in its name” – the same noxious mix that George Orwell warned about in his chilling, futuristic novel *1984*. It is a warning we have failed to heed. As veteran journalist Walter Cronkite observed in his preface to a commemorative edition of *1984*:

“*1984* is an anguished lament and a warning that vibrates powerfully when we

may not be strong enough nor wise enough nor moral enough to cope with the kind of power we have learned to amass. That warning vibrates powerfully when we allow ourselves to sit still and think carefully about orbiting satellites that can read the license plates in a parking lot and computers that can read into thousands of telephone calls and telex transmissions at once and other computers that can do our banking and purchasing, can watch the house and tell a monitoring station what television program we are watching and how many people there are in a room. We think of Orwell when we read of scientists who believe they have located in the human brain the seats of behavioral emotions like aggression, or learn more about the vast potential of genetic engineering. And we hear echoes of that warning chord in the constant demand for greater security and comfort, for less risk in our societies. We recognize, however dimly, that greater efficiency, ease, and security may come at a substantial price in freedom, that ‘law and order’ can be a doublethink version of oppression, that individual liberties surrendered for whatever good reason are freedoms lost.”

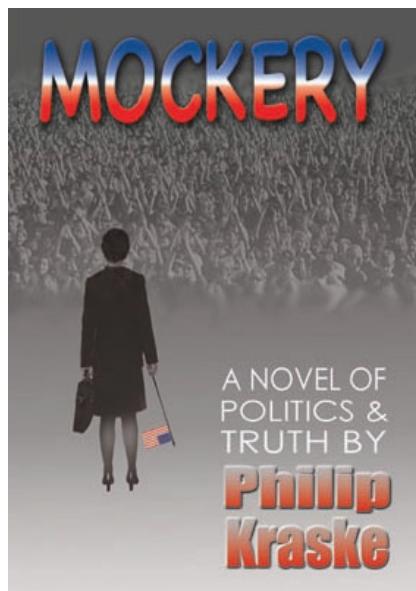
**CT**

*Constitutional attorney and author John W. Whitehead is founder and president of The Rutherford Institute. His new book The Freedom Wars (TRI Press) is available online at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). He can be contacted at [johnw@rutherford.org](mailto:johnw@rutherford.org). Information about The Rutherford Institute is available at [www.rutherford.org](http://www.rutherford.org).*

**Our so-called elected representatives could and should have provided oversight on these technologies in order to limit their wide-spread use by corporations and government agencies**

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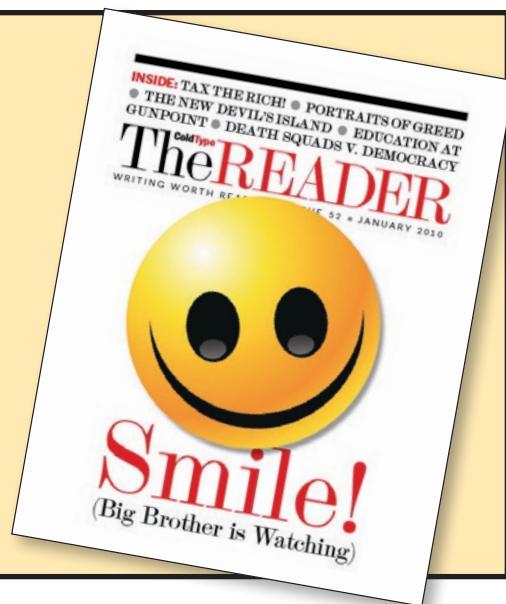
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# Tax the rich!

Fed up seeing your life become increasingly stressed with more debt and less cash in your pocket?  
**Michael I. Niman** has the answer, in three words

**I**t's hard to organize a political movement in the age of one-minute news stories and seven-second sound bites. Reality is just too damned complex for our degraded communications culture. Vote for the politician with the flag and the baby, who will cut your taxes and buy you a new car. Stories about how casino capitalists empowered by neoconservative market deregulation took down the global economy with toxic assets, and how hegemonic market relationships shifted the pain of economic collapse to the poorest nations and people, resulting in accelerated patterns of upward wealth redistribution and the subsequent uptick in violent conflicts, just don't fit into this news model.

It's also difficult to propose realistic solutions to such problems when, on those rare occasions the news media actually does allow a dissident voice, they only get seven seconds of airtime or two lines of newsprint. But I think I've got the sound bite that addresses a fix for almost all of our social, economic and environmental problems: Tax the rich!"

It doesn't take seven seconds to say. Perhaps two. And I can write it 13 times in two lines. Try it. Write it. Shout it. Tax the rich!

Though seemingly mind-numbingly simple, it's a universal fix. Worried about how to pay for an economic stimulus plan – not a namby-pamby one that just bails out bank-

ers, but one that would put Americans back to work? Just tax the rich. Worried about the deficit? Tax the rich! Want to rebuild our nation's crumbling infrastructure? Tax the rich! How about creating green jobs and stimulating a green economy? Tax the rich! Want to guarantee each American child the right to a quality education and affordable college tuition? Tax the rich!

**For our Tax the Rich coalition to work, it's got to be a broad-based movement focusing on one and only one issue: taxing the rich**

### Tax the Rich!

For our Tax the Rich coalition to work, it's got to be a broad-based movement focusing on one and only one issue: taxing the rich. For or against abortion rights, marijuana legalization, nuclear power, gay marriage or Don't Ask, Don't Tell? It doesn't matter, we all want to tax the rich. For or against New York's Rockefeller Drug Laws, California's Three Strikes law, or Texas's quest to jail everyone forever? It doesn't matter. We can all agree that the \$50,000-per-year bill to lock people up, whether we think they should be in jail or not, should be paid by taxing the rich.

For or against the War on Terror, the Drug War, the Afghanistan War or the Iraq War? We'll have that argument someplace else. Right now we're talking about taxing the rich. Right or wrong, someone has to pay the outstanding bill for these wars. Our current plan of borrowing from China and Saudi Arabia borders on economic trea-

## THE ECONOMY / 1

**I'm not arguing here for or against the concept of private property. I'm just saying the people who own most of our nation's wealth should be the ones paying to protect their alleged rights to that ownership**

son. During World War II, we paid for the military by raising the maximum tax rate, paid only by the rich, to 94 percent. Hell, they're the ones who profited from the war. And they're the only ones who were able to both pay for the war and still have money left over to support their lavish lifestyles. So we taxed the rich.

This is a simple concept. Even 15 years after World War II ended, during the Republican Eisenhower administration, we kept their top tax rate at 91 percent, so we could pay off the bills for that war, the Korean War, and the incubating Cold War.

### Tax the Rich!

Our current economic model essentially uses the tax system to take money from working- and middle-class people and redistribute it to the rich in the form of corporate welfare, tax-free loans and bailouts, and subsidies for building and operating the infrastructure the rich use in both making and keeping their money. Try this simple political theory on for size: The primary purpose of civil government is to protect private property. Want to squat an empty building, stay in your foreclosed home, or grow tomatoes and squash on the edge of some rich person's estate? Taxpayer-funded police will enforce trespass laws and drag your butt off to a taxpayer-funded jail. I'm not arguing here for or against the concept of private property. I'm just saying the people who own most of our nation's wealth should be the ones paying to protect their alleged rights to that ownership. This is conservative, libertarian economic philosophy: Tax the rich.

Want to print your own Swoosh shirts? Nike will have you arrested. Ditto for Disney and Mickey Mouse, or your beloved football team and its registered logo. See what happens when you offer your new Amber Swift album up for file-sharing, or try selling a homemade copy of Toy Story 3 on eBay. Taxpayers subsidize this government enforcement of intellectual property laws that benefit the rich, who take the big-

gest cut every time you hit the buy button on iTunes. Again, I'm not arguing here for or against intellectual property laws. Let's keep our coalition broad. I think we can all agree, however, that if we have such laws, we should tax the rich to pay for their enforcement.

The taxpayer-funded criminal justice system, in addition to protecting the wealth and private property of the rich, also abets the rich in their chronic theft from the poor. If you stop paying the 28-percent interest on your credit card debt, or steal unaffordable medications from a drugstore, you'll wind up in a taxpayer-funded court. If your mortgage adjusts upward to the point where you can no longer afford to pay it, you'll wind up in taxpayer-funded court. Why not pay for these courts by taxing the rich?

The same principle holds true when we fight wars to protect property the rich claim to own, or to acquire resources the rich will soon own. And who should pay the bill for police to protect the estates of the rich, the banks the rich own, their Bentleys and their yachts? The reality is, if you steal from the poor, you will likely get away with it. If you steal from the rich, if you rob a bank, you will go to jail. So why not tax the rich to pay for this criminal justice system? They already seem to own it.

### Tax the Rich!

It also turns out that taxing the rich helps grow the economy. Again, the theory is painfully simple: Put money in the hands of rich people and they invest or spend it either abroad or on luxury goods that provide few jobs per dollar spent. Put money in the hands of the poor and they'll immediately pump all of it back into the economy. If you want to stimulate the economy, take money from the rich and give it to the poor. The poor will just give it back to the rich anyway, but at least it will pass through a few middle-class hands on the way.

In the 1950s and 1960s, when we actually taxed the rich, we were able to build the interstate highway system, wage an expen-

sive war, and fund a welfare state. Economic growth, stimulated heavily by government and poor people's spending, allowed the "liberal" Kennedy and Johnson administrations to cut the tax rate for the rich by 21 percent, lowering their rate to 70 percent. Then greed got the better of America. Today's top tax rate for individuals "earning" over \$373,650, is 35 percent, while the rate on "unearned income" from passive investments is capped at 15 percent – which is 10 percent less than someone earning \$34,000 per year would pay on their "earned" income.

We financed this historically unprecedented wealth transfer with deficit spending and cuts to government services. These cuts led to increases in public university tuitions, a plethora of fees and sales taxes, and local and state taxes, at the same time our public infrastructure began to decay and food, medical, and education assistance to the poorest Americans was cut. We didn't cut any of the government services that protect the rich's monopoly on wealth, however. The Great Society gave way to the McMansion when we stopped taxing the rich.

This stuff is simple, but you'd never know it since rich people own our media and our politicians. They've linguistically transformed their obligation to contribute to society by paying taxes into a "tax burden." And likewise, they've bastardized the language to describe their endless campaign to pass the responsibility of paying off government debt to the middle class as "tax relief." Call it what you will, those who reap most of the material benefits of our society should also shoulder most of the "burden." So let's tax the rich.

The corporate media also tell us that economics is far too complex for us to wrap our little working- and middle-class minds around. They even manufacture "think tanks" to lend a bought-and-paid-for academic veneer to their economic propaganda. But their "trickle-down" meme is even simpler than mine. Money we give to the rich will supposedly trickle down to

the poor. After 30 years of this experiment, the data showing otherwise is overwhelming. But you'd never know this from reading, watching, or listening to the American media. They'll say anything to avoid taxing the rich.

### Tax the Rich!

Let's embrace a bit of complexity for a moment. When rich people in developed countries get tax cuts, their take-home income soars, leaving them with a surplus of money, which history has shown they will wildly and irresponsibly invest in speculative assets, creating various market "bubbles." Then markets correct and these bubbles spectacularly burst, creating radical disruptions that crash economies. In the roaring 1920s, when the tax rates for the richest Americans decreased from 73 percent to 25 percent, the rich invested wildly, driving stock prices up to unsustainable levels. When that market corrected, it gave us the "Great Crash" of 1929 and the subsequent "Great Depression." The next major crash came a few years after Reagan halved the maximum tax rates, creating another bubble-bust cycle. The ensuing years between these crashes, when taxes on the rich were in the 70 to 90 percent range, saw a historically unprecedented period of economic stability. Bush Senior held Reagan's line on taxes, and the economy floundered. Bush Junior cut taxes further, and we got another bubble, followed by another big crash.

Get the picture? We can prevent this mayhem by taxing the rich.

When taxes are higher, income for working- and middle-class taxpayers also rises, even adjusted for inflation, since the labor market is modulated by real after-tax income. Inversely, when taxes are cut, real income for these same working people tends to drop. The opposite, however, has historically held true for the rich, whose income drops drastically when taxes rise, and rises at a similar rate when taxes are cut. Hence, they have a vested interest in keeping taxes low, while the rest of us have a vested inter-

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## THE ECONOMY / 1

**Our elections are little more than auction blocks where the rich can afford to sponsor candidates they like and destroy ones they don't**

est in seeing taxes rise. The rich, however, can back up their interests with money, which they often invest in buying media organizations, which parrot their anti-tax mantras.

This is why the Founding Fathers warned against allowing a super-wealthy class to emerge, and until the late 19th century, even after adjusting income into today's dollars, there were no billionaires. The fear was that such a class would have the financial resources to dominate a political system, rendering democracy obsolete. Political scientists point out that you cannot have both massive economic inequality and democracy.

The best way to prevent, or reverse, such inequality, and to salvage our democracy, is to tax the rich!

### Tax the Rich!

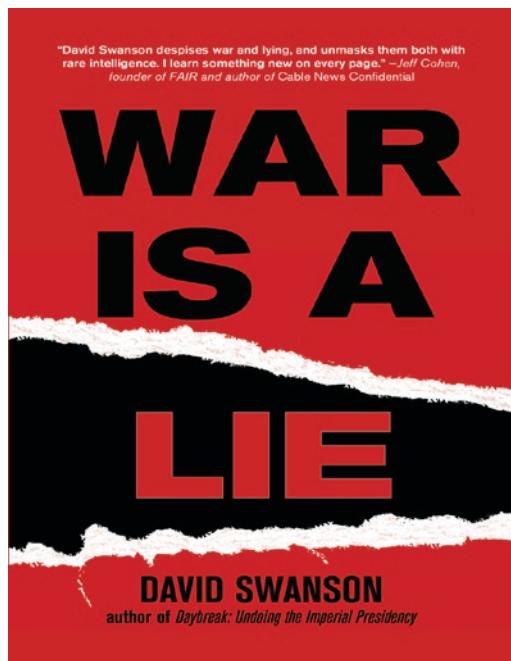
Of course our political class will not tax the rich for us. Politicians are deathly afraid that the rich will punish them. Our elections are little more than auction blocks where the rich can afford to sponsor candidates they like and destroy ones they don't.

But why don't we-the-people want to tax the rich? The bottom line is that we do want to tax the rich. Ask your friends. Who really doesn't want to tax the rich? We just need to ignore the media messages that say we don't.

Here's a strategy for a broad-based Tax the Rich political movement. Call or email your representatives and tell them to tax the rich. Call them out when they refuse to tax the rich. Petition for ballot lines around the country for a Tax the Rich party, and endorse candidates with the strongest tax-the-rich commitments or track records, and oppose those who refuse to tax the rich.

It fits on buttons, bumper stickers, t-shirts, railroad bridges, abandoned buildings, and highway overpasses. You can work it into conversations. You can post it to your Facebook profile, Tweet it, shout it out your window, tattoo it on your arm. But we've got to get the message out loud and clear: Tax the damned rich! **CT**

*Michael I. Niman is a professor of Journalism and Media Studies at Buffalo State College.*



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**WAR IS A LIE**  
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# The few, the proud, the fifty rich

The holidays were tough for millions and millions of people suffering the effects of the Great Recession – but, as **Alan Maass** reports, Wall Street had lots to celebrate

**H**e's number 69 on the latest Forbes 400 list of richest Americans and head of Blackstone Group, the world's largest private equity firm specializing in corporate takeovers. He lives in a 35-room triplex on Park Avenue in Manhattan, with second "homes" – mansions, really – in the Hamptons, Palm Beach and Jamaica. His private chef regularly spends \$3,000 for a weekend's feasting for him and his wife, including those stone crabs he loves at \$400 each. Which works out to \$40 a claw.

But comfortable as his life is, Stephen Schwarzman isn't the kind of guy to allow tyranny to go unopposed. "It's a war," he declared in July at the board meeting of a nonprofit organization, according to *Newsweek*. "It's like when Hitler invaded Poland in 1939."

And what cruel injustice was Schwarzman standing against?

Turns out it's all those people who want to tax him to death. Schwarzman was talking about a widely supported Democratic proposal – now abandoned, naturally – to close a loophole that allows private equity firms like Blackstone to pay taxes at less than half the rate of normal corporations.

Which, when you think about it, is not really in any way like the Nazi blitzkrieg that killed hundreds of thousands of Poles in a country that would become the site of

the extermination camps for Jews, Roma, socialists, communists and others.

And yet Schwarzman's out-of-control ranting isn't so out of the ordinary for Corporate America these days. Big business seems to have adopted a motto from the Marine Corps: The few, the proud, the filthy rich – and the rest of you can go to hell.

The profits of US businesses hit another record in the third quarter of 2010, clocking in at \$1.659 trillion at an annual rate, according to the Commerce Department – the highest figure in non-inflation-adjusted dollars since the government started keeping track more than 60 years ago. This was the seventh straight quarter of rising profits, and at one of the fastest clips in recent history.

Meanwhile, unemployment has hung on stubbornly at twice its pre-crisis level, and one in six Americans – including one in four children – is at risk of hunger, according to the latest government statistics.

But don't expect any humility from the US Chamber of Commerce. The business federation is spoiling for a new fight – against a "regulatory tsunami of unprecedented force" allegedly coming from the Obama administration. The Chamber's Chief Executive Thomas Donahue says the White House is plotting "thousands of new and questionable regulatory rulemakings."

Any bets on the outcome of that one?

**This was the seventh straight quarter of rising profits, and at one of the fastest clips in recent history**

## THE ECONOMY / 2

**In the first nine months of the year, the big six banks in the US – Bank of America, JPMorgan Chase, Citigroup, Wells Fargo, Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley – cleared \$35 billion in profits**

On Wall Street, the top three dozen publicly held banks, hedge funds and investment firms plan to pay \$144 billion in compensation and benefits this year, according to the *Wall Street Journal's* survey – the second-straight record-setting year.

But ask any banker, and they'll tell you sums like that aren't much comfort when people are just...so...mean.

"We've been ostracized," one unnamed executive told the *Observer* newspaper. "I went to jury duty about a year ago, and when I said I'm in investment banking, the people in the jury room were making ugh sounds. And I'm like, fuck you. I'm proud of what I do. And I think this firm did a lot to get the recovery going. Ranked somewhere below a pimp and an oil well operator isn't right."

Corporate America is snarling – rather than laughing – all the way to bank. The Wall Street parasites who set off the crisis with their gambling are swimming in money again, while businesses turn the screws tighter and tighter – throwing people out of work, slashing government programs that the poor depend on, and forcing those who still have a job to work harder for less.

And all the while acting like they are the persecuted ones.

### Back to spendthriftiness

The got-it-flaunt-it rule is back for the super-rich after a few difficult years of cash flow problems.

At Christie's and other New York auction houses that peddle art to the highest bidder, the first two weeks of November were among the most lucrative in history. Dr. Francesca Fusco reports that her Manhattan cosmetic surgery business is booming again – "Wall Street is back spending as much if not more than before," she gushes.

And the bidding action for rentals next summer in the posh Hamptons on Long Island is "hotter and heavier" than ever, says Dolly Lenz of Prudential Douglas Elliman. She has three people ready to pony up more than \$400,000 to put a roof over their heads

for a few weeks next year.

It isn't just New York City, of course. The vast gap between rich and poor has grown even larger during the Great Recession. Today, the richest 1 percent of Americans takes nearly 24 percent of overall income – nearly tripling their share since 1976 and the most extreme level of inequality since statistics started being kept.

One reason for this, of course, is that the US financial system is up to its old tricks – as if the cataclysmic crisis of 2008 never happened.

In the first nine months of the year, the big six banks in the US – Bank of America, JPMorgan Chase, Citigroup, Wells Fargo, Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley – cleared \$35 billion in profits. Thanks to the way the bankers reward themselves, a lot of that money will end up being paid out as bonuses.

And it's mostly on the government's dime, to boot. Not only did the federal government save them with a multibillion-dollar rescue when the crisis hit, but the bankers are still taking advantage of the Federal Reserve Bank's policy of pumping money into the economy by lending to financial institutions at effective 0 percent interest rates.

Some of that free cash is fueling a revival in the market for speculative investments known as derivatives – the very thing that set off the Wall Street crash of 2008. But a healthy portion is being lent back to the government through the purchase of Treasury bills at 3 percent interest. It's a guaranteed profit for the banks, without the bother and risk of making loans for something that might be productive for the rest of society.

The financial sector of the economy accounts for more than a quarter of the profits of US businesses, up from around one-seventh 25 years ago. As Paul Wooley, a veteran of the British financial system-turned-critic of the banks, said, "It's like a cancer that is growing to infinite size, until it takes over the entire body.

But then again, Corporate America as a

whole isn't acting any differently from the banks.

Business profits as an overall dollar amount hit a new record in the third quarter. Calculated as a percentage of the gross domestic product – the total production of goods and services in the economy – profits reached 11.2 percent, close to the high point of the 2000s boom. In other words, for every \$9 produced in the US economy today, the ruling class is pocketing \$1.

But the corporate profit boom isn't leading to an investment boom, at least not investment in the US. Earlier this year, the Federal Reserve estimated that non-financial corporations were sitting on \$1.8 trillion in cash and other so-called liquid assets, up 26 percent from the year before, the fastest increase for cash on hand since records started being kept in 1952.

This is the reason for the anemic jobs reports issued each month by the government. In most months this past year, private-sector employment crept upward, though it was offset several times by job losses in the public sector. But in any case, the increases are too small to keep up with the rise in the working-age population, much less replace the jobs lost during the recession.

Since December 2007, the US economy has lost 5.4 percent of non-farm payroll jobs – roughly one lost out of every 19. And with Corporate America banking its profits, there's no sign of that collapse being made up soon. At the same time as profits for the third quarter jumped 28 percent over the year before, business spending on compensation for employees rose only 7.6 percent, or about one-quarter as fast.

That statistic reveals the old-fashioned secret of the profit boom – corporations are making workers work harder for less. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the output of the US economy rose 4.1 percent in the third quarter compared to the year before, the number of hours worked increased by 1.6 percent, and unit labor costs fell by nearly 2 percent.

It doesn't take a genius to figure out that

big business is going to be plenty happy as long as profits roll in without making new investments in jobs and higher wages – something the Federal Reserve recognized when it revised its prediction last month to project official unemployment staying above 9 percent throughout 2011 and above 8 percent for the election year that follows.

**That statistic reveals the old-fashioned secret of the profit boom – corporations are making workers work harder for less**

### Playing the victim

And still Corporate America's filthy rich few play the victim – like Schwarzman with his outbursts against “big government” and the terrible injustice of being made to pay taxes at something closer to the rate that working people do.

Only...it turns out that Stephen Schwarzman isn't opposed to all “big government.”

The Blackstone Group's last big deal before the Wall Street crash in 2008 was the takeover of the Hilton Hotel chain. Blackstone and a group of investors agreed to pay \$26 billion for the company. They put in \$5.6 billion of their own money and borrowed over \$20 billion from a group of seven banks.

That's how buyout firms work: They finance their massive purchases with huge loans, they then cut costs ruthlessly – meaning they lay off workers and close factories – and they sell what's left as quickly as possible, leaving the takeover target saddled with the debts.

In the case of Hilton, though, the recession made it difficult to find a buyer for the restructured company or to refinance the massive loans from the 2007 purchase. Only this year was Blackstone able to reach a deal with banks that reduced its debt load by about \$4 billion – by extending some of the loans and paying for others at a steep discount over what they had been worth.

But one of the lenders in the Blackstone deal for Hilton was under slightly different management.

The investment bank Bear Stearns had contributed about \$4 billion in loans for the Hilton takeover. Less than a year later, when

## THE ECONOMY / 2

**Almost a year and a half after the union contract expired, the Blackstone-owned chain is demanding that workers represented by UNITE HERE accept concessions**

Bear was careening toward bankruptcy, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York took over those Hilton debts – at full value – in order to entice JPMorgan Chase to buy the collapsing Bear.

So when Schwarzman and Co. wanted to refinance, they were negotiating in part with the federal government, in the form of the New York Fed. Which graciously agreed to sell back \$320 million of the total Hilton debt at a cost to Blackstone of \$142 million.

In other words, Blackstone and Hilton got a gift of \$178 million from their friends at the Fed – the equivalent of 10 percent of Blackstone's revenue in all of 2009.

Not that they were hurting, mind you. "We were in good shape before," Hilton CEO Chris Nassetta said of the effect of the debt deal, "and we're in exceptionally good shape now."

Workers at Hilton, on the other hand, aren't in such "exceptionally good shape." Almost a year and a half after the union contract expired, the Blackstone-owned chain is demanding that workers represented by UNITE HERE accept concessions – \$200 a month toward their health care plan, and a freeze on pension contributions.

"They got all this money from the federal government, and yet they won't give us a contract," said Gloria King, who was among four dozen workers picketing outside a Hilton in the posh shopping district near Chi-

cago's downtown during a three-day strike by UNITE HERE in October. The workers carried signs reading "Taxpayers on Strike."

Probably the worst among Hilton/Blackstone's demands is the speedup – management wants housekeepers to clean 20 rooms a day, a 40 percent increase in work that is already physically exhausting.

That's why Xiomara Cruz is worrying not about the invasion of Poland, but Hilton's war on her health. As the room cleaner in San Francisco told SocialistWorker.org's Regina Johnson in October: "I have numbness in my fingers, shoulder and back problems. Everyone has back and shoulder pain and numbness in their fingers. We are supposed to have two breaks and a dinner break. I am not taking time for dinner and breaks because there's too much work, but we have to sign off on the sheet saying we took our breaks, even when we didn't."

It's a crime that union workers like Cruz are being told that they have to work harder for less because Hilton doesn't have the money – at the same time as its owners at Blackstone are proudly predicting a 50 percent increase in revenues for 2010. But for the filthy rich in Corporate America, crimes like that pay – very, very well. **CT**

*Alan Maas is the editor of SocialistWorker – www.socialistworker.org – where this article first appeared.*

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# Portraits of greed

**Sam Pizzigati's** annual list of the 10 greediest corporate executives in America

**H**ard times can be good times – for the aggressively avaricious. Where others see pain, they see opportunity. In desperation, they delight. The grimmer the economic outlook, the more ghastly their grabbing.

And who grabbed the most outrageously in 2010? We offer below our annual take on America's ten greediest of the year.

## 10. Nick Saban: A coach's fabulous crimson ride

America's college football coaches seem to have made an end run around the Great Recession. In 2006, only 10 of the about 120 big-time college football coaches took home at least \$2 million a year. The 2010 total: 38.

The king of them all: the University of Alabama's Nick Saban, with a 2010 takehome at \$6,087,349, six times the college football coaching average. Only five coaches in all of professional sports will this year make more than Saban.

*Forbes* has labeled Saban the “most powerful coach in sports,” and his many perks – everything from two cars to a contract clause that lets him exit Alabama at any time without taking a financial penalty – amply confirm that assessment.

Financial penalties, meanwhile, are abounding throughout the rest of Alabama's public sector. Budget cuts have forced some

colleges in the state to up tuition as much as 23 percent. The state's overall education budget dropped 9.5 percent in 2010, and local school boards now see no way to “avoid major layoffs.”

Saban, for his part, has been blasting the “greed” of sports agents who sneak college athletes cash in hopes of cashing out big themselves when the athletes turn pro. In August, Saban called these agents no better “than a pimp.”

A pimp, responded one national sports writer, displays a “willingness to physically exploit young people” the pimp claims “to protect” and, “above all, a love of money.” That definition, continued Fox Sports analyst Mark Kriegel, just might fit Nick Saban, Alabama's most “highly paid state employee.”

## 9. Howard Schultz: How to brew a bigger fortune

A decade ago, after running coffee giant Starbucks for 13 years, Howard Schultz stepped down as CEO to take life a bit easier as the company's “chief global strategist.” Early in 2008, with Starbucks struggling mightily in the marketplace, Schultz took back his CEO slot.

The struggles continued. Massive layoffs would soon slash the chain's workforce by 19 percent. Schultz would feel the pain. He started trumpeting “the shared sacrifice I

**Massive layoffs would soon slash the chain's workforce by 19 percent. Schultz would feel the pain**

**New assembly line workers at GM, for their part, are now making only \$14 an hour, half the rate they would have been making before GM's meltdown**

want to make” – and pledged to take almost no personal salary.

But CEOs, wink, wink, only get a small fraction of their total pay from straight salary. The Starbucks corporate board, behind the sacrificing scenes, was actually turbo-charging the Schultz pay package with a mammoth grant of stock options, delivered at just the moment Starbucks shares were hovering at a rock-bottom low.

Starbucks valued those options, at the time of their granting, at \$12.4 million. By May 2010, after a Wall Street mini-boom, the value of the shares had soared to \$46.8 million. More good news for Schultz: He scored another \$26 million last year exercising options he had been granted way back in 1998 and 1999.

And what about Starbucks shareholders? Those who bought their shares in 2007, right before the Great Recession, still have no gain to show for their investment.

### **8. Daniel Akerson: Competing at a mythic level**

The chief executive of General Motors since this past September, Daniel Akerson gave his first “high-profile speech” as the automaker’s CEO. The prime takeaway from his address? The feds, said Akerson, need to ease up on the bailout pay limits still in effect for his fellow top GM executives.

“We have to be competitive,” Akerson told the Economic Club of Washington, D.C. “We have to be able to attract good people.”

Getting “good people” to fill jobs below GM’s executive level, on the other hand, apparently doesn’t matter all that much. GM salaried employees, Akerson has decided, will not see any increases this coming year in their base salaries. New assembly line workers at GM, for their part, are now making only \$14 an hour, half the rate they would have been making before GM’s meltdown.

Akerson is currently making \$1.7 million in cash annually, on top of \$5.3 million in stock for the next three years. Before GM’s meltdown, the automaker’s CEO, Rick Wag-

oner, was raking in a much more “competitive” \$10.2 million.

“Competitive” might not actually be the right word here. In the year Wagoner all by himself was collecting \$10.2 million, Toyota’s top 32 execs – a group that included CEO Katsuaki Watanabe – were together pulling in only \$19.9 million.

### **7. Don Blankenship: Dirty business as usual**

Outside the nation’s coal fields, few Americans knew Don Blankenship, the CEO at Massey Energy, before last April. But that all changed after an explosion that month left 29 Massey miners dead. Reporters would soon grill Blankenship about the mine’s long history of safety violations, over 500 in 2009 alone.

“Violations,” the Massey chief coldheartedly retorted, “are unfortunately a normal part of the mining process.”

Almost as normal as windfall paychecks for Don Blankenship. The Massey CEO took home nearly \$34 million in 2005, about quadruple the industry standard. Over the last three years, he has waltzed away from his office with another \$38.2 million. But the real waltzing is only now beginning.

The 60-year-old Blankenship is retiring at the end of this year with a pension valued at \$5.7 million, another \$12 million in severance, still another \$27.2 million in deferred pay, title to a company-owned house, and a two-year consulting agreement that pays \$5,000 a month for no more than 32 hours work.

Blankenship may even exit, once all this year’s stats have come in, with a 2010 “performance” bonus that factors in safety.

How can a coal company CEO with 29 dead miners get a safety bonus? Massey’s flagship safety standard, “Non-Fatal Days Lost,” merely multiplies “the number of employee work-related accidents times 200,000 hours, divided by the total employee hours worked.” Death doesn’t factor in.

### **6. David Cote: King of America’s**

### **corporate political cash**

Coal can kill. Uranium, too. Workers who handle uranium, notes labor journalist Mike Elk, “suffer rates of cancer 10 times higher than the general public.”

That’s one big reason why the union local that represents workers at a Honeywell uranium facility in Illinois this past June rejected a management proposal to eliminate retiree medical care and boost – to \$8,500 a year – the out-of-pocket health care costs active workers have to pay.

A disappointed Honeywell, one of the nation’s top defense contractors, promptly locked the Illinois uranium workers out. Those workers, ever since then, have been trying to meet face to face with Honeywell CEO David Cote.

The week after Thanksgiving, the locked-out workers even traveled to Washington, D.C., where Cote, a member of President Obama’s National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility, was discussing with his fellow commissioners a variety of proposals to slash federal spending.

Cote, who took home \$13.2 million last year and \$28.7 million the year before, has been spending big himself – on political contributions. Under his direction, Honeywell has emerged as the nation’s top corporate political giver.

Cote’s agenda? Making sure the budget-cutters in Washington keep hands off defense contracts. As one alternative, press reports indicate, he’s pushing a freeze on the pay that goes to America’s servicemen and women.

### **5. David Tepper: This hedge needs clipping**

Nobody made more money last year than America’s top hedge fund managers, and no hedge fund manager made more than David Tepper. This 53-year-old former junk bond trader at Goldman Sachs hit a \$4 billion jackpot essentially betting, in the middle of the global financial meltdown, that Uncle Sam wouldn’t let Wall Street’s biggest banks go under.

Tepper is currently doing his best to single-handedly reboot America’s still depressed residential real estate market. In June, he spent \$43.5 million to pick up a summer home in the Hamptons that used to belong to former New Jersey governor and Goldman Sachs CEO Jon Corzine. The 6.5-acre beachfront spread sports six bedrooms, a tennis court, and a heated pool – and rented last summer for \$900,000.

The \$43.5 million Tepper shelled out ended up the highest price paid this year for a Hamptons home. The total also amounted to about half the record \$88 million the hedge fund industry raised for the homeless this past May at the 2010 Robin Hood Foundation dinner, Wall Street’s single biggest annual charity gala.

One official at the foundation dubbed that \$88 million an act of “extraordinary generosity.” Others might define “extraordinary” a bit differently. David Tepper and the rest of the hedge fund industry’s top 25 last year together pocketed \$25.3 billion. They averaged, each and every business day, over \$100 million.

### **4. Lloyd Blankfein: Getting the most from our tax dollars**

Lloyd Blankfein, the chief exec at Wall Street’s biggest bank, has had a stunning century. Since 2000, Bloomberg News calculates, Blankfein has earned a whopping \$125 million in cash bonuses and enough additional stock awards to leave him with a personal stash of Goldman shares worth over \$300 million.

And the goodies keep coming. This January, Blankfein will pick up another \$24.3 million in stock, as a delayed payout from previous years. He’ll also pick up millions more in soon-to-be-announced bonuses for 2010.

News of these bonuses, Wall Street analyst Jeanne Branthover predicts, will leave the public “outraged” and Wall Streeters “excited” – that “there’s still a reason to be working so hard.”

How hard is Lloyd Blankfein working?

**Cote’s agenda?**  
**Making sure the budget-cutters in Washington keep hands off defense contracts**

**The truth turned out to be anything but. Five months later, with no fanfare, an Oracle filing with the federal Securities and Exchange Commission revealed that the company was taking a huge severance write-off for personnel reductions**

He simply never misses an opportunity, however small, to make a buck off taxpayers. This year's prime example: the fees that Goldman Sachs has fixed on Build America Bonds, the federal program that's helping states and localities raise money for construction job projects.

Local governments, in tough times, often have to cut back on such projects because they can't afford to pay the interest on new bond offerings. With Build America Bonds, the federal government is paying 35 percent of this interest.

Investment banks charge municipalities fees to bring their bonds to investors. Goldman's fees typically range up to 0.625 percent of each bond issue. But Goldman has been charging, on Build America Bonds, up to 0.875 percent. Why so much? Goldman, Blankfein told Congress, had to "educate the market."

### **3. Mark Hurd: Unfurling a platinum parachute**

The truly greedy don't just grab – at the expense of those they overpower. And the truly greedy don't just feel entitled to grab all they can get. The truly greedy feel invincible while they're grabbing away, just like former Hewlett-Packard CEO Mark Hurd.

Hurd gained the HP reins in 2005. He proceeded to pocket \$134.2 million, through 2009, mainly by wheeling and dealing his way through dozens of mergers that killed nearly 40,000 jobs.

HP's board cheered Hurd on, every step of the way, until this past August when news surfaced that the married CEO had wined and dined a former erotic actress, handed her a huge and undeserved marketing contract, and then fudged HP's books to cover up his indiscretions.

That arrogance would cost Hurd his job, but not much else. Hurd left HP with a severance package that may total \$40 million and almost immediately landed a comfy new gig as president of business software giant Oracle. His new contract will bring Hurd, in his first Oracle year, as much as \$11

million – and a boss, Oracle CEO Larry Ellison, who just happens to be his buddy.

### **2. Larry Ellison: How dare we call him ruthless**

Mark Hurd has shown himself to be a whiz at the merge-and-purge corporate CEO two-step. But the master of that merger two-step – snatch a rival's customers, then fire its workers – has always been Oracle chief executive Larry Ellison, the third-richest man in America.

Oracle has bought out 66 companies over the years, and Ellison, the Wall Street Journal estimates, has collected \$1.84 billion in compensation just the last ten years alone. But Oracle's chief started this past year out vowing to change his ways.

In January, after consummating a \$7.4 billion takeover of Sun Microsystems, Ellison had "We're Hiring" buttons handed out at the news conference to announce the deal – and then royally denounced a news report that Oracle would be axing half of Sun's 27,600 workers.

"Those who wrote this should be ashamed of themselves," Ellison ranted. "The truth is, we are going to hire about 2,000 new people to beef up the Sun businesses – about twice as many as we will let go."

The truth turned out to be anything but. Five months later, with no fanfare, an Oracle filing with the federal Securities and Exchange Commission revealed that the company was taking a huge severance write-off for personnel reductions. As many as 8,600 jobs, one analyst calculated, would be history.

### **1. Andrew Clark: Education really does pay**

Just a few years ago, at the height of America's subprime frenzy, bankers and mortgage lenders were making mega millions hoodwinking vulnerable old people into refinancing their homes at unconscionably high interest rates.

Today, in an economy still reeling from that fraud, a new high-growth industry –

the for-profit higher ed sector – is hoodwinking vulnerable young people into taking on taxpayer-financed student loans they can't possibly repay.

And now this industry, facing federal regulations that aim to rein in its deceit, is waging a massive media campaign based on the phony premise that Washington wants to make it “harder to get the education” students “need to succeed.”

No one is personally profiting more from this for-profit higher ed industry chutzpah than the CEO of the San Diego-based Bridgepoint Education, an enterprise that specializes, of late, in going after returning military veterans. That CEO, Andrew Clark, last year took home \$20.5 million.

For-profit colleges didn't pay any particular attention to military vets until 2008. But Congress that year gave veteran tuition benefits a significant hike, and the for-profits rushed to gobble up the newly available tuition dollars. Bridgepoint's military enrollment soared to 9,200 in 2009, up from

just 329 three years earlier.

Overall, the *New York Times* recently reported, Andrew Clark's Bridgepoint last year spent more on marketing and promotion than on educating its students.

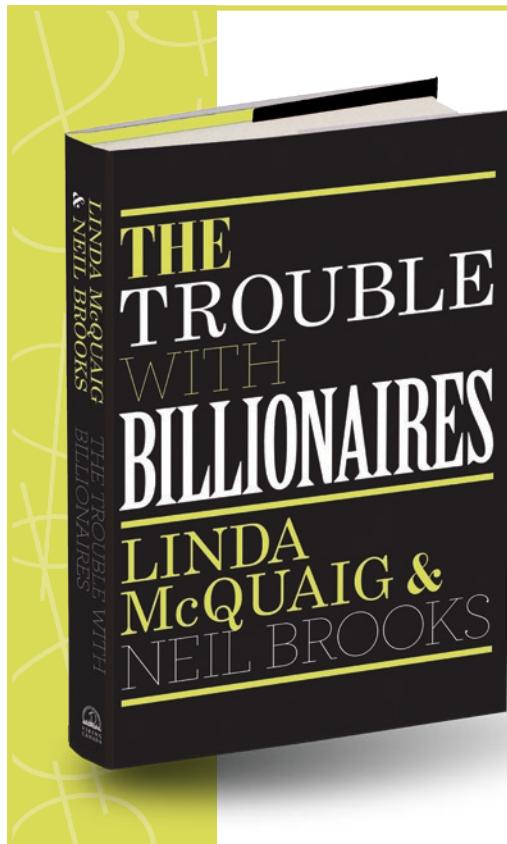
For-profit colleges have hit upon an enormously lucrative business model: Promise vets – and other potential students – anything to get them to enroll, even if that means signing them up for courses of little real value or classes, the *Times* notes, they would be “all but certain” to fail. If students do fail or drop out, no prob. The for-profits get to keep the tuition, courtesy of America's taxpayers.

Plenty of America's power suits, to be sure, are making more money than Andrew Clark. But none are grabbing with any more gusto.

If students do fail or drop out, no prob. The for-profits get to keep the tuition, courtesy of America's taxpayers

**CT**

**Sam Pizzigati** is the editor of the online weekly *Too Much* – [www.toomuchonline.org](http://www.toomuchonline.org) – and an associate fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies.



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# The UK's odious debts

**George Monbiot** says many of Britain's PFI deals were undemocratic and against the national interest and it's time the government stopped honouring them

If a hospital no longer requires the services it contracted to buy, tough. If clinical needs or local demographics change, tough

**Y**ou've been told that nothing is sacred; that no state spending is safe from being cut or eroded through inflation. You've been misled. As the new public spending data released by the government show, a £267bn bill has been both ring-fenced and index-linked. This sum, spread over 50 years or so, guarantees the welfare not of state pensioners or children or the unemployed, but of a different class of customer. To make way, everything else must be cut, further and faster than it would otherwise have been.

This is the money the state now owes to private corporations: the banks, construction and service companies which built infrastructure under the Private Finance Initiative. In September 1997 the Labour government gave companies a legal guarantee that their payments would never be cut. Whenever there was a conflict between the needs of patients or pupils and PFI payments, it would thenceforth be resolved in favour of the consortia. The NHS now owes private companies £50bn for infrastructure that cost only £11bn to build, plus £15bn for maintenance charges.

PFI contracts typically last for 25 or 30 years; in one case (Norfolk and Norwich University Hospitals) for 60 years. In 1997 the British Medical Association warned that "the NHS could find itself with a facility which is

obsolete in 10 or 20 years' time, but for which it will still have to pay for 30 years or more." No one's celebrating being proved right.

This summer Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, thanks to the extortionate terms of its PFI contract, found itself with a shortfall of £70m. Under other circumstances it would suspend maintenance work and cut ancillary services until the crisis had passed. But its contract demands that it does the opposite: it must protect non-clinical services by cutting doctors, nurses and beds.

If a hospital no longer requires the services it contracted to buy, tough. If clinical needs or local demographics change, tough. Where hospitals can't pay the massive penalty clauses said to lurk in the agreements, the NHS must be re-shaped around contractual, not clinical, needs.

## An outrageous racket

The cost and inflexibility of PFI is an outrage, a racket, the legacy of 13 years of New Labour appeasement, triangulation and false accounting. At first sight, it looks as if nothing can be done: contracts are contracts. What I'm about to propose is a wild shot, but I hope it deserves, at least, to be discussed. I contend that the money we owe to the PFI consortia should be considered odious debt.

Odious debt is a legal term usually applied

to the endowments of dictators in the developing world. It means debt incurred without the consent of the people and against the national interest. While the concept is not accepted by all legal scholars, it has some traction. In 2008 Ecuador refused to pay debts which, it argued, had been illegitimately acquired by previous governments. I believe it applies to at least some of our PFI liabilities.

PFI was a Tory invention but became a Labour doctrine. The 1997 Labour manifesto announced that the party would “reinvigorate the Private Finance Initiative”. But it was vague about the detail. Labour front-benchers had announced that some areas of public provision were off-limits. For example, John Prescott pledged that “Labour will take back private prisons into public ownership”. Jack Straw promised to “bring these prisons into proper public control and run them directly as public services.” But within two months of taking office, Straw had renewed one private prison contract and announced two new ones. There was no democratic mandate for this policy, which appears to have arisen from secret talks with companies.

Secrecy surrounded the whole scheme. To this day, PFI contracts remain commercially confidential. You can't read them; MPs can't read them. We don't know what we are being stung for or whether the costs are justified. But there are some powerful clues.

Blair's administration gave public bodies no choice: if they wanted new projects, they had to use the private finance initiative. In some cases private companies weren't interested, so the schemes had to be reverse-engineered to attract them. In Coventry, for example, NHS bosses originally sought £30m of public money to refurbish the city's two hospitals. When the government told them it was “PFI or bust”, the refurbishment plan was dropped in favour of a scheme to knock down both hospitals and build a new one – with fewer beds and doctors and nurses – at an eventual, corporate-friendly cost of £410m. A report commissioned by the local health authority found that the scheme had been “progressively tailored to fit the needs of pri-

vate investors”. To get their new buildings or services, public bodies had to show that PFI was cheaper than public procurement. The system was rigged to make this easy. They could choose their own value for “optimism bias” in public procurement, which means the amount by which they guessed that a public project might overrun its budget. But, by official decree, optimism bias was deemed not to exist in private procurement.

They could also attach whatever price they wanted to the risk ostensibly being transferred to the private sector. A paper published in the *British Medical Journal* shows that, before risk transfer was costed, the hospital schemes it studied would have been built more cheaply with public money. After the risk was estimated, they all tipped the other way; in some cases by less than 0.1%.

These valuation exercises were notional anyway, because as soon as a preferred bidder for the contract had been chosen, the agreed prices were junked. The winning consortium had the public authority over a barrel, and could renegotiate at leisure. Desperate public bodies were gulled and outmanoeuvred with the blessing of central government, which sought only to keep the corporations off its back and the liabilities off its balance sheets. Was this a legitimate means of loading our schools and hospitals with debt? I don't think so.

I know that the chances of getting any of this debt recognised as odious, especially by the current government, are small to say the least. But where else do we go with this? I've been writing about inflexible PFI contracts since 1998. I've wasted months on this mission, trying to understand and explain the most complex issue in public life. For all the good it's done, I might as well have gone fishing. Now I see corporations squatting like great cuckoos on our public services, while officials pour the money which should have been spent on nurses and teachers into their widening bills. Yes, I'm bitter. Yes, I'm clutching at straws. But have you got a better idea?

To this day, PFI contracts remain commercially confidential. You can't read them; MPs can't read them. We don't know what we are being stung for or whether the costs are justified

CT

# The techno-fantasies of Evo Morales

**Chellis Glendinning** tells a story about the consequences of modernisation in Bolivia

Perhaps the tip-off came when President Morales proclaimed via his government TV station that the goal was to make Bolivia's economy like that of Brazil, which is currently viewed as the #1 country in Latin America to invest in

**O**n 22 January 2006, Bolivia's newly-inaugurated President Evo Morales made his exuberant procession through the streets of La Paz to join the throngs of supporters awaiting him in the Plaza de los Héroes. To the excited crowds, Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano announced that the historic event signaled "the end of fear." Vice-president Álvaro García Linera shouted that, in the new government, poor Bolivianos would be given equality at last.

And President Morales proclaimed, "Our job is to finish the work of Che Guevara!"

It was a triumphant day – for the most destitute country in South America had finally risen above the centuries of oligarchies and dictatorships to elect one of its own: the first *indígena* to lead the nation in 500 years.

But who, at that peak moment, was remembering that Che Guevara was not just the hero of courage and confrontation whose life's work lay unfinished due to assassination in Bolivia? He was also Cuba's great pusher of industry, development, and modernization.

And so, true to his words, Morales has pursued industry, development, and modernization.

#### From Flores to Progreso

Perhaps the tip-off to this lunge toward tech-

nological expansion arose when billboards leading into the tiny agricultural town of Tiquipaya were abruptly changed from "EL CAPITÁL DE FLORES" to "EL CAPITÁL DEL PROGRESO" – and high-rise apartments and office buildings, suddenly and without local input, began to tower over tin-roofed shanties and women hawking papayas on the Reducto.

Or perhaps the tip-off came when President Morales proclaimed via his government TV station that the goal was to make Bolivia's economy like that of Brazil, which is currently viewed as the #1 (and, according to financial advisers in the US, *only*) country in Latin America to invest in.

Or perhaps it surfaced when he claimed access to wireless *Banda Ancha*/Universal Broadband as a "human right" – despite that international scientists have proven that electromagnetic emissions can cause sleeplessness, anxiety disorders, depression, cancer, genetic breakage, heart disorders, immunological deterioration, and other health problems.

The discovery of lithium was the biggest boon to Morales' urge to emulate Brazil's rise to economic potency. The rarity of the "gold of the 21st century" – with its importance to the up-and-coming electric-car battery industry, as well as to nuclear weaponry – has put Bolivia in the running to build a Saudi-Arabia-size bank account,

with battery sales between 2011 and 2014 slated to top \$902 million and total sales possibly reaching \$515 billion. At the same time, partnerships with the likes of Mitsubishi and South Korea have traditional communities nervous about any possibility of local input – as does the inevitable contamination of air, water, and soil via leaching, leaks, spills, and emissions.

The Morales administration is likewise building multi-million-dollar hydro-electric dams whose construction is requiring the displacement of entire villages. The president is allowing Brazil to build two dams near the border that will outsize the Hoover Dam by 300 percent, just as Brazil is pitching in \$1.5 billion toward Bolivia's hydrocarbon industry, with an emphasis on petrochemicals. Energía Argentina is erecting a 900-mile pipeline through Bolivia for importing natural gas to Argentina, while the administration has signed a contract with Jindal corporation of India to construct one of the largest iron mines in the world near Santa Cruz. In August 2010, Morales announced plans for an international state-of-the-tech airport in Oruro that will increase toxic contamination, while providing access to international corporations partnering in mining deals. And in September the administration verified that caches of uranium exist in the hills of Potosí and the country would partner with Iran to explore excavation. By October, after a quick trip to Iran, Morales announced his desire to build nuclear plants in Bolivia.

Then there's his pet mega-project.

The Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America aims to construct mega-high-tech-industrial-highway-telecommunications-corridor networks throughout the continent, and Bolivia's part has already been started: a 300-kilometer highway that will bust through a national eco-reserve, slashing the forestlands of at least 11 endangered animals and 60 indigenous communities, some of whom are the last to live according to their traditional hunter-gatherer ways. The Vil-

la Tunari-San Ignacio de Moxos highway promises to create environmental havoc; foster development in the form of motels, gas stations, and entertainment centers – all the while emanating a swath of electromagnetic radiation. And this is not to mention how industrial thoroughfares historically enhance prostitution and narco-trafficking, both of which already pose problems in the area.

Local communities are protesting these projects by demanding the autonomy and local decision-making that President Morales daily promises via his Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia. But just as political scientist Langdon Winner pointed out in *Autonomous Technology: Technics as a Theme in Political Thought* (1977), the pursuit of technology – which always springs from political urges and always has political effects – escapes the democratic process because it is viewed as an inevitable aspect of “progress.”

Despite his Aymará origins, it seems, Evo Morales has been captured by said fantasy.

**Local communities are protesting these projects by demanding the autonomy and local decision-making that President Morales daily promises via his Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia**

#### Borrachero del Poder

The truth about Bolivia's flurry of *nouveau-tech* modernization is that, while such a pursuit may have appeared to be the means toward sustainability and defense for an island like Cuba, under attack by the world's most potent nation-state in the 1960's – today's ecologists, environmentalists, social-movement activists, and traditional peoples assert that exploitation/expansion-based development can no longer be the way up and out.

Writing in mid-20th century, US philosopher Lewis Mumford and French sociologist Jacques Ellul were among the earliest to apply a systemic analysis to technological society, noting that the Machine itself had become its template, infiltrating every thought, act, agency, architecture, and institution. Their breakthrough insights were followed in late century by such intellects as political scientist Langdon Winner, physicist Vandana Shiva, historian Kirk-

## SOUTH AMERICA

**Grabbed by such contradictions, in August 2010, Morales' own Minister of the Environment, Juan Pablo Ramos, resigned his post – “out of conscience.”**

patrick Sale, farmer-poet Wendell Berry, community activist Gustavo Esteva, and others – all of whom agree on the essential dysfunction of industrial technologies and the mega-machine-scale society they foster. And their work has been substantiated by a cavalcade of witnesses to the impossibility of continued technological development *a la* late-stage-mass society – to name just a few: Peak-Oil expert Richard Heinberg, ecologist Stephanie Mills, journalist Danny Schechter, and biologist E.O. Wilson.

For all his attention to international consultants, President Morales has made zero use of the perspectives drawn by such voices – who curiously share with him a fundamental critique of capitalism and the dominant civilization, as well as respect for the traditional wisdoms of indigenous cultures. Not to mention the myriad intellectuals, social-movement comrades, and *indigena* thinkers within Bolivia, many of whom have become cynical about that glorious hope surging through the Plaza de los Héroes in 2006.

One of those is the president of the National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu, Rafael Quispe, who is demanding a moratorium on extractive projects. Another is theologian/government-insider Rafael Puente, who describes 2010 as the start of the “*Borrachero del Poder*”/“Drunk with Power” phase of the administration. Cochabamba’s Water War leader Oscar Olivera holds to the notion that true power resides “in the plaza, not in the palace,” while his sister, water activist Marcela Olivera, claims she is witness to two different Evo Morales’: the one who makes international eco-proclamations and the one, at home, who is pushing dams, uranium excavation, cell towers, and mega-highways.

Grabbed by such contradictions, in August 2010, Morales’ own Minister of the Environment, Juan Pablo Ramos, resigned his post – “out of conscience.”

### Contradictions and Ironies

The irony is that President Morales is cham-

pioned by activists the world over as something of a modern-day Che Guevara.

His screw-you-Copenhagen Cumbre Mundial de los Pueblos Sobre el Cambio Climático held in Cochabamba in April 2010 was a rare opportunity for global climate-change activists to gather their energies toward *real* progress on addressing the environmental problems foisted by technocapitalist excesses

But little was it known – amongst all the excitement, sunrise ceremonies, Aztec dancers, and marches by local indigenous groups – that Morales’s government had actually *tarped* over the all-pervasive carcasses of fresh-cut ancient trees in wood lots around Cochabamba. Little was it noticed that they had installed a flashy, multi-storyed, conference-ready, Wi-Fi-ed-to-the-Max, luxury hotel – for the occasion – in the rock-dusted-nowhere-shanty town of Tiqupaya where most people live in adobe-tin huts. Or that the government had unilaterally thrown up a barrage of cell towers for global activists’ Blackberries, for which local residents would have little use, but from which they would bear the health brunt for years to come.

Plus, Morales made hay with the global spotlight right before the conference, announcing his intent to launch Bolivia’s very own telecommunications satellite whose purpose is to splay electromagnetic radiation over the unwitting countryside – and, ironically, whose name will be Tupak Katari, after the great Andean freedom fighter. When local activists tried to enter the meeting hall with banners in protest, the military threw them out.

Now President Morales has inspired activists around the world again, in Cancún, with his *gritos* of “*¡Planeta o Muerte!*” and “*¡Venceremos!*” brilliantly bringing to mind earlier, perhaps more-empowering times.

Surely today’s world – perched as it is on the edge of ecological/social/economic/cultural collapse – presents a wild ride through ironies and contradictions. Speaking on “Democracy Now,” the president quipped,

"What is Bolivia going to live off? Let's be realistic."

The sad lesson of the slashed hopes of the decolonization movements that took the planet by storm after World War II was that the set-up of power relations resulting from centuries of empires is a predicament that fosters contradiction: how to recover local dignity and equality in a world demanding full-tilt participation in global power politics. One can reflect on the *sabiduria*/wisdom of the writer Andrew Schmookler in his 1984 *The Parable of the Tribes*, in which he points out that as long as one bully is playing the field, all other players must in some way – whether by submission, co-op-

tation, or bullying-up – play too.

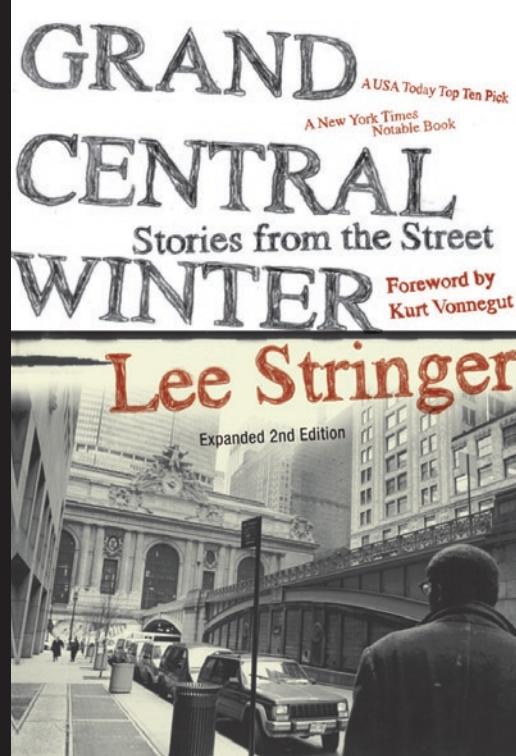
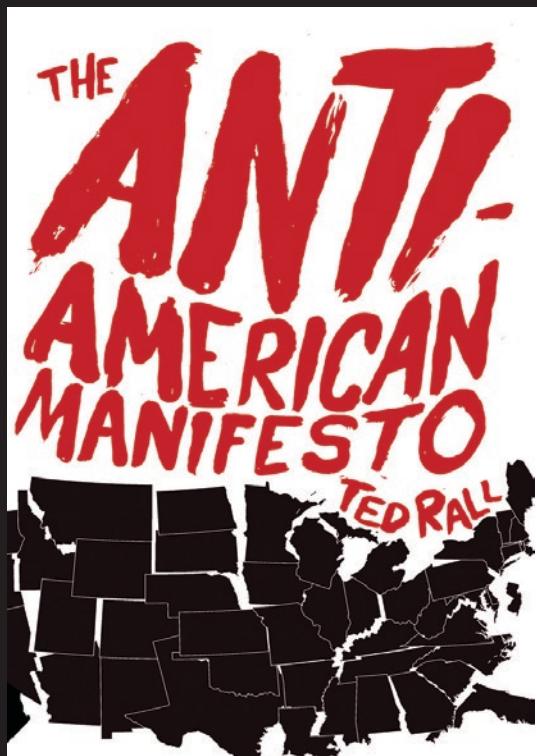
For all his sincerity, good intentions, and love of *charango* music, Morales appears to be allowing himself – and his country – to become victims of situation by traveling a superhighway paved in what some might call a state-of-the-past fantasy. **CT**

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Morales appears to be allowing himself – and his country – to become victims of situation by traveling a superhighway paved in what some might call a state-of-the-past fantasy

## GRAND CENTRAL WINTER

LEE STRINGER



**THE ANTI-AMERICAN  
MANIFESTO**  
**TED RALL**

# Why are wars not reported honestly?

The public needs to know the truth about wars. So why have journalists colluded with governments to hoodwink us? asks **John Pilger**

Never has so much official energy been expended in ensuring journalists collude with the makers of rapacious wars which, say the media-friendly generals, are now “perpetual”

In the US Army manual on counterinsurgency, the American commander General David Petraeus describes Afghanistan as a “war of perception ... conducted continuously using the news media”. What really matters is not so much the day-to-day battles against the Taliban as the way the adventure is sold in America where “the media directly influence the attitude of key audiences”. Reading this, I was reminded of the Venezuelan general who led a coup against the democratic government in 2002. “We had a secret weapon,” he boasted. “We had the media, especially TV. You got to have the media.”

Never has so much official energy been expended in ensuring journalists collude with the makers of rapacious wars which, say the media-friendly generals, are now “perpetual”. In echoing the west’s more verbose warlords, such as the waterboarding former US vice-president Dick Cheney, who predicated “50 years of war”, they plan a state of permanent conflict wholly dependent on keeping at bay an enemy whose name they dare not speak: the public.

At Chicksands in Bedfordshire, the Ministry of Defence’s psychological warfare (Psyops) establishment, media trainers devote themselves to the task, immersed in a jargon world of “information dominance”, “asymmetric threats” and “cyberthreats”. They share premises with those who teach

the interrogation methods that have led to a public inquiry into British military torture in Iraq. Disinformation and the barbarity of colonial war have much in common.

Of course, only the jargon is new. In the opening sequence of my film, *The War You Don’t See*, there is reference to a pre-WikiLeaks private conversation in December 1917 between David Lloyd George, Britain’s prime minister during much of the first world war, and CP Scott, editor of the *Manchester Guardian*. “If people really knew the truth,” the prime minister said, “the war would be stopped tomorrow. But of course they don’t know, and can’t know.”

In the wake of this “war to end all wars”, Edward Bernays, a confidante of President Woodrow Wilson, coined the term “public relations” as a euphemism for propaganda “which was given a bad name in the war”. In his book, *Propaganda* (1928), Bernays described PR as “an invisible government which is the true ruling power in our country” thanks to “the intelligent manipulation of the masses”. This was achieved by “false realities” and their adoption by the media. (One of Bernays’s early successes was persuading women to smoke in public. By associating smoking with women’s liberation, he achieved headlines that lauded cigarettes as “torches of freedom”.)

I began to understand this as a young reporter during the American war in Vietnam.

During my first assignment, I saw the results of the bombing of two villages and the use of Napalm B, which continues to burn beneath the skin; many of the victims were children; trees were festooned with body parts. The lament that “these unavoidable tragedies happen in wars” did not explain why virtually the entire population of South Vietnam was at grave risk from the forces of their declared “ally”, the United States. PR terms like “pacification” and “collateral damage” became our currency. Almost no reporter used the word “invasion”. “Involvement” and later “quagmire” became staples of a news vocabulary that recognised the killing of civilians merely as tragic mistakes and seldom questioned the good intentions of the invaders.

On the walls of the Saigon bureaus of major American news organisations were often displayed horrific photographs that were never published and rarely sent because it was said they were would “sensationalise” the war by upsetting readers and viewers and therefore were not “objective”. The My Lai massacre in 1968 was not reported from Vietnam, even though a number of reporters knew about it (and other atrocities like it), but by a freelance in the US, Seymour Hersh. The cover of *Newsweek* magazine called it an “American tragedy”, implying that the invaders were the victims: a purging theme enthusiastically taken up by Hollywood in movies such as *The Deer Hunter* and *Platoon*. The war was flawed and tragic, but the cause was essentially noble. Moreover, it was “lost” thanks to the irresponsibility of a hostile, uncensored media.

Although the opposite of the truth, such false realities became the “lessons” learned by the makers of present-day wars and by much of the media. Following Vietnam, “embedding” journalists became central to war policy on both sides of the Atlantic. With honourable exceptions, this succeeded, especially in the US. In March 2003, some 700 embedded reporters and camera crews accompanied the invading American forces in Iraq. Watch their excited reports,

and it is the liberation of Europe all over again. The Iraqi people are distant, fleeting bit players; John Wayne had risen again.

The apogee was the victorious entry into Baghdad, and the TV pictures of crowds cheering the felling of a statue of Saddam Hussein. Behind this façade, an American psyops team successfully manipulated what an ignored US army report describes as a “media circus [with] almost as many reporters as Iraqis”. Rageh Omaar, who was there for the BBC, reported on the main evening news: “People have come out welcoming [the Americans], holding up V-signs. This is an image taking place across the whole of the Iraqi capital.” In fact, across most of Iraq, largely unreported, the bloody conquest and destruction of a whole society was well under way.

In *The War You Don’t See*, Omaar speaks with admirable frankness. “I didn’t really do my job properly,” he says. “I’d hold my hand up and say that one didn’t press the most uncomfortable buttons hard enough.” He describes how British military propaganda successfully manipulated coverage of the fall of Basra, which BBC News 24 reported as having fallen “17 times”. This coverage, he says, was “a giant echo chamber”.

The sheer magnitude of Iraqi suffering in the onslaught had little place in the news. Standing outside 10 Downing St, on the night of the invasion, Andrew Marr, then the BBC’s political editor, declared, “[Tony Blair] said that they would be able to take Baghdad without a bloodbath and that in the end the Iraqis would be celebrating, and on both of those points he has been proved conclusively right...” I asked Marr for an interview, but received no reply. In studies of the television coverage by the University of Wales, Cardiff, and Media Tenor, the BBC’s coverage was found to reflect overwhelmingly the government line and that reports of civilian suffering were relegated. Media Tenor places the BBC and America’s CBS at the bottom of a league of western broadcasters in the time they allotted to opposition to the invasion. “I am perfectly open to

**On the walls  
of the Saigon  
bureaus of major  
American news  
organisations  
were often  
displayed horrific  
photographs  
that were never  
published and  
rarely sent  
because it  
was said they  
were would  
“sensationalise”  
the war by  
upsetting readers  
and viewers and  
therefore were not  
“objective”**

## MEDIA BEATEN

**"If we who are meant to find out what the bastards are up to, if we don't report what we find, if we don't speak up," he told me, "who's going to stop the whole bloody business happening again?"**

the accusation that we were hoodwinked," said Jeremy Paxman, talking about Iraq's non-existent weapons of mass destruction to a group of students last year. "Clearly we were." As a highly paid professional broadcaster, he omitted to say why he was hoodwinked.

Dan Rather, who was the CBS news anchor for 24 years, was less reticent. "There was a fear in every newsroom in America," he told me, "a fear of losing your job . . . the fear of being stuck with some label, unpatriotic or otherwise." Rather says war has made "stenographers out of us" and that had journalists questioned the deceptions that led to the Iraq war, instead of amplifying them, the invasion would not have happened. This is a view now shared by a number of senior journalists I interviewed in the US.

In Britain, David Rose, whose *Observer* articles played a major part in falsely linking Saddam Hussein to al-Qaida and 9/11, gave me a courageous interview in which he said, "I can make no excuses . . . What happened [in Iraq] was a crime, a crime on a very large scale . . ."

"Does that make journalists accomplices?" I asked him.

"Yes . . . unwitting perhaps, but yes."

What is the value of journalists speaking like this? The answer is provided by the great reporter James Cameron, whose brave and revealing filmed report, made with Malcolm Aird, of the bombing of civilians in North Vietnam was banned by the BBC. "If we who are meant to find out what the bastards are up to, if we don't report what we find, if we don't speak up," he told me, "who's going to stop the whole bloody busi-

ness happening again?"

Cameron could not have imagined a modern phenomenon such as WikiLeaks but he would have surely approved. In the current avalanche of official documents, especially those that describe the secret machinations that lead to war – such as the American mania over Iran – the failure of journalism is rarely noted. And perhaps the reason Julian Assange seems to excite such hostility among journalists serving a variety of "lobbies", those whom George Bush's press spokesman once called "complicit enablers", is that WikiLeaks and its truth-telling shames them. Why has the public had to wait for WikiLeaks to find out how great power really operates?

As a leaked 2,000-page Ministry of Defence document reveals, the most effective journalists are those who are regarded in places of power not as embedded or clubbable, but as a "threat". This is the threat of real democracy, whose "currency", said Thomas Jefferson, is "free flowing information".

In my film, I asked Assange how WikiLeaks dealt with the draconian secrecy laws for which Britain is famous. "Well," he said, "when we look at the Official Secrets Act labelled documents, we see a statement that it is an offence to retain the information and it is an offence to destroy the information, so the only possible outcome is that we have to publish the information." These are extraordinary times.

**CT**

**John Pilger's latest film, *The War You Don't See*, is now available on DVD at Amazon.co.uk. His web site is [www.johnpilger.com](http://www.johnpilger.com)**

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# The torturers revisited

Read *Kafka* if you want to understand the modern world, writes **Paul Balles**

**T**he *Trial* is a novel by Franz Kafka, first published in 1925. One of Kafka's best-known works, it tells the story of a man arrested and prosecuted by a remote, inaccessible authority, with the nature of his crime never revealed either to him or the reader.

The theme developed a familiar ring to it following the imprisonment of “enemy combatants” in Guantanamo. Echoes of such places come from another Kafka story, *In the Penal Colony*, where everyone is guilty simply because they’re there. If they weren’t guilty, they wouldn’t be there.

This was the kind of assumption made by the torturers at Abu Ghraib or the jailers in secret CIA prisons around the world or the guards at Guantanamo. You can be sentenced without trial or defence.

*In the Penal Colony* describes the last use of an elaborate torture and execution device that carves the sentence of the condemned prisoner on his skin in a script before letting him die, all in the course of twelve hours.

“It’s a remarkable piece of apparatus,” says the officer in *In the Penal Colony* to the explorer and surveyed with a certain air of admiration of the apparatus which was after all quite familiar to him.

“In any case, the condemned man looked so like a submissive dog that one might have thought he could be left to run free on the surrounding hills and would only need

to be whistled for when the execution was due to begin,” says the story’s narrator.

One can easily imagine the jailers at Abu Ghraib making such psycho comments as they attached electric wires to their prisoners’ fingers or forcing a prisoner to remain nude while dogs attacked him.

That was when cell phones and camcorders made it possible to record the sick psychotic joys of torturing for jailers or their remote commandants.

As for commandants, GW Bush recalls in his memoir that when the CIA asked him whether they could proceed with waterboarding of Khalid Sheik Mohammed, the alleged plotter of the 9/11 attacks, Bush replied “Damn right,” reported the Washington Post.

It’s Kafkaesque to imagine this scenario in Guantanamo as they set up the waterboard to nearly drown their captives. CIA interrogators used the controversial waterboarding technique 183 times on Khalid Sheik Mohammed.

Former Vice President Dick Cheney has also acknowledged supporting torture. “I was a big supporter of waterboarding,” he boasted in a television interview in February.

One must wonder whether they were enjoying, like Kafka’s officer or commandant, remote thoughts about their minions inflicting pain on untried “enemy combatants”.

**One can easily imagine the jailers at Abu Ghraib making such psycho comments as they attached electric wires to their prisoners’ fingers or forcing a prisoner to remain nude while dogs attacked him**

## BACK TO KAFKA

**Echoes of Kafka,  
Abu Ghraib,  
Guantanamo  
and the CIA's  
black holes of  
extraordinary  
rendition  
reverberate  
from the UK**

On November 5th Al Jazeera reported that Council members in Geneva, Switzerland, levelled a barrage of criticisms at the US administration calling for the closure of the Guantanamo Bay prison and for investigations into alleged torture by US troops abroad.

Torturing untried prisoners is by no means an exclusive province of America. On November 6th, the New York Times reported that a lawyer for 200 Iraqis demanded a public inquiry into what they described as brutal mistreatment by British soldiers in a secret detention centre near Basra.

The lawyer "told the High Court in London on Friday that the abuse amounted to 'Britain's Abu Ghraib.' The assertion was

buttressed with video recordings."

Echoes of Kafka, Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo and the CIA's black holes of extraordinary rendition reverberate from the UK.

The US administration continues to deny that torture is torture. "Let there be no doubt, the United States does not torture and it will not torture," says Harold Koh, legal adviser at the US State Department.

CT

*Kafka should be a must read for all government officials, prison staff, members of the military and responsible citizens. Paul J. Balles is a retired American university professor and freelance writer who has lived in the Middle East for many years.*

# FRAMING INNOCENCE

A Mother's Photographs, a Prosecutor's Zeal, and a Small Town's Response

**LYNN POWELL**

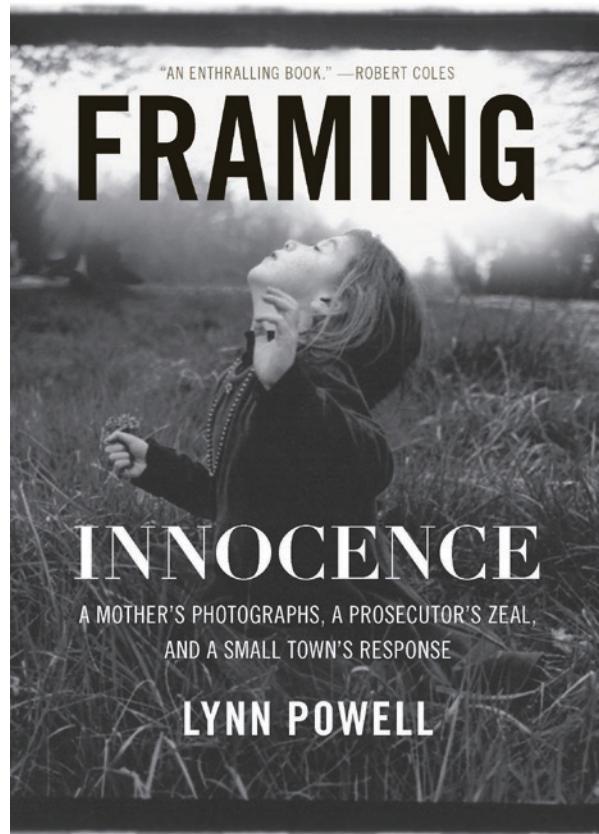
The story of how innocent photographs taken by a mother of her child became the heart of a wrenching legal battle

"A fascinating cautionary tale. . . . Powell is a facile writer, and her closeness to the material adds a subjective element to the story that makes it more immediate and compelling." —

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# Ex-spoofs v Assange

It's not Julian Assange whom we should be afraid of, writes **Sherwood Ross**, better to look into the activities of the CIA

**T**wo writers with close ties to US intelligence agencies published a shocking article Dec. 23rd in the *Miami Herald* asserting that WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange is “a narcissistic nut” with “blood on his hands” and President Obama should do “whatever it takes to shut down WikiLeaks.” Without giving a single example of how Assange’s disclosures caused blood to flow, co-authors Thomas Spencer and F. W. Rustmann warn, “No nation can operate without secrets. Unless we adopt an aggressive plan, adopt new tough laws and take immediate action – overt and covert – we face disaster.” The authors go on to state the president should be joined in this suppression of the press by “Congress and our entire intelligence, military and law-enforcement communities” because “(our)lives are depending” on it.

While the above is vaguely worded it does appear that Spencer and Rustmann are calling for “immediate” and “covert” action – to put a stop to Assange’s activities. In short, they appear to be saying Obama & Co. have the right to terminate Assange covertly, that is to say, secretly, and, as the word has come to mean in CIA parlance, “violently” as well. It is no surprise that two writers closely tied to US spy agencies appear to be advocating covert action against Assange, but it is a bit of a shock that the *Miami Herald* would publish this seeming

call for blood.

Pardon me for suspecting this hysterical screech for Assange’s scalp was published with the blessing of the Central Intelligence Agency(CIA). Rustmann spent 24 years as a CIA payroller and was an instructor in its covert training center, so he would know, if anybody, how to stick Assange’s feet into a block of cement and dump him in the Everglades. (Hollywood might even make a movie about it, with Rustmann’s intoning, “He sleeps with the alligators.”) As for *Herald* co-author Spencer, he is a lawyer who represents intelligence officers and is a Life Member in the Association of Former Intelligence Officers.

Rustmann’s former CIA employer, by the way, probably could have taught gangster Al Capone a thing or two. Capone’s record for murders at a single “massacre” was a measly seven, famously achieved in Chicago on Saint Valentine’s Day, 1929. The CIA’s covert killers, who do things globally, triggered a slaughter of 75,000 folks just in El Salvador alone in the 1980s. By some estimates, the CIA has been responsible for overthrowing a score of governments resulting in the murders of millions of people around the world.

Apparently, Spencer and Rustmann weren’t paying attention to former CIA Director Robert Gates, now our Secretary of Defense, who conceded there was no proof

**The CIA’s covert killers, who do things globally, triggered a slaughter of 75,000 folks just in El Salvador alone in the 1980s.**

## THOUGHTS ON ASSANGE / 1

*Herald writers  
Rustmann and  
Spencer seemingly  
want to silence  
Assange the same  
way the CIA has  
often silenced  
its enemies*

that Assange has blood on his hands. As Scott Horton pointed out in *Harper's*: "When pressed by the Senate Armed Services Committee, Secretary Gates was forced to admit that these claims were hyperbole - 'the leak... did not disclose any sensitive intelligence sources or methods.' Gates went on to acknowledge that there was no evidence of any informant being killed or threatened or even requesting protection as a result of the WikiLeaks publications."

In fact, the charge Rustmann and Spencer make about Assange having "blood on his hands" is true not of WikiLeaks but is true over and over again of the CIA. It is the world's No. 1 gangster organization and it operates at the direction of the White House, and has done so for years. Only on Dec. 21st, the *Associated Press* reported from Santiago that "A Chilean government lawyer is seeking to arrest four retired army officers for the killing of renowned folk singer Victor Jara during the 1973 coup." And which US Agency was behind that violent overthrow? At least 3,000 innocent Chileans were tortured and executed by the generals with the support of the CIA. And Spencer and Rustmann want WikiLeaks shut down? It is the CIA that needs to be abolished.

While Rustmann and Spencer do not cite a single instance of blood on Assange's hands, investigative journalist William Blum in *Rogue State* (Common Courage Press) reels off a long list of CIA violent actions more than 20 pages long. Here are just a few:

**Greece:** The CIA set up an internal security agency for the neo-fascist government in 1949 that engaged in widespread torture.

**Philippines:** The CIA interfered in the elections, culminating in the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos, the torture tyrant.

**Iran:** In 1953, the CIA overthrew a democratically-elected government. Thousands were subsequently tortured and killed. (Wonder why the Iranians hate the US today?)

**Guatemala:** A CIA-led coup overthrew Jacobo Arbenz in 1953, ticking off 40 years

of torture and murder that killed more than 200,000 people.

**The Congo:** The CIA was involved in the assassination of Patrice Lumumba and it pushed Mobutu Sese Seko into power "whose corruption and cruelty," Blum wrote, "shocked even his CIA handlers."

**Ghana:** In 1966, the CIA backed the military to overthrow Kwame Nkrumah.

**Bolivia:** The CIA helped the military in 1964 overthrow President Victor Paz by force and violence.

CIA lies to its own government have resulted in horrific wars in which thousands died. As Tim Weiner writes in his book, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of The CIA* (Anchor), on August 9, 1974, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger received information that "the CIA had been lying about what it had been doing in Athens, deliberately misleading the American government -- and those lies had helped start the war consuming Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus, a war in which thousands died." Blood on whose hands?

*Herald* writers Rustmann and Spencer seemingly want to silence Assange the same way the CIA has often silenced its enemies. During my college days, when I worked on the *Herald*, it would have been unthinkable for any editor to allow a contributor to advocate "covertly" attacking another individual in the pages of a newspaper. Apparently, times have changed.

Today, as the CIA overthrows one government after another, it follows the philosophy of Karl Marx, who declared, "Force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one." And as the CIA illegally ships weapons to its friendly dictators around the world, it advances the famous thesis of Red China's Mao Tse-tung, who believed "political power grows out of the barrel of a gun." Abolishing the CIA, which has now adopted the old violent Communist approach in its operations, and transferring its budget to the Peace Corps, is a step that would cause bells to ring around the world. Meanwhile, Assange might do well to hire a few body guards.

CT

**Sherwood Ross** is a Miami-based writer who once worked for *The Miami Herald*. Today, he runs the Anti-War News Service

# Death squads v democracy

**Michael Keefer** on Julian Assange, Wikileaks and Canada's right to know what its government is up to

**T**om Flanagan, University of Calgary political science professor, right-wing pundit, and mentor and former senior advisor to Prime Minister Harper, has earned himself more international media attention during the past month than even he may have an appetite for.

On November 30th, Flanagan spoke as one of the regular panelists on CBC Television's national political analysis program, *Power and Politics* with Evan Solomon. Starting into the camera, while across the bottom of the television screen there appeared a banner reading "WIKILEAKS LATEST: New document mentions PM Stephen Harper," Flanagan had this to say about Julian Assange, the founder and editor of Wikileaks:

"Well, I think Assange should be assassinated, actually. I think Obama should put out a contract and maybe use a drone or something."

Evan Solomon's reaction was delayed – and when it finally came, thumpingly stupid. After letting Flanagan outline for nearly ten seconds his reasons for advocating political murder, he broke in at last, saying: "Tom, that's pretty harsh stuff, just for the record, that's pretty harsh stuff."

Flanagan responded to this interruption with what appears to have been a joke: "Well, I'm feeling very manly today." But making it clear that his initial remarks

were seriously intended, he wrapped up his contribution to the program with a parting shot: "I wouldn't feel unhappy if Assange disappeared." This sounds rather as though, after proposing a murder contract and a drone attack, he was offering Obama a third form of assassination: how about a death-squad "disappearance"? Solomon responded, echoing his earlier feebleness: "Well, I've gotta say, Tom Flanagan calling for that, that's pretty strong stuff...."

One of the most lucid comments to date on this disgusting episode has come from *Calgary Herald* journalist and University of Calgary alumnus Kris Kotarski, in a public letter calling on Dr. Elizabeth Cannon, the university's President, "to condemn Dr. Flanagan in the harshest possible terms."

"Better than most," Kotarski writes, "a professor of political science should understand that academic freedom is not possible without political freedom, and that political freedom cannot survive in a climate where journalists and opponents of a ruling regime hear public intellectuals advocate for their assassination on the nightly news. If this were a Russian, Chinese or Iranian intellectual calling for the murder of a regime opponent, Canadians would be appalled. Considering Canada's proud tradition of political freedom, it is all the more offensive to hear an active member of the University of Calgary faculty and the former chief of

**"Well, I think Assange should be assassinated, actually. I think Obama should put out a contract and maybe use a drone or something"**

## THOUGHTS ON ASSANGE / 2

In an age in which the “memory hole” imagined by George Orwell in his dystopian novel 1984 has become a literal reality, the work of WikiLeaks is crucial

staff and campaign manager for the sitting Prime Minister do the same” (<http://censureflanagan.wordpress.com/>).

As one would expect, there have been attempts both by Flanagan and by his supporters in the media to explain his remarks away as an ill-judged attempt at humour. For example, Sarah Petz has written in *Macleans* magazine: “Joking about the assassination of a major public figure is terrible [...]. However, considering it was obviously a bad joke and not a serious incitation to commit violence, maybe it’s time for everyone to move on.”

Petz likens Flanagan’s comments in the video footage to “something your conservative uncle would say in a drunken argument over an awkward family dinner” (“Let Flanagan’s remarks die,” *Macleans* [4 December 2010]). But while there may have been a note of brutal flippancy in his tone, Flanagan was stone-cold sober. The only jest in his statement was the inane Neo-Con in-joke about “feeling very manly today.” Some people of Flanagan’s political leanings – men like Dick Cheney, John Bolton, and George W. Bush – seem to find the quasi-erotic charge they get from making threats of violence invigorating, even amusing. Others might wonder how manly it is to find one’s pleasure in bullying and terrorizing people.

It’s perhaps just as well that the video footage of this CBC program has gone global, together with explanations of Flanagan’s close links to our current Prime Minister. Julian Assange, let us remind ourselves, is not just the “major public figure” that *Macleans* calls him: he has for several years taken a leading role in what is arguably the most courageous and the most significant journalistic work currently ongoing anywhere in the world.

In an age in which the “memory hole” imagined by George Orwell in his dystopian novel 1984 has become a literal reality, the work of WikiLeaks is crucial. Assange has himself pointed out in public lectures and interviews that news reports are now

routinely deleted by media corporations, both from their online archives and from their indexes, leaving behind nothing but a “document not found” message for search-engine inquiries; while in the UK some 300 news stories, including one about a deliberate chemical spill that injured over 100,000 people, are currently smothered by court orders that make it illegal even to mention the existence of a court order blocking publication of the facts.

Moreover, the US government has been moving steadily toward a situation in which its agencies possess something approaching what Admiral John Poindexter called “total intelligence awareness,” while citizens are increasingly confined to a corresponding state of ignorance on all matters of importance. Lawrence Davidson explains the strategy:

“Democratic elites have learned that they do not need to rely on the brute force characteristic of dictatorships as long as they can sufficiently control the public media environment. You restrict meaningful free speech to the fringes of the media, to the ‘outliers’ along the information bell curve. You rely on the sociological fact that the vast majority of citizens will either pay no attention to that which they find irrelevant to their immediate lives, or else they will believe the official story line about places and happenings of which they are otherwise ignorant. Once you have identified the official story line with the official policy being pursued, loyalty to the policy comes to equate with patriotism. It is a shockingly simple formula and it usually works.” (“On the Historical Necessity of WikiLeaks,” MWC News [4 December 2010], <http://mcwnews.net/focus/editorial/7045-historical-necessity-of-wikileaks.html>)

While it is undoubtedly embarrassing for American elites (whom one hesitates to grace with the word “democratic”) to have the dirty linen of their diplomatic double-dealings exposed to the world, their most urgent concern seems to be to ensure that as little as possible of the WikiLeaks mate-

rial becomes known in any organized way to the American public. Hence the censorship being exercised by the *New York Times* (in contrast to the manner in which the *Guardian* and *Der Spiegel* are releasing the material that they all possess) – and hence also the vitriolic hatred expressed toward Julian Assange by Hillary Clinton, Newt Gingrich, and Bill O'Reilly, and the death-threats issued against him by Sarah Palin, Mike Huckabee, and William Kristol.

Noam Chomsky has remarked that “Perhaps the most dramatic revelation [of the leaked cables] is the bitter hatred of democracy that is revealed both by the US government – Hillary Clinton, [and] others – and also by the diplomatic service” (<http://chomsky.info/interviews/20101130.htm>). The paroxysms of loathing now being directed at Julian Assange are another expression of that same hatred of democracy.

While most Canadians are already aware of our own government's repeated demonstrations of contempt for democratic principles and practice, understanding the implications of Tom Flanagan's behaviour remains important. Canada's standards of public discourse have decayed to the point at which our national broadcaster is not ashamed to carry an open incitement to political murder made by the leading ideologue of the governing party, a former and for all we know continuing close associate of Prime Minister Harper. It is dismaying to recognize that our media system includes, at its centre, people for whom the open-eyed advocacy of lawless violence is something merely to shrug off, like an off-colour joke, as “pretty strong stuff.”

But acceptance of that kind of dismissal is only possible so long as Canadians continue to believe that our governing elites have always operated at a safe distance from such totalitarian tactics as those recommended by Tom Flanagan. Is that in fact the case, or is our belief perhaps conditioned by effective control of what Davidson calls the “public media environment”?

How many of us know about Canada's

central role in the overthrow of Haiti's duly elected democratic government in February 2004, or about the role of Canada's military in facilitating – or at the very least doing nothing to prevent – the campaigns of political terror, massacre and rape that followed the coup? Or about the fact that Canada exercised effective control over a post-coup prison system in Haiti that even the Organization of American States condemned as horrifying? (The Deputy Minister of Justice who ran that system was both appointed and paid by the Canadian International Development Agency.) Or about the role of the RCMP in providing training and tutelage for a reconstituted Haitian National Police that engaged in documented death-squad activities against civilians between 2004 and at least 2006, and is suspected of involvement in such crimes as the “disappearance” of human rights activist Lovinsky Pierre-Antoine in August 2007? (Should we not feel some degree of responsibility for these crimes? Might it be in any way significant that Lovinsky was “disappeared” just three weeks after having annoyed Canadian authorities in Haiti by trying to organize a demonstration against Stephen Harper's brief visit to the island in July?)

The WikiLeaks cables apparently include more than 1,800 documents emanating from Ottawa (whether from American diplomats posted there or from Canadian authorities communicating with the US is unclear). Their contents may be entirely confined to banal and routine matters. Or they may perhaps provide further substantiation of the fact that crimes of state terror of the kind Tom Flanagan thought it appropriate to recommend on CBC Television – far from being mere rhetoric, let alone a “joke” – touch Canadians more closely than most of us have been able to recognize.

Should the WikiLeaks cables turn out to contain material of this kind, we might expect to hear angry denunciations of Julian Assange from Liberal as well as from Conservative quarters – for Canada's participation in the Haitian coup of 2004 was decid-

**Canada's standards of public discourse have decayed to the point at which our national broadcaster is not ashamed to carry an open incitement to political murder made by the leading ideologue of the governing party, a former and for all we know continuing close associate of Prime Minister Harper**

**"If we value freedom of information, transparency, openness, and democracy, we ought to praise not to condemn such efforts"**

ed and acted upon by the governments of Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin, whose policies the Harper Conservatives have in this respect merely continued.

One may hope that in such a case, Canadian public opinion would respond with a firm defence of our democratic right to know about and to control the doings of our elected representatives and public servants – and to ensure that their actions remain in conformity with domestic and international law.

As for the present, I note with interest that Vancouver lawyer Gail Davidson has filed a complaint against Tom Flanagan with the Vancouver police and the RCMP (see Charlie Smith, "Police complaint filed after Tom Flanagan calls for assassination of

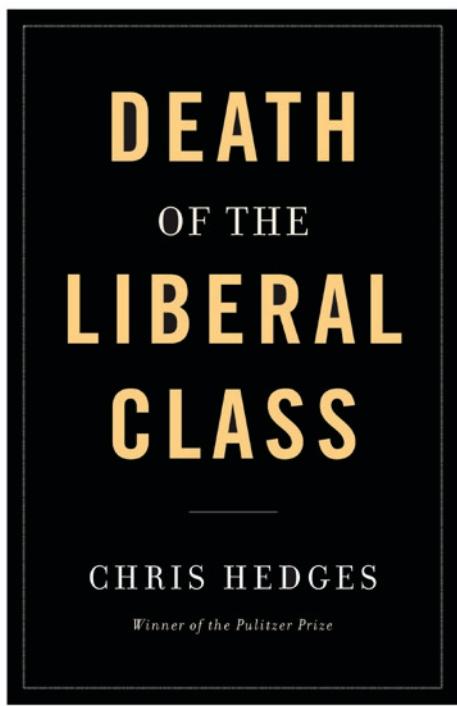
Wikileaks' Julian Assange, Straight.com [4 December 2010], <http://www.straight.com/article-362941/vancouver/lawyer-files-criminal-flanagan-assassination-wikileaks-julian-assange>). I'm happy to endorse a comment posted by 'Delmazio' in response to this news:

"We need more people like Mr. Julian Assange who are willing to speak truth to power, and encourage the free flow of information which directly affects public policy decisions. If we value freedom of information, transparency, openness, and democracy, we ought to praise not to condemn such efforts."

**CT**

**Michael Keefer** is professor of English at the University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada

## The new work from **Chris Hedges**, bestselling author of **Empire of Illusion**



"Liberals conceded too much to the power elite. The tragedy of the liberal class and the institution it controls is that it succumbed to opportunism and finally to fear. It abrogated its moral role. It did not defy corporate abuse when it had the chance. It exiled those within its ranks who did. And the defanging of the liberal class not only removed all barriers to neofeudalism and corporate abuse but also ensured that the liberal class will, in its turn, be swept aside."



**NATION BOOKS**

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# Literary outsider

Writing a good novel is much easier than finding a bad agent, writes **Philip Kraske**

**B**ack in the 80s I heard about a fiction writer who, disgusted by the endless rejections to his work, typed up William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom*, put his own name on it, and sent it out to agents and publishers. To his immense satisfaction, the manuscript did no better than his own did – although one editor wrote back, "I never liked Faulkner in college, and I still don't."

I've remembered that writer many times as I hobbled along my own Via Dolorosa through Publishing America. The closest I ever got to a book acceptance was an agent who liked the three chapters of my (soon-to-be-self-published) novel, *The Magnificent Mary Ann*. She asked to see the entire manuscript, kept it for six months, then wrote back and said she had finally been able to read it, but, alas (that's always the word agents use; it connotes grace, erudition, and heartlessness), she didn't feel strongly enough about "Marianne" to represent it for me. Lest you wonder, the name of the main character is mentioned 672 times in the text.

The story about the frustrated writer, however, taught me two lessons. First, the obvious one – that good writing is no guarantee of a publishing contract. Second, that in order to publish, it helps not to be an dummy.

For only a dummy would type out – yes,

you "typed" back then, dear reader; not keyed in, not copied and pasted – 22 lines, change the paper, and type 22 more, on and on all the way to the end of someone else's famous novel, and then send it out at ten bucks a package, plus return postage. No, for anyone smarter than the average bear, a walk through the bookstore will do to see what the fiction market is all about.

Here are Clancy and Silva and Forsythe pouring out the feed – hackneyed characters, sand-and-cement writing – to their baa-ing readerships. There stands the airport-thriller bookrack, bristling with terrorists and those who foil them between one bedroom joust and the next. If you mislay one of these masterpieces while changing flights in O'Hare, no matter. You can always buy another, turn to roughly the same point in the book, and pick up where you left off.

Then there is the flavor of the season: Lisbeth Salander, star of Steig Larsson's *Millennium* series. She is a computer genius, a math genius, a chess genius, a speed-reader capable of absorbing hundreds of pages an hour, and has a photographic memory. Is Lisbeth from Sweden or Krypton? Despite an education that stopped well short of high school, Lisbeth is capable of electronically stealing and then hiding hundreds of millions of Swedish kronor in the world banking system, especially in Gibraltar. All right, let's give her a pass on that one: maybe her

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## LITERARY LIFE

**When it's my turn under the editor's lamp, it's immediately clear that my writing demands greater engagement by the reader; the sheep baa in fear at words like "connote"**

seventh-grade history teacher, in discussing the Treaty of Utrecht, mentioned that it eventually turned into a fiscal paradise, and was still a pain in the Spanish patootie.

Never mind: Larsson sells millions. So what are publishers looking for? The next Larsson, a new Grisham, or another \_\_\_\_\_. Fill in the blank yourself – it's easy. For many are the choices in the Häagen-Dazs of literary cholesterol. Book agents – those guardians of the publishing gates, as editors wouldn't touch the rabble of actual writers with a ten-foot pica ruler – weave fantasies for anxious publishers: I've found The Next Steig who will make the sheep baa, the profits fatten, the stock rise.

Which is to say, they haven't found me. And they had their chance: I wrote – pined – to every single one of them in America and many in the UK. Zilch.

What's the problem? My thrillers are of the literary type, more on the line of John le Carré: full characters, chiselled dialogue, vivid description, a moral perspective. I don't write airport-bookrack tumbleweeds.

Le Carré, in fact, is an excellent example of how good writing can evolve in today's market. Look at his superb mid-70s thriller about the hunt for a Palestinian mail-bomber, *The Little Drummer Girl*: long descriptions of Palestinian refugee camps, colourful background on his main characters, twenty-line paragraphs. Nowadays his paragraphs are short, his descriptions just as beautiful but more concise, his characters described deftly through action and dialogue. Graceful writing for the modern reader. Bravo, John!

But of course, le Carré's type of stuff sells because people have read his previous work. And there's rub. When it's *my* turn under the editor's lamp, it's immediately clear that my writing demands greater engagement by the reader; the sheep baa in fear at words like "connote." Even if the editors love the

manuscript, they know from the get-go that the PR effort will cost the moon. And if they get huffy about it, the bottom-line boys quickly remind them that, well, there is a recession on, and the company *does* lose money on nearly every new author it publishes.

Hence the rejection: *alas*.

So you won't find me trying my luck in the market with *Absalom, Absalom*. But you won't find me giving up, either. In addition to punditing politically progressive pomp from my website, [www.philipkraske.com](http://www.philipkraske.com), I will soon bring out *The Magnificent Mary Ann*, my third novel, which combines a love story with a business thriller. Novel number four – which takes place where no man of letters has gone before, Quito, Ecuador – is just a few drafts from completion. Number five is fighting its way out of the cocoon. By the time it is finished, I predict that total sales will have reached three figures – but don't quote me.

That's the great thing about writing good fiction today: there's no money in it. You do it for love of the art, pure and simple – as does my publisher, Encompass Editions, which produces a beautiful book. Maybe if I generate a little buzz, a mainstream publisher will buy in. But till then, I self-publish and I don't care who knows it. I write as I please, I treat my readers as cultured comrades, and I don't have to pull hair with some damn sales exec who thinks chapter two needs a sex scene.

Granted, sales don't go much beyond family and (blackmailed) friends, but satisfaction – ah, pass me that cold beer – satisfaction is golden.

**CT**

**Philip Kraske** is the author of three novels, the second of which is *Mockery*, which ColdType's editor says is the best political fiction he has read in the past year. Read the first chapter at [www.coldtype.net](http://www.coldtype.net) this month.

**READ THE BEST OF JOE BAGEANT**  
<http://coldtype.net/joe.html>

# Berlin, 1934

**Fred Reed** awaits the thud of jackboots in northern streets

**F**lags. These are always a bad sign. Hardly a politician appears on television who doesn't stand in front of an American flag, sometimes three American flags. A venomous nationalism now poisons the air, and grows. We are off and rolling.

The trappings of fascism spread. General David Petraeus, commander of the Eastern Front, poses with the President in the White House in combat fatigues. The country is now the Homeland, reminiscent of the Nazi Fatherland and the Soviet Motherland. We hear of American Exceptionalism, the ritual self-idolization beloved of pathological nationalism. Blood and Soil. The American Dream. *Übermenschen*. All we need is a short Austrian.

We may get one. The times ripen for a man on a horse. (Or perhaps a woman: Twitler of Alaska looms.) An ignorant population, unread, unfamiliar with the outside world, focuses its anxieties on troubling dark things lurking abroad, the brown hordes from the south, the rising Chinese, inexplicable Moslems who want to kill all Christians. Sooner rather than later such a mob finds solace in an angry unity. From an unhappy lower middle-class spring Brown Shirts. Wait.

Things come together: Falling standards of living across a country in irremediable decline, diminishing expectations, growing

anger in search of focus, a sense of a birth-right being stolen as preeminence drifts across the Pacific. Here is fertile soil for some strange crop not yet clearly seen.

It will play out against a backdrop of totalitarian watchfulness all too imaginable. A digital world lends itself to tyranny, making it, I think, inescapable. For practical purposes, the capacity to store data is infinite, to network it across the world, to track, to scan, to watch. This is not the place for a disquisition on the technology of surveillance. Just note that the machinery exists for a totalitarian watchfulness beyond Stalin's wettest dreams. The government wants this, pushes for it daily, and gets it. You can't spend a dollar, take a flight, or send an email without a federal federal office watching. It is getting worse and cannot be stopped. Surveillance is too easy.

We will be told, are being told, that to be safe we must submit, that enemies within and without are upon us, that terrorists spawn plots everywhere. Where communists once hid in every closet and the House Un-American Activities Committee, HUAC, hunted them, now we have Islamo-terrorists hunted by Homeland Security.

What matter civil rights when the Moslem is at our throats? The price of liberty is eternal vigilance, and the vigilance ends liberty. Hysteria darkly flowers. Homeland Security now wants to train us in how to re-

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## FASCISM CALLING

**Shortly we will hear the death rattle of free expression. No government sees an advantage to itself in a free press, though countries with decent governments feel much less threatened**

act to a nuclear attack, a la 1950. Scare 'em, keep 'em scared, tell them you are protecting them, and they will kiss your boots. An Australian publishes embarrassing cable traffic from American embassies, and politicians call for him to be killed by the CIA. The agency is revered as a sort of clandestine Batman and Robin, defending America secretly where evil swirls in the coming night. Kill, kill. On subways we are told to watch each other, to report curious behavior to the authorities. Nothing can stop this.

Constitutionality becomes a fading memory. Random searches in train stations, genital examinations in airports, the decline of habeas corpus, the evasion of the duty of Congress to declare wars, on and on. The government does what it wants. There is no recourse. We are told that it is to make us safe. I haven't asked to be made safe.

The genius of American politics is to espouse democracy while keeping political power from the people. The trick is to have barely distinguishable candidates for the presidency who carefully avoid mention of substance – the wars, for example, or affirmative action, guns, abortion. These elections, if so they be, allow people to wave placards, roar invective about throwing the rascals out and returning to traditional American etc. The dust settles and things remain as they were.

Governance does not rest with the people. Today, decree replaces legislation, and must, for our safety. If Homeland Security says you must go through a CAT scan, naked, and singing the Star Spangled Banner, then you have to do it. There is no recourse. You can unelect an elected official, but there is no way to get at a bureaucrat. If you do not submit, you go to jail.

Shortly we will hear the death rattle of free expression. No government sees an advantage to itself in a free press, though countries with decent governments feel much less threatened. Our government fears nothing more.

America has a carefully controlled press that appears free because it is not explicitly

controlled by the government. But the real power in America rests with the big corporations and their lobbies, with Wall Street, whose personnel move in and out of the formal government at will. All of the traditional media, radio, newspapers, and television, are owned by large corporations. How curious that they do not question large corporations.

The only free press in America is the internet, and the government does not like it. Washington now moves to "regulate" it. To promote fairness, you see, to prevent piracy, and to maintain national security. Then it will be found necessary to suppress "hate sites." How will this play out? America retreats behind its emotional borders, gazes over the ramparts, frightened and hostile. In those outlets of the media that pander to The Heartland, to the manipulable unlettered, the nationalist drumbeat grows apace. That America's bankruptcy results from America's economic policies, that the country is everywhere hated because of wilfully chosen behavior – this does not occur to people who do not read, who do not so much as know the dates of World War II. They will find someone else to blame. Liberals. Mohammedans. Mexicans.

A danger is that the country will lash out abroad, ever more feebly as the economy declines, at nations that no longer pay attention to it. Washington says that it "will not tolerate a nuclear Iran," and Iran ignores the admonition. You cannot not tolerate what you can't prevent. The Pentagon sends the carriers to steam ferally in circles off North Korea, which ignores them. The consequences of wounded vanity are not trivial in world affairs, as anyone knows who has a familiarity with the Treaty of Versailles. But who does?

It serves nothing to raise alarms, to pen Philippics, to gnash hands and wring teeth. Minor political currents can be diverted by protest, but this one is the torrent subsequent to a broken dam. It will go where it will, as the Thirties went where they would. Hold on tight.

CT

# Media hit of the year

Our media experienced a few highs and many lows in 2010, but nothing as disgraceful as the vitriol against Helen Thomas, says **Danny Schechter**

In 1960, I co-founded a student magazine at Cornell University called *Dialogue*. I was a wannabe journalist, fixated on emulating the courageous media personalities of the times from Edward R. Murrow to a distinctive figure I came to admire at Presidential press conferences, a wire service reporter named Helen Thomas.

In recent years, my faith in the power of dialogue in politics has been severely tested – as, no doubt has hers – in an age where diatribes and calculated demonization chills debate and exchanges of opposing views.

Once you are labeled and stereotyped, especially if you are denounced as an anti-Semite, you are relegated to the fringes, pronounced a hater beyond redemption, even beyond explanation.

You have been assigned a scarlet letter as visible as the Star of David the Nazis made Jews wear.

My career path took me from covering civil rights activism in the streets to later working in the suites of network power. I went from the underground press to rock and roll radio to TV reporting and producing at CNN and ABC.

As a member in good standing of an activist generation, I saw myself more as an outsider in contrast to Helen's distinctive credentials as an insider, as a White House bureau chief and later as the dean of the

White House Correspondents Association.

Yet, beneath her establishment credentials and status, she was always an outsider too – one of nine children born to a family of Lebanese immigrants in Winchester, Kentucky, who despite their Middle East origins, were Christians in the Greek Orthodox Church.

She became a pioneering woman, a modern day Helen of Troy, who broke the glass ceiling, infiltrating the clubby, mostly male, inside-the-beltway world of big egos and self-important media prima donnas, most supplicants to power, not challengers of it.

Her origins were more modest. She grew up in an ethnic neighborhood in Detroit, a city I later worked in, as an intern in the Mayor's office (I was in a Ford Foundation education in politics program in the sixties that also boasted a fellow fellow in another city, Richard B. Cheney. Yes, the one and the same.)

Helen received her bachelor's degree from Wayne State University in 1942, the year I was born. Earlier this year, her alma mater which had taken so much pride in her achievements, withdrew an award in her name in a striking gesture of cowardice and submission to an incident blown out of all proportions that instantly turned Helen from a shero to a zero in a quick media second.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center – not, by

**Once you are labeled and stereotyped, especially if you are denounced as an anti-Semite, you are relegated to the fringes, pronounced a hater beyond redemption, even beyond explanation**

## CRUCIFYING HELEN

I didn't know until she told me that she had also been hounded for years by Abe Foxman, a leader of the Anti-Defamation League, who demanded she explain 25 questions she asked Presidents over the decades

the way, linked to the legendary Nazi Hunter (who was unhappy with its work), put her on their top-ten list of anti-Semites after angry remarks she made about Israel went viral and blew up into one of the major media stories of 2010.

President Barack Obama who cheerfully brought her a birthday cake, hailing her long years of service to the American people, later labeled her remarks "reprehensible." You would think that given all the vicious slurs, Hitler comparisons and putdowns directed at him, he would be more cautious tossing slurs at others.

But no, all politicians pander to deflect criticism whenever they fear the winds of enmity will blow their way.

But now it was Helen who was being compared to Hitler in a new furor over the Führer even though she says she grew up in a home that despised him, and from which her two brothers joined the army in World War II. She says now "We didn't do enough to expose Hitler early on. He was not just anti Jewish. He was anti-American!"

I might add if I considered it necessary, that I grew up in a Jewish family and am proud of that identity, our culture and traditions. But that was no big thing to Helen who worked alongside Jews all of her life in the media world, many as close friends. Her main concern as a child was with non-Jews who baited her in school as a "garlic eater," a foreigner.

She may be a critic of Israel but never a hater of Jews, a distinction the world recognizes, but that right-wing backers of the Israel lobby (and the media that backs it) refuse to accept in the name of a black/white 'you are with us or ag'in us' ideological agenda which has no tolerance for critics, differences of opinion or the anger of the dispossessed.

They only see themselves as victims, never the people they victimize. Prejudice often infects those who live in glass houses and who are quick to condemn others.

For many years, I admired Helen from afar, and later gave her an award for Truth

In Media voted by my colleagues on Media-channel.org. She was an institution, an icon of honor. We were impressed by her history of asking tough questions even when they embarrassed Presidents.

Then, suddenly, last June, I like everyone in the world of media, was stunned to witness her public fall from grace, partly self-inflicted, perhaps because of inelegant language used in response to an ambush interview by provocateur father-son Israeli advocates posing as journalists

They were following in the footsteps of the vicious comments by Ann ("You will find liberals always rooting for savages against civilization") Coulter who earlier denounced her as an "old Arab" sitting yards from the President as if she was threatening him. She refused to dignify that smear with a response.

I didn't know until she told me that she had also been hounded for years by Abe Foxman, a leader of the Anti-Defamation League, who demanded she explain 25 questions she asked Presidents over the decades, "I didn't answer," "she told me, "because I don't respond to junk mail."

Foxman then sent the questions to her employer trying to get her fired, she says. Later, he recruited former Bush Press Secretary Ari Fleisher in his crusade against her. Ari and his boss disliked her "hostile" questions about Iraq on official claims that have since been unmasked as lies.

Helen always stuck to her guns. She was considered the *grand dame* of White House journalists. Presidents respected her. She went to China with Nixon. You don't survive in that highly visible pit of presidential polemics for as long as she did by backing down. Many correspondents assigned there turn into bulldogs for the camera. Maybe that's why Helen can appear abrupt at times.

She has, however, always been polite enough to try to answer questions from strangers without always realizing who she was dealing with in a new world of media hit jobs, where "GOTCHA" YouTube videos

thrive on recording embarrassing moments, what we used to call “bloopers.”

In her senior years, she was brought down by a kid looking for a marketable soundbyte like the one he extracted – as if he was a big game hunter in Africa who bagged a lioness. She had been baited and took the bait. Unaware of how the video could be used, she ventilated and then regretted doing so. It was too late. That one media hit job triggered millions of online video hits.

Helen later apologized for **how** she said what she did without retracting the essence of her convictions. But by then, it was too late. Her long career was instantly terminated. The perception became everything; the context nothing.

She tried to be conciliatory, saying, “I deeply regret my comments I made last week regarding the Israelis and the Palestinians. They do not reflect my heart-felt belief that peace will come to the Middle East only when all parties recognize the need for mutual respect and tolerance. May that day come soon.”

Those remarks were derided and dismissed, with the pundits and papers demanding her scalp. She had no choice but to resign after her company, her agent, her co-author and many “friends” started treating her like a pariah.

“You cannot criticize Israel in this country and survive,” she says now. She believes the Israel lobby controls the discourse on Israel. She cited, as an example, CNN firing a veteran editor in Lebanon for praising a popular cleric for his support for women after he died. (CNN had no problems hiring Wolf Blitzer, a former executive director of AIPAC.)

I didn’t ask her but I am sure she is sympathetic to President Carter for speaking out on the issue the way he has, despite the way he was later dumped on. Once under predictable vitriolic attack began, even he was forced to back down away from some of his positions.

She was forced into retirement and thrown to the wolves in a media culture

that relishes stories of personal destruction and missteps. It’s the old ‘the Media builds you up before they tear you down’ routine.

As blogger Jamie Frieze wrote, “I don’t think she should have been forced to resign. After all, the freedom of speech doesn’t come with the right to be comfortable. In other words, the fact that you’re uncomfortable doesn’t trump my free speech. Thomas made people uncomfortable, but that doesn’t mean her speech should be punished.”

But punished she was

As a veteran of one kind of real journalism, she may have been inexperienced in dealing with our volatile media culture that now thrives on hostile ‘drive by’ attacks and putdowns.

When I called Helen Thomas to ask if she might be willing to share some of her thoughts on what happened, I found her as eloquent as ever, supportive of WikiLeaks, critical of Grand Jury harassment in the Middle West against Palestinian supporters and angry with President Obama for his many right turns and spineless positions.

This clearly was not a mea culpa moment for her, but what has she learned from this ordeal?

While she hasn’t written about the incident she did speak to me about it for publication.

I first asked her for her view about what happened?

She was, she said, on a path outside the White House on a day in which Jewish leaders were being honored inside, at American Jewish Heritage Celebration Day, an event she said she was unaware of. A rabbi, David Nesenoff, asked to speak to her, and introduced his two sons who he said wanted to become Journalists. (One was actually a friend of his son Adam, also his webmaster.)

“People seeking advice come to me a lot,” she explained, “and I told them about my love of journalism and that they should pursue their goals. I was gracious, and told them to go for it.”

**She had no choice but to resign after her company, her agent, her co-author and many “friends” started treating her like a pariah**

## CRUCIFYING HELEN

**There was also anger at President Obama for not denouncing Israel's intervention on the high seas. But, by that time, Helen Thomas was silenced and silent**

Then the subject abruptly changed. "What you think of Israel?" they asked next. It was all very pleasant and I don't blame them for asking," she told me. But, then, she admitted, she didn't know the people who she then said, "shoved a microphone in my face like a jack knife."

It wasn't just any Rabbi making conversation. Nessenoff is an ardent pro-Israel supporter who runs a website called Rabbi Live and can be a flamboyant self-promoter. He says, "even though I was born in Glen Cove and grew up in Syosset Long Island, Israel is my Jewish homeland. It is the homeland for all Jewish people."

The *Jewish Forward* newspaper would later report,

"Nesenoff came under scrutiny for appearing in a video depicting a man of Mexican descent pretending to give a weather forecast while a bearded rabbi in a black hat and coat stands nearby.

"The four-and-a-half-minute video, titled *Holy Weather*, features Nesenoff dressed as 'Father Julio Ramirez,' an outsize caricature of a Mexican priest. The rabbi makes statements that fuel stereotypes, painting Mexican laborers as dishwashers. He speaks in an exaggerated rasp of a Mexican accent, saying, among other things, 'The last time I saw a map like that I was in an immigration office with three gringos down on the Mexican border, you know, right near New Mexico.' Fractured Spanish pops up from time to time, as when Nesenoff says the rabbi's tendency to get better assignments is 'no *mucho bueno* picnic.'

"Though some critics used the skit as ammunition to portray him as a hypocrite and a racist, Nesenoff said he was dressed up because it was Purim."

God, he said, likes humor.

Israeli officials were not in a laughing mood during this period for other reasons. Fox News reported: "A senior Israeli politician tells Fox News that Israel is currently in the midst of its worst international crisis since the creation of the Jewish state. The politician, who asked not to be named in

order to speak more candidly, added that for the first time Israel's legitimacy is being questioned by many in the international community.

"The official believes the lack of a viable peace process, combined with last week's Gaza-bound flotilla incident, which killed nine, has brought Israel to this situation. The Israeli public doesn't understand the severity of the situation, according to the politician. The official believes that Israelis should not react in a nationalistic way to recent events, because it is only weakening the Jewish state in this process."

I don't know if any of this was weighing on Helen's mind but I do know that criticism of Israel was soon at an all time fever pitch because of the Gaza Aid Flotilla which left Turkey on the day of the "interview."

Supporters of the humanitarian project feared Israel would attack the ships as they soon did. For media spin, Tel Aviv righteously and loudly defended its violent interception of the non-violent convoy as an act of legitimate self-defense but, later, quietly, paid compensation to the victims when the world media turned against them.

Soon, there would protests worldwide and furious exchanges in the media. Much of it was very emotional. There was also anger at President Obama for not denouncing Israel's intervention on the high seas. But, by that time, Helen Thomas was silenced and silent.

(In some outlets, the incident "outing" Helen was used, bizarrely, as pro-Israel "balance" to show why Israel must act tough.)

Back at the North Lawn that day at the White House, Helen, who must have been following these evolving events, blew a fuse, or at least lost her usually professional demeanor. Here's the now infamous exchange videotaped by an amateur cameraman, offering a deliberately unflattering and extreme tight close up of an 89 year-old woman.

**Nesenoff:** Any comments on Israel? We're asking everybody today, any comments on Israel?

**Thomas:** Tell them to get the hell out of Palestine.

**Nesenoff:** Oooh. Any better comments on Israel?

**Thomas:** Remember, these people are occupied and it's their land. It's not German, it's not Poland ...

**Nesenoff:** So where should they go, what should they do?

**Thomas:** They go home.

**Nesenoff:** Where's the home?

**Thomas:** Poland, Germany and America and everywhere else

**Nesenoff:** So you're saying the Jews go back to Poland and Germany?

**Thomas:** And America and everywhere else. Why push people out of there who have lived there for centuries? See?

Nesenoff does not repeat her use of America, but only to Poland and German. He has nothing to say about her reference to occupation,

Clearly, the question triggered something deeper in Helen, feelings that she had perhaps bottled up for many years in the White House where every reporter has a built in radar that teaches them to be careful about what they say and how they say it, especially on a subject like Israel that Helen considers a "third rail," almost an "untouchable issue." She earlier told one college audience, "I censored myself for 50 years when I was a reporter." (She was then an opinion columnist and perhaps freer to speak her mind.)

Israel was not a new subject for her to comment on either. Anyone from the Arab world tends to have a very different understanding of the history there, a perspective that we rarely hear or see. It's a narrative driven by anger at unending Palestinian victimization.

She told me she had been in Israel in 1954 and visited the Palestinian village of Kibia that was invaded by Israel in which local residents were driven out and many killed. She told me she personally met many Palestinians forced from their homes. She is not the only one angry about this often hidden legacy, especially because many Israelis jus-

tify expelling Palestinians in biblical terms and are supported by Christian Evangelicals in saying so.

That's ironic, isn't it, because in our media, fanatical fundamentalists are only pictured as Muslims, rarely as Jews.

Her historic memory was clearly triggered although her views are hardly extreme. She says Israel has a right to exist, and so do Jews "like all people. But not the right to seize others' lands." She says Israel has defied 65 UN resolutions on these issues. She was frustrated when so many Presidents danced around the issues and in her view, "caved" on human rights.

To Nesenoff and many viewers oriented to see the world only through a unflinching pro-Israel narrative, Helen had crossed the line from being anti-Israel to being anti-Semitic. The reason: the inclusion of Poland and Germany into the mix were considered "obviously anti-Semitic."

She agrees that by citing Germany, she opened the door to accusations of insensitivity, lumping her in with holocaust deniers, but denies being one or hating Jews. She says she was startled by that charge because she is, she says, a Semite so how can she be ant-Semitic? (Another irony: Jewish emigration to today's Germany has increased 10 fold since the fall of the Berlin Wall to 200,000 with many leaving Israel. This "reverse exodus" troubles Israeli officials.)

Helen told me her thinking on this subject goes back to being moved by a Rabbi who spoke alongside Martin Luther King Jr at the March on Washington in 1963. I was there also, and heard him speak too, and so I looked him up,

It was Joachim Prinz of the American Jewish Congress who made a speech that influenced a younger Helen Thomas. He said, "When I was the rabbi of the Jewish community in Berlin under the Hitler regime, I learned many things. The most important thing that I learned under those tragic circumstances was that bigotry and hatred are not the most urgent problem. The most ur-

**Helen told me her thinking on this subject goes back to being moved by a Rabbi who spoke alongside Martin Luther King Jr at the March on Washington in 1963**

## CRUCIFYING HELEN

**But, to this day, there has been almost no compassion, empathy or respect shown for one of our great journalists, Helen Thomas, who has been presumed guilty and sentenced to oblivion with barely a word spoken in her defense**

gent, the most disgraceful, the most shameful and the most tragic problem is silence."

Helen says her whole career has been about combating the sin of silence. She says she has now been liberated to speak out. And "all I would like is for people to know what I was trying to say, that Palestinians are living under tyranny and that their rights are being violated. All I want is some sympathy for Palestinians."

Had she said it like that, if she had perhaps made a distinction between Israel as a State and its settlers on occupied lands, she might still have her job. Unfortunately, what she did say, and how she said it, brought all the attention on her, not the issues she was trying to expose.

Now it's the holiday season, allegedly a time of peace and forgiveness when Presidents issue pardons to convicted criminals and reflection is theoretically permitted, a time when it's been suggested that even a State Department hawk like Richard Holbrooke could, on his deathbed call for an end to the Afghan war that he had dogmatically supported.

We have watched the rehabilitation of so many politicians over recent years who have stumbled, taken money or disgraced themselves in sex scandals, including Senators, even Presidents.

Helen Thomas is not in that category.

Yet, many of those "fallen" are back in action, tarnished perhaps, but allowed to recant, to work and then appear in the media.

But, to this day, there has been almost no compassion, empathy or respect shown for one of our great journalists, Helen Thomas, who has been presumed guilty and sentenced to oblivion with barely a word spoken in her defense. She admittedly mis-spoke and is now officially "Missing" like some disappeared priest in Argentina

A whole world may be critical of Israel. Millions may believe that the occupiers should withdraw or that that Israeli rejectionism of the peace process must end. But when a "mainstream" American reporter of great stature touches these sentiments, she is consigned to Dante's inferno, and turned into a non-person.

How can we expect Israelis and Palestinians to reconcile if our media won't set an example by reconciling with Helen Thomas?

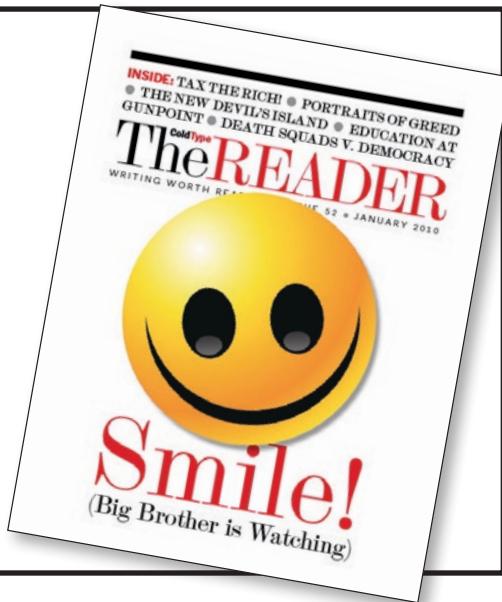
**CT**

**News Dissector** Danny Schechter blogs for and edits Mediachannel.org. His latest film is *Plunder The Crime Of Our Time*. – [Plunderthecrimeofourtime.com](http://Plunderthecrimeofourtime.com)

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# Education at gunpoint

**Ramzy Baroud** remembers an essay he wrote at school in Gaza

I recall the first sentence of my fifth grade essay on “Education and Youth”. Written with the occasional aid of my father, and dotted with clichés, it read something like this:

“Youth is the backbone of any nation, and education is essential to arm the youth with the knowledge they need to lead their societies toward change, progress and prosperity.”

The grayish blue pencil I used to write my essay with was one of several items handed annually by United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) staff to refugee children in many schools scattered throughout the Gaza Strip. My Arabic teacher was Abu Kamal al-Hanafi, a wonderful man with a terrible temper, who was also the Imam of the local mosque. My classroom had exactly 62 students. My desk was as old as the Israeli occupation of Gaza, if not older. The roof was filled with holes, creating an exciting spectacle as birds flew in and out, often nesting in available spaces. Watching these scenes made the brutish Arabic grammar lessons bearable, and eased the fear caused by Abu Kamal’s bouts of anger and the occasional Israeli gunfire in and around the refugee camp.

While the introduction to my “Education and Youth” essay was clichéd and I may not have known what many of the terms actually meant, its overriding sentiment remains

as true for me now as it ever was.

I remembered my essay as I read about the first World Education Forum (WEF) in Palestine, which took place in several regions throughout historic Palestine, including Jerusalem, Nazareth, Jaffa, Bethlehem and the Gaza Strip. Those who were denied access by Israeli authorities had their own conference in Lebanon. The event, which started on October 28, lasted four days.

The problems faced by the education system in Palestine were difficult enough during my childhood. Now they have compounded to unforeseen levels, with the educational sector divided between two educational ministries in Gaza and the West Bank, the former under Israeli siege and the latter under military occupation. Were it not for UNRWA, the already severe obstacles would have become completely insurmountable long ago. But today even UNRWA is struggling with depleting funds and political haggling between competing Palestinian authorities and an ever atrocious Israeli occupation.

According to statistics provided by the United Nations IRIN news agency and recently cited by IPS, 39,000 children in Gaza had no available school to attend following the recent Israeli war. The United Nations has put the number of schools and kindergartens that were destroyed or severely damaged by the Israeli onslaught during the

**The problems faced by the education system in Palestine were difficult enough during my childhood. Now they have compounded to unforeseen levels**

## GAZA MEMORY

**With every extra mile added to Israel's already gigantic annexation wall, and with every new military checkpoint, more and more Palestinian students in the West Bank are held back - from school, from opportunities, from a better life**

2008-2009 war at 280. Considering earlier problems of a barely standing educational infrastructure, malnourished pupils and devastated family incomes, one can only imagine the impact of the latest blow.

As if the damage caused by Israel was not enough, the Palestinian Authority has also done its fair share of harm.

According to the Palestine Monitor, the head of the Ministry of Education proclaimed in his message to the conference: "Through education we will become a prosperous nation, and will obtain a life that allows us to live in freedom. We are a people who can live and learn despite the problems we encounter. We will continue to improve education, so that future generations can live peacefully."

I can humbly concede that this statement is much more impressive than my fifth grade proclamations. But as well-meaning and accurate as the assessment sounds, one can hardly absolve the Palestinian leadership of its own share of the blame.

Following the clashes between Fatah and Hamas, which lead to the ousting of Fatah from Gaza in 2007, thousands of teachers refused to return to work. They were paid by the West Bank leadership and resuming work under Hamas might have meant the freezing of their salaries by rival Fatah. The Hamas government was left with the formidable task of filling the vacant posts at very short notice. Many schools were also destroyed during the war, and many teachers and students were killed or wounded. Since the families of most students were poorer than ever under a harsh Israeli siege, bringing the educational system in Gaza back to its old status was almost impossible.

Gaza might be the most referenced example, for obvious reasons, but the education debacle in Palestine hardly stops there. With every extra mile added to Israel's already gigantic annexation wall, and with every new military checkpoint, more and more Palestinian students in the West Bank

are held back - from school, from opportunities, from a better life.

Palestinians living in third class status in today's Israel, struggling against constant attacks on their identity and history also have numerous challenges to overcome.

On top of the problems created by military occupation, discrimination and political factionalism, other challenges, which also exist in other Middle Eastern societies, such as adult literacy and gender equality, are also very much relevant in Palestine. These too need to be addressed.

The World Education Forum conferences were accurately named "Education for Change." But in order for this change to take place, rival Palestinian factions must not politicize education. If complete unity eludes them at the moment, they should at least unify their ministries of education, even if temporarily, under the auspices of a third Palestinian party.

Needless to say, the Israeli occupation and the siege must end. No healthy educational system can ever be fostered under the boots of soldiers and at gunpoint.

More, regional and international solidarity is essential to help Palestinians achieve a semblance of normalcy in their educational system under the current difficult circumstances.

The good news is that I got a full mark on my Arabic essay on "Education and Youth". Whether the parties involved will ever agree that "education is essential to arm the youth with the knowledge they need to lead their societies toward change, progress and prosperity" remains to be seen. Personally, I will maintain my fifth grade position. I now understand what it means.

**CT**

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# Avoiding the new Devil's Island

**William Blum** on Wikileaks, Sweden and Julian Assange's biggest fear

**I**t's December 16, 2010. I'm standing in the snow in front of the White House ... Standing with Veterans for Peace ... I'm only a veteran of standing in front of the White House; the first time was February 1965, handing out flyers against the war in Vietnam. I was working for the State Department at the time and my biggest fear was that someone from that noble institution would pass by and recognize me.

Five years later I was still protesting Vietnam, although long gone from the State Department. Then came Cambodia. And Laos. Soon, Nicaragua and El Salvador. Then Panama was the new great threat to America, to freedom and democracy and all things holy and decent, so it had to be bombed without mercy. Followed by the first war against the people of Iraq, and the 78-day bombing of Yugoslavia. Then the land of Afghanistan had rained down upon it depleted uranium, napalm, phosphorous bombs, and other witches' brews and weapons of the chemical dust; then Iraq again. And I've skipped a few. I think I hold the record for most times picketing the White House by a right-handed batter.

And through it all, the good, hard-working, righteous people of America have believed mightily that their country always means well; some even believe to this day that we never started a war, certainly nothing deserving of the appellation "war of ag-

gression".

On that same snowy day last month Julian Assange of Wikileaks was freed from prison in London and told reporters that he was more concerned that the United States might try to extradite him than he was about being extradited to Sweden, where he presumably faces "sexual" charges.<sup>1</sup>

That's a fear many political and drug prisoners in various countries have expressed in recent years. The United States is the new Devil's Island of the Western world. From the mid-19th century to the mid-20th, political prisoners were shipped to that godforsaken strip of French land off the eastern coast of South America. One of the current residents of the new Devil's Island is Bradley Manning, the former US intelligence analyst suspected of leaking diplomatic cables to Wikileaks. Manning has been imprisoned for seven months, first in Kuwait, then at a military base in Virginia, and faces virtual life in prison if found guilty, of something. Without being tried or convicted of anything, he is allowed only very minimal contact with the outside world; or with people, daylight, or news; among the things he is denied are a pillow, sheets, and exercise; his sleep is restricted and frequently interrupted. See Glenn Greenwald's discussion of how Manning's treatment constitutes torture.<sup>2</sup>

A friend of the young soldier says that

**The United States  
is the new Devil's  
Island of the  
Western world**

## ANTI EMPIRE REPORT

**The Wikileaks documents may not produce any world-changing revelations, but every day they are adding to the steady, gradual erosion of people's belief in the US government's good intentions**

many people are reluctant to talk about Manning's deteriorating physical and mental condition because of government harassment, including surveillance, seizure of their computer without a warrant, and even attempted bribes. "This has had such an intimidating effect that many are afraid to speak out on his behalf." 3 A developer of the transparency software used by WikiLeaks was detained for several hours last summer by federal agents at a Newark, New Jersey airport, where he was questioned about his connection to WikiLeaks and Assange as well as his opinions about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>4</sup>

This is but a tiny incident from the near-century buildup of the American police state, from the Red Scare of the 1920s to the McCarthyism of the 1950s to the crackdown against Central American protesters in the 1980s ... elevated by the War on Drugs ... now multiplied by the War on Terror. It's not the worst police state in history; not even the worst police state in the world today; but nonetheless a police state, and certainly the most pervasive police state ever – a *Washington Post* study has just revealed that there are 4,058 separate federal, state and local "counterterrorism" organizations spread across the United States, each with its own responsibilities and jurisdictions.<sup>5</sup> The police of America, of many types, generally get what and who they want. If the United States gets its hands on Julian Assange, under any legal pretext, fear for him; it might be the end of his life as a free person; the actual facts of what he's done or the actual wording of US laws will not matter; hell hath no fury like an empire scorned.

John Burns, chief foreign correspondent for the *New York Times*, after interviewing Assange, stated: "He is profoundly of the conviction that the United States is a force for evil in the world, that it's destructive of democracy."<sup>6</sup> Can anyone who believes that be entitled to a full measure of human rights on Devil's Island?

The WikiLeaks documents may not produce any world-changing revelations, but

every day they are adding to the steady, gradual erosion of people's belief in the US government's good intentions, which is necessary to overcome a lifetime of indoctrination. Many more individuals over the years would have been standing in front of the White House if they had had access to the plethora of information that floods people today; which is not to say that we would have succeeded in stopping any of the wars; that's a question of to what extent the United States is a democracy.

One further consequence of the release of the documents may be to put an end to the widespread belief that Sweden, or the Swedish government, is peaceful, progressive, neutral and independent. Stockholm's behavior in this matter and others has been as American-poodle-like as London's, as it lined itself up with an Assange-accuser who has been associated with right-wing anti-Castro Cubans, who are of course US-government-supported. This is the same Sweden that for some time in recent years was working with the CIA on its torture-rendition flights and has about 500 soldiers in Afghanistan. Sweden is the world's largest per capita arms exporter, and for years has taken part in US/NATO military exercises, some within its own territory. The left should get themselves a new hero-nation. Try Cuba.

There's also the old stereotype held by Americans of Scandinavians practicing a sophisticated and tolerant attitude toward sex, an image that was initiated, or enhanced, by the celebrated 1967 Swedish film *I Am Curious (Yellow)*, which had been banned for awhile in the United States. And now what do we have? Sweden sending Interpol on an international hunt for a man who apparently upset two women, perhaps for no more than sleeping with them both in the same week.

And while they're at it, American progressives should also lose their quaint belief that the BBC is somehow a liberal broadcaster. Americans are such suckers for British accents. The BBC's Today presenter,

John Humphrys, asked Assange: “Are you a sexual predator?” Assange said the suggestion was “ridiculous”, adding: “Of course not”. Humphrys then asked Assange how many woman he had slept with.<sup>7</sup> Would even Fox News have descended to that level? I wish Assange had been raised in the streets of Brooklyn, as I was. He would then have known precisely how to reply to such a question: “You mean including your mother?”<sup>8</sup>

Another group of people who should learn a lesson from all this are the knee-reflex conspiracists. Several of them have already written me snide letters informing me of my naiveté in not realizing that Israel is actually behind the release of the WikiLeaks documents; which is why, they inform me, that nothing about Israel is mentioned. I had to inform them that I had already seen a few documents putting Israel in a bad light. I’ve since seen others, and Assange, in an interview with Al Jazeera on December 23, stated that only a meager number of files related to Israel had been published so far because the publications in the West that were given exclusive rights to publish the secret documents were reluctant to publish much sensitive information about Israel. (Imagine the flak Germany’s *Der Spiegel* would get hit with.) “There are 3,700 files related to Israel and the source of 2,700 files is Israel,” said Assange. “In the next six months we intend to publish more files.”<sup>9</sup>

Naturally, several other individuals have informed me that it’s the CIA that is actually behind the document release.

#### **The right to secrecy**

Many of us are pretty tired of supporters of Israel labeling as “anti-Semitic” most any criticism of Israeli policies, which is virtually never an appropriate accusation. Consider the Webster Dictionary definition: “Anti-Semite. One who discriminates against or is hostile to or prejudiced against Jews.” Notice that the state of Israel is not mentioned, or in any way implied.

Here’s what real anti-Semitism looks like.

Listen to former president Richard Nixon: “The Jews are just a very aggressive and abrasive and obnoxious personality... most of our Jewish friends... they are all basically people who have a sense of inferiority and have got to compensate.” This is from a tape of a conversation at the White House, February 13, 1973, recently released.<sup>10</sup> These tapes, and there are a large number of them, are the WikiLeaks of an earlier age.

Yet, as the prominent conservative Michael Medved pointed out after the release of Nixon’s remarks: “Ironically, though, no American did more to rescue the Jewish people when it counted most: after the 1973 Egyptian-Syrian surprise attack destroyed a third of Israel’s air force and killed the American equivalent of 200,000 Israelis, Nixon overruled his own Pentagon and ordered immediate re-supply. To this day, Israelis feel gratitude for this decisiveness that enabled the Jewish state to turn the tide of war.”<sup>11</sup> So, was Richard Nixon anti-Semitic? And should his remarks be kept secret?

In another of his recent interviews, Julian Assange was asked whether he thought that “a state has a right to have any secrets at all.” He conceded that there are circumstances when institutions have such a need, “but that is not to say that all others must obey that need. The media has an obligation to the public to get out information that the public needs to know.”<sup>12</sup>

I would add that the American people – more than any other people – have a need to know what their government is up to around the world because their government engages in aggressive actions more than any other government, continuously bombing and sending young men and women to kill and die. Americans need to know what their psychopathic leaders are really saying to each other and to foreign leaders about all this shedding of blood. Any piece of such information might be used as a weapon to prevent yet another Washington War.

Michael Moore has recently written: “We were taken to war in Iraq on a lie. Hundreds

**“The Jews are just a very aggressive and abrasive and obnoxious personality.... most of our Jewish friends... they are all basically people who have a sense of inferiority and have got to compensate.”**

## ANTI EMPIRE REPORT

**The agents spent many hours going through each shelf and drawer, carting away dozens of boxes of personal belongings. So what kind of privacy and secrecy should the State Department be entitled to?**

of thousands are now dead. Just imagine if the men who planned this war crime back in 2002 had had a WikiLeaks to deal with. They might not have been able to pull it off. The only reason they thought they could get away with it was because they had a guaranteed cloak of secrecy. That guarantee has now been ripped from them, and I hope they are never able to operate in secret again.”

And, dear comrades, let us not forget: Our glorious leaders spy on us all the time; no communication of ours, from phone call to email, is secret from them; nothing in our bank accounts or our bedrooms is guaranteed any kind of privacy if they wish to know about it. Recently, the FBI raided the midwest homes of a number of persons active in solidarity work with Palestinians, Colombians, and others. The agents spent many hours going through each shelf and drawer, carting away dozens of boxes of personal belongings. So what kind of privacy and secrecy should the State Department be entitled to?

**Preparing for the propaganda onslaught**  
February 6 will mark the centenary of the birth of Ronald Reagan, president of the United States from 1981 to 1989. The conservatives have wasted no time in starting the show. On New Year’s Day a 55-foot long, 26-foot high float honoring Reagan was part of

the annual Rose Parade in Pasadena, California. To help you cope with, hopefully even counter, the misinformation and the omissions that are going to swamp the media for the next few months, here is some basic information about the great man’s splendid achievements, first in foreign policy:

**Nicaragua** – For eight terribly long years the people of Nicaragua were under attack by Ronald Reagan’s proxy army, the Contras. It was all-out war from Washington, aiming to destroy the progressive social and economic programs of the Sandinista government – burning down schools and medical clinics, mining harbors, bombing and strafing, raping and torturing. These Contras were the charming gentlemen Reagan called “freedom fighters” and the “moral equivalent of our founding fathers”.

**El Salvador** – Salvador’s dissidents tried to work within the system. But with US support, the government made that impossible, using repeated electoral fraud and murdering hundreds of protestors and strikers. When the dissidents took to the gun and civil war, the Carter administration and then even more so, the Reagan administration, responded with unlimited money, military aid, and training in support of the government and its death squads and torture, the latter with the help of CIA torture manuals. US military and CIA personnel played an active role on a continuous basis. The

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result was 75,000 civilian deaths; meaningful social change thwarted; a handful of the wealthy still owned the country; the poor remained as ever; dissidents still had to fear right-wing death squads; there was to be no profound social change in El Salvador while Ronnie sat in the White House with Nancy.

**Guatemala** – In 1954, a CIA-organized coup overthrew the democratically-elected and progressive government of Jacobo Arbenz, initiating 40 years of military-government death squads, torture, disappearances, mass executions, and unimaginable cruelty, totaling more than 200,000 victims – indisputably one of the most inhumane chapters of the 20th century. For eight of those years the Reagan administration played a major role. Perhaps the worst of the military dictators was General Efraín Ríos Montt, who carried out a near-holocaust against the Indians and peasants, for which he was widely condemned in the world. In December 1982, Reagan went to visit the Guatemalan dictator. At a press conference of the two men, Ríos Montt was asked about the Guatemalan policy of scorched earth. He replied “We do not have a policy of scorched earth. We have a policy of scorched communists.” After the meeting, referring to the allegations of extensive human-rights abuses, Reagan declared that Ríos Montt was getting “a bad deal” from the media.

**Grenada** – Reagan invaded this tiny country in October 1983, an invasion totally illegal and immoral, and surrounded by lies (such as “endangered” American medical students). The invasion put into power individuals more beholden to US foreign policy objectives.

**Afghanistan** – After the Carter administration provoked a Soviet invasion, Reagan came to power to support the Islamic fundamentalists in their war to eject the Soviets and the secular government, which honored women’s rights. In the end, the United States and the fundamentalists “won”, women’s rights and the rest of Afghanistan lost. More than a million dead, three million disabled, five million refugees; in

total about half the population. And many thousands of anti-American Islamic fundamentalists, trained and armed by the US, on the loose to terrorize the world, to this day. “To watch the courageous Afghan freedom fighters battle modern arsenals with simple hand-held weapons is an inspiration to those who love freedom,” declared Reagan. “Their courage teaches us a great lesson – that there are things in this world worth defending. To the Afghan people, I say on behalf of all Americans that we admire your heroism, your devotion to freedom, and your relentless struggle against your oppressors.”<sup>12</sup>

**The Cold War** – As to Reagan’s alleged role in ending the Cold War ... pure fiction. He prolonged it. Read the story in one of my books.<sup>13</sup>

Some other examples of the remarkable amorality of Ronald Wilson Reagan and the feel-good heartlessness of his administration:

Reagan, in his famous 1964 speech, “A Time for Choosing”, which lifted him to national political status: “We were told four years ago that 17 million people went to bed hungry each night. Well, that was probably true. They were all on a diet.”

“Undermining health, safety and environmental regulation. Reagan decreed such rules must be subjected to regulatory impact analysis – corporate-biased cost-benefit analyses, carried out by the Office of Management and Budget. The result: countless positive regulations discarded or revised based on pseudo-scientific conclusions that the cost to corporations would be greater than the public benefit.”

“Kick-starting the era of structural adjustment. It was under Reagan administration influence that the International Monetary Fund and World Bank began widely imposing the policy package known as structural adjustment – featuring deregulation, privatization, emphasis on exports, cuts in social spending – that has plunged country after country in the developing world into economic destitution. The IMF chief at the time

“We were told four years ago that 17 million people went to bed hungry each night. Well, that was probably true. They were all on a diet”

## ANTI EMPIRE REPORT

**The “yellow rain”, it turned out, was pollen-laden feces dropped by huge swarms of honeybees flying far overhead.**

was honest about what was to come, saying in 1981 that, for low-income countries, ‘adjustment is particularly costly in human terms’.

“Silence on the AIDS epidemic. Reagan didn’t mention AIDS publicly until 1987, by which point AIDS had killed 19,000 in the United States.” – Russell Mokhiber and Robert Weissman <sup>14</sup>

“Reagan’s election changed the political reality. His agenda was rolling back the welfare state, and his budgets included a wide range of cuts for social programs. He was also very strategic about the process. One of his first targets was Legal Aid. This program, which provides legal services for low-income people, was staffed largely by progressive lawyers, many of whom used it as a base to win precedent-setting legal disputes against the government. Reagan drastically cut back the program’s funding. He also explicitly prohibited the agency from taking on class-action suits against the government – law suits that had been used with considerable success to expand the rights of low- and moderate-income families.

“The Reagan administration also made weakening the power of unions a top priority. The people he appointed to the National Labor Relations Board were qualitatively more pro-management than appointees by prior Democratic or Republican presidents. This allowed companies to ignore workers’ rights with impunity. Reagan also made the firing of strikers an acceptable business practice when he fired striking air traffic controllers in 1981. Many large corporations quickly embraced the practice. ... The net effect of these policies was that union membership plummeted, going from nearly 20 percent of the private sector workforce in 1980 to just over 7 percent in 2006. “ – Dean Baker <sup>15</sup>

Reaganomics: a tax policy based on a notion of incentives which says that “the rich aren’t working because they have too little money, while the poor aren’t working because they have too much.” – John Kenneth Galbraith

“According to the nostrums of Reagan Age America, the current Chinese system – in equal measure capitalist and authoritarian – cannot actually exist. Capitalism spread democracy, we were told ad nauseam by a steady stream of conservative hacks, free-trade apologists, government officials and American companies doing business in China. Given enough Starbuckses and McDonald’s, provided with sufficient consumer choice, China would surely become a democracy.” – Harold Meyerson <sup>16</sup>

Throughout the early and mid-1980s, the Reagan administration declared that the Russians were spraying toxic chemicals over Laos, Cambodia and Afghanistan – the so-called “yellow rain” – and had caused more than ten thousand deaths by 1982 alone, (including, in Afghanistan, 3,042 deaths attributed to 47 separate incidents between the summer of 1979 and the summer of 1981, so precise was the information). President Reagan himself denounced the Soviet Union thusly more than 15 times in documents and speeches. The “yellow rain”, it turned out, was pollen-laden feces dropped by huge swarms of honeybees flying far overhead. <sup>17</sup>

Reagan’s long-drawn-out statements re: Contragate (the scandal involving the covert sale of weapons to Iran to enable Reaganites to continue financing the Contras in the war against the Nicaraguan government after the US Congress cut off funding for the Contras) can be summarized as follows:

I didn’t know what was happening.  
If I did know, I didn’t know enough.  
If I knew enough, I didn’t know it in time.  
If I knew it in time, it wasn’t illegal.  
If it was illegal, the law didn’t apply to me.  
If the law applied to me, I didn’t know what was happening.

**CT**

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

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14. June, 2004; Mokhiber is editor of Corporate Crime Reporter; Weissman, editor of the Multinational Monitor, both in Washington, D.C.
15. April, 2007; Baker is Co-Director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research, Washington, DC
16. Washington Post columnist, June 3, 2009
17. "Killing Hope", p.349

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