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International, National, and Community News—From a Left Perspective

Vol. 2 No. 3

January/February 2011

Witness at the White House Fence

By Ray McGovern

“Show me your company, and I’ll tell you who you are,” my grandmother would often say with a light Irish lilt but unmistakable seriousness, an admonition about taking care in choosing what company you keep.

On Thursday, December 16, I could sense her smiling down through the snow as I stood pinned to the White House fence with Daniel Ellsberg, Chris Hedges, Margaret Flowers, Medea Benjamin, Coleen Rowley, Mike Ferner, Jodie Evans, and over 125 others risking arrest in an attempt to highlight the horrors of war.

The witness was sponsored by Veterans For Peace, a group composed of many former soldiers who have “been there, done that” regarding war, distinguishing them from President Barack Obama who, like his predecessor, hasn’t a clue what war is really about. (Sorry, Mr. President, donning a bomber jacket and making empty promises to the troops in the middle of an Afghan night does not qualify.)

The simple but significant gift of presence was being offered outside the White House. As I hung on the fence, I recalled what I knew of the results of war.

Into view came some of my closest childhood friends—like Bob, whose father was killed in WWII when Bob was in kindergarten. My uncle Larry, an Army chaplain, killed in a plane crash.

Other friends like Mike and Dan, whose big brothers were killed in Korea. So many of my classmates from Infantry Officers Orientation at Ft. Benning killed in the Big Muddy called Vietnam.

My college classmate with whom I studied Russian, Ed Krukowski, First Lieutenant, USAF, one of the very first casualties of Vietnam, killed, leaving behind a wife and three small children. Other friends, too numerous to mention, killed in that misbegotten war.

More recently, Casey Sheehan and 4,429 other U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq, and the 491 U.S. troops killed so far this year in Afghanistan (bringing that

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Photo by Ellen Davidson

Above: Member of March Forward! is arrested at Dec. 16 civil resistance action; below: protesters on the White House fence



Photo by Ellen Davidson

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Don't Go, Don't Kill

By Cindy Sheehan

The recent repeal of the U.S. military policy of "Don't ask, don't tell" is far from being the human rights advancement some are touting it to be. I find it intellectually dishonest, in fact, illogical on any level to associate human rights with any military, let alone one that is currently dehumanizing two populations as well as numerous other victims of its clandestine "security" policies.

Placing this major contention aside, the enactment of the bill might be an institutional step forward in the fight for "equality"; however institutions rarely reflect reality.

Do we really think that the U.S. Congress vote to repeal the act and Obama signing the bill is going to stop the current systemic harassment of gays in the military?

While I am a staunch advocate for equality of marriage and same-sex partnership, I cannot—as a peace activist—rejoice in the fact that now homosexuals can openly serve next to heterosexuals in one of the least socially responsible organizations that currently exists on earth: The U.S. military.

It is an organization tainted with a history of intolerance towards anyone who isn't a Caucasian male from the Midwest. Even then I'm sure plenty fitting that description have faced the terror and torment enshrined into an institution that transforms the pride and enthusiasm of youth into a narrow zeal for dominating power relations.

Wrong Battle for Equality

It is hard to separate this issue from the activities of the military. War might be a "racket," but it is also the most devastating act one can be involved in, whether you are the aggressor or a victimized

civilian, no one can shake off the psychological scars of war. No one.

Its effects on the individual as well as collective human psyche are terminal. Championing equal rights is an issue of morality, war is immoral, and the U.S. military is heading further and further down the path of immorality.

Even with the advent of WikiLeaks, transparency and accountability of U.S. military activity has been sucked into a black hole of silence. Drone attacks, illegal cross-border interventions, extra-judicial assassinations all occur in the name of national interest. It is not in the interest of equal rights activists to support an institution that is intent on ignoring every protocol of human decency.

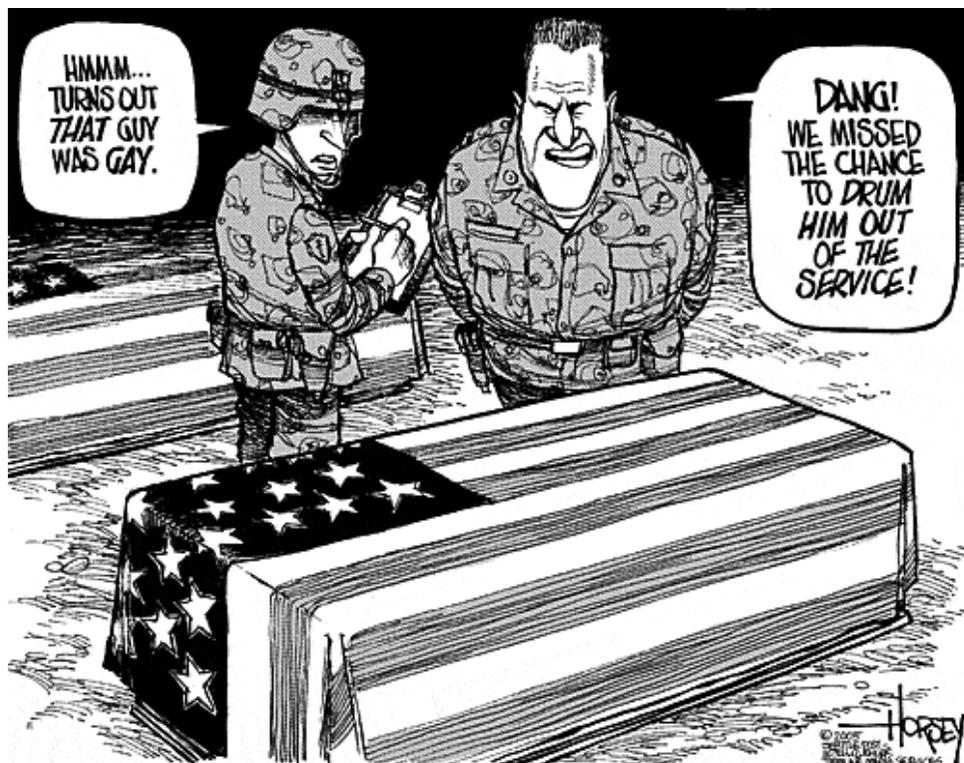
Face it, gays are now and have been in the military since before Valley Forge during the Revolutionary War.

The only difference being one can now admit their orientation without fear of official recrimination—a major boon for the equal rights movement! The capacity for increased carnage should not be celebrated as a victory!

I cannot help but think about those that are on the receiving end of U.S. military aggression. So a minor change has occurred at the input juncture of the war machine, but the output remains the same: we dismantle systems of indigenous governance, support disingenuous often criminal overlords, commit endless acts of brutality, and worst of all leave entire nations rudderless, spiraling downwards into the same abyss that engulfs the U.S. military's lack of accountability.

I wonder what the response towards don't ask, don't will be overseas? I wonder if mothers across the Swat Valley in Northern Pakistan are cheering the repeal of the act (most likely not), gathering in the streets to celebrate a victory in the global pursuit of human equality, only to be forced to take cover as yet another hellfire-laden drone appears on the horizon. Hell hath no fury, as a drone

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Woodstock International

is published by Scoop Progressive Media, LLC.

Woodstock International

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www.woodstockinternational.us

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Editorial

Peace of Mind

A cloak of sadness hangs heavy on my shoulders. It drapes to the very roots of my being. Approaching 70, in many ways I have every reason not to be sad. I am grateful to be still physically strong, energetic, and vibrant. I have not lost much muscle mass; my mental and emotional faculties are still intact; I have a beautiful, intelligent daughter, doing well in college. My finances aren't that great but I have plenty to eat, a roof over my head, my daughter has earned almost a complete scholarship at one of the best schools in the country; I have a dog and two cats; my girlfriend, also a dedicated activist, loves me; I have wonderful friends. Why on earth does this sadness permeate every cell in my being? Why can I never escape from it?

A dear friend asked me two days ago what I would like for my birthday. This friend and her partner, both also social activists, are extremely generous and have means. They have helped often in times of need. Lately I have been on the edge of poverty, as have many in these perilous economic times when the country's wealth is being diverted to wars and Wall Street. I knew I could ask for almost anything within reason and they would probably fulfill that wish. I could think of nothing that would ease even temporarily this sadness. After a while, I said with some resignation, "peace of mind."

Peace, how deeply we all long for it. Yet everywhere we look it seems there is suffering. The makers of war, our corporate-controlled and -permeated government and its minions, prosper and thrive in a lust for power and dominance; some obtain unimaginable, obscene wealth while millions starve and die because of their policies.

Another friend, Mike Ferner, president of Veterans For Peace and a former Navy medic during the Vietnam war, just came back from three weeks observing the situation in Afghanistan. He says, "Afghanistan's people need food not bombs, health care not warfare and courage for peace, not war." When I look at Mike, in his grieving eyes I see the same sadness that infects my soul.

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Jail the Bankers or This Economy Will Never Fully Recover

By refusing to hold the corporate criminals at the heart of the housing crisis accountable for their crimes, we're creating powerful incentives for future malfeasance.

By Joshua Holland

The Great Recession showed the world that the crimes that create the most victims are not committed by terrorists, gangbangers or drug traffickers, but by well-heeled crooks in Wall Street's executive suites. Tens of millions of people have seen their jobs disappear and their pension funds fleeced, and had their homes taken out from under their feet as a result of the crash of Wall Street's Great Casino. Yet so far, the culprits have been given little more than a slap on the wrist.

Failing to prosecute Wall Street's high-flying crooks doesn't only represent a great miscarriage of justice. Powerful voices within the economic establishment are now making the case that holding the bankers criminally culpable is necessary if we ever hope to stop our national economy from moving from one speculation-driven bubble to the next.

Nobel-prize winner Joe Stiglitz recently told AOL's *Daily Finance* that major damage resulting from the financial disaster "has not really been taken on board, and that is confidence in our legal system, in our rule of law, in our system of justice." His prescription? "I think we ought to go do what we did" in the wake of similar financial crises in the past, and "actually put many of these guys in prison."

His argument is based not on the visceral satisfaction of seeing the high and mighty brought down a peg, but on cold economic grounds. At heart, economics is the study of incentives, and by refusing to hold the corporate criminals at the heart of the housing crisis accountable in any meaningful way, we're creating powerful incentives for more malfeasance in the future.

As Stiglitz explained, "People have an incentive sometimes to behave badly, because they can make more money if they can cheat. If our economic system is going to work then we have to make sure that what they gain when they cheat is offset by a system of penalties." With those penalties amounting to a small 5 percent or 10 percent tax on illegal profits, what's to stop the crooks? "You're still sitting home pretty with your several hundred million dollars that you have left over after paying fines," Stiglitz said.

Economist James Galbraith of the University of Texas agrees. He told Bill Moyers that at the heart of the crisis was "a huge amount of" criminal fraud, which the Bush administration and the FBI knew was occurring but didn't prosecute. "There will have to be full-scale investigation and cleaning up of the residue of" those crimes, said Galbraith, "before you can have... a return of confidence in the financial sector. And that's a process which needs to get underway."

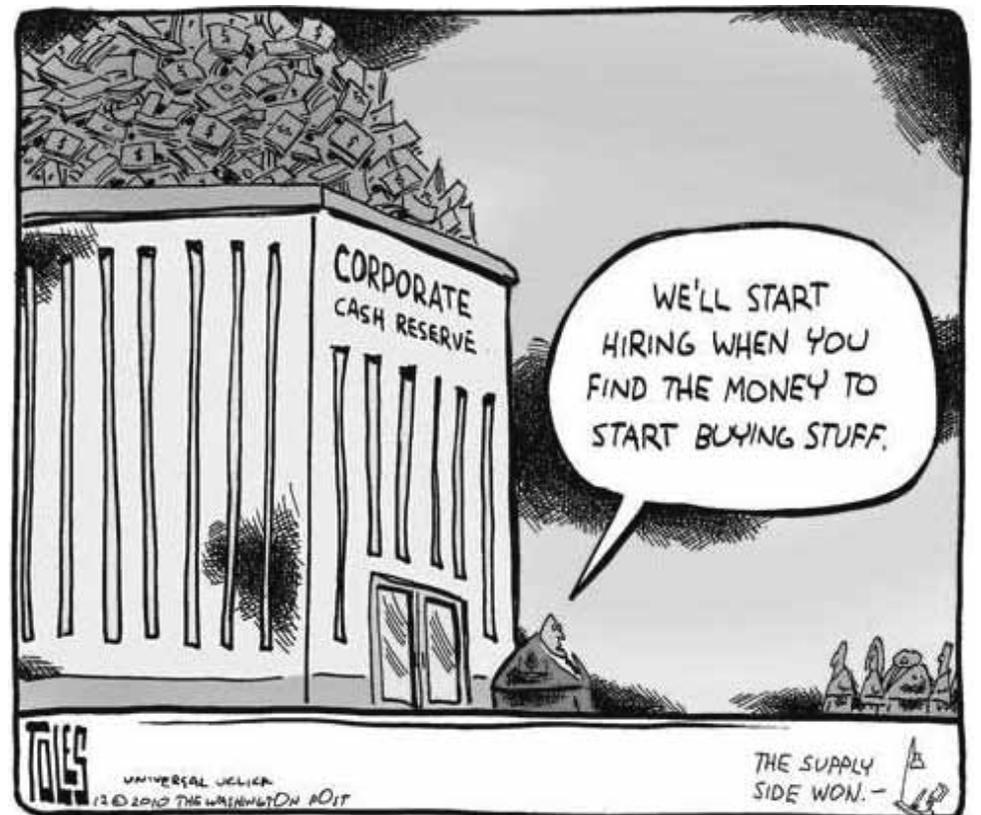
According to University of Missouri scholar (and veteran regulator) William Black, there was widespread fraud "at every step in the home finance food chain." As Black and economist L. Randall Wray recently wrote:

The appraisers were paid to overvalue real estate; mortgage brokers were paid to induce borrowers to accept loan terms they could not possibly afford; loan applications overstated the borrowers' incomes; speculators lied when they claimed that six different homes were their principal dwelling; mortgage securitizers made false [representations] and warranties about the quality of the packaged

The investors 'acted as if future losses were somebody else's problem,' the economists wrote. 'They were right.'

loans; credit ratings agencies were overpaid to overrate the securities sold on to investors; and investment banks stuffed collateralized debt obligations with toxic securities that were handpicked by hedge fund managers to ensure they would self destruct.

Economists talk about "moral hazard," which basically means that people—and institutions—behave differently when they're insulated from the potentially negative consequences of their actions. That moral hazard has been a fixture of our under-policed financial sector for years. A shining example of that is Citigroup, which received \$45 billion in TARP funds in addition to having another \$300 billion in bad paper taken off its books by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. But that was only the latest round; last year, the *New York Times* noted that over the past 80 years, "the United States government has engineered not one, not two, not three, but at least four rescues of the institution now known as Citigroup."



The consequences of being able to tap the public treasury when private firms near the brink of collapse are predictable. Indeed, in 1993 another Nobel Prize-winning economist, George Akerlof, teamed with Paul Romer, a renowned expert on economic growth, to study the root causes of the 1980s savings and loan crisis. The *New York Times* summarized their findings last year, writing that the crisis resulted from investors having

fundamental hazard: that potential loss of faith in our justice system. Stiglitz called it "collateral damage" from Wall Street's crash, noting that "people aren't sure that we have justice for all. Somebody is caught for a minor drug offense, they are sent to prison for a very long time. And yet, these so-called white-collar crimes, which are not victimless, almost none of these guys, almost none of them, go to prison."

Even in the S and L crisis that Akerlof and Romer studied, those who perpetrated fraud didn't get off with a mere fine. As financial reporter Zach Carter noted, "During the savings and loan crisis, more than 1,100 bankers went to jail for fraud." But, he added, "for some reason, the top brass at today's SEC seems to think that it's very important to bring these cases against companies, so long as the perpetrators get to walk away."

James Galbraith echoed that point, telling Bill Moyers that "the overwhelming emphasis, in the [Obama] administration's program, I think, has been to return things to a condition of normalcy, to use a 1920s word, that prevailed five and 10 years ago."

It's a matter of enormous social consequence to see justice done in the wake of Big Finance's serious crimes. But the takeaway from some of our leading economic experts is that doing so also serves a vitally important economic end; if we don't punish the guilty, we'll never fully recover from the collapse of Wall Street's house of cards.

November 17, 2010

Joshua Holland is an editor and senior writer at AlterNet. He is the author of *The 15 Biggest Lies About the Economy (and Everything else the Right Doesn't Want You to Know About Taxes, Jobs and Corporate America)*. Drop him an email or follow him on Twitter.

"borrowed huge amounts of money, made big profits when times were good and then [leaving] the government holding the bag for their eventual (and predictable) losses."

In a word, the investors looted. Someone trying to make an honest profit, Professors Akerlof and Romer said, would have operated in a completely different manner. The investors displayed a "total disregard for even the most basic principles of lending," failing to verify standard information about their borrowers or, in some cases, even to ask for that information.

The investors "acted as if future losses were somebody else's problem," the economists wrote. "They were right."

At the time, Akerlof predicted that the next opportunity for the bankers to loot hundreds of billions from the treasury would come in "an obscure little market called credit derivatives."

When it comes to criminal activity, there is a more

Bush's Friend Barack

By Ralph Nader

After nearly two years out, I can imagine George W. Bush writing his successor the following letter:

Dear President Obama

As you know I've been peddling my book *Decision Points* and while doing interviews, people ask me what I think of the job you're doing. My answer is the same: He deserves to make decisions without criticism from me. It's a tough enough job as it is. But their inquiries did prompt me to write you to privately express my continual admiration for the job you are doing. Amazing! I say "privately" because making my sentiments public would not do either of us any good, if you know what I mean.

First, I can scarcely believe my good fortune as to how your foreign and military policies—"continuity" was the word used recently by my good friend, Joe Lieberman—has protected my legacy. More than protected, you've proven yourself just as able—and I may say sometimes even more so—to "kick ass" as my Daddy used to say.

My pleasant surprise is darn near limitless. Your Justice Department has not pursued any actions against my people—not to mention Dick Cheney and I—that the civil liberties and human rights crowd keep baying for you to do.

Overseas, all I see are five stars. You are roaring in Afghanistan, dispatching our great special forces into Yemen, saying, like me, that you'll go anywhere in the world to kill those terrorists. When you said you would assassinate American citizens abroad suspected of "terrorism"—that news came over the radio during breakfast when I was eating my shredded wheat and I almost choked with amazement. You got cajones, buddy. I was hesitant about crossing the border into Pakistan—but you, man, are blasting away. Even Dick, who would never say it publically, told me he is impressed.

The Leftists are always trying to have your policies show me up negatively. Hah—they're having one hell of a tough time, aren't they?

Me state secrets, you state secrets. Me executive privilege, you executive privilege. Me stop the release of torture videos, you backed me up. Me indefinite detention, you indefinite detention. Me extraordinary rendition; you extraordinary rendition. Me sending drones, you sending tons more, flying 24/7. Me just had to look the other way on collateral damage, you doing the same and protecting our boys doing it. Me approving night time assassination raids, you're upping the ante especially since General Petraeus took over. Me beefing up Defense, you not skipping a beat. Me letting the CIA loose, you told them operate at large. Me demanding no pictures of our fallen troops, you doing the same, but allowing

the families to go to Dover which I should have done.

There is one big difference. I never cracked a law book. You are a top Harvard lawyer and teacher of constitutional law. So when you do what I did, man, it's—what's the word—legitimization!

Domestically, sure you rag Wall Street, but you continued the big bail out of the bankers and their supporting cast. Sure, you're tougher with your words, but they deserve it—remember I said that the Wall Streeters "got drunk" and "got a hangover."

What I get such a kick out of is how you handled the unions and libs who backed you with dreams of Hope and Change. How smoothly you let them learn they got nowhere to go, just as we used to tell our conservative wing the same thing (though now they've been reborn as growling Tea Partiers). So, cardcheck, single payer, rolling back my Party's passage of legislation in Congress—you made them forget it!

You have been such a great president—backing me on so many things—keeping most tax cuts and shelters, support for my oil and gas buddies (my base), big loan guarantees for nukes, keeping Uncle Sam from bargaining down pharma, expanding free trade, not going tough on China (my Daddy especially liked this one), avoiding class struggle rhetoric and so on.

You want to know how confident I am about you? Even though you called waterboarding "torture," I proudly admitted approving its use to protect our country and its freedoms. Isn't that really what the Presidency is all about, along with honoring our troops and the entire national defense efforts?

Semper fi—

George W. Bush

P.S. My mother Barbara is a big fan. She calls your term so far *Obamabush*. Cute, aye, for someone who was never a wordsmith.

Orinally published on CommonDreams.org.

Ralph Nader is a consumer advocate, lawyer, and author. His most recent book—and first novel—is *Only The Super-Rich Can Save Us*. His most recent work of nonfiction is *The Seventeen Traditions*.



Don't Go

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operated from somewhere south of the Mason-Dixon Line.

Don't equal human rights extend to those that the Empire has mislabeled as the "enemy"? Or do we now have to ignore the fact that innocent people are being slaughtered by the thousands?

Unjust Binaries

We live in a world governed by binaries, straight or gay, them or us, freedom or tyranny. Until we break away from this norm, we shall forever be shackled to a narrow existence, manipulated by a political establishment that serves its own interests.

We should embrace complication, appreciate difference and most of all not be duped into accepting "victories" that clearly benefit an elite, that you and me (pardon the binary) will never be part of.

were deeply harmed by life in the military.

Because of the callous and violent nature of the system, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is on the rise and suicide rates among veterans and the spouses of active duty soldiers are skyrocketing.

Veterans still find it very difficult to access the services, benefits and bonuses that were promised to them by their recruiters. I cannot imagine the repealing of DADT significantly improving the material conditions experienced by gays during military service.

While the children of war profiteers and politicians are protected from any kind of sacrifice, this Empire preys on the rest of our youth—gay/straight; male/female—and spits their mangled or dead bodies onto the dung heap of history, without a qualm or a twinge of conscience.

Joining the U.S. military should never be an option for the socially conscious while our troops are being used as corporate tools for profit, or hired assassins for

To see a demographic that is traditionally better educated, more politically progressive, and economically advantaged fight to join this killing machine is very disheartening.

Some of us in the peace movement work really hard to keep our young people out of the hands of the war machine that preys on disadvantaged young people in inner cities and poor rural settings.

To see a demographic that is (without appearing to stereotypes) traditionally better educated, more politically progressive, and economically advantaged fight to join this killing machine is very disheartening.

I can see how one could view the repeal as a step forward, framed in the context dictated by the political elites of the Washington beltway. I can imagine much displeasure amongst the military brass—but I cannot reiterate enough how this is not a progressive moment in the social history of the United States.

The U.S. military is not a human rights organization and nowhere near a healthy place to earn a living or raise a family. My email box is filled with stories of mostly straight soldiers and their families who

imperial expansion. Soldiers are called: "Bullet sponges," by their superiors and "dumb animals" by Henry Kissinger, the former secretary of state.

While soldiers are dehumanized and treated like dirt, they are taught to dehumanize "the other," and treat them as less than dirt. It is a vicious cycle, and the way to stop a vicious cycle is to denounce and reject it, not openly participate.

I want to bang my head against a wall when another young gay person commits suicide as a result of despicable bullying, yet people within the same community have fought hard for the right to openly join the biggest bully ever! Don't go, don't kill!

Originally published on Open Mike Blog December 26, 2010.

Cindy Sheehan's oldest child Casey was killed in Iraq on April 4th, 2004. Since then she has been on a mission to end the wars and hold George W. Bush accountable.

November, 2005

It would be naive to depend on the Supreme Court to defend the rights of poor people, women, people of color, dissenters of all kinds. Those rights only come alive when citizens organize, protest, demonstrate, strike, boycott, rebel, and violate the law in order to uphold justice."—Howard Zinn

By Howard Zinn

John Roberts sailed through his confirmation hearings as the new Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, with enthusiastic Republican support, and a few weak mutterings of opposition by the Democrats. Then, after the far right deemed Harriet Miers insufficiently doctrinaire, Bush nominated arch conservative Samuel Alito to replace Sandra Day O'Connor. This has caused a certain consternation among people we affectionately term "the left."

I can understand that sinking feeling. Even listening to pieces of Roberts's confirmation hearings was enough to induce despair: the joking with the candidate, the obvious signs that, whether Democrats or Republicans, these are all members of the same exclusive club. Roberts's proper "credentials," his "nice guy" demeanor, his insistence to the Judiciary Committee that he is not an "ideologue" (can you imagine anyone, even Robert Bork or Dick Cheney, admitting that he is an "ideologue"?) were clearly more important than his views on equality, justice, the rights of defendants, the war powers of the President.

At one point in the hearings, the *New York Times* reported, Roberts "summed up his philosophy." He had been asked, "Are you going to be on the side of the little guy?" (Would any candidate admit that he was on the side of "the big guy"? Presumably serious "hearings" bring out idiot questions.)

Roberts replied: "If the Constitution says that the little guy should win, the little guy's going to win in court before me. But if the Constitution says that the big guy should win, well, then the big guy's going to win, because my obligation is to the Constitution."

If the Constitution is the holy test, then a justice should abide by its provision in Article VI that not only the Constitution itself but "all Treaties made, or which shall be made, under the Authority of the United States, shall be the Supreme Law of the Land." This includes the Geneva Convention of 1949, which the United States signed, and which insists that prisoners of war must be granted the rights of due process.

A district court judge in 2004 ruled that the detainees held in Guantanamo for years without trial were protected by the Geneva Convention and deserved due process. Roberts and two colleagues on the Court of Appeals overruled this.

There is enormous hypocrisy surrounding the pious veneration of the Constitution and "the rule of law." The Constitution, like the Bible, is infinitely flexible and is used to serve the political needs of the moment. When the country was in economic crisis and turmoil in the Thirties and capitalism needed to be saved from the anger of the poor and hungry and unemployed, the Supreme Court was willing to stretch to infinity the constitutional right of Congress to regulate interstate commerce. It decided that the national government, desperate to regulate farm production, could tell a family farmer what to grow on his tiny piece of land.

When the Constitution gets in the way of a war, it is ignored. When the Supreme Court was faced, during Vietnam, with a suit by soldiers refusing to go, claiming that there had been no declaration of war by Congress, as the Constitution required, the soldiers could not get four Supreme Court justices to agree to even hear the case. When, during

Don't Despair About the Supreme Court

World War I, Congress ignored the First Amendment's right to free speech by passing legislation to prohibit criticism of the war, the imprisonment of dissenters under this law was upheld unanimously by the Supreme Court, which included two presumably liberal and learned justices: Oliver Wendell Holmes and Louis Brandeis.



The courts have never been on the side of justice, only moving a few degrees one way or the other, unless pushed by the people. Those words engraved in the marble of the Supreme Court, "Equal Justice Before the Law," have always been a sham.

It would be naive to depend on the Supreme Court to defend the rights of poor people, women, people of color, dissenters of all kinds. Those rights only come alive when citizens organize, protest, demonstrate, strike, boycott, rebel, and violate the law in order to uphold justice.

The distinction between law and justice is ignored by all those Senators—Democrats and Republicans—who solemnly invoke as their highest concern "the rule of law." The law can be just; it can be unjust. It does not deserve to inherit the ultimate authority of the divine right of the king.

The Constitution gave no rights to working people: no right to work less than twelve hours a day, no right to a living wage, no right to safe working conditions. Workers had to organize, go on strike, defy the law, the courts, the police, create a great movement which won the eight-hour day, and caused such commotion that Congress was forced to pass a minimum wage law, and Social Security, and unemployment insurance.

The Brown decision on school desegregation did not come from a sudden realization of the Supreme Court that this is what the Fourteenth Amendment called for. After all, it was the same Fourteenth Amendment that had been cited in the Plessy case upholding racial segregation. It was the initiative of brave families in the South—along with the fear by the government, obsessed with the Cold War, that it was losing the hearts and minds of colored people all over the world—that brought a sudden enlightenment to the Court.

The Supreme Court in 1883 had interpreted the Fourteenth Amendment so that nongovernmental institutions—hotels, restaurants, etc.—could bar black people. But after the sit-ins and arrests of thousands of black people in the South in the early Sixties, the right to public accommodations was quietly given constitutional sanction in 1964 by the Court. It now interpreted the interstate commerce clause, whose wording had not changed since 1787, to mean that places of public accommodation could be regulated by Congressional action and be prohibited from discriminating.

Soon this would include barbershops, and I suggest it takes an ingenious interpretation to include barbershops in interstate commerce.

The right of a woman to an abortion did not depend on the Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade*. It was won before that decision, all over the country, by grassroots agitation that forced states to recognize the right. If the American people, who by a great majority favor that right, insist on it, act on it, no Supreme Court decision can take it away.

The rights of working people, of women, of black people have not depended on decisions of the courts. Like the other branches of the political system, the courts have recognized these rights only after citizens have engaged in direct action powerful enough to win these rights for themselves.

This is not to say that we should ignore the courts or the electoral campaigns. It can be useful to get one person rather than another on the Supreme Court, or in the Presidency, or in Congress. The courts, win or lose, can be used to dramatize issues.

On St. Patrick's Day, 2003, on the eve of the invasion of Iraq, four anti-war activists poured their own blood around the vestibule of a military recruiting center near Ithaca, New York, and were arrested. Charged in state court with criminal mischief and trespassing (charges well suited to the American invaders of a certain Mideastern country), the St. Patrick's Four spoke their hearts to the jury. Peter DeMott, a Vietnam veteran, described the brutality of war. Danny Burns explained why invading Iraq would violate the U.N. Charter, a treaty signed by the United States. Clare Grady spoke of her moral obligations as a Christian. Teresa Grady spoke to the jury as a mother, telling them that women and children were the chief victims of war, and that she cared about the children of Iraq. Nine of the twelve jurors voted to acquit them, and the judge declared a hung jury. (When the federal government retried them on felony conspiracy charges, a jury in September acquitted them of those and convicted them on lesser charges.)

Still, knowing the nature of the political and judicial system of this country, its inherent bias against the poor, against people of color, against dissidents, we cannot become dependent on the courts, or on our political leadership. Our culture—the media, the educational system—tries to crowd out of our political consciousness everything except who will be elected President and who will be on the Supreme Court, as if these are the most important decisions we make. They

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Deserving Neither Liberty Nor Safety

The Long-Term Assault on Civil Liberties in America

Commies, Pinkos, Reds at the windows. Foreign agitators runnin' elevators. J. Edgar Hoover in a pink tu-tu. Investigatin' anyone who thinks like a-you. Welcome to the fifties, you look a little shifty.

—From "God and the FBI" by Janis Ian

By Fred Nagel

Visiting Budapest in the early nineties, after the fall of the Soviet Union, I had a chance to talk to some Hungarians about their lives during and after the Soviet occupation. I was particularly interested in the

government to show a judge some good reason for snooping in your house (reasonable cause that there is evidence relevant to a crime). This assault on the Fourth Amendment, which protects citizens from unwarranted search and surveillance, has some startling ramifications.

The FBI can not only search your home or business, but also listen to your phone conversations, monitor your computer and Internet use, and search your medical, financial, library, and academic records. All this without ever letting you know. As an example, librarians were put on notice that it is a

you can be locked up and denied your most basic rights, based on evidence you may never even find out about.

Secret military tribunals have been set up to try immigrants and other foreigners for terrorism, with the death penalty a distinct possibility. Even U.S. citizens who are allowed access to a lawyer may have their conversations monitored if the attorney general "suspects" that terrorist activity is involved. Good-bye to another very basic right we have come to expect, that of attorney/client privilege.

is the Church Committee Report, a congressional investigation of the Bureau conducted in 1975. According to this report, the FBI was in trouble by the 1920s when agents carried out the "Palmer Raids" that eventually rounded up 10,000 citizens in what was termed "indiscriminate arrests of innocent with the guilty" as well as "unlawful seizures by federal detectives." The Church Committee also cited reports by legal scholars that "found federal agents guilty of using third-degree tortures, making illegal searches and arrests, using agents provocateurs." A young man, J. Edgar Hoover, joined the Bureau in time to take part in these raids.



On Friday, September 24, 2010, the FBI raided seven homes and an antiwar office. Fourteen activists in Illinois, Minnesota, and Michigan were also handed subpoenas to testify before a federal grand jury. The usual groups were targeted . . . All had been involved in the antiwar marches at the Republican National Convention in St. Paul.

secret police. Did they feel safer now that they couldn't be taken away in the middle of the night for something they had said or written? One woman's response was typical. "They would never come for me," she said. "They came for our writers, our intellectuals, but never for me; I was never scared."

Perhaps the average American thought the same way about the USA PATRIOT Act, passed within a month after the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. Certainly members of Congress felt that way. The act was over 300 pages long, and most simply did not have time to read it in the rush for passage.

They should have. It gives our government the right to secretly investigate individuals and groups if they violate criminal laws and their actions "appear to be intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population. . ." Cutting a fence, throwing a stone, or crossing a police barrier in pursuit of civil rights, protecting the environment, or protesting the World Trade Organization would certainly qualify. And only one member of a group needs to engage in this type of action for the whole group to be investigated.

The USA PATRIOT Act does away with the need for a search warrant, the process that requires the

violation of law to let any library user know that his/her records have ever been checked. And hundreds of libraries report that records have been checked, although they are forbidden to reveal the specifics. There can be little doubt that homes have also been searched, patient records copied, etc. since passage of this act. Could my house or computer be searched simply because I wrote this article? In the brave, new world of the USA PATRIOT Act, anything is possible.

Indefinite imprisonment without charges and without evidence used to be unthinkable as well. But the USA PATRIOT Act allows this for non-citizens who are members of a designated "terrorist organization." Moreover, the FBI gets to label any group it wants as supporting terrorism. Did you give money to the African National Congress in its fight against apartheid in South Africa? Did you support CISPE, an organization trying to change U.S. policy in El Salvador and Central America? If you did and you are not a citizen, you could join the thousands who have been rounded up, questioned, and held in indefinite detention, without charges and without access to legal representation. Two U.S. citizens have also been imprisoned in this manner, establishing a chilling precedent for the future, no matter what their supposed crimes. The line has clearly been crossed, and as a citizen of this country,

The Total Information Awareness database, organized as part of the Bush Era's Department of Homeland Security, was an ominous step toward a police state. Masterminded by Admiral John Poindexter (criminally convicted in 1990 for lying to Congress, destroying official documents, and obstruction of justice), this database would have collected every bit of information that existed on every citizen in this country. A massive public outcry stopped that program before it was put into place. But since then, the government's surveillance programs have multiplied dramatically, especially under Obama, who signed the extension of the USA PATRIOT Act without any reforms at all. Currently, the Justice Department is trying to get a federal appeals court to overturn a ruling against planting GPS devices without a warrant.

"Big deal," you reply. "The FBI has been doing all this stuff for years. Where have you been?" Well, it has been doing this since 1908, when Congress first refused to authorize the FBI (at that time the Bureau of Investigation), explaining that "a system of spying upon and espionage of the people, such as has prevailed in Russia" was unacceptable in a free society. The president then created the FBI while Congress was not in session.

The clearest and most reliable source of FBI history

By the 1950s Hoover, as head of the FBI, was one of the most powerful men in the country. He used his investigators to collect information on a broad range of public figures and had no scruples when it came to using that information to influence congressional votes or presidential decisions. It was under Hoover that COINTELPRO was born, a comprehensive system of surveillance that the Church Committee found "had no conceivable rational relationship to either national security or violent activity. The unexpressed major premise of much of COINTELPRO is that the Bureau has a role in maintaining the existing social order, and that its efforts should be aimed toward combating those who threaten that order." Combating the civil rights movement, the American Indian Movement, and the anti-Vietnam War movement to be specific. The FBI served as thought police of the 1950s and 1960s.

The mindless destruction caused by COINTELPRO is still coming to light. Martin Luther King Jr. was a particular target. Over several years, the FBI wiretapped King's home and office phones and put bugs in his hotel rooms. At the same time, it worked to deny him awards and honorary degrees, and even tried to prevent an audience with Pope Paul VI. Hoover was quick to exploit the results of the wiretaps, proof of King's illicit affairs that he then

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Liberty Nor Safety

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had his agents mail to King's supporters and to the media. Finally, the FBI mailed copies of bedroom tapes to King himself, along with an anonymous letter suggesting he commit suicide rather than having his wife, family, and the nation know about his marital infidelity.

The FBI vendetta against other African-American and Indian groups was just as brutal. Leonard Peltier sits in a federal prison today, framed for a murder that most historians doubt he committed. The role of the FBI in his extradition from Canada and the withholding of more than 12,000 FBI documents from his trial is another low point in the violation of civil liberties. Among the documents withheld was a ballistic test that proved that the fatal bullets could not have come from the gun tied to Mr. Peltier at the trial. According to Amnesty International, he is a "political prisoner" who should be "immediately and unconditionally released."

The Church Committee Report was released in 1976. Senator Frank Church told the nation at that time that the FBI's COINTELPRO had been "a sophisticated vigilante operation aimed squarely at preventing the exercise of First Amendment rights of speech and association." He also reassured U.S. citizens "that never again will an agency of the government be permitted to conduct a secret war against those citizens it considers a threat to the established order."

But by 1980, things were back to normal for the FBI, at least according to Frank Varelli, who infiltrated a CISPES office in Dallas for the Bureau that year. In an in-depth statement to Congress in 1987, he revealed a complicated but all too familiar pattern of surveillance, theft, and dirty tricks directed at this legal and nonviolent organization. CISPES was founded to promote peace in El Salvador. Specifically, it worked to expose U.S. military aid that funded right-wing death squads operating there. Varelli was hired by the FBI as part of an "international terrorism investigation," but



his tactics included the familiar cameras and sound equipment in bedrooms, this time as part of an attempt to smear and blackmail the Dallas head of CISPES, a nun by the name of Sister Linda Hajak. Varelli also provided the Salvadoran National Guard with lists of U.S. citizens traveling there "who were not friendly to Reagan policies." Just one year before Varelli supplied these lists, three nuns and one church worker, all U.S. citizens, had been raped and murdered in El Salvador by members of this same National Guard.

The FBI has admitted to launching this investigation from 1981 through 1985 but has refused to reveal on what legal authority it did so. More than 50 CISPES offices were broken into during this period.

In 1990, it was the turn of the environmental movement. Two activists, Judi Bari and Darryl Cherney, were arrested and accused of making and transporting bombs, a charge the FBI knew was false. Historian and writer, Howard Zinn's testimony in a successful lawsuit against the FBI says it all. "It seems clear that the history of the FBI is consistent with the charges that it sought to discredit and 'neutralize' Judi Bari and Darryl Cherney, and the environmental cause they were working for, by smearing them publicly with sensational false charges of possession of a bomb, and that it did not hesitate to violate their constitutional rights to achieve its ends."

The fact that the average U.S. citizen is unaware of all of this is a testament to the the FBI's skill at public relations. Of course, the FBI has done some excellent crime fighting in its history. But even its campaign against the Mafia has been exaggerated in the media. Anti-crime efforts in places like Boston are now being exposed for what they were. The FBI allied itself with certain crime families to arrest and take the credit for convicting members of other families. It was a little crime fighting and a lot of PR, a Hoover legacy that extends into the 21st century. How many movies and TV shows were influenced by the Bureau over the last 40 years? That is where you and I learned about the FBI.

The FBI, as well as similar federal law enforcement agencies, has done a much better job of protecting us from dissent than of protecting us from crime for all these years. And as for terrorists, in the entire history of the FBI there were precious few of those caught among the tens of thousands detained, bugged, discredited, falsely charged, and publicly humiliated. Looking at the history of the FBI, is it any wonder that 19 men were able to board four domestic airliners and fly them with such deadly accuracy into their targets? They learned to fly at U.S. flight schools while the Bureau was busy tracking down and playing dirty tricks on students protesting free trade and the World Bank.

Police forces all across this land have followed the lead of the FBI in snooping. The Denver Police Department revealed a 40-year program of gathering and storing information on the usual suspects: Sister Antonia Anthony, a 74-year-old nun

who taught destitute Indians, and Shirley Whiteside, who with her husband ran a community soup kitchen. These were the types of people labeled "criminal extremists" in the database developed by Orion, a software company with ties to the Pentagon. When asked how more than 3,000 Denver citizens ended up with this label, the police said that it was up to each officer to "use his own judgment" in characterizing people. The label "criminal extremist" was often used when a person didn't seem to fit any other category. There just doesn't seem to be much hesitation when it comes to spying on and labeling this country's citizens. It is done from the FBI all the way down to the local police.

On Friday, September 24, 2010, the FBI raided seven homes and an antiwar office. Fourteen activists in Illinois, Minnesota, and Michigan were also handed subpoenas to testify before a federal grand jury. The usual groups were targeted: the Twin Cities Anti-War Committee, the Palestine Solidarity Group, the Colombia Action Network, Students for a Democratic Society, and the Freedom Road Socialist Organization. All had been involved in the antiwar marches at the Republican National Convention in St. Paul.

Tracy Molm was one of the activists targeted in the early morning raid.

"I heard a pounding on my door in my apartment complex; that was pretty bizarre. I opened the door and they shoved their way in saying 'We are FBI agents and we have a warrant.' I was in my bathrobe and they told me I had to sit on my couch, and they were going to search my apartment. They pulled my roommate and a friend out of her room and told them to sit on the couch too. They took my phone from me. And they took my computer. They proceeded to go through everything in our apartment. If we wanted to go to the bathroom, an FBI agent had to come with us. We were told we could leave, but couldn't come back.



"I was outraged and stunned. I never thought in my wildest dreams that this could happen. Everything I have ever done has been around peace and justice issues around the world, and particularly U.S. foreign policy. So it was really surprising. I was on a delegation to the West Bank, in the occupied territories in 2004, which is six years ago. And they said this is in regards to that."

I have never much liked Benjamin Franklin's famous quote about civil liberties: "They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety." It seemed a little elitist, suggesting that some people haven't earned the right to enjoy freedom of expression. Perhaps they have no need for it, like the woman in Budapest saying that the secret police would never come for her. But maybe Franklin was simply saying he had done his part and the rest was up to us.

In many ways, we have failed Ben Franklin and we have failed ourselves. I like to think that there is still time to win back our basic civil liberties in the land of the free, home of the brave. To get involved, make a donation or find out more go to www.stopfbi.net.

Fred Nagel is an activist writer, filmmaker, and radio show host; his website is classwars.org.

Supreme Court

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are not. They deflect us from the most important job citizens have, which is to bring democracy alive by organizing, protesting, engaging in acts of civil disobedience that shake up the system. That is why Cindy Sheehan's dramatic stand in Crawford, Texas, leading to 1,600 anti-war vigils around the country, involving 100,000 people, is more crucial to the future of American democracy than the mock hearings on Justice Roberts or the ones to come on Judge Alito.

That is why the St. Patrick's Four need to be supported and emulated. That is why the GIs refusing to return to Iraq, the families of soldiers calling for withdrawal from the war, are so important.

That is why the huge peace march in Washington on September 24 bodes well.

Let us not be disconsolate over the increasing control of the court system by the right wing.

The courts have never been on the side of justice, only moving a few degrees one way or the other, unless pushed by the people. Those words engraved in the marble of the Supreme Court, "Equal Justice Before the Law," have always been a sham.

No Supreme Court, liberal or conservative, will stop the war in Iraq, or redistribute the wealth of this country, or establish free medical care for every human being. Such fundamental change will depend, the experience of the past suggests, on the actions of an aroused citizenry, demanding that the promise of the Declaration of Independence—an equal right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—be fulfilled.

Freedom from Want

By Lisa Savage

As I digest the news that progressive congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords was gunned down in Arizona in what appears to be a politically motivated assassination, I am working on an op-ed in response to meeting I was at yesterday about poverty in Maine.

The new governor of Maine, Paul LePage, won when a third party candidate with a lot of foreign capital in his resume split the progressive vote. Tea Party candidate LePage and company begin the work of coping with an \$800 million shortfall in funding for existing programs this month.

It is not a task to be envied. LePage is making grandiose claims such as refusing all federal funding, but overblown rhetoric won't make the task of facing up to reality any easier. If federal funds are not available to maintain and repair roads, or plow them, this will have swift economic consequences. Almost all Mainers rely on trucks running along Interstate 95 to bring us food and medicine, for instance.

Once upon a time Norman Rockwell illustrated the four freedoms that FDR had identified as the foundation of our well-being. Rockwell's painting of a grandmother putting a roast turkey on the table for her assembled family was titled *Freedom from Want*. Once we thought this an essential freedom, the foundation of a secure social order.

During my lifetime poverty has grown so that now 1 in 7 in the United States live below the poverty level. For children, it is 1 in 5. That is 20 percent of children living in households where adults must choose whether to pay rent or buy food, because they cannot afford to do both. Maine is poorer than average, and the county I live in, Somerset, is the poorest in Maine.

I met with members of the Maine Poor People's Economic Human Rights Coalition twice recently to examine their vision of a society I would want to live in. I will lobby to have my taxes support this vision rather than funding 800-plus military bases around the globe, and occupations that make us no safer. Bring our war dollars home to make this a reality for every family and individual in Maine.

Bill of Maine Economic Human Rights

- 1) Every individual has a right to have basic needs met, such as:
 - food and clothing
 - permanent housing
 - health care
 - child care
- 2) Every individual has a right, to income to provide the basic needs of the family, through productive employment and/or through entitlements.
- 3) Every individual has a right to:
 - freedom from discrimination in obtaining basic needs
 - seek one's choice of employment
 - productive work with equal pay for equal or comparable work at a liveable wage
 - protections against the ill effects of unemployment
 - a standard of living that is adequate for security and well-being
- 4) Every individual has a right to:
 - form and join labor unions and other groups which protect their interests
 - bargain collectively on issues such as pay and working conditions



Photo by John Clarke Flagg

Holding a freshly lit candle, Daniel Flagg of Bangor joined dozens of others in front of the Bangor Area Homeless Shelter for Bangor's annual Homeless Memorial Day vigil walk Tuesday evening. Flagg said he was homeless until a few weeks ago. "I didn't realize the homeless situation until I was homeless myself," said Flagg. Flagg hopes to volunteer his time to help other homeless persons.

- work in businesses or cooperatives with opportunities for economic democracy
 - strike without fear of reprisals
- 5) Every individual has a right to education or training to obtain the skills that allow participation in and contribution to the Maine economy.
 - 6) Every individual has a right to access financial services, including, but not limited to, savings or checking accounts, loans and IRAs.
 - 7) Every individual has a right to access quality legal services regardless of ability to pay.

This sounds like the kind of Maine I want for my children and grandchildren.

Originally published on went2thebridge.blogspot.com.

Obama's Orwellian embrace of all things corporate and politically rightward has been deliberate, forceful and consistent throughout his career; not the product of cowardice, weakness, incompetence, naïve idealism, or bad timing. This is Barack Obama, as he has always been: a servile facilitator and protector of the political establishment; an insidious capitulator and "consensus man"; a sellout who piously sits back and lets others fight (while railing against their "bickering"), and then accepts whatever deal is politically expedient—no matter what morals or principles he violates, no matter who or what he betrays.

—Larry Chin, *Global Research*, December 11, 2010

By Lenore J. Daniels

Where do we stand now? As Black Americans, we stand on the cliff of an abyss.

Thank the *leadership* of our civic and political leaders for shifting the Black community's attention from the struggle to educate and empower us with the spirit of resistance. More than 40 years after COINTELPRO's annihilation of Malcolm, King, and other Black leaders, Black leadership has been groomed to facilitate the rapid death of the Black population in service to domestic and foreign aggressive U.S. pogroms to silence protest. In place of genuine Black protest, we have an optical illusion: Careerists, dressed in suits, founders of mega-organizations, masquerading as Black interests organizations. The suited careerists, in contrast to Martin L. King, mimic the corporate

In 2010 No Photos of Obama with MLK Equivalent

warmongers while their organizations operate massive voter registration drives on behalf of the U.S.'s corporate leadership.

As a whole, we have accepted a definition of leadership crafted by our opposition, an opposition that has grown stronger, increasingly corporate ruled, surrounded by a global security apparatus and criminal "justice" establishment not limited to federal, state, and local courts within the United States.

Black leadership is not ignorant of the reality of the corporate coup—they are complicit with in the coup because, as a whole, Black leadership helped to emancipate the corporations and now corporate interests is, in part or in whole, the interests of Black leadership on the one hand and also the local Black prison security guard, educator, politician, Black college student who wants to be the next Bill Gates, and even a 6th grader who knows more corporate-sponsored rappers than he or she knows anything about the history of Black resistance. Black leadership has unified to speak to the community about "responsibility," "individual

successful," and "economic power"—we need to gain economic power—knowing good and well this is utter nonsense in this day and age of corporate control, but it serves to remind the Black population that in this new day the motto is—get rich or die trying!

Starting with the Maynard Jacksons to the Willie Browns, the Jesse Jacksons (Senior and Junior) to the Al Sharptons, the John Lewises (Malcolm or me!) to the Charles Rangel, the Eddie Longs to the T.D. Jakes (God-wants-you-to-get-rich-pastors), to any number of Black academic enslaved clowns (silent as the colleges and universities shut down Black studies) and countless "urban policy" government gofers—the message has been the same: a fighter no, but a joiner—that's where the money is!

Capitalist slaveholders learned to control the potential for massive resistance among the enslaved. Today, after Malcolm and King could not be co-opted and had to be killed, our leadership should be held responsible for supporting and facilitating, willing or through silence, the high Black incarceration rates and the hand over of Black children to camps (so-called educational institutions) where they have been mentally gutted and left to flounder in despair.

And there is no rescue for this population anywhere in sight!

It is this Black leadership that made it possible for the emergence of a Barack Obama as the ultimate useful tool for the advancement of corporate capitalism. Make no mistake, the leadership these

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NO ACT OF REBELLION IS WASTED

By Chris Hedges

I stood with hundreds of thousands of rebellious Czechoslovakians in 1989 on a cold winter night in Prague's Wenceslas Square as the singer Marta Kubišová approached the balcony of the Melantrich building. Kubišová had been banished from the airwaves in 1968 after the Soviet invasion for her anthem of defiance, "Prayer for Marta." Her entire catalog, including more than 200 singles, had been confiscated and destroyed by the state. She had disappeared from public view. Her voice that night suddenly flooded the square. Pressing around me were throngs of students, most of whom had not been born when she vanished. They began to sing the words of the anthem. There were tears running down their faces. It was then that I understood the power of rebellion. It was then that I knew that no act of rebellion, however futile it appears in the moment, is wasted. It was then that I knew that the Communist regime was finished.

"The people will once again decide their own fate," the crowd sang in unison with Kubišová.

I had reported on the fall of East Germany before I arrived in Prague. I would leave Czechoslovakia to cover the bloody overthrow of the Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaucescu. The collapse of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe was a lesson about the long, hard road of peaceful defiance that makes profound social change possible. The rebellion in Prague, as in East Germany, was not led by the mandarins in the political class but by marginalized artists, writers, clerics, activists and intellectuals such as Vaclav Havel, whom we met with most nights during the upheavals in Prague in the Magic Lantern Theater. These activists, no matter how bleak things appeared, had kept alive the possibility of justice and freedom. Their stances and protests, which took place over 40 years of Communist rule, turned them into figures of ridicule, or saw the state seek to erase them from national consciousness. They were dismissed by the pundits who controlled the airwaves as cranks, agents of foreign powers, fascists or misguided and irrelevant dreamers.

I spent a day during the Velvet Revolution with several



Wenceslas Square, Prague, Nov. 21, 1989



Journalist Chris Hedges does civil resistance at the White House Dec. 16

elderly professors who had been expelled from the Romance language department at Charles University for denouncing the Soviet invasion. Their careers, like those of thousands of professors, teachers, artists, social workers, government employees and journalists in our own universities during the Communist witch hunts, were destroyed. After the Soviet invasion, the professors had been shipped to a remote part of Bohemia where they were forced to work on a road construction crew. They shoveled tar and graded roadbeds. And as they worked they dedicated each day to one of the languages in which they all were fluent—Latin, Greek, Italian, French, Spanish, or German. They argued and fought over their interpretations of Homer, Virgil, Dante, Goethe, Proust, and Cervantes. They remained intellectually and morally alive. Kubišová, who had been the most popular recording star in the country, was by then reduced to working for a factory that assembled toys. The playwright Havel was in and out of jail.

The long, long road of sacrifice, tears, and suffering that led to the collapse of these regimes stretched back decades. Those who made change possible were those who had discarded all notions of the practical. They did not try to reform the Communist Party. They did not attempt to work within the system. They did not even know what, if anything, their protests would accomplish. But through it all they held fast to moral imperatives. They did so because these values were right and just. They expected no reward for their virtue; indeed they got none. They were marginalized and persecuted. And yet these poets, playwrights, actors, singers, and writers finally triumphed over state and military power. They drew the good to the good. They triumphed because, however cowed and broken the masses around them appeared, their message of defiance did not go unheard. It did not go unseen. The steady drumbeat of rebellion constantly exposed the dead hand of authority and the rot and corruption of the state.

The walls of Prague were covered that chilly winter with posters depicting Jan Palach. Palach, a university student, set himself on fire in Wenceslas Square on Jan. 16, 1969, in the middle of the day to protest the crushing of the country's democracy movement. He died of his burns three days later. The state swiftly attempted to erase his act from national memory. There was no mention of it on

As long as a few of us rebel it will always remain possible to defeat a system of centralized, corporate power that is as criminal and heartless as those I watched tumble into the ash bin of history in Eastern Europe.

state media. A funeral march by university students was broken up by police. Palach's gravesite, which became a shrine, saw the Communist authorities exhume his body, cremate his remains and ship them to his mother with the provision that his ashes could not be placed in a cemetery. But it did not work. His defiance remained a rallying cry. His sacrifice spurred the students in the winter of 1989 to act. Prague's Red Army Square, shortly after I left for Bucharest, was renamed Palach Square. Ten thousand people went to the dedication.

We, like those who opposed the long night of communism, no longer have any mechanisms within the formal structures of power that will protect or advance our rights. We too have undergone a coup d'état carried out not by the stone-faced leaders of a monolithic Communist Party but by the corporate state. We too have our designated pariahs, whether Ralph Nader or Noam Chomsky, and huge black holes of state-sponsored

historical amnesia to make us ignore the militant movements, rebels and radical ideas that advanced our democracy. We opened up our society to ordinary people not because we defied the wisdom of the Founding Fathers or the sanctity of the Constitution. We opened it up because of communist, socialist and anarchist leaders like Big Bill Haywood and his militant unionists in the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

We may feel, in the face of the ruthless corporate destruction of our nation, our culture, and our ecosystem, powerless and weak. But we are not. We have a power that terrifies the corporate state. Any act of rebellion, no matter how few people show up or how heavily it is censored by a media that caters to the needs and profits of corporations, chips away at corporate power. Any act of rebellion keeps alive the embers for larger movements that follow us. It passes on another narrative. It will, as the rot of the state consumes itself, attract wider and wider numbers. Perhaps this will not happen in our lifetimes. But if we persist we will keep this possibility alive. If we do not, it will die.

All energy directed toward reforming political and state structures is useless. All efforts to push through a "progressive" agenda within the

corridors of power are naive. Trust in the reformation of our corporate state reflects a failure to recognize that those who govern, including Barack Obama, are as deaf to public demands and suffering as those in the old Communist regimes. We cannot rely on any systems of power, including the pillars of the liberal establishment—the press, liberal religious institutions, universities, labor, culture and the Democratic Party. They have been weakened to the point of anemia or work directly for the corporations that dominate our existence. We can rely now on only ourselves, on each other.

Go to Lafayette Park, in front of the White House, at 10 a.m. Dec. 16. Join dozens of military veterans, myself, Daniel Ellsberg, Medea Benjamin, Ray McGovern, Dr. Margaret Flowers and many others who will make visible a hope the corporate state does not want you to see, hear or participate in. Don't be discouraged if it is not a large crowd. Don't

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Witness at the White House Fence

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total to 1,438). And their mothers. And the mothers of all those others who have died in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan. Mothers don't get to decide; only to mourn.

A pure snow showered down as if to say blessed are the peacemakers. Tears kept my eyes hydrated against the cold.

The hat my youngest daughter knit for me three years ago when I had no hair gave me an additional sense of being showered with love and affirmation. There was a palpable sense of rightness in our witness to the witless ways of the White House behind the fence.

I thought to myself, this White House is a far cry from the "Camelot" administration of John F. Kennedy, who brought me, and so many others to Washington almost a half-century ago. And yet, I could not resist borrowing a song from the play, *Camelot*: "I wonder what the king is doing tonight. What merriment is the king pursuing tonight..."

Perhaps strutting before a mirror in his leather bomber jacket, practicing rhetorical flourishes for the troops, like, "You are making our country safer." The opposite, of course, is true, and if President Obama does not know that, he is not as smart as people think he is.

More accurately, the troops are making Obama's political position safer, protecting him from accusations of "softness" on Afghanistan, just as a surge of troops into Iraq postponed the inevitable, sparing George W. Bush from the personal ignominy of presiding over a more obvious American defeat in Iraq.

Both presidents were willing to sacrifice those troops on the altar of political expediency, knowing full well that it is not American freedom that "the insurgents" hate, but rather U.S. government policies, which leave so many oppressed, or dead.

Despite our (Veterans For Peace) repeated requests over many months, Obama has refused to meet with us. On Wednesday, though, he carved out five hours to sit down with many of the fat cat executives who are profiteering from war.

It seems the President was worried that he had hurt the fat cats' feelings—and opened himself to criticism as being "anti-business"—with some earlier remarks about their obscenely inflated pay.

Before our witness on Thursday, we read in the *Washington Post* that Obama told the 20 chief executives, "I want to dispel any notion we want to inhibit your success," and solicited ideas from them "on a host of issues." By way of contrast, the President has shown zero interest in soliciting ideas from the likes of us.

'The Big Fool Said to Push On'

In another serendipitous coincidence, as we were witnessing against the March of Folly in Afghanistan, the President was completing his "review" of the war and sealing the doom of countless more soldiers and civilians (and, in my view, his own political doom) by re-enacting the Shakespearean tragedy of Lyndon the First.

Afraid to get crossways with the military brass, who have made it embarrassingly clear that they see no backbone under that bomber jacket, Obama has just sped past another exit ramp out of Afghanistan by letting the policy review promised for this month become a charade.

Hewing to the script of Lyndon the First, Barack Obama has chosen to shun the considered views of U.S. intelligence agencies, which, to their credit, show in no uncertain terms the stupidity of keeping U.S. troops neck-deep in this latest Big Muddy in Afghanistan—to



Ray McGovern addresses Dec. 16 rally

borrow from Pete Seeger's song from the Vietnam era.

There is one reality upon which there is virtually complete consensus as highlighted by the U.S. intelligence agencies: The U.S. and NATO will not be able to "prevail" in Afghanistan if Pakistan does not stop supporting the Taliban. Are we clear on that? That's what the recent National Intelligence Estimate on Afghanistan says.

A companion NIE on Pakistan says there is not a snowball's chance in hell that the Pakistani Army and security services will somehow "change their strategic vision" regarding keeping the Taliban in play for the time when the United States and its NATO allies finally leave Afghanistan and when Pakistan will want to reassert its influence there.

Should it be too hard to put the two NIEs together and reach the appropriate conclusions for policy?

It is difficult to believe that—after going from knee-deep to waist-deep in the Big Muddy by his early 2009 decision to insert 21,000 troops into Afghanistan, and then from waist-deep to neck-deep by deciding a year ago to send in 30,000 more—Obama would say to "push on."

The answer lies in the kind of "foolish consistency" Emerson termed the "hobgoblin of little minds." Out of crass political considerations, Obama continues to evidence a spineless persistence behind this fool's errand. He seems driven by fear of offending other important Washington constituencies, such as the neoconservative opinion-makers, and having to face the wrath of the be-medaled and be-ribboned Gen. David Petraeus. This is pitiable enough—but a lot of people are getting killed or maimed for life.

'When will we ever learn?'

To answer this other Vietnam-era song, well, we have learned—many of us the hard way. We need to tell the big fool not to be so afraid of neocon columnists and the festooned left breast of the sainted Petraeus—you know, the 10 rows of medals and merit badges that made him so lopsided he crashed down on the witness table and was given a time-out by the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Outside the White House on Thursday, we found ourselves singing "We Shall Overcome" with confidence. And what we learned later of other witnessing conducted that same day provided still more affirmation, grit, and determination.

For example, 75 witnesses braved freezing temperatures at the Times Square recruiting station in New York to express solidarity with our demonstration in Washington.

continued on next page ...



Photo by Ellen Davidson

Woodstock International editor and Veterans For Peace member Tarak Kauff is dragged away by police Dec. 16

Witness at the White House

... continued from previous page

There in Times Square stood not only veterans, but also grandmothers from the Granny Peace Brigade, the Raging Grannies, and Grandmothers Against the War. Two of the grandmothers were in their 90s, but stood for more than an hour in the cold. The Catholic Worker, War Resister League, and other antiwar groups were also represented.

What? You didn't hear about any of this, including the arrest of 131 veterans and other antiwar activists in front of the White House? Need I remind you of the Fawning Corporate Media and how its practitioners have always downplayed or ignored protests, large or small, against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan?

A Rich Tradition

Civil disobedience was Henry David Thoreau's response to his 1846 imprisonment for refusing to pay a poll tax that violated his conscience. Thoreau was protesting an earlier war of aggression, the U.S. attack on Mexico.

In "Civil Disobedience," Thoreau asked:

"Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience then? I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward.

"It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think right."

Imprisonment was Thoreau's first direct experience with state power and, in typical fashion, he analyzed it:

"The State never intentionally confronts a man's sense, intellectual or moral, but only his body, his senses. It is not armed with superior wit or honesty, but with superior physical strength. I was not born to be forced. I will breathe after my own fashion. Let us see who is the strongest."



92-year-old participant at Dec. 16 civil resistance at the White House

Prior to his arrest, Thoreau had lived a quiet, solitary life at Walden, an isolated pond in the woods about a mile and a half from Concord, Mass. He returned to Walden to mull over two questions: 1) Why do some men obey laws without asking if the laws are just or unjust; and, 2) why do others obey laws they think are wrong?

More recent American prophets have thrown their own light on the crises of our time while confronting the questions posed by Thoreau.

Amid the carnage of Vietnam, Fr. Daniel Berrigan, SJ, posed a challenge to those who hoped for peace without sacrifice, those who would say, "Let us have peace but let us lose nothing. Let our lives stand intact; let us know neither prison nor ill repute nor disruption of ties."

Berrigan saw no such easy option. "There is no peace," he said, "because the making of peace is at least as costly as the making of

war—at least as liable to bring disgrace and prison."

So, if the making of peace today means prison, that's where we need to be. It is time to accept our responsibility to do ALL we can to stop the violence of wars waged in our name. Now it's our turn to ponder those questions.

This article first appeared at Consortiumnews.com.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, the publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in Washington, D.C. During his career as a CIA analyst, he prepared and briefed the President's Daily Brief and chaired National Intelligence Estimates. He is a member of the steering group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).



March of the Dead Dec. 16 at the White House

No Act of Resistance Wasted

... continued from page 9

let your friends or colleagues talk you into believing it is useless. Don't be seduced by the sophisticated public relations campaigns disseminated by the mass media, the state or the Democratic Party. Don't, if you decide to carry out civil disobedience, be cowed by the police. Hope and justice live when people, even in tiny numbers, stand up and fight for them.

There is in our sorrow—for who cannot be profoundly sorrowful?—finally a balm that leads to wisdom and, if not joy, then a strange, transcendent happiness. To stand in a park on a cold December morning, to defy that which we must defy, to do this with others, brings us solace, and perhaps even peace. We will not find this if we allow ourselves to be disabled. We will not find this alone. As long as a few of us rebel it will always remain possible to defeat a system of centralized, corporate power that is as criminal and heartless as those I watched tumble into the ash bin of history in Eastern Europe.

Originally published on truthdig.com.

Chris Hedges is a senior fellow at The Nation Institute. His newest book is *Death of the Liberal Class*.

BITTER MEMORIES OF WAR ON THE WAY TO JAIL

By Chris Hedges

The speeches were over. There was a mournful harmonica rendition of taps. The 500 protesters in Lafayette Park in front of the White House fell silent. One hundred and thirty-one men and women, many of them military veterans wearing old fatigues, formed a single, silent line. Under a heavy snowfall and to the slow beat of a drum, they walked to the White House fence. They stood there until they were arrested.

The solemnity of that funerary march, the hush, was the hardest and most moving part of Thursday's protest against the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. It unwound the bitter memories and images of war I keep wrapped in the thick cotton wool of forgetfulness. I was transported in that short walk to places I do not like to go. Strange and vivid flashes swept over me—the young soldier in El Salvador who had been shot through the back of the head and was, as I crouched next to him, slowly curling up in a fetal position to die; the mutilated corpses of Kosovar Albanians in the back of a flatbed truck; the screams of a woman, her entrails spilling out of her gaping wounds, on the cobblestones of a Sarajevo street. My experience was not unique. Veterans around me were back in the rice paddies and lush undergrowth of Vietnam, the dusty roads of southern Iraq or the mountain passes of Afghanistan. Their tears showed that. There was no need to talk. We spoke the same wordless language. The



Photo by Ellen Davidson

butchery of war defies, for those who know it, articulation.

What can I tell you about war?

War perverts and destroys you. It pushes you closer and closer to your own annihilation—spiritual, emotional and, finally, physical. It destroys the continuity of life, tearing apart all systems, economic, social, environmental and political, that sustain us as human beings. War is necrophilia. The essence of war is death. War is a state of almost pure sin with its goals of hatred and destruction. It is organized sadism. War fosters alienation and leads inevitably to nihilism. It is a turning away from the sanctity of life.

And yet the mythic narratives about war perpetuate the allure of power and violence. They perpetuate the seductiveness of the godlike force that comes with the license to kill with impunity. All images and narratives about war disseminated by the state, the press, religious institutions, schools and the entertainment industry are gross and distorted lies. The clash between the fabricated myth about war and the truth about war leaves those of us who return from war alienated, angry and often unable to communicate. We can't find the words to describe war's reality. It is as if the wider culture sucked the words out from us and left us to sputter incoherencies. How can you speak meaningfully about organized murder? Anything you say is gibberish.

The sophisticated forms of industrial killing, coupled with the amoral decisions of politicians and military leaders who direct and fund war, hide war's reality from public view. But those who have been in combat see death up close. Only their story tells the moral truth about war. The power of the Washington march was that we all knew this story. We had no need to use stale and hackneyed clichés about war. We grieved together.

War, once it begins, fuels new and bizarre perversities, innovative forms of death to ward off the boredom of routine death. This is why we would drive into towns in Bosnia and find bodies crucified on the sides of barns or decapitated, burned and mutilated. That is why those slain in combat are treated as trophies by their killers, turned into

Left: Veterans For Peace President Mike Ferner on the White House fence Dec. 16; below: rally in Lafayette Park



Photo by Ellen Davidson



Photo by Ellen Davidson

Participants bringing signs into Lafayette Park for rally Dec. 16

grotesque pieces of performance art. I met soldiers who carried in their wallets the identity cards of men they killed. They showed them to me with the imploring look of a lost child.

We swiftly deform ourselves, our essence, in war. We give up individual conscience—maybe even consciousness—for the contagion of the crowd and the intoxication of violence. You survive war because you repress emotions. You do what you have to do. And this means killing. To make a moral choice, to defy war's enticement, is often self-destructive. But once the survivors return home, once the danger, adrenaline highs and the pressure of the crowd are removed, the repressed emotions surface with a vengeance. Fear, rage, grief and guilt leap up like snake heads to consume lives and turn nights into long, sleepless bouts with terror. You drink to forget.

We reached the fence. The real prisoners, the ones who blindly serve systems of power and force, are the mandarins inside the White House, the Congress and the Pentagon. The masters of war are slaves to the idols of empire, power and greed, to the idols of careers, to the dead language of interests, national security, politics and propaganda. They kill and do not know what killing is. In the rise to power, they became smaller. Power consumes them. Once power is obtained they become its pawn. Like Shakespeare's Richard III, politicians such as Barack Obama fall prey to the forces they thought they had harnessed. The capacity to love, to cherish and protect life, may not always triumph, but it saves us. It keeps us human. It offers the only chance to escape from the contagion of war. Perhaps it is the only antidote. There are times when remaining human is the only victory possible.

The necrophilia of war is hidden under platitudes about honor, duty or comradeship. It waits especially in moments when we seem to have little to live for and no hope, or in moments when the intoxication of war is at its pitch to be unleashed. When we spend long enough in war, it comes to us as a kind of release, a fatal and seductive embrace that can consummate the long flirtation with our own destruction. In the Arab-Israeli 1973 war, almost a third of all Israeli casualties were due to psychiatric causes—and the war lasted only a few days. A World War II study determined that, after 60 days of continuous combat, 98 percent of all surviving soldiers will have become psychiatric casualties. A common trait among the 2 percent who were able to endure sustained combat was a predisposition toward "aggressive psychopathic personalities." In short, if you spend enough time in combat you go insane or you were insane to begin with. War starts out as the annihilation of the other. War ends, if we do not free ourselves from its grasp, in self-annihilation.

Those around me at the protest, at once haunted and maimed by war, had freed themselves of war's contagion. They bore its scars. They were plagued by its demons. These crippling forces will always haunt them. But they had returned home. They had returned to life. They had asked for atonement. In Lafayette Park they found grace. They had recovered within themselves the capacity for reverence. They no longer sought to become gods, to wield the power of the divine, the power to take life. And it is out of this new acknowledgement of weakness, remorse for their complicity in evil and an acceptance of human imperfection that they had found wisdom. Listen to them, if you can hear them. They are our prophets.

In this Nov. 21, 1989 file photo about 200,000 people gather in Wenceslas Square, Prague, Czechoslovakia during the so-called Velvet Revolution that bought to an end the decades of repressive communist rule. The tears and grief, the halting asides, the catch in the throat, the sudden breaking off of a sentence, is the only language that describes war. This faltering language of pain and atonement, even shame, was carried like great, heavy boulders by these veterans as they tromped slowly through the snow from Lafayette Park to the White House fence. It was carried by them as they were handcuffed, dragged through the snow, photographed for arrest, and frog-marched into police vans. It was carried into the frigid holding cells of a Washington jail. If it was understood by the masters of war who build the big guns, who build the death planes, who build all the bombs and who hide behind walls and desks, this language would expose their masks and chasten their hollow, empty souls. This language, bereft of words, places its faith in physical acts of nonviolent resistance, in powerlessness and compassion, in truth. It believes that one day it will bring down the house of war.

As Tennyson wrote in "In Memoriam":
Behold, we know not anything;
I can but trust that good shall fall
At last—far off—at last, to all,
And every winter change to spring.

So runs my dream: but what am I?
An infant crying in the night:
An infant crying for the light:
And with no language but a cry.

This article was originally published on truthdig.org.

Chris Hedges is a senior fellow at The Nation Institute. His newest book is *Death of the Liberal Class*. To find out more about the Washington protest: www.stopthesewars.org

Failure to Obey

By Leah Bolger

Imagine you are taking a walk in a park and you witness a mugging. What would you do? Would you look the other way or would you try to stop it? If you are one who would try to stop it, then what would you do when it is your government that is committing the crime? As citizens we are told that we should call our Congressman or write a letter to the editor when we are dissatisfied with our government. But writing a letter to the editor is no more effective at stopping the crimes of our government than it is at stopping a mugging.

On December 16th, 2010, I participated in an act of civil resistance in an attempt to stop my government from continuing to commit crimes—namely the ongoing wars of aggression in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. In the middle of a heavy snowstorm, I was arrested along with 130 other people in front of the White House who refused to move off the sidewalk when ordered to by the police. We were not violent, we carried no weapons, and we damaged no property. We were, however, willing to disobey the police as an act of resistance to our government; as a way of saying "No" to the senseless slaughter of innocent people; "No" to outrageous war profiteering, "No" to our government's flagrant disregard of international law, "No" to the squandering of hundreds of billions of dollars.

Although it is we who were treated like criminals—handcuffed, arrested and charged, we are not the ones ordering drone strikes or sending in troops. We are not the ones using illegal weapons and poisoning the earth. We are not the ones with blood on our hands. The real criminals continue unabated, shamelessly claiming that they are "making progress," and unabashedly announcing that they plan to continue their crimes for many years to come.

None of us expected that these illegal wars of aggression would immediately stop due to our simple action, but we did hope that we would send a message—a message that there are citizens who do not support our government's illegal wars and occupations; a message to the world that we are shamed by the actions of our government and we will do everything we can to stop it. It is our sincere hope that

Right: Veterans For Peace Vice President Leah Bolger addresses press conference Dec. 15; below: CODEPINK founder Medea Benjamin is arrested Dec. 16

this action will be a spark that ignites the consciousness of others; that our refusal to obey and willingness to put our liberty on the line will give them the courage of their own convictions and they will also begin to act in resistance as well.

We will continue to defy and disobey, to resist and to rebel. We will not stop until the real criminals have been stopped. We will keep pushing the public to wake up to the horror of war and to take responsibility for ending it. We will rail against these crimes of inhumanity with all the force we can muster. We will continue to try with our voices and our bodies, to throw ourselves onto the machine of greed and killing.

"Failure to Obey a Lawful Order" is a misdemeanor and carries a maximum penalty of a \$1000 fine. So what is the penalty for failure to obey international law?

This article was originally published on CommonDreams.org.

Leah Bolger spent 20 years on active duty in the U.S. Navy and retired in 2000 at the rank of Commander. She is currently a fulltime peace activist and serves as the National Vice President of Veterans For Peace.



Photo by Ellen Davidson



Photo by Ellen Davidson

WIKILEAKS, THE UNITED STATES, AND DEVIL'S ISLAND

By William Blum

December 16 ... 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 aggression".

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.

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.

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 god-forsaken 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.

A friend of the young soldier says that 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." A developer of the transparency software used by WikiLeaks was detained for several hours last summer by federal agents at a Newark, N.J., airport, where he was questioned about his connection to WikiLeaks and Assange as well as his opinions about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

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. 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



Demonstration in support of Bradley Manning and WikiLeaks

life as a free person; the actual facts of what he's done or the actual wording of U.S. 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." 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 U.S. 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.

The right to secrecy

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."

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 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.

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Amy Goodman Interviews Noam Chomsky

WikiLeaks Cables Show Our Political Leadership's 'Profound Hatred for Democracy'

In a nationally broadcast exclusive interview, Amy Goodman of *Democracy Now!* speaks with world-renowned political dissident and linguist Noam Chomsky about the release of more than 250,000 secret U.S. State Department cables by WikiLeaks.

AMY GOODMAN: For reaction to the WikiLeaks documents, we're joined by world renowned political dissident and linguist Noam Chomsky, Professor Emeritus at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, author of over a hundred books including his latest *Hopes and Prospects*. Forty years ago, Noam and Howard Zinn helped government whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg edit and release the Pentagon Papers that top-secret internal U.S. history of the Vietnam War.



Noam Chomsky joins us from Boston. It is good to have you back again, Noam. Why don't we start there. Before we talk about WikiLeaks, what was your involvement in the Pentagon Papers? I don't think most people know about this.

NOAM CHOMSKY: Dan and I were friends. Tony Russo, who also who prepared them and helped leak them. I got advanced copies from Dan and Tony and there were several people who were releasing them to the press. I was one of them. Then I—along with Howard Zinn as you mentioned—edited a volume of essays and indexed the papers.

AMY GOODMAN: So explain how, though, how it worked. I always think this is important—to tell this story—especially for young people. Dan Ellsberg—Pentagon official, top-secret clearance—gets this U.S. involvement in Vietnam history out of his safe, he Xerox's it and then how

did you get your hands on it? He just directly gave it to you?

NOAM CHOMSKY: From Dan Ellsberg and Tony Russo, who had done the Xeroxing and the preparation of the material.

AMY GOODMAN: How much did you edit?

NOAM CHOMSKY: Well, we did not modify anything. The papers were not edited. They were in their original form. What Howard Zinn and I did was—they came out in four volumes—we prepared a fifth volume, which was critical essays by many scholars on the papers, what they mean, the significance and so on. And an index, which is almost indispensable for using them seriously. That's the fifth volume in the Beacon Press series.

AMY GOODMAN: So you were then one of the first people to see the Pentagon Papers?

NOAM CHOMSKY: Outside of Dan Ellsberg and Tony Russo, yes. I mean, there were some journalists who may have seen them, I am not sure.

AMY GOODMAN: What are your thoughts today? For example, we just played this clip of New York republican congress member Peter King who says WikiLeaks should be declared a foreign terrorist organization.

NOAM CHOMSKY: I think that is outlandish. We should understand—and the Pentagon Papers is another case in point—that one of the major reasons for government secrecy is to protect the government from its own population. In the Pentagon Papers, for example, there was one volume—the negotiations volume—which might have had a bearing on ongoing activities and Daniel Ellsberg withheld that. That came out a little bit later. If you look at the papers themselves, there are things Americans *should* have known that others did not want them to know. And as far as I can tell, from what I've seen here, pretty much the same is true. In fact, the current leaks are—what I've seen, at least—primarily interesting because of what they tell us about how the diplomatic service works.

AMY GOODMAN: The documents' revelations about Iran come just as the Iranian government has agreed to a new round of nuclear talks beginning next month. On Monday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the cables vindicate the Israeli position that Iran poses a nuclear threat. Netanyahu said, "Our region has been hostage to a narrative that is the result of sixty years of propaganda, which paints Israel as the greatest threat. In reality, leaders understand that that view is bankrupt. For the first time in history, there is

agreement that Iran is the threat. If leaders start saying openly what they have long been saying behind closed doors, with can make a real breakthrough on the road to peace," Netanyahu said. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also discussed Iran at her news conference in Washington. This is what she said:

HILARY CLINTON: I think that it should not be a surprise to anyone that Iran is a source of great concern, not only in the United States. What comes through in every meeting that I have—anywhere in the world—is a concern about Iranian actions and intentions. So, if anything, any of the comments that are being reported on allegedly from the cables confirm the fact that Iran poses a very serious threat in the eyes of many of her neighbors and a serious concern far beyond her region. That is why the international community came together to pass the strongest possible sanctions against Iran. It did not happen because the United States said, "Please, do this for us!" It happened because countries—once they evaluated the evidence concerning Iran's actions and intentions—reached the same conclusion that the United States reached: that we must do whatever we can to muster the international community to take action to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear weapons state. So if anyone reading the stories about these, uh, alleged cables thinks carefully what they will conclude is that the concern about Iran is well

founded, widely shared, and will continue to be at the source of the policy that we pursue with like-minded nations to try to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

AMY GOODMAN: That was Secretary to Hillary Clinton yesterday at a news conference. I wanted to get your comment on Clinton, Netanyahu's comment, and the fact that Abdullah of Saudi Arabia—the King who is now getting back surgery in the New York—called for the U.S. to attack Iran. Noam Chomsky?

NOAM CHOMSKY: That essentially reinforces what I said before, that the main significance of the cables that are being released so far is what they tell us about Western leadership. So Hillary Clinton and Benjamin Netanyahu surely know of the careful polls of Arab public opinion. The Brookings Institute just a few months ago released extensive polls of what Arabs think about Iran. The results are rather striking. They show the Arab opinion holds that the major threat in the region is Israel—that's 80. The second major threat is the United States—that's 77. Iran is listed as a threat by 10 percent.

With regard to nuclear weapons, rather remarkably, a majority—in fact, 57—say that the region would have a positive effect in the region if Iran had nuclear weapons. Now, these are not small

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On Behalf of Julian Assange and WikiLeaks

We, the undersigned, stand in defense of Julian Assange, WikiLeaks and their actions to safeguard and advance democracy, transparency and government accountability, as protected under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

WikiLeaks performs an invaluable service to the broad U.S. and global public with a commitment to the protection of human rights and the rule of law. Government representatives have issued serious and unjustified threats against Mr. Assange and his non-profit media organization which serve only to maintain a cloak of secrecy around high crimes and violations of international law, including torture, tampering with democratically elected governments, illegal bombings and wars, surveillance, mass slaughter of innocent civilians and more.

We call on all governments, organizations, and individuals of conscience forcefully to condemn and reject all U.S. efforts to

fraudulently criminalize the legitimate journalism of Julian Assange, WikiLeaks and related efforts to expose an increasingly lawless U.S. government to the indispensable democratic requirement of public scrutiny. True or false, any charges which the Swedish government may pursue are irrelevant to the primacy of an independent free press.

Journalists should not be made into criminals for publishing materials critical of the government. Therefore, we reject any efforts to extradite Julian Assange to the United States or allied client states in relation to these matters. We condemn and reject every incitement to murder, incarcerate or in any way harm Mr. Assange. We encourage all those with information on corruption and violations of law to take courage from the example of Mr. Assange and WikiLeaks by acting to expose all such information into the light of public and judicial review.

Sanford Kelson—Attorney at Law

OPEN LETTER

December 27, 2010

James Averhart
 Commanding Officer
 US MCB Quantico Brig
 3247 Catlin Avenue
 Quantico VA 22134-5000

Re: Bradley Manning

Dear Sir:

During twelve years of public school education I estimate I said the Pledge of Allegiance approximately 2000 times. I remember it well. I was especially proud to recite the ending phrase... *with liberty and justice for all.*

Upon graduation from high school in 1962, I joined the U.S. Army and proudly took the soldiers' oath to *...support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same...*

After serving honorably, having attained the rank of sergeant, I graduated from law school in 1974 where I learned about the rule of law and the Bill of Rights which includes the right of freedom of speech and press, the right to assemble and petition for redress, the right to be free from unreasonable searches, the right not to be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law, the right not to be subjected to cruel and unusual punishment and the right to a speedy and public criminal trial.

I then took the lawyer oaths to be admitted to the Pennsylvania and Federal Bars, again, swearing, *...I will support, obey and defend the Constitution of the United States...*

The same pledge and oaths exist today but things have changed drastically since the time I took them.

The current president lists people, including U.S. citizens, for assassination without any due process protections. The previous president and the current one both kidnapped people and secretly vanished them to torture chambers in dictatorial regimes that the USG supports over the will of the people in those countries. The USG violates the prohibition against unreasonable searches. Peace activists exercising their constitutional rights are spied upon and harassed. The United States makes war in violation of the Constitution and solemn treaties. The USG authorizes cruel and unusual punishment in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen (and I ask whether also at the Quantico Brig? More about this below).

Government officials have admitted engaging in acts that violated the law and their oaths of office and there have been no attempts by appropriate government officials to hold them accountable, e.g., former president George W. Bush acknowledged authorizing water boarding. Law suits filed by victims of these abuses are regularly summarily dismissed.

To paraphrase Howard Zinn, the late famous historian and professor, I feel as if I live in an occupied country.

I am writing to you because I am deeply concerned about your prisoner, Bradley Manning. I have read what Mr. Manning's lawyer has written about his client's treatment. If true, Mr. Manning's treatment involves cruel and unusual punishment.

It is not relevant at this moment what crimes, if any, Private Manning may have committed. What matters is whether he is being subjected to cruel and unusual punishment. You are responsible for his treatment and, I hope, nay, as an American, a veteran, a lawyer, a person who has taken oaths to protect and defend the Constitution, I demand that you insure that Bradley Manning is treated in accordance with the law of the land and not as the law has been perverted since 9-11, but according to the clear words of the Constitution, federal statutes and established case law against cruel and unusual punishment and torture.

Very truly yours,

Sanford Kelson

cc: Colonel Daniel J. Choike
 Base Commander, Marine Corps Base Quantico
 basecmdrsmail.fct@usmc.mil, (703) 784-6870

Chomsky on WikiLeaks

... continued from page 15

numbers. 80, 77, say the U.S. and Israel are the major threat. 10 say Iran is the major threat. This may not be reported in the newspapers here—it is in England—but it's certainly familiar to the Israeli and U.S. governments, and to the ambassadors. But there is not a word about it anywhere. What that reveals is the profound hatred for democracy on the part of our political leadership and the Israeli political leadership. These things aren't even to be mentioned. This seeps its way all through the diplomatic service. The cables do not have any indication of that.

Amy Goodman is the host of *Democracy Now!*, a daily international TV/radio news hour airing on 800 stations in North America (democracynow.org). She was awarded the 2008 Right Livelihood Award, dubbed the "Alternative Nobel" prize, and received the award in the Swedish Parliament in December.

WikiLeaks, the U.S.

... continued from page 14

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

A friend of the young soldier says that 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.

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?

This article was excerpted from *The Anti-Empire Report* at www.killinghope.com.

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

"When our racists present the ugliest face of Judaism, ignoring its universalist message, they do great damage to the religion of millions of Jews around the world. The most important Jewish rabbis were silent this week in face of the racist fire that was ignited by rabbis, or murmured something about "ways of peace"—referring to the rule forbidding the provocation of Goyim, because they might treat the Jews in their countries as the Jews treat the minorities in their own state. Up to now, no Christian priest has yet called upon his flock not to let apartments to Jews—but it could happen."

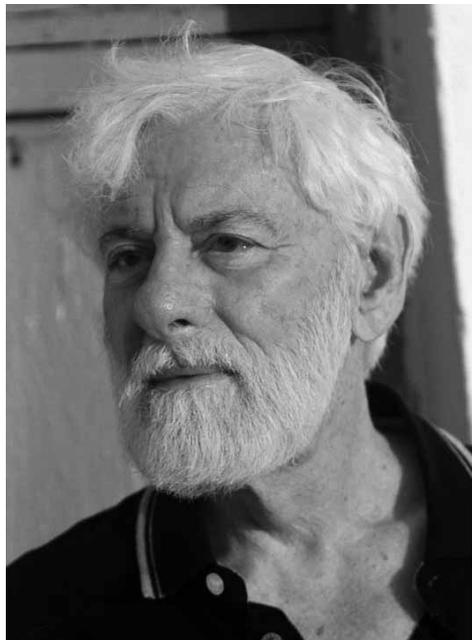
By Uri Avnery

It is easy to despair before the filthy wave of racism that is engulfing us.

The remedy for this despair: the growing number of young people, sons and daughters of the new Israeli generation, who are joining the fight against racism and occupation.

In December, several hundred of them gathered in a hall in Tel Aviv (belonging, ironically, to the Zionist Federation of America) to launch a book published by the group "Breaking the Silence."

In the hall there were some veterans of the peace



Uri Avnery

camp, but the great majority of those present were youngsters in their 20s, male and female, who have completed their military service.

The Occupation of the Territories is a book of 344 pages, consisting of almost 200 testimonies by soldiers about the daily and nightly life of the occupation. The soldiers supplied the eyewitness accounts, and the organization, which is composed of ex-soldiers, verified, compared and sifted them. In the end, 183 of some 700 testimonies were selected for publication.

Not even one of these testimonies was denied by the army spokesman, who generally hastens to contradict honest accounts of what is happening in the occupied territories. Since the editors of the book have themselves served as soldiers in these places, it was easy for them to distinguish between

'The Darkness to Expel'

truth and falsehood.

The book makes very depressing reading, and not because it details gruesome atrocities. On the contrary, the editors made it a point not to include incidents of exceptional brutality committed by sadists, which can be found in every army unit in Israel and throughout the world. Rather, they wanted to throw light on the grey routine of the occupation.

There are accounts of nocturnal incursions into quiet Palestinian villages as exercises—breaking into random houses where there were no "suspects," terrorizing children, women and men, creating mayhem in the village—all this to "train" the soldiers. There are stories about the humiliation of passers-by at the checkpoints ("Clean up the checkpoint and you will get your keys back!"), casual harassment ("He started to complain, so I hit him in the face with the butt of my weapon!"). Every testimony is meticulously documented: time, place, unit.

At the launch of the book, some of the testimonies were shown on film, with the witnesses daring to show their faces and identify themselves by their full name. These were no exceptional people, no fanatics or bleeding hearts. No weepers of the "we shoot and we weep" school. Just ordinary young people, who had time to come to grips with their personal experiences.

There are even occasional flashes of humor. Like the tale of the soldier who had for a long time been manning a roadblock between two Palestinian villages, without understanding its purpose or its security value. One day, a bulldozer suddenly appeared from nowhere, uprooted the concrete blocks and drove off with them, again without any explanation. "They have stolen my roadblock!" the soldier complains, having got used to the place.

The titles of the testimonies speak for themselves: "To produce sleeplessness in the village," "We used to send neighbors to disarm explosive charges," "The battalion commander ordered us to shoot anyone trying to remove the bodies," "The commander of the navy commandos put the muzzle of the rifle into the man's mouth," "They told us to shoot at anybody moving in the street," "You can do whatever you feel like, nobody is going to question it," "You shoot at the TV set for fun," "I did not know that there were roads for Jews only," "A kind of total arbitrariness," "The [Hebron settler] boys beat up the old woman," "Arrest the settlers? The army cannot do that." And so on. Just routine.

The intention of the book is not to uncover atrocities and show the soldiers as monsters. It

aims to present a situation: the ruling over another people, with all the high-handed arbitrariness that this necessarily entails, humiliation of the occupied, corruption of the occupier. According to the editors, it is quite impossible for the individual soldier to make a difference. He is just a cog in a machine that is inhuman by its very nature.

Groups of young people who are simply fed up are springing to life in the country. They are signs of an awakening that finds its expression in the daily fight of hundreds of groups devoted to different causes. Only seemingly different—because these causes are essentially bound up with each other. The fight against the occupation, for the refugees who seek shelter in this country, against the demolition of the houses of the Bedouin in the Negev, against the invasion of Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem by settlers, for equal rights for the Arab citizens in Israel, against social injustices, for the preservation of the environment, against government corruption, against religious coercion, etc etc. They have a common denominator: the fight for a different Israel.

Young volunteers for each of these fights—and for all of them together—are needed today more than ever, in face of the racism that is raising its ugly head all over Israel—an open racism, shameless and indeed proud of itself.

The phenomenon by itself is not new. What is new is the loss of any vestige of shame. The racists shout their message on every street corner and earn applause from politicians and rabbis.

It started with the flood of racist bills designed to delegitimize the Arab citizens. "Admission committees," "loyalty oaths," and much more. Then came the religious edict of the chief rabbi of Safed, forbidding Jews to let apartments to Arabs. This still caused shock and embarrassment. Since then, however, all the dams have broken. A gang of 14-year-old boys ambushed Arabs in the center of Jerusalem, using a 14-year-old girl as bait, and beat them unconscious. Hundreds of rabbis all over the country signed a manifesto forbidding the letting of apartments to "foreigners" (meaning Arabs who have lived in the country for centuries). In Bat Yam, a city bordering Tel Aviv, a stormy demonstration called for the expulsion of all Arabs from the town. Next day, a demonstration in Tel Aviv's squalid Hatikva quarter demanded the expulsion of refugees and foreign workers from the neighborhood.

Ostensibly, the demonstrations in Bat Yam and Hatikva were aimed at different targets: the first

against Arabs, the second against foreign workers. But the same well-known fascist activists appeared and spoke at both, carrying the same placards and shouting the same slogans. The most conspicuous of these was the assertion that the Arabs and the foreigners are endangering Jewish women—the Arabs marry them and take them to their villages, the foreign workers flirt with them. "Jewish Women for the Jewish People!" cried the posters—as if women were property.

The connection between racism and sex has always intrigued researchers. White racists in the United States spread the rumor that "niggers" have bigger penises. Among German Nazi newspapers, the most sensationalist was *Der Stürmer*, a pornographic sheet filled with stories about innocent blond girls seduced by the money of crooked-nosed ugly Jews. Its editor, Julius Streicher, was condemned and hanged in Nuremberg.

Some believe that one of the roots of racism is a feeling of sexual inadequacy, the lack of self-confidence of men afraid of sexual impotence and/or competition—the very opposite of the picture of the macho racist he-man. It is enough to look at the racist protesters to draw conclusions.

Jean-Paul Sartre famously said that every person is a racist—the difference being between those who admit it to themselves and try to combat it and those who do not.

That is undoubtedly true. I have a simple test for the power of racism: you are driving and somebody cuts your path. If it is a black driver, you say: "Damn nigger!" If it is a woman, you shout: "Go home to your kitchen!" If he wears a kippah, you cry: "Bloody Dos!" ("Dos" is a derogatory Hebrew term for a religious Jew.) If it is a driver without special features, you just shout: "Idiot! Who gave you a driving license?"

The hatred of strangers, the aversion to everyone who is unlike you, are—so it seems—biological traits, remnants from the time of ancient man, when every stranger was a threat to the limited resources the tribe had to depend on. It exists in many other animal species, too. Nothing to be proud of.

The civilized human being, and even more so the civilized human society, has a duty to fight these

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Itamar Shapira, member of Breaking the Silence

In the Middle of the Night

By Abdullah Abu Rahmah

A year ago tonight, on International Human Rights Day, our apartment in Ramallah was broken into by the Israeli military in the middle of the night and I was torn away from my wife Majida, my daughters Luma and Layan, and my son Laith, who at the time was only nine months old.

As the coordinator of the Bil'in Popular Committee against the Wall and Settlements I was convicted of "organizing illegal demonstrations" and "incitement." The "illegal demonstrations" refer to the nonviolent resistance campaign that my village has been waging for the last six years against Israel's Apartheid Wall that is being built on our land.

I find it strange that the military judges could call our demonstrations illegal and charge me for participating in and organizing them after the world's highest legal body, the International Court of Justice in The Hague, has ruled that Israel's wall within the occupied territories is illegal and must be dismantled. Even the Israeli supreme court ruled that the Wall's route in Bil'in is illegal.

I have been accused of inciting violence: this charge is also puzzling. If the check points, closures, ongoing land theft, wall and settlements, night raids into our homes and violent oppression of our protests does not incite violence, what does?

Despite the occupations constant and intense incitement to violence in Bil'in, we have chosen another way. We have chosen to protest nonviolently together with Israeli and International supporters. We have chosen to carry a message of hope and real partnership between Palestinians and Israelis in the face of oppression and injustice. It is this message that the Occupation is attempting to crush through its various institutions including the military courts. An official from the Israeli Military Prosecution shamelessly told my Attorney, Gaby Lasky, that the objective of the military in my prosecution is to "put an end" to these demonstrations.

The crime of incitement that I have been convicted of is defined under Israeli military decree 101 regarding the prohibition of hostile action of propaganda and incitement as "The attempt, verbally or otherwise, to influence public opinion in the Area in a way that may disturb the public peace or public order" and carries a 10 year maximal sentence. This definition is so broad and vague that it can be applied to almost any action or statement. Actually, these words could be considered incitement if they were spoken in the occupied territories.

On the 11th of October of this year I was sentenced to 12 months in prison, plus 6 months suspended sentence for 3 years, and a fine. My family and I, especially my daughters, were counting the days to my release. The military prosecution waited until just a few days before the end of my sentence before appealing against my release, arguing that I should be imprisoned longer. I have completed my sentence but remain



Abdallah Abu Rahmah protects a young girl in Bil'in

in prison. Though international law considers myself and other activists as human rights defenders, the occupation authorities consider us criminals whose freedom and other rights must be denied. In the year that I have spent in prison, the demonstrations in Bil'in, Naalin, Al Maasara, and Beit Omar have continued. Nabi Saleh and other villages have taken up the popular struggle. Within this year, the International campaign calling for Boycott Divestment and Sanctions of Israel until it complies with International law has grown considerably, as have legal actions against Israeli war crimes. I hope that soon Israel will no longer be able to ignore the clear condemnation of its policies coming from around the world.



Abdallah Abu Rahmah during a demonstration in Bil'in

In the year that I have spent in prison, my son Laith has taken his first steps and said his first words, and Luma and Layan have been growing from children to beautiful young girls. I have not been able to be with them, to walk holding their hands, to take them to school as they and I are used to. Laith does not know me now. And my wife Majida has had to care for our family alone.

In 2010 children in Bil'in and throughout the West bank are still being awakened in the middle of the night to find guns pointed at their heads. In the year that I have spent in prison, the military has carried out dozens of night raids in Bil'in with the purpose of removing those involved in the popular struggle against the occupation.

Imagine if heavily armed men forced their way into your home in the middle of the night. If your children were forced to watch as their father or brother was blindfolded, handcuffed, and taken away. Or if you as a parent were forced to watch this being done to your child.

This week the door of our cell was opened and a sixteen year boy was pushed inside. My friend Adeb Abu Rahme was shocked to recognize his son, Mohammed, whom Adeb had not seen since he himself was arrested during a nonviolent demonstration 16 months ago.

Mohammad smiled when he saw his Father, but his face was red and swollen and it was clear that he was in pain. He told us that he had been taken from his home two nights previously. He spent the first night blindfolded and shackled, being moved from one place to another. The next day after a terrifying, disoriented, and sleepless night he was taken to an interrogation room, his blindfold was removed and an interrogator



Another dream, a Palestinian man and woman harvesting their ancient olive tree

A Murderous State— Perhaps It Was a Dream

By Joan Nestle

Here on the Pacific rim, I sometimes drift between sleep and awakening, sometimes images from the square box at the foot of my bed slip into my dreams. Was this a dream? I see a man overlooking the main street of an Israeli-Arab town, speaking of what is happening, I see two bus loads of shouting settlers pouring into the street, proclaiming their ownership of the town, proclaiming that it is their god given right to displace the Arab citizens. I see, along with the man on the stone balcony, looking down on all of this, a few Arab Israeli young men shout back, pick up stones, and then as if it had all been planned before hand, the provocation, the slogans of ethnic cleansing, come, from out of the picture frame, endless barrages of tear gas canisters, falling like thick snow, and as the youth fall, rushing into my dream come Israeli soldiers, in their black uniforms, faces covered, and in fives and ten, they bend over the fallen youths and start to beat them—tell me this is a dream. Hundreds of soldiers attacking the Arab citizens of this town—chosen I think for practice, for the civic uprisings that will come when the loyalty oath comes into law. Tell me this is a dream. This calculated plan to taunt and then punish unto death a whole population within the state of Israel, the state that in other dreams I have been told is democratic and akin to all the United States and the West holds dear. Tell me I am a haunted Jew, a self-hating Jew, that I am dreaming of an impossible meanness of the Israeli national spirit—that such a thing never happened, that god does not travel on such a bus, that masked soldiers beating helpless youths who can't get air into their lungs, just for practice, is not something Jews would do. Tell me I am dreaming.

showed him pictures of people from the village. When questioned about the first picture he told the interrogator that he did not recognize the person. The interrogator slapped him hard across the face. This continued with every question that Mohammad was asked: when he did not give the answer that the interrogator wanted, he was slapped, punched and threatened. Mohammad's treatment is not unusual.

Young boys from our village have been taken from their homes violently and report being denied sleep, food, and water and being kept in Isolation and threatened and often beaten during interrogation.

What was unusual about Mohammad is that he did not satisfy his
continued on next page ...

GAZAN YOUTH'S MANIFESTO FOR CHANGE

Fuck Hamas. Fuck Israel. Fuck Fatah. Fuck UN. Fuck UNWRA. Fuck USA!

We, the youth in Gaza, are so fed up with Israel, Hamas, the occupation, the

violations of human rights and the indifference of the international community! We want to scream and break this wall of silence, injustice and indifference like the Israeli F16's breaking the wall of sound; scream with all the power in our souls in order to release this immense frustration that consumes us because of this fucking situation we live in; we are like lice between two nails living a nightmare inside a nightmare, no room for hope, no space for freedom. We are sick of being caught in this political struggle; sick of coal dark nights with airplanes circling above our homes; sick of innocent farmers getting shot in the buffer zone because they are taking care of their lands; sick of bearded guys walking around with their guns abusing their power, beating up or incarcerating young people demonstrating for what they believe in; sick of the wall of shame that separates us from the rest of our country and keeps us imprisoned in a stamp-sized piece of land; sick of being portrayed as terrorists, homemade fanatics with explosives in our pockets and evil in our eyes; sick of the indifference we meet from the international community, the so-called experts in expressing concerns and drafting resolutions but cowards in enforcing anything they agree on; we are sick and tired of living a shitty life, being kept in jail by Israel, beaten up by Hamas and completely ignored by the rest of the world.

There is a revolution growing inside of us, an immense dissatisfaction and frustration that will destroy us unless we find a way of canalizing this energy into something that can challenge the status quo and give us some kind of hope. The final drop that made our hearts tremble with frustration and hopelessness happened 30rd November, when Hamas' officers came to Sharek Youth Forum, a leading youth organization (<<http://www.sharek.ps>>) with their guns, lies and aggressiveness, throwing everybody outside, incarcerating some and prohibiting Sharek from working. A few days later, demonstrators in front of Sharek were beaten and some incarcerated. We are really living a nightmare inside a nightmare. It is difficult to find words for the pressure we are under. We barely survived the Operation Cast Lead, where Israel very effectively bombed the shit out of us, destroying thousands of homes and even more lives and dreams. They did not get rid of Hamas, as they intended, but they sure scared us forever and distributed post traumatic stress syndrome to everybody, as there was nowhere to run.

We are youth with heavy hearts. We carry in ourselves a heaviness so immense that it makes it difficult to us to enjoy the sunset. How to enjoy it when dark clouds paint the horizon and bleak memories run past our eyes every time we close them? We smile in order to hide the pain. We laugh in order to forget the war. We hope in order not to commit suicide here and now. During the war we got the unmistakable feeling that Israel wanted to erase us from the face of the earth. During the last years Hamas has been doing all they can to control our thoughts, behaviour and aspirations. We are a generation of young people used to face missiles, carrying what seems to be a impossible mission of living a normal and healthy life, and only barely tolerated by a massive organization that has spread in our society as a malicious cancer disease, causing mayhem and effectively killing all living cells, thoughts and dreams on its way as well as paralyzing people with its terror regime. Not to mention the prison we live in, a prison sustained by a so-called democratic country.



Young Palestinian atop the Israeli apartheid wall that cuts through villages and farmlands in the West Bank

History is repeating itself in its most cruel way and nobody seems to care. We are scared. Here in Gaza we are scared of being incarcerated, interrogated, hit, tortured, bombed, killed. We are afraid of living, because every single step we take has to be considered and well thought, there are limitations everywhere, we cannot move as we want, say what we want, do what we want, sometimes we even cant think what we want because the occupation has occupied our brains and hearts so terrible that it hurts and it makes us want to shed endless tears of frustration and rage!

We do not want to hate, we do not want to feel all of this feelings, we do not want to be victims anymore. ENOUGH! Enough pain, enough tears, enough suffering, enough control, limitations, unjust justifications, terror, torture, excuses, bombings, sleepless nights, dead civilians, black memories, bleak future, heart aching present, disturbed politics, fanatic politicians, religious bullshit, enough incarceration! WE SAY STOP! This is not the future we want!

We want three things. We want to be free. We want to be able to live a normal life. We want peace. Is that too much to ask? We are a peace movement consistent of young people in Gaza and supporters elsewhere that will not rest until the truth about Gaza is known by everybody in this whole world and in such a degree that no more silent consent or loud indifference will be accepted.

This is the Gazan youth's manifesto for change!

We will start by destroying the occupation that surrounds ourselves, we will break free from this mental incarceration and regain our dignity and self respect. We will carry our heads high even though we will face resistance. We will work day and night in order to change these miserable conditions we are living under. We will build dreams where we meet walls.

We only hope that you—yes, you reading this statement right now!—can support us. In order to find out how, please write on our wall or contact us directly: freegazayouth@hotmail.com

We want to be free, we want to live, we want peace.

FREE GAZA YOUTH!

Ayman Jamal Mghamis
Project Coordinator
Social Arts Centre (SAC)
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Middle of the Night

... continued from previous page

interrogator and with competent representation was released within a few days. Usually children, just because they are children, will say whatever the interrogator wants them to say to make such treatment stop. Adeeb, myself, and thousands of other prisoners are being held in prison based on testimonies forced or coerced out of these children. No child should ever receive such treatment.

When the children who had testified against me retracted what they said in interrogation and told the military judge that their testimonies were given under duress, the judge declared them hostile witnesses.

Adeeb Abu Rahmah and I are the first to be convicted with incitement and participation in illegal demonstrations since the first Intifada but, unfortunately, it does not seem that we will be the last.

I often wonder what Israeli leaders think they will achieve if they succeed in their goal of suppressing the Palestinian popular struggle? Is it possible that they believe that our people can sit quietly and watch as our land is taken from us? Do they think that we can face our children and tell them that, like us, they will never experience freedom? Or do they actually prefer violence and killing to our form of nonviolent struggle because it camouflages their ongoing theft and gives them an excuse to continue using us as guinea pigs for their weapons?

My eldest daughter Luma was nine years old when I was arrested. She is now ten. After my arrest she began going to the Friday demonstrations in our village. She always carries a picture of me in her arms. The adults try to look after her but I still worry for my little girl. I wish that she could enjoy her childhood like other children, that she could be studying and playing with her friends. But through the walls and barbed wire that separates us I hear my daughter's message to me, saying: "Baba, they cannot stop us. If they take you away, we will take your place and continue to struggle for justice." This is the message that I want to bring you today. From beyond the walls, the barbed wire, and the prison bars that separate Palestinians and Israelis

Abdallah Abu Rahmah, coordinator of the Bil'in Popular Committee Against the Wall and the Settlements was arrested on 10 December 2009.

An Open Letter from Gaza

Two Years after the Massacre, a Demand for Justice

While the Palestinians of the Besieged Gaza Strip, on this day, two years on from Israel's genocidal attack on our families, our houses, our roads, our factories and our schools, are saying enough inaction, enough discussion, enough waiting—the time is now to hold Israel to account for its ongoing crimes against us. On the 27th of December 2008, Israel began an indiscriminate bombardment of the Gaza Strip. The assault lasted 22 days, killing 1,417 Palestinians, 352 of them children, according to main-stream Human Rights Organizations. For a staggering 528 hours, Israeli Occupation Forces let loose their U.S.-supplied F15s, F16s, Merkava Tanks, internationally prohibited white phosphorous, and bombed and invaded the small Palestinian coastal enclave that is home to 1.5 million, of whom 800,000 are children and over 80 percent U.N.-registered refugees. Around 5,300 remain permanently wounded.

This devastation exceeded in savagery all previous massacres suffered in Gaza, such as the 21 children killed in Jabalia in March 2008 or the 19 civilians killed sheltering in their house in the Beit Hanoun Massacre of 2006. The carnage even exceeded the attacks in November 1956 in which Israeli troops indiscriminately rounded up and killed 275 Palestinians in the Southern town of Khan Younis and 111 more in Rafah.

Since the Gaza massacre of 2009, world citizens have undertaken the responsibility to pressure Israel to comply with international law, through a proven strategy of boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS). As in the global BDS movement that was so effective in ending the apartheid South African regime, we urge people of conscience to join the BDS call made by over 170 Palestinian organizations in 2005. As in South Africa the imbalance of power and representation in this struggle can be counterbalanced by a powerful international solidarity movement with BDS at the forefront, holding Israeli policy makers to account, something the international governing community has repeatedly failed to do. Similarly, creative civilian efforts such as the Free Gaza boats that broke the siege five times, the Gaza Freedom March, the Gaza Freedom Flotilla, and the many land convoys must never stop their siege-breaking, highlighting the inhumanity of keeping 1.5 million Gazans in an open-air prison.

Two years have now passed since Israel's gravest of genocidal acts that should have left people in no doubt of the brutal extent of Israel's plans for the Palestinians.

The murderous navy assault on international activists aboard the Gaza Freedom Flotilla in the Mediterranean Sea magnified to the world the cheapness Israel has assigned to Palestinian life for so long. The world knows now, yet two years on nothing has changed for Palestinians.

The Goldstone Report came and went: despite its listing count after count of international law contraventions, Israeli "war crimes" and "possible crimes against humanity," the European Union, the United Nations, the Red Cross, and all major Human Rights Organizations have called for an end to the illegal, medieval siege, it carries on unabated. On 11th November 2010 UNRWA head John Ging said, "There's been no material change for the people on the ground here in terms of their status, the aid dependency, the absence of any recovery or reconstruction, no economy... The easing, as it was described, has been nothing more than a political easing of the pressure on Israel and Egypt."

On the 2nd of December, 22 international organizations including Amnesty, Oxfam, Save the Children, Christian Aid, and Medical Aid for Palestinians produced the report 'Dashed Hopes, Continuation of the Gaza Blockade' calling for international action to force Israel to unconditionally lift the blockade, saying the Palestinians of Gaza under Israeli siege continue to live in the same devastating conditions. Only a week ago Human Rights Watch published a comprehensive report "Separate and Unequal" that denounced Israeli policies as Apartheid, echoing similar sentiments by South African anti-apartheid activists.

We Palestinians of Gaza want to live at liberty to meet Palestinian friends or family from Tulkarem, Jerusalem or Nazareth; we want to have the right to travel and move freely. We want to live without fear of another bombing campaign that leaves hundreds of our children dead and many more injured or with cancers from the contamination of Israel's white phosphorous and chemical warfare. We want to live without the humiliations at Israeli checkpoints or the indignity of not providing for our families because of the unemployment brought about by the economic control and the illegal siege. We are calling for an end to the racism that underpins all this oppression.

We ask: when will the world's countries act according to the basic premise that people should be treated equally, regardless of their origin, ethnicity or colour—is it so far-fetched that a Palestinian child deserves the same human rights as any other human being? Will you be able to look



back and say you stood on the right side of history or will you have sided with the oppressor?

We, therefore, call on the international community to take up its responsibility to protect the Palestinian people from Israel's heinous aggression, immediately ending the siege with full compensation for the destruction of life and infrastructure visited upon us by this explicit policy of collective punishment. Nothing whatsoever justifies the intentional policies of savagery, including the severing of access to the water and electricity supply to 1.5 million people. The international conspiracy of silence towards the genocidal war taking place against the more than 1.5 million civilians in Gaza indicates complicity in these war crimes.

We also call upon all Palestine solidarity groups and all international civil society organizations to demand:

- An end to the siege that has been imposed on the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as a result of their exercise of democratic choice.
- The protection of civilian lives and property, as stipulated in International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law such as The Fourth Geneva Convention.
- The immediate release of all political prisoners.
- That Palestinian refugees in the Gaza Strip be immediately provided with financial and material support to cope with the immense hardship that they are experiencing
- An end to occupation, Apartheid and other war crimes.
- Immediate reparations and compensation for all destruction carried out by the Israeli Occupation Forces in the Gaza Strip.

Boycott, Divest, and Sanction, join the many International Trade Unions, Universities, Supermarkets and artists and writers who refuse to entertain Apartheid Israel. Speak out for Palestine, for Gaza, and crucially ACT. The time is now.

Besieged Gaza, Palestine

List of signatories:

General Union for Public Services Workers
 General Union for Health Services Workers
 University Teachers' Association
 Palestinian Congregation for Lawyers
 General Union for Petrochemical and Gas Workers
 General Union for Agricultural Workers
 Union of Women's Work Committees
 Union of Synergies—Women Unit
 The One Democratic State Group
 Arab Cultural Forum
 Palestinian Students' Campaign for the Academic Boycott of Israel
 Association of Al-Quds Bank for Culture and Info
 Palestine Sailing Federation
 Palestinian Association for Fishing and Maritime
 Palestinian Network of Non-Governmental Organizations
 Palestinian Women Committees
 Progressive Students' Union
 Medical Relief Society
 The General Society for Rehabilitation
 General Union of Palestinian Women
 Afaq Jadeeda Cultural Centre for Women and Children
 Deir Al-Balah Cultural Centre for Women and Children
 Maghazi Cultural Centre for Children
 Al-Sahel Centre for Women and Youth
 Ghassan Kanfani Kindergartens
 Rachel Corrie Centre, Rafah
 Rafah Olympia City Sisters
 Al Awda Centre, Rafah
 Al Awda Hospital, Jabaliya Camp
 Ajyal Association, Gaza
 General Union of Palestinian Syndicates
 Al Karmel Centre, Nuseirat
 Local Initiative, Beit Hanoun
 Union of Health Work Committees
 Red Crescent Society Gaza Strip
 Beit Lahiya Cultural Centre
 Al Awda Centre, Rafah

Pakistan Will Implode if the United States Does Not Leave Afghanistan

The assassination of Salmaan Taseer has shown only too clearly the growing extremism in Pakistan, the radicalization of its society and the polarization that is taking hold. This is not just between the religious and the secular, but also the polarization that the “war on terror” has caused between the various religious sects.

There were no Pakistanis involved in 9/11 and al-Qaeda was then based in Afghanistan. The only militancy we were suffering was among the tribal groups who had fought against the Soviets and whose idea of jihad was a war against foreign occupation. Yes, there was sectarian violence, but suicide bombers were unheard of.

So after 9/11, when General Musharraf chose to ally with the Americans in the “war on terror,” it was a fundamental blunder. Overnight he turned the jihadi groups created to fight foreign occupation from supporters into enemies, people prepared to fight the Pakistani army because of its support for the U.S. invasion.

New Enemies

Musharraf then made a second mistake in sending the army into the tribal areas. Our own tribespeople immediately rose up in revolt. Rather than co-opting these people—and, remember, every man is armed—we made new enemies. Then along came the U.S. drones to kill more of our people. Soon, the U.S. “war on terror” was seen as a war on Islam by the majority of Pakistanis and certainly by the Pashtuns in the tribal areas. Terror and extremism intensified.

Every year extremism gets worse, our society becomes more radicalized and the bloodshed grows. This is how you must see the context of this assassination. Society is now so polarized that because Taseer criticized the blasphemy law he was seen as criticizing Islam. But that was not what he said. This assassination would not have happened before the “war on terror.”

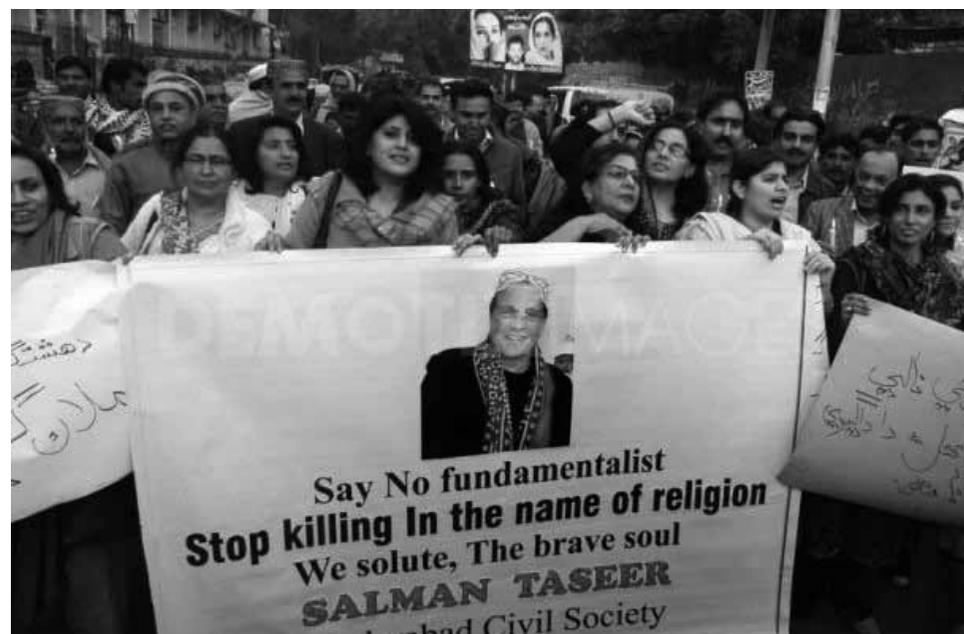
Imams of different sects are being killed now, and mosques and churches bombed. The fanaticism keeps getting worse. As disturbing as Taseer’s assassination is, just as disturbing is the way his assassin has become a hero. That is why this whole thing is so dangerous, it shows where we are headed.

I have been predicting this from day one. There is no military solution in Afghanistan, only dialogue, so the supreme irony is that in siding with the Americans all we have done is send the levels of violence up in Pakistan. The “war on terror” has weakened the state and then, thanks to the George Bush-sponsored National Reconciliation Ordinance in 2007, which allowed an amnesty for all the biggest political crooks,

we now have the most corrupt government in our history. The “war on terror” is destroying Pakistan.

Clemenceau once said: “War is too important to be left to the generals.” He was right; for us it has been a disaster. There is incredible anti-American

sentiment here, and the drone attacks only fuel that hatred. We need a change of strategy, otherwise the worst-case scenario will be achieved here; an unstable nuclear state.



‘Darkness to Expel’

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traits—not only because they are ugly in themselves, but also because they hinder the modernization of the globalized world. In which cooperation between peoples and between people is imperative. It takes us back to the stone age.

The situation here is now moving in the opposite direction: the country is embracing the racist demon. After millennia as the victims of racism, it seems as if Jews here are happy to be able to do unto others what has been done to them.

It is impossible to ignore the central role played by rabbis in this filthy mess. They ride the wave and assert that this is the spirit of Judaism. They quote the holy texts at length.

The truth is that Judaism, like almost every religion, includes racist and anti-racist, humanist and barbarian elements. The Crusaders, who massacred the Jews on their way to the Holy Land and who slaughtered the inhabitants of Jerusalem—Muslims and Jews alike—when they conquered the city, shouted: “God Wills It!” One can find in the New Testament magnificent passages preaching love, side by side with quite different sections. So, too, in the Koran there are Surahs full of love for humankind and calls for justice and equality, as well as others full of intolerance and hatred.

So, too, the Hebrew Bible. The racists quote Rabbi Maimonides, who interpreted two biblical words

as a commandment not to let non-Jews reside in the country. The whole Book of Joshua is a call to genocide. The Bible commands the Israelites to murder the entire tribe of Amalek (“both man and woman, infant and suckling”) and the Prophet Samuel dethroned King Saul because he spared the lives of Amalekite prisoners (1 Samuel 15).

But the Hebrew Bible is also a book of unequalled humanity. It starts with the description of the creation of man and woman, stressing that all human beings are created in the image of God—and therefore equal. “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him, male and female created he him.” The Bible repeatedly demands the treatment of “Gerim” (foreigners living among the Israelites) as Israelites, “because you were foreigners in the land of Egypt.”

As Gershom Schocken, the owner and long-time editor in chief of Haaretz, pointed out in an article republished this week on the 20th anniversary of his death: Ezra did indeed expel the non-Jewish wives from the community, but before that, foreign women played a central role in the Biblical story. Bathsheba was the wife of a Hittite, before she married King David and became the mother of the house from which the Messiah will come in due course (or from which, as Christians believe, Jesus—who was born 2010 years ago today—already came.) David himself was the descendant of Ruth, a Moabite woman. King Ahab, the greatest of Israelite kings, married a Phoenician woman.

‘We Are All Now at Risk’

It’s not a question of there being no room for moderates, it’s that moderates are being pushed towards extremism. Taseer didn’t say anything anti-Islamic, he just questioned the blasphemy law and whether it should be used to victimize innocent people. His death has caused many moderates to think there is no point in being a martyr. If it makes people such as myself think twice about what we say, then where does that leave us? We are all now at risk.

Crime in Pakistan is now at a level that breaks all records. Yet 60 percent of the elite police forces are now employed protecting VIPs. Where does that leave ordinary people? Young Pakistanis are being radicalised and the Taliban grow in strength. The United States is no longer fighting just the Taliban, it is fighting the whole Pashtun population.

The consequences for Pakistan, with its population of 180 million, are enormous. And there is an impact, too, on Muslim youth in Western countries. Graham Fuller, the CIA chief of staff in Kabul, wrote in 2007 that, if NATO left Afghanistan, Pakistan security forces could overcome terrorism and extremism. But, as long as the Americans push Pakistan to do more in the tribal areas, the situation will worsen—until Pakistan itself implodes.

Originally published by Guardian News and Media.

When our racists present the ugliest face of Judaism, ignoring its universalist message, they do great damage to the religion of millions of Jews around the world. The most important Jewish rabbis were silent this week in face of the racist fire that was ignited by rabbis, or murmured something about “ways of peace”—referring to the rule forbidding the provocation of Goyim, because they might treat the Jews in their countries as the Jews treat the minorities in their own state. Up to now, no Christian priest has yet called upon his flock not to let apartments to Jews—but it could happen.

The silence of the “Torah sages” is thunderous. Even more so the silence of the country’s political leaders: Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shimon Peres did not roar his outrage, and Binyamin Netanyahu has contented himself with calling upon the racists “not to take the law into their own hands.” Not a single word against racism, not a single word about morality and justice.

When I listened to the ex-soldiers at the Breaking the Silence meeting, I was filled with hope. This generation understands its duty to heal the state in which they will spend their lives.

In the words of the Hanukkah song, which is rapidly becoming the anthem of the antiracist demonstrations: “We come the darkness to expel!”

Uri Avnery is a journalist, peace activist, former member of the Knesset, and leader of Gush Shalom.

The Vagina Dialogues

Women cannot be prevented from getting AIDS without ending violence towards them

By Eve Ensler

Vagina is the most terrifying word, the most threatening word, in any language of any country I have ever been to. Even when the vagina is worshipped in theory, as the yoni is in India, it is denigrated in practice. It is more reviled and feared than words like plutonium, genocide, and starvation. In many countries the word for female genitalia is so derogative or disgusting, it cannot be spoken in public. In a few places, there is no word in the language for vagina at all.

As the vagina is the primary port of transmission from men to women of the AIDS virus, how women and men perceive vaginas, talk about or don't talk about vaginas, how women know their vaginas, feel agency over their vaginas, determines everything about their future. Many women, even in so-called progressive countries, are still not comfortable asking a man out, acting directly

Frankly, nothing short of a worldwide sexual revolution will stop the spread of AIDS. We need to disassemble the shame, reclaim pleasure, celebrate desire, human connection, skin and touch. We need to release the shackles of oppression, one-way enjoyment and narrow-minded education. We need open and fearless discussion allowing sex to be what it is—natural and beautiful.

on their own desire, be it for a man or a woman. Many women who are sexually active and educated about the virus are still, because of insecurity and embarrassment, having unsafe sex. Many women in the year 2010 do not know how their clitoris functions or how to give themselves pleasure, nor do they feel safe telling a partner or a husband what they need or that it hurts when they are entered without preparation or that it would all work much better if it happened slower.

For so many women in the world, because there is no open sex education, because women are discouraged from masturbation, because sex has been defined—like science or maths or business or politics—as something essentially male and belonging to men, sex is perceived as something foreign



and inaccessible. Because women are regularly forced and taken against their will in parts of the world, sex has become associated with pain. It has become something you survive. Each year millions of women forcibly have their clitoris cut and removed. For many women, your vagina belongs to the clan, to the tribe, to the state, to the church, to the mosque, to the temple, to your husband. But it most certainly does not belong to you. So if it isn't yours, how do you protect it or cherish it?

You cannot prevent women from getting AIDS without ending violence toward them, without shifting the dynamics of power. You cannot stop a disease that is being transmitted through sex unless you admit that sex exists, unless women have a right to sex and desire—the same way men have a right—unless women are equal active participants and not passive recipients of men's desires and thus the diseases men pass on through their narcissistic ejaculations. Until women know they have a right to refuse to be touched or entered and a right to invite it, a right to demand protection and a right to



expect it, there will be no ending AIDS. And until these rights are backed up by courts and enforced by states, women will never have those rights.

A man can get away with raping a virgin and saying he believes it will cure AIDS, as long as there is a sanctioned and enforced environment of sexual ignorance. Creating a true and substantial dialogue about sex and sexuality means breaking taboos and asking questions. It means standing up to authorities like the church, which refuse to promote contraception and sex education. It means boldly speaking out against fundamentalist forces that promote abstinence, claiming it prevents AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases and early pregnancy when the data tell another story.

Frankly, nothing short of a worldwide sexual revolution will stop the spread of AIDS. We need to disassemble the shame, reclaim pleasure, celebrate desire, human connection, skin and touch. We need to release the shackles of oppression, one-way enjoyment and narrow-minded education. We need open and fearless discussion allowing sex to be what it is—natural and beautiful.

The revolution will not happen without men. We need to create an environment where sexuality is more about connection than conquering, more about pleasure than performance. Men need to ask questions and admit their vulnerabilities. They need to go slow and go deeper. Women need to expect this, demand it and allow a place for it.

The time is now. There are 33 million people living in the world with the HIV virus, about half of them women. I venture to say a good portion of them got the disease because there is no environment which supports them saying outright and directly, "Love my vagina."

Originally published by Guardian News and Media Limited.

Eve Ensler is a playwright and activist and the founder of V-Day, a global movement to end violence against women and girls. Her newest work is *I Am an Emotional Creature: The Secret Life of Girls Around the World*. For V-Day events near you, see www.vday.org.

Peace of Mind

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A month ago, on Dec. 16, on a cold, snowy day in Washington, D.C., Mike and I got arrested, dragged away from the White House fence where we and 129 others (also arrested that day in a veteran-led civil resistance) were demanding an immediate end to the U.S. policy of endless war. Of course the President didn't listen to us—when has a president ever really listened to the people?

On that day, the President was rather calmly speaking to the press about the "progress" we are making in Afghanistan. As he told lie after lie inside the warmth and comfort of the White House, we stood outside in the cold and snow for hours. Yet on that day, with feet and hands becoming numb, my sorrow ceased for a time. With my brothers and sisters, united in our resistance to war, hypocrisy, and lies, there was a feeling of great solidarity, which at least for a time seemed to erase this oppressive sadness. We stood and got arrested for a commitment to truth, peace, and humanity.

Prior to a slow and solemn march to the White House, where we climbed over police barricades to stand on the concrete footwall of the surrounding cold metal fence, Chris Hedges, Daniel Ellsberg, and others addressed the rally in Lafayette Park. They spoke of the necessity of civil resistance, and about a young man, Bradley Manning, in oppressive, soul-crushing solitary confinement for eight months now, accused of exposing the lies and the brutality of U.S. wars and occupations. We stood in solidarity with the Bradley Mannings of this world, with the courage of WikiLeaks director Julian Assange, and all those suffering and resisting our corporate-permeated and controlled government's murderous policies. We were cold but warmed, empowered by the righteousness of what we were doing, and for a short time I was relieved of this sense of sadness that now seems to never leave me.

Chris Hedges wrote, "There is in our sorrow—for who cannot be profoundly sorrowful?—finally a balm that leads to wisdom and, if not joy, then a strange, transcendent happiness. To stand in a park on a cold December morning, to defy that which we must defy, to do this with others, brings us solace, and perhaps even peace."

Illness, old age, death, and natural disasters will always be part of our existence, and we need to learn to live and accept it with as much dignity and poise as possible, but the wars, the greed, the lusting for power by the few over the many, this is what must never be accepted. For peace of mind, for the sake of being human, for the children, for our planet, this needs to be resisted with every fiber of our being. You, the reader, may have another path to peace, but for myself, only when I am conscious of being in solidarity with the others, resisting and trying to ease the suffering, do I find peace.

—Tarak Kauff

2010: No Photo Ops

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agents of capitalism offer is in direct contradiction to the legacy of a Martin L. King. King did not see fit to commit suicide after J. Edgar Hoover's threatened to reveal FBI tapes of King engaged in extra-marital sex as an example of King's "hypocrisy." But, if he lived today, he would wring his own neck rather than continue to be witness to the willful betrayal and very real hypocrisy on the part of Black leadership in the United States.

Black leaders in 2010 are millionaires, corporate partners, and businessmen. What leadership this cabal offers has been as a mutant and therefore cooperating league of soldiers more patriotic than right wingers, nudging the faithful even closer to the edge of the cliff and encouraging them to jump! Collectively, their unified effort has killed the potential for a viable Black leadership in the spirit of resistance.

It is no wonder our leadership surrounded Obama, corporate capitalism's well-groomed specimen. At the top of this paradigm shift sits Brand Obama!

Take a look at PBS's White House Photographers. This is a program determined to assure the American public that the Obama White House is photographing history. We follow a very busy photographer (Obama's photographer from his days as an Illinois senator) as he follows the president busy days.

Try as he might to capture honest, spontaneous, un-staged" photos, the cameraman's subject seems always aware of the camera. Similar to Bill Clinton, Obama is a star, an American celebrity—all smiles and hand shakes, a good all-around guy. In this PBS presentation, Obama "at-work" is the Yuppie graduate student you might meet at a social event at Harvard University, let us say.

Surprised? Looking for someone presidential?

Well, who would expect to see graduate students, at their social events, contemplating the fall of drones that usually manages to miss the "No. 1" terrorist plotter but absolutely wipes out families with children? So there are no photos like the ones we have seen of Lyndon Johnson in the Oval room with his hand on forehead, weary, regretting war, bloody and brutal war, war that returns young soldiers home with

psychological and devastating physical wounds. In this hour-long presentation, we see only a photo of Obama greeting the caskets of dead soldiers, and we are told the president was "overwhelmed." Otherwise, he is worried in a photo or two about the passing of insurance and pharmaceutical health care bill. Obama has to win for his constituency!

Then we are back, witnessing America's example of a winner! A charming, calm, and composed Obama works a room and fills it with his smile and his jokes. But then there is the calm and composed Obama, working a room with smiles and jokes. He laughs. Everyone laughs. The people surrounding president love him! But is there a photo of this winner surrounded by citizens opposed to the money give away to Wall Street? I cannot image such a photo these days.

But history is being recorded, we are reminded. And not one photo of Obama signing into law another opportunity to secure an effective police state within the United States and globally! Who will remember those dark moments?

The rapid presentation of John F. Kennedy and Johnson photos taken by their White House photographers seemed real, less staged. Perhaps these men, contemplating the war of their day and the young in the streets or fearless men and women of the civil rights—perhaps these presidents knew a King was out there, an A. Philip Randolph, an Adam Clayton Powell—some serious troublemakers—were out there?

But at the White House in 2010, there are no pictures of Obama seated next to an equivalent of Martin L. King!

In the hunter's history books on the rise (and silent fall) of Barack Obama will comment on how he looked good, stayed cool, and got the job done for a corporate rebound. It is the only narrative that matters to Wall Street now! I believe Obama knows this and that he has always known his task was to save capitalism and remove as much of that civil liberties nonsense as possible.

Obama never betrayed those he made the real promises to!

We the hunted, however, will have to struggle to remember that Barack Obama did not betray Black

Americans! Our Black leadership in the post-racial era betrayed the Black struggle but not Barack Obama!

Black Americans betrayed themselves!

Black Americans should have recognized a "Black" man—who said his war would be better—would send their sons and daughter (not Arnie Duncan's or Rahm Emmanuel's or Larry Sumner's children or grandchildren) to die for lies—his lies—and that that man represented the same old contempt for Black Americans!



"It wasn't a dream as much as a nightmare that one day my legacy would be celebrated when a black man would become President of the United States by coddling big business, supporting domestic spying and touting the virtues of a foreign policy predicated on the misconception that America has a responsibility to police the entire world."

They should have known it was a slave ship disguised as the good ship Hope. And even that ship, the one that sailed in the 90s with the Captain from Hope playing a saxophone, was shipwrecked and stranded millions of Blacks on these isolated rural complexes.

No. Black people should have recognized the person Obama told them he was. For he was forthcoming with Black Americans! He may have told white liberals he was not to be feared. Counting on deep-seated racism in the United States—I ain't really Black!—Obama won the white liberals over!

But Obama frowned down on Black people! He hurled a fiery tongue and denounced (with anything but coolness and calm) Black Americans as a racial group. He denounced Black culture. He denounced the Black heritage. He did so at every opportunity. He did so in his memoirs. For a man made of images, he needed only one image to bring out the handkerchiefs of the predominantly Civil Right era generation: Pettus Bridge! Oh, remember Pettus Bridge! And it had to be Selmaonly—for Selma and Pettus Bridge lead to the Black vote!

Oh, no! His handlers were not stupid—Black leadership fell for it! Great opportunity for historical photos! Maybe, cabinet position, too?

Obama won and snubbed them as he had snubbed Blacks in Chicago. Firmly aligned with the Daley Machine and the financiers on La Salle Street in Chicago, a fiercely determined Obama proved his worth to the corporate capitalist when he clicked the delete button in an office in Chicago and disappeared the poor Black community along the Lake on the Southside. A new map of his new constituency—the wealthy along Miracle Mile along the lakefront! He did not even need Black votes, but the Blacks, so faithful to the Democrats, voted for him anyway. A

Black man! He could even publicly denounce the astute pastor, Rev. Jeremiah Wright, and Black people still voted for the "Black" man.

You think our Black leadership did not know that Barack Obama was always (even in Chicago where he was groomed) "a servile facilitator and protector of the political establishment; an insidious capitulator"?

Surrounded by Tony Rezko, Mayor Daley and his men, Rahm and Axelrod, the financiers on La Salle, and Goldman Sachs, who needs a now deceased population? Besides, Chicago could not allow the dead to vote anymore! The U.S. government called a halt to that tradition!

When the corporate capitalists finally throw Obama overboard (and not because he is "Black"), the government's "street cleaners" may pull out the bulldozers and the big trash cans to pick up the deceased—because this collective is Black! Watch we do not mistake the trash cans for Noah's Ark!

Originally published on blackcommentator.com.

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Nation of Androids

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androids of the corporate / military elite—in this nation or anywhere else. Let us move beyond betrayal to an actualized and sustained vision of renewal! Organize, Organize, and then Organize some more! What is at stake? Our very existence, that of our offspring, and that of the planet itself!

Originally printed on blackcommentator.com.

BlackCommentator.com editorial board member Larry Pinkney is a veteran of the Black Panther Party, the former Minister of Interior of the Republic of New Africa, a former political prisoner, and the only American to have successfully self-authored his civil/political rights case to the United Nations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. He is the author of *Saying No to Power: Autobiography of a 20th Century Activist and Thinker.*

Is the United States a Nation of Psychological Androids?

"Never be deceived that the rich will allow you to vote away their wealth."—Lucy Parsons

"If those in charge of our society—politicians, corporate executives, and owners of press and television—can dominate our ideas, they will be secure in their power. They will not need soldiers patrolling the streets. We will control ourselves."
—Howard Zinn

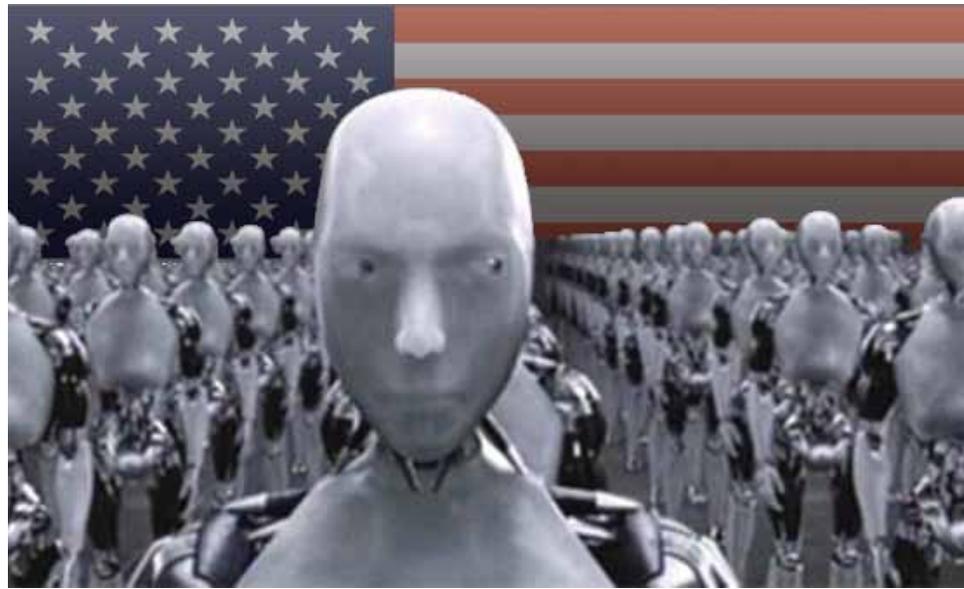
By Larry Pinkney

Have we allowed ourselves to become psychological androids—putty and/or expendable cannon fodder—in the hands of the corporate/military elite of this nation and its subservient corporate-stream media?

The word android is defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as "a mobile robot usually with a human form." Yet, beyond the mere physical aspect of what an android is is the all-powerful psychological component on the part of who is actually in "control" of the android. When humans cease to be in control of their own ideas and creative processes we are in essence relegated to psychological androids. As the late political organizer Steve Biko noted: "The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed."

Everyday Black, White, Brown, Red, and Yellow people in this nation have entered the year 2011, under the yoke of the most hideous and vicious forms of national and global corporate exploitation/domination [i.e. hegemony] and military madness as yet visited upon humankind. Meanwhile, the nominal black-faced emperor of this insane U.S. empire piously and relentlessly feeds our sons, our daughters, our fathers, our mothers, our brothers, our sisters, our aunts, uncles, and our cousins into the flaming, insatiable ovens of corporate greed and military insanity. As we steadily lose our jobs, homes, educational opportunities, futures, and our legal and human rights—we are told that war is actually peace (or at least guarantees peace) and that we must willingly sacrifice ourselves upon the blood-drenched altar of an endless war against "terrorism." Never mind, as the late historian, Howard Zinn, pointedly and correctly observed: "How can you have a war on terrorism when war itself is terrorism?" Moreover, war enriches the coffers of the already bloated corporate elite while simultaneously increasing—not diminishing—"terrorism." None of this is lost upon the cunning minds of the corporate/military elite or the diversionary corporate-stream media.

We everyday Black, White, Brown, Red, and Yellow people watch racial and national tensions heighten as economic resources become ever more scarce



for common folk, while the rich become even richer. We watch as the most repressive and unjust political and economic laws are passed and enacted against the people of this nation—in the name of so-called "bipartisanship" and then swiftly spun away by a treacherous, complicitous corporate-stream media. We watch as arguably the most articulately draconian president in the history of this nation, adroitly sets the stage for a blatant corporate-fascist state all in the name of "hope and change." We watch in horror as the political, civil, and human rights of an entire nation are skillfully banished into obscurity, right before our very eyes.

How could political, economic, and social conditions have become so bleak in two years?

Notwithstanding the undeniable fact that the previous Bush/Cheney administration's policies were clearly and utterly reprehensible, the answer is relatively simple. Many people were simply not paying attention, thus allowing themselves to be euphorically swept up into a frenzy of non-critical thinking in futile anticipation of the fulfillment of the superficial so-called "hope and change" double-speak rhetoric, which was dangled like a poisonous carrot, by those who make up the present Obama / Biden administration. Moreover, instead of heeding the wise words of the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. when he said to judge people based upon the "content of their character, not the color of their skin ;," so many did precisely the opposite. Thus, with the overwhelming backing and support of the corporate / military elite and corporate-stream media (for which major corporate support should have—but did not—sound deafening mental alarms) Barack Obama became head of the U.S. empire. Another crucial factor as to how and why everyday people could have been so thoroughly bamboozled is the shameful betrayal by much of the Black intelligensia and so-called

Left and 'progressives' in their support for the double-talking, corporate Barack Obama. They, for a certainty, knew better! However, this betrayal and complicity, on the part of an inordinate amount of them, continues to this very year of 2011. Nevertheless, and despite them, a growing amount

When humans cease to be in control of their own ideas and creative processes, we are in essence relegated to psychological androids.

of just plain everyday Black, White, Brown, Red, and Yellow people have begun to pay serious attention to that symbolic "man behind the curtain" [i.e. the android-maker], and are legitimately hopping mad.

Many of the people of this nation were insidiously lulled into a slumber—a slumber from which some are now beginning to awaken. The android-like psychological state of so many is beginning to be replaced by the pain of betrayal and the recognition that the Obama/Biden regime (notwithstanding the Obama and corporate-stream media double-speak) has, over the last two years repackaged and accelerated the Bush/Cheney policies of war abroad and economic, legal, and political disenfranchisement at home.

Moving Beyond the Pain of Betrayal

Understanding that the corporate Obama / Biden regime and the scandalous Democrats and Republicans [i.e. the Republicrats] in Congress have, for all practical purposes, established and codified into law, a very real (and often not-so-subtle) police-state in this nation, must serve to

strengthen the resolve of everyday people to throw off this unacceptable and intolerable situation. This "peace" prize-toting, constitutional lawyer, and purveyor of war—Barack Obama, has despite himself, done something incredibly valuable: He has demonstrated for all conscious people to see that mere color or gender, etc. must never be the lone deciding factor(s) by which crucial choices and/or political decisions are made. He has demonstrated that superficiality is precisely that—superficial!

Everyday people in this nation must grasp the international nature of the struggle for justice and human rights world wide. The corporate 21st century fascists are attacking everyday people around the world. Indeed, that is the nature of what is often referred to as [corporate] "globalization." We must understand that globalization means wealth for the tiny rich elite, and austerity and pain for the vast majority of just plain everyday people—in this nation and throughout the world. Just as the corporate elite inside this nation are

about the business of economic strangulation as it attempts to pit everyday people against each other—exactly the same objectives are practiced internationally under what is termed "globalization."

The people of the United States must recognize that our struggle here for political, economic and political justice and human rights is intertwined with those of everyday people in Haiti, in Spain, in Greece, in Germany, in Norway, in Venezuela, in Brazil, in Argentina, in Palestine, in Zambia, in every nation of every corner of Mother Earth! Internationalism must be the answer of everyday people to the blood-sucking bane of globalization. We are not alone—no matter what the corporate-stream media might try and have us believe! This planet belongs to everyday people—not to the vampiric corporate elite. We must be the guardians and sustainers of this planet. We must tell our own stories—present our own narratives—for the present and the future.

As we the people intensify in our struggle here, let us remember our brothers and sisters around the world. No!!! We will not be the psychological

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