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DIGITAL Magazine



February 15, 2010

Eric Alterman The Games Journalists Play

It's no exaggeration to say that John Heilman and Mark Halperin's *Game Change* proved to be one of those brief, earthshaking events in the "village" that are the story until they're—almost immediately—replaced by another one. (In this case, its replacement was a genuine earthquake in Haiti and a metaphorical one in Massachusetts.) Because of the authors' unparalleled access to the 2008 presidential race's major players, and their willingness to offer blanket anonymity to those willing to spill, they succeeded in constructing a rather rare commodity: a book that sings as it sings; a story that suffers not at all from the reader's full knowledge of how it all turns out.

Phenomena such as *Game Change's* publication are often more interesting for what they show about the community that prizes them than for the actual information they contain. Its most revealing passages, as I Hendrik Herzberg noted in *The New Yorker*, "are based on what may be fairly called gossip."

It is packed with score-keeping, back-stabbing, virtuosically impressive feats of mind-reading by its authors. As Charles Pierce pointed out in his "Slacker Friday" appearance on my "Altercation" blog, what there isn't is any discussion of why healthcare, Afghanistan or Al Qaeda. But surely this is an accurate reflection of the meaning of "news" to the MSM Powers. That Be-White, New York's Heilman is one of the more independent-minded mainstream reporters, Halperin, of *Time* and formerly of ABC, occupies a place in the forging of insider conventional wisdom with a focus no less intense on appearances and shiny surfaces.

Just before the book was published, as its spin machine was falling into place, *The Atlantic's* Marc Ambinder offered this assessment: "Political scientists aren't going to like this book, because it portrays politics as it is actually lived by the candidates, their staff and the press, which is to say—a messy, sweaty, ugly, arduous competition between flawed human beings—a universe away from numbers and probabilities and theories."

Challenged privately, Ambinder retreated and apologized for this crack, going so far as to promise to attend the next convention of the Midwest Political Science Association as penance. Even so, he was surely giving voice to what most political journalists and practitioners believe. (*The New York Times Magazine's* Matt Bai made a similarly sweeping anti-academic statement in a review published in the journal *Democracy* last year.)

A second, unintentional revelation of *Game Change's* is the actual degree to which political journalists and their colleagues cooperate to create campaign narratives. It's a story that is so commonly understood, and so often repeated, that it's almost comical to wonder how they fact-checked that one...

Edwards and the not-so-saintly-after-all Elizabeth Edwards, it is that everything we were sold during the campaign about this couple was a lie. It doesn't really matter much in terms of whether he would have made a good president, but given how much ink is spilled on the "character" issues of candidates and their spouses, it's significant that virtually everything written about the Edwardses when it mattered belied reality. Can this really be news to everyone who covered the 2004 and 2008 campaigns?

The authors also devote considerable space to a column early in the campaign in which Hollywood mogul David Geffen made nasty comments about Bill and Hillary Clinton to Maurice Dowd before co-hosting an Obama fundraiser. Like Dowd, the *Game Change* authors go gaga over Geffen's "world-class" "Rumsfeld-bergs, de Koonings, Pollocks, Gorkys, a Jasper Johns target, a Jasper Johns flag" in the book: "a Jasper Johns flag and a matchbox pair of de Koonings" in her column.) They describe how Geffen and Dowd, "a mischievous dyad," conspired to produce a bombshell attack on the Clintons' character. Dowd interviewed Geffen for fifteen minutes. She then "let" and wrote her column, then called Geffen and read it to him." The next night, after the fundraiser, Dowd came to dinner with the Obamas and a few Hollywood types, and Geffen read the column to Barack Obama, who presumably was amused.

The Clinton campaign took the bait. Mark Penn, who comes off only slightly better in this book than did Hammit, suggested leaving whatever still-under-seal presidential records might reflect unfavorably on Geffen. Campaign spokesman Howard Wolfson demanded that Obama return Geffen's money not clear to me why I should be apologizing for someone else's remarks." The incident became a boon to Obama, making the Clinton campaign look panicked and incompetent. (Hillary gave Geffen a copy of her campaign chief, Pat Sols Doyle. If there is one worthwhile lesson to be learned from this book, it is not to make big decisions when somebody's just woken you up.)

More significant, the episode demonstrates just how little a role the rules of professional journalism play in allegedly top-flight political reporting. Real reporters do not read their columns to their subjects in advance. And Penn and Wolfson knew damn well that Obama had no control over what Geffen said or did, but demand, because the phony foot-fight story line was so much fun to pursue. Finally, at the end of the story, Heilman and Halperin inform us, in the voice of God, that "Soon after, when Geffen visited New York, people in cars on Madison Avenue beeped their horns and gave the thumbs-up as he walked down the street."



Villagers and human rights officials accuse the United States military of torturing suspects in hidden detention centers.

On a quiet, wintry night last year in the eastern Afghan town of Khost, a young government employee named Ismatullah simply vanished. He had just been seen in the town's bazaar with a group of friends. Family members scoured Khost's dusty streets for days. Village elders contacted Taliban commanders in the area who were wont to kidnap government workers, but they had never heard of the young man. Even the governor got involved, ordering his police to round up nettlesome criminal gangs that sometimes preyed on young hazzarpopers for ransom.

But the hunt turned up nothing. Spring and summer came and went with no sign of Ismatullah. Then one day, long after the police and village elders had abandoned their search, a courier delivered a neat handwritten note on Red Cross stationery to the family. In it, Ismatullah informed them that he was in Bagram, an American prison more than 200 miles away. US forces had picked him up while he was on his way home from the bazaar, the terse letter stated, and he didn't know when he would be freed.

In the past few years Paktun villagers in Afghanistan's rugged heartland have begun to lose faith in the American project. Many of them can point to the precise moment of their transformation, and it usually took place in the dead of night, when most of the country was fast asleep. In its attempt to stamp out the growing Taliban insurgency and Al Qaeda, the US military has been arresting suspects and sending them to one of a number of secret detention areas on military bases, often on the slightest suspicion and without the knowledge of their families. These

night raids have become phantoms than coalition little known or understood turning Afghans greeted as liberators in

One Dark Night in V November 19, 20 of a leafy neighborhood in the through the front spokesman for A in Kabul at the ti sleeping in the Hamidullah, w of the door of t managed to c him. Then A too, was sho out to the t in the rose silent barr The fr their wr the flee Finally Rahm Rahw

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THE CIA'S SECRET SITES IN SOMALIA

JEREMY SCAHILL

END OF MURDOCH EPOCH?

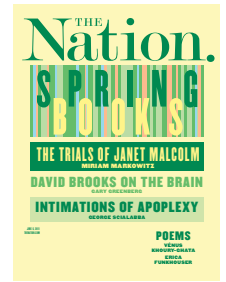
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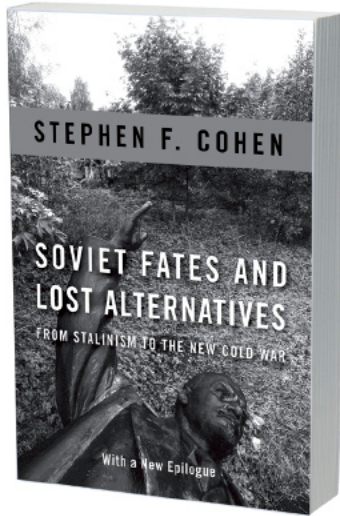
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Exchange

Science vs. Blatherskite

CHICAGO

Gary Greenberg's rant on David Brooks's newest book ["The Dumbest Story Ever Told," June 6] is another in the long line of sarcastic, culturistically fundamentalist diatribes against what is in fact valid and factual information essential to understanding human behavior. What are Greenberg's credentials that he can repudiate so facetly all neurological, evolutionary and cognitive science?

I find Brooks generally annoying in trying to tie conservative "values" to this subject, but the science he has attempted to understand is not the problem. To sneer at the extraordinary new insights the discovery of mirror neurons has given us is sophomoric. Mirror neurons, oxytocin and empathic functions that underlie the emergence of conscious feelings and cognitions are important components that help us understand who we are—not through reductionist, pat answers but through descriptions of somatic and neural system components that in interaction with external environmental systems, cultural and physical, within which we are situated, give us a handle on some of the baffling complexities of which both religion and cultural anthropology are deeply ignorant and dismissive.

It's time the left, like the right, started respecting the recent findings of science and adapting their ideals to them. Science is not a religion to be repudiated, à la fundamentalists, but important knowledge to be accommodated and applied. It is of course embedded in cultural and political forces, but that is not a reason to deny its validity. That form of reasoning is notoriously right-wing. Nothing in science requires a moral reset in order to acknowledge it. It requires us to take the effort and have the courage to constantly re-evaluate and re-understand an infinitely perplexing world.

JAN ARNOLD

BOULDER, COLO.

Through the use of fMRI brain-scanning machines, neuroscientists are making

some amazing, if tentative, discoveries concerning the political aspects of the human mind:

§ Democratic and Republican biases regarding political information (Kaplan), as well as their differing disgust reactions to Abu Ghraib (Hamman);

§ Liberals and conservatives as to tolerance and perceived threats (Kanai);

§ Aggression and bullying (Decety);

§ Empathy (Iacoboni);

§ Roles of reason and emotion in political thinking (Westen);

§ Racial biases based on skin tone (Ronquillo).

But instead of incorporating those findings into their work, psychoanalytic professionals (this time, Gary Greenberg) respond with nonscientific, sarcastic (shame-based) attacks on the whole fMRI endeavor. It seems they intend to preserve the dark ages of Freud, which not only provide them with personal and professional sustenance but are conjured out of their roots in Western religion/philosophy. They would extend their reign as the experts on the human condition. But their work has become "so last century" (Freeman).

Meanwhile, the hard sciences will still be sliding human beings into fMRI machines, stimulating them, observing the brain's responses, for more hard data. They will do so without much regard to their findings being hijacked by us politicians to pursue our pre-existing agendas (this time, David Brooks of the right and Greenberg of the still largely psychoanalytically guided left).

In this, the right has an advantage over the left. It was never much influenced by the psychoanalytic construct and its cobweb confusions. It may turn out that it is in the nature of conservatives to avoid family therapy, even when they (Newt Gingrich) and their loved ones would clearly benefit from it. Meanwhile, many on the left (Oliver Stone) seem to bathe in it, even to the point of making movies based on it rather than empirical reality. News flash: we abandoned Afghanistan to invade Iraq for oil, not

Debt Ceiling Delusions

As the partisan fight over the debt ceiling approached the August 2 deadline, President Obama presented Republicans with what, at almost any other time in recent history,

would be seen as a conservative's dream: \$4 trillion in spending cuts over ten years, and the offer to restructure core pieces of the Democratic legacy, including Social Security and Medicare. GOP House Speaker John Boehner walked away from the deal not because the cuts weren't steep enough but because they would be achieved, in part, through tax increases on hedge-fund managers, private jet owners and oil and gas companies.

The Republicans have once again shown themselves to be a party, to paraphrase Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz, of the 1 percent, by the 1 percent, for the 1 percent. It is a party that accepts no new taxes, no closing of loopholes, no crack-downs on overseas tax havens and no increase in corporate tax rates, even as the biggest corporations pay little or no taxes on billions in profits. It is a party that embraces savage cuts in the social safety net but then draws a line in the sand to protect the wealthy. To Republicans, shared sacrifice is anathema. Now, as before, the global economy may be their victim.

What's worse is that, rather than being chastised, the GOP has been empowered by an establishment media obsessed with debt and deficits. When Republicans decry tax increases, it is all too rare to hear the media respond with facts or to offer historical perspective. In the 1950s, the corporate sector accounted for an average of 27.6 percent of all federal revenues; in 2010 it was 8.9 percent. And individual tax rates for the richest are now lower than in all but five of the past seventy-nine years.

At press time, the GOP had retreated from its insistence on major cuts, instead offering a cynical and circuitous plan that would allow Obama to increase

the debt ceiling in three stages while allowing Republicans the symbolic opportunity to vote against it. In the meantime, we are confronted with grim news about a jobs crisis that has spiraled into a genuine emergency, even as it is treated as the "new normal" or a mere inconvenience.

President Obama and his team have recently taken to talking about "a unique opportunity to do something big" with regard to the debt ceiling. Little, however, has been said about applying that desire for bigness to job creation. Obama wants to play the role of reasonable adult, urging members of both parties to "eat our peas." But being reasonable means leading a nation that cries out for relief and reconstruction after months of stalled job growth—not acting like a hostage negotiator.

And if lines are being drawn in the sand, the president must draw his as well. Yes, he should demand that the rich pay their fair share, but insisting that they contribute to deficit reduction cannot be our fundamental cause. We must draw our lines on behalf of the jobless, who now spend, on average, forty weeks looking for work. We must draw ours on behalf of the elderly, who cannot afford a smaller Social Security check. We must draw ours for the hundreds of thousands of families who have already lost their Medicaid.

President Obama was elected, in part, because he challenged the smallness of our politics. But his actions on the debt negotiations suggest that he has embraced that smallness. This is a time for the president to join the millions across the country who demand solutions for the employment and economic crisis. As Obama himself said, "If not now, when?"

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Sky Falls on Murdoch

Is this the end of Rupert? For decades the billionaire media baron relentlessly amassed power on three continents. As recently as July 4 only a fool would have bet against that process continuing. In New York, shares of News Corporation were trading at \$18.54; having bought out his daughter Elisabeth's production company, Shine, for £415 million (\$673 million), Murdoch also arranged for his son James, who had been running British Sky Broadcasting (BSkyB), to move to New York—apparently securing family control over the company for the next generation. In London the government of David Cameron, elected with the backing of Murdoch's newspapers, was expected to wave through a deal that would let the 80-year-old tycoon buy the 61 percent of BSkyB he doesn't already own, giving him even greater influence over British politics. A week later, the deal was off.

COMMENT

The House of Murdoch has been shaken to its foundations. The political firestorm began with a report in the *Guardian* that journalists from the *News of the World*, Murdoch's Sunday tabloid, had hacked into the mobile phone messages of Milly Dowler, a murdered 13-year-old girl, setting off a wave of public revulsion that in turn sparked an advertising boycott. Prime Minister Cameron condemned the hacking as "dreadful"; Labour Party leader Ed Miliband called for Rebekah Brooks, a Murdoch executive who'd been editor of the *News of the World* when the hacking occurred, to resign. When it emerged that the paper had also hacked into the voicemail accounts of British soldiers killed in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Royal British Legion, the country's largest veterans' organization, announced it was cutting its ties with the paper. Just when it seemed the paper's reputation could sink no lower, it was reported that victims of the July 7, 2005, London bombing had also had their voicemail accounts hacked. Even Rupert Murdoch described the mounting scandal as "deplorable and unacceptable."

In a desperate attempt to limit the damage James Murdoch announced that the 168-year-old tabloid would be shut down. Miliband, who'd made an obligatory appearance at a Murdoch garden party in June, suddenly seemed to discover his backbone (or another portion of his anatomy starting with "b"), moving to force Parliament to debate the BSkyB merger. As the Labour motion opposing the merger gathered support from across the political spectrum, Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt announced that he was referring the bid to the Competition Commission as well as the media regulator Ofcom, delaying a decision for at least three months. Speculators who had bought BSkyB shares in anticipation of the merger began to bail out—which, in turn, knocked a whopping 15 percent (\$7 billion) off the value of News Corporation. Then on July 13, in a stunning reversal, James and Rupert Murdoch withdrew their bid, saying "it is too difficult to progress in this climate." Long accustomed to making the political weather, the Murdochs were battered by the storm.

Both Murdochs had been "invited" to appear before a parliamentary select committee—an offer their surprise move may have been designed to refuse. But the family firm's troubles are

Noted.

A VICTORY FOR HEALTHCARE: Challengers of President Obama's **Affordable Care Act** couldn't have asked for a more favorable judge to hear their case than **Jeffrey Sutton**, who cast the deciding vote on June 29 in the first federal court of appeals decision on the law's constitutionality. Sutton is not just a former law clerk to Justice **Antonin Scalia**, a **George W. Bush** appointee and an active member of the **Federalist Society**; until his nomination to the US Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, he was the leading advocate on states' rights before the Supreme Court. He argued, successfully, that Congress could not impose the Age Discrimination Act or the Americans with Disabilities Act on state employers and could not enact the Violence Against Women Act. Liberal groups vigorously opposed his nomination to the Sixth Circuit precisely because of his vehement states' rights views.

The constitutional challenge to Obamacare turns on a states' rights claim. Challengers argue that the law's requirement that people who can afford to buy healthcare insurance must do so or pay a fine is beyond Congress's power under the Commerce Clause and therefore remains the exclusive prerogative of the states. If such an argument would appeal to anyone, it would be Judge Sutton. Yet when he cast his decisive vote, he sided with the Obama administration and upheld the law, reasoning that Congress's action went no further than regulations the **Supreme Court** has upheld in the past. As sympathetic to states' rights as Sutton is, he could not find a way to support the challenge. That's good news for those who believe that it's about time the United States joined the rest of the developed world in providing basic healthcare for all its citizens. If those challenging the healthcare reform law could not persuade Judge Sutton, they are likely to have a tough time in the Supreme Court. DAVID COLE

A TOKEN TORTURE INVESTIGATION: The Justice Department has severely narrowed its inquiries into the Bush-era torture regime. On June 30 Attorney General **Eric Holder** announced a full criminal investigation by

the department into the deaths of two CIA detainees, but said it will not further pursue inquiries into the alleged abuse of many others in US custody over the past decade. Holder said that based on a two-year review by federal prosecutor **John Durham**, expanded investigation into ninety-nine out of 101 considered cases "is not warranted."

Holder did not identify the two cases, but it has been widely reported that one involves the highly publicized death of **Manadel al-Jamadi** at Abu Ghraib, while the other involves the death of **Gul Rahman** at a secret US prison in Afghanistan. Rahman reportedly froze to death after being shackled half-naked to a concrete wall.

Human rights organizations offered support for the new investigation but condemned the more consequential decision to close the other inquiries. **Jameel Jaffer**, deputy legal director at the ACLU, said the narrow investigation "is not proportionate to the scale and scope of the wrongdoing." But others were relieved. "I welcome the news that the broader inquiries are behind us," declared **Leon Panetta** on his last day as CIA director before taking charge at the Pentagon. "We are now finally about to close this chapter of our agency's history."

MARC KILSTEIN

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE... On July 9 news broke that the United States will suspend almost \$800 million in military aid to Pakistan because of deteriorating relations between the two allies. But Pakistan has been cut off before.

It was 1990. The '80s had been an era of glorious American generosity. Gen. **Zia ul Haq**, dictator, antiwoman fanatic and shredder of the Constitution, had been one of **Ronald Reagan's** favorite poodles. But with Zia and the Big Red Soviet Machine both dead and the United States bored with bloodletting in post-jihad Afghanistan, aid to nuclear-aspiring Pakistan made little sense. Snap went the umbilical cord. And off came the gloves: as India prepared America for Y2K, Pakistan prepared Afghanistan for the apocalypse, cultivating **Mullah Omar** and the Taliban. By 1998 India had goaded Pakistan into testing a nuclear weapon. By 1999, with Gen. **Pervez Musharraf** leading the way, Pakistan had goaded India into the disastrous

Kargil war. Musharraf's punishment: he got to run Pakistan for almost a decade. Who paid for his toys? Hint: it was yet another Republican president, in another era of glorious US generosity. MOSHARRAF ZAIDI

JUSTICE IS NOT COLORBLIND: For women of color facing prison, skin tone—not just race—may be a decisive factor. A recent study conducted by **Villanova University** titled "The Impact of Light Skin on Prison Time for Black Female Offenders" has found that darker-skinned women are likely to get more punitive prison terms and are also more likely to serve more of their overall sentences than their lighter-skinned counterparts. Examining the cases of more than 12,000 African-American female inmates in North Carolina, the study's authors concluded that darker-skinned women were sentenced to nearly 12 percent more prison time than lighter-skinned women and that darker-skinned women typically served 11 percent more of their sentences. Past studies have found similar correlations among African-American men.

Colorism has long been a topic of both controversy and comedy in the African-American community, as seen in everything from dark-skinned-versus-light-skinned jokes to a recent documentary, *Dark Girls*. Challenging cultural perceptions about beauty is one thing; that such perceptions define who is considered to be more "criminal" is a disturbing finding about an already biased system. BRITNEY WILSON

BACHMANN'S "EX-GAY" PROBLEM:

A hard-hitting investigation by **Mariah Blake** for TheNation.com has confirmed damning allegations about the husband of GOP presidential hopeful **Michele Bachmann**: that Bachmann & Associates, his Christian counseling center in Lake Elmo, Minnesota, which has received state and federal funding, is on a mission to "cure" homosexuality. **Marcus Bachmann** has denied practicing such therapy. But Blake obtained evidence to the contrary, thanks in part to **Truth Wins Out**, a gay rights group that sent an activist undercover to the clinic for "treatment." His findings—and Blake's report—shed new light on the Bachmanns' disturbing embrace of this movement, which should haunt her in 2012.

far from over. Some shareholders, aggrieved at the way Rupert Murdoch “habitually uses News Corp to enrich himself and his family members at the Company’s...expense,” filed a lawsuit challenging the acquisition of Shine—but really aimed at the way the whole corporation has been run for the past four decades. (For connoisseurs of irony, one of the lead plaintiffs in the suit is Amalgamated, the union bank.) There is even a chance Murdoch or his lieutenants could face prosecution in the United States under the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act.

Still, it’s probably worth remembering that Murdoch has been counted out before. Back in 1969 he was very much the dark horse in the race to buy the *News of the World*, whose owners had agreed to sell to Robert Maxwell. Maxwell’s fraudulent dealings were still unsuspected, but his Czech Jewish origins were held against him by the paper’s editor, who remarked that the *News of the World* “was—and should remain—as British as roast beef and Yorkshire pudding.” Snatching the title from Maxwell was Murdoch’s first move out of his native Australia—and out from under the shadow of his father, newspaper magnate Sir Keith Murdoch. Though in considerable decline from its heyday in the 1950s, when it sold more than 8 million copies a week, the *News of the World* was still the top-selling English-language paper anywhere; with its weekday stablemate, the *Sun*, which Murdoch acquired a year later, it supplied the steady profits that enabled him to build his British empire. (In 2010, a terrible year in the newspaper business, the two titles reported a profit of £86 million.)

In the 1990s Murdoch’s single-minded push into broadcasting, building the Fox network in the United States and BSkyB in Britain, burdened the company with so much debt it would have collapsed if bankers hadn’t been too terrified to call in his loans.

Indeed, it is precisely the possibility that he will no longer be quite so feared that makes the current crisis potentially so dangerous for Murdoch. When *News of the World* reporter Clive Goodman and private investigator Glenn Mulcaire first pleaded

guilty to hacking into the mobile phone accounts of members of the royal family in 2007, the story initially died a death that, in retrospect, can only be viewed as unnatural. Scotland Yard declared the case closed, and despite dogged reporting by the *Guardian* and the *New York Times*, the rest of the media showed little interest. The recent revelation that Murdoch’s reporters routinely made illegal payments to corrupt police officers for confidential information explains some official failures. Reporters aware of similar arrangements at their own shops may also have been reluctant to pursue the story. (Reader, have you changed your access code lately?)

And the treatment meted out to former Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who had his voicemail hacked by Mulcaire, his bank accounts viewed by the *Sunday Times* and his infant son’s medical records stolen by the *Sun*, illustrates why so few politicians have been willing to challenge Murdoch. *Guardian* reporter Nick Davies’s account of how Rebekah Brooks, at the time the *Sun*’s editor, told the Browns the paper was about to publish a story revealing their 4-month-old son, Fraser, had just been diagnosed with cystic fibrosis is a chilling study in the abuse of press power. Brown wasn’t a sworn foe—the Browns had even invited a *Sun* columnist to their wedding!

Parliament’s success in forcing Murdoch’s hand suggests that the puppets may have turned on the puppet master—at least in Britain. Can Americans dare hope that Murdoch’s political influence in the United States is also on the wane? A world without Fox News would be a fairer (if not more balanced) world in every sense. But as the widening revelations of the phone-hacking scandal show, News Corporation is not an ordinary commercial enterprise. Through his journalists and gossip columnists and the network of former and current police officers and law enforcement officials on his payroll, Rupert Murdoch has been operating what amounts to a private intelligence service. And the threat of personal exposure—on the front page of the *Sun* or Page Six in the *Post*—gives News Corporation a kind of leverage over inquisitive regulators or troublesome politicians wielded by no other company on earth.

English already has the expression “para-state” to describe the kind of shadowy forces that operate beneath and behind legitimate authority. Is it really unreasonable to suggest that in News Corporation, Fox, News International, Sky and the rest of Murdoch’s empire, we are witnessing the exposure of the para-corporation?

D.D. GUTTENPLAN

D.D. Guttenplan writes from The Nation’s London bureau.

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

A Summary of Public Response to the News That a Tabloid Hacked The Phones of a Missing Girl and of Families of Soldiers Killed in Afghanistan

All England said, in one voice, “Blimey! Could even Murdoch be that slimy?”

Trading Against Colombia

In July Congress took up a major trade package that includes free trade agreements with Colombia, Panama and South Korea. All these pacts are flawed in their own way, but none is more problematic than the proposed deal with Colombia, which would reward a political elite that has long repressed labor unions and could devastate that country’s rural farmers.

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President Obama entered office vowing to strengthen the links between trade and human rights. A good start would have been to junk the Colombia FTA altogether, which was negotiated under George W. Bush. Instead, the administration set out to improve the agreement through negotiations with Colombia's new president, Juan Manuel Santos. The result, unveiled in April, was a side agreement called the Action Plan,

COMMENT

which lays out a series of promised steps by Colombia to bolster labor rights.

If the Obama administration thought the Action Plan would appease progressive critics of the FTA, it soon learned otherwise. The plan was instantly condemned by nearly every major US labor union, as well as the Sierra Club and leading progressives in Congress. Critics noted that fifty-one union officials were assassinated in Colombia in 2010—more than in all other nations combined and an increase over such killings in 2009. At least 2,500 unionists were arrested last year.

The key problem with the Action Plan is that none of its provisions are enforceable. The plan is merely a set of promises that Colombia could easily renege upon once Congress ratifies the FTA.

What's more, the biggest problem with this FTA isn't even addressed in the Action Plan: the pact would throw thousands of rural farmers out of work by allowing a flood of cheap US agricultural products—subsidized by American taxpayers—into Colombia. Farmers make up 20 percent of the nation's labor force, and their livelihoods are now protected by steep tariffs on food imports. The FTA would change all that, with devastating results. According to a study funded by Oxfam International, the domestic production of corn and rice would fall by 20 percent, while farmers growing wheat, beans and pork would be hit even harder by US imports.

Overall, 1.8 million small farmers would see their incomes drop by an average of more than 16 percent, while 400,000 would experience income declines of 50–70 percent. The Oxfam study estimates that the FTA would destroy at least 20 percent of employment, or more than 15,000 jobs, for small farmers who already live on less than \$3.90 per day. The Colombian government has no specific plan to retrain these rural workers—nor has the Obama administration asked for such a plan.

If all this sounds vaguely familiar, there is a reason: the North American Free Trade Agreement and the Central American Free Trade Agreement also put large numbers of rural farmers out of work while fattening profits for US agribusiness.

Unemployed rural farmers in poor countries don't have many good choices. One obvious way to survive is to migrate to the United States in search of work, however risky such a journey may be. Both NAFTA and CAFTA have been widely credited with helping spur illegal immigration by peasants rendered destitute by the onslaught of cheap US farm products. Displaced farmers in Colombia might likewise head north—only to be greeted by an increasingly draconian US crackdown on undocumented workers (the irony of US hostility to economic refugees created by our own trade policies is seldom remarked on).

Legions of desperate Colombian peasants would have other choices, too—none of them good. If they can no longer survive by cultivating rice or corn, they might grow coca and help boost Colombia's vast production of cocaine for the US market. Or, if they just want a paycheck, they could join one of Colombia's many paramilitary groups. Another option—especially if they are angry about the collapse of their livelihood—would be to join the FARC, the leftist guerrilla group that remains actively at war with the Colombian government.

Proponents of the Colombia FTA, including officials in the Obama administration, say ratification would give an economic and political boost to that troubled nation. But the agreement seems designed to produce the opposite results: higher unemployment, more coca production, larger paramilitaries and a stepped-up insurgency. In short, the FTA would create yet more instability in Colombia.

Congress is still haggling about how to move forward on all three of the pending FTAs, as well as renewal of Trade Adjustment Assistance to help US workers. To stop the Colombia deal, lawmakers may have to vote against a single legislative package that includes the TAA and the trade deals with South Korea and Panama.

Is this FTA really that bad? Yes, it is.

DAVID CALLAHAN AND LAUREN DAMME

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@Nation.com



Go to Mogadishu's front lines with Jeremy Scahill and photographer Rick Rowley in our **Slide Show: Tracking the CIA in Somalia.**



Appalled by the news that the Clinton Foundation donated shoddily built, searingly hot and toxic trailers to the Haiti relief effort? Take a look inside, in our **Slide Show: Inside the Clinton Foundation's Haiti Trailers**, with photographs taken by reporters Isabel Macdonald and Isabeau Doucet.



Greg Mitchell is live-blogging the fallout from the *News of the World* hacking scandal. Check back throughout the day for the latest updates.



From 2004 to 2009, African-American families saw their incomes plunge by more than 83 percent, reversing generations of economic gains. Watch Melissa Harris-Perry's MSNBC segment **Black Families Devastated by the Recession.**



In **The Trials of Julian Assange**, Tom Hayden reports that the WikiLeaks editor is not only fighting extradition in the sexual assault case; he's also worried about potential conspiracy charges by a grand jury in Virginia.

Patricia J. Williams

Slouching Towards Faux

Shortly after Dominique Strauss-Kahn was indicted on charges of attempted rape, his friend Bernard-Henri Lévy wrote a defense of him that, among other wrongheaded assertions, denounced the American justice system as one where “anyone can come along and accuse another fellow of any crime—and it will be up to the accused to prove that the accusation is false and without basis in fact.” What Lévy actually described is a presumption of guilt, not the American presumption of innocence. In the United States, the prosecutor—whose responsibility extends not merely to the accuser but to the general interests of justice—has the burden of proof. The accused doesn’t have to prove or disprove anything; indeed, the accused doesn’t have to say a word, as per our Fifth Amendment.

Lévy’s offhand remark came closer to describing the global media than our courts. Journalistic values like accuracy, accountability and respect for human dignity have fallen by the wayside as entertainment and titillation have prevailed. The inescapable rush to judgment that pours forth in hi-def in seemingly every public space—from elevators to taxicabs to airports to bank lobbies—is a kind of civic poison.

It’s because of the media that we find our democratic processes foundering in increasingly debased public discussion: Strauss-Kahn’s accuser is driven to suing the *New York Post* for its unsubstantiated claims that she is a prostitute. Pundits mock the very principled prosecutor, Cyrus Vance Jr., as a sucker for having dutifully and appropriately revealed potentially exculpatory information. Radio jocks spend hours dumping on those who believe the accuser’s history of lying has anything to do with Strauss-Kahn’s “obvious” guilt. When HLN opinionator Nancy Grace’s howling impersonation of blind Fury wins her more respect than the deliberation of an actual jury, as in the Casey Anthony murder trial, we worry for the safety of judges, defendants, accusers and jurors. We forget that the case against Anthony was circumstantial; as much as she lied to law enforcement—a crime for which she has been convicted—her child’s body was so decomposed there was no way to prove either how she died or who did it.

We are swimming in a gloop of scuttlebutt and tittle-tattle, driven by “unnamed sources” who always represent themselves as “close to the investigation” yet who speak only “on condition of anonymity.” Those deceptively anodyne descriptors have moved us down an ethical spectrum from transparent reporting to stories that are “underwritten,” bribed, extorted or outright lies.

Consider, for example, the insidious model of Rupert Murdoch’s media empire. Fox News Channel is a subsidiary of the Fox Entertainment Group, which in turn is a subsidiary of Murdoch’s conglomerate News Corporation. It’s a perfect circle, a consciously structured looping between news and entertainment,

a business model premised on positing the amorality of “anything goes” as the civic equivalent of “freedom of the press.”

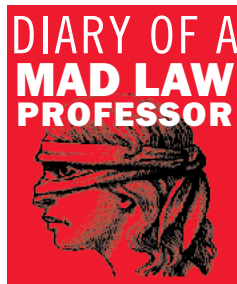
In Britain, Murdoch’s devouring influence is finally being challenged with revelations that his employees compromised a murder investigation by hacking into the voicemail of the victim and erasing her last messages; tapped the phones of politicians with whom Murdoch took issue; and paid police officers and government officials “in the six figures” for information about ongoing investigations. It is perhaps only in America that any enterprise of Murdoch’s labeled “fair and balanced” is still received as anything but laughable. We know, too, that paying for information has become broad practice among American tabloids like the *Post*; but we seem inured to the concern that tabloid sensibility is not just unreliable but corrupting.

The Anglo-American justice system constructs criminal cases as singular—as particular to named individuals and specifically delineated indictments. Social narratives, norms and values can never be entirely absent, but the system attempts to regulate their influence through mechanisms like the rules of evidence (barring rumor and unsubstantiated opinion) and standards of proof (like “reasonable person” and “reasonable doubt”). To keep from destroying reputations unnecessarily, we adhere to a presumption of innocence. Police are supposed to keep certain aspects of investigations closed until there is at least “probable cause.” Similarly,

both sides screen and filter evidence for probity. In some cases, judges have the discretion to sequester juries from outside or inflammatory input. And we trust lawyers, prosecutors and judges to keep confidences as a matter of professional ethics.

But none of these structural buffers can operate as they should if a Murdoch-like empire runs the world, carelessly spitting out the home addresses of those it wishes to skewer, hacking into the phones of unlucky witnesses, pursuing stories into sealed records, private homes and bathroom stalls. Our democracy depends on a free press to discuss the issues of the day without interference from government. What that noble ideal does not account for is the existence of media monopolies able to exercise national and international control over civic spaces—even to the degree that their power vies with that of governments. Their careless, nonempirical, even fictionalized narratives invade privacy, ruin careers, mythologize racial stereotypes, exploit class divisions, exacerbate ideological discord, unleash mobs, wreak vengeance, assemble armies and annihilate the common good.

Today’s media chatter is beholden not to truth but rather to profit, fear and fantasy. What becomes of the duty to listen that is at the heart of free expression? What becomes of the shared mulling of ideas that allows us to think of one another as equals who exist in society with one another? What becomes of the measured thought exchange that is the essence of due process? ■



Eric Alterman

The Twilight of Social Democracy

In the introduction to his 2008 collection, *Reappraisals*, Tony Judt offered up a concise elegy both for European social democracy and its weaker, occasionally envious cousin, American liberalism: “For much of the second half of the twentieth century, it was widely accepted that the modern state could—and therefore should—perform the providential role; ideally, without intruding excessively upon the liberties of its subjects, but where intrusion was unavoidable, then in exchange for social benefits that could not otherwise be made universally available. In the course of the last third of the century, however, it became increasingly commonplace to treat the state not as the natural benefactor of first resort but as a source of economic inefficiency and social intrusion best excluded from citizens’ affairs whenever possible. When combined with the fall of Communism, and the accompanying discrediting of the socialist project in all its forms, this discounting of the state has become the default condition of public discourse in much of the developed world.”

One need only glance at the headlines—not only of American newspapers, where a Democratic president is in the process of dismantling some of the signal achievements of the welfare state, but all across the European continent—to see much of the same. Though taxation levels are at historic lows, “austerity” is in the driver’s seat regardless of whether the government in question considers itself to be of right or left.

It was therefore a propitious moment for liberal and social democratic thinkers from Europe and the United States to gather in late June in Paris at a symposium, organized in Judt’s memory, to consider what has gone wrong and where to go from here.

Of course, one could point to any number of problems that the left failed to anticipate and arguments it neglected to drive home when times were relatively flush. Today we are witnessing what former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt once called the “hungry, rapacious wolf” of capitalism in decline, and with it what the German-American historian Fritz Stern aptly termed “a decline of civisme” on the part of both elites and the masses. This is true even where the welfare state remains strong. Muslim immigration has caused a crisis of identity for those nations whose magnificent socioeconomic achievements turn out to have rested on a foundation of a homogenous population base. People, it turns out, do not generally appreciate the opportunity to be forced to subsidize, through tax and transfer policies, the lifestyles of those they deem to be different from themselves. The French historian Pierre Rosanvallon noted that “it is here that the anti-immigration argument gets its force. On the left the view is one of nostalgia. An extremely weak response to a strong attack and it’s hard to see how it can survive the argument ‘the immigrants are stealing the welfare state.’” This story can be told almost anywhere in Europe and increasingly applies as well to the United States.



As much as I would like to, dear readers, I cannot offer any optimistic reading of where the left should turn to combat these ideas—at least not on the basis of the panels I attended in Paris. It should surprise no one that leftist intellectuals are more adept at identifying problems than at offering solutions. On one panel the French economist Thomas Piketty suggested a global tax on the extremely wealthy, which would be a fine idea if anyone had any clue how to force the extremely wealthy to accept it. The political philosopher Ronald Dworkin argued that the US education system needs to be infused anew with political ideas and arguments, as “ventilation” would expose the stupidity of contemporary conservative ideas. Again, my admiration for Dworkin’s philosophical work notwithstanding, I’ve rarely heard a less promising solution suggested to our current quandaries. One need only examine the controversy surrounding the content of Texas history textbooks to see that the forces of free-market absolutism, xenophobia and social reaction would likely loom at least as large in education as they do in our benighted political debates.

The sociologist Richard Sennett took a different tack. Leftists, he explained, should expect to lose when it comes to political battles. The problem is one of a lack of trust in elites. People do not believe that the programs politicians propose will stick or make any difference if they do, and they do not vote their own interests because all they see are the likely costs.

As a consequence, he argues, we need to emphasize the “social” in social democracy and obsess less about electoral politics and more about civil society [see Sennett, “A Creditable Left,” page 24]. The left needs to stop trying to win arguments and begin engaging people in politics. For as Saul Alinsky argued, getting people to participate in projects with people unlike themselves is itself a goal of social democracy. So the left needs to be less programmatic and more fluid, helping inarticulate people connect—not to make arguments, not to mobilize aggression, but in the name of “solidarity” for its own sake.

I dunno.

It so happens that the current president of the United States was also an Alinsky man once upon a time. But it was not Sennett’s Alinsky he embraced; rather, it was the one who believed “No one can negotiate without the power to compel negotiation. This is the function of the community organizer. Anything otherwise is wishful non-thinking.” The president told a journalist that while working as a South Side Chicago organizer, he learned that “the key to creating successful organizations was making sure people’s self-interest was met and not just basing it on pie-in-the-sky idealism.” His mentor in the job, Jerry Kellman, believed Obama wanted to synthesize “the Alinsky teaching on self-interest” with “Dr. King’s appeals to our mutuality.”

The present challenge for the American left is to make that fellow remember why he once believed this; the long-term challenge is to remember and believe in it ourselves. ■



RICK ROWLEY

THE CIA'S SECRET SITES IN SOMALIA

Renditions, an underground prison and a new CIA base are elements of an intensifying US war.

by JEREMY SCAHILL

Nestled in a back corner of Mogadishu's Aden Adde International Airport is a sprawling walled compound run by the Central Intelligence Agency. Set on the coast of the Indian Ocean, the facility looks like a small gated community, with more than a dozen buildings behind large protective walls and secured by guard towers at each of its four corners. Adjacent to the compound are eight large metal hangars, and the CIA has its own aircraft at the airport. The site, which airport officials and Somali intelligence sources say was completed four months ago, is guarded by Somali soldiers, but the Americans control access. At the facility, the CIA runs a counterterrorism training program for Somali intelligence agents and operatives aimed at building an indigenous strike force capable of snatch operations and targeted "combat" operations against members of Al Shabab, an Islamic militant group with close ties to Al Qaeda.

As part of its expanding counterterrorism program in Somalia, the CIA also uses a secret prison buried in the basement of Somalia's National Security Agency (NSA) headquarters, where prisoners suspected of being Shabab members or of having links to the group are held. Some of the prisoners have been snatched off the streets of Kenya and rendered by plane to Mogadishu. While the underground prison is officially run by the Somali NSA, US intelligence personnel pay the salaries of intelligence agents and also directly interrogate prisoners. The existence of both facilities and the CIA role was uncovered by *The Nation* during an extensive on-the-ground investigation in Mogadishu. Among the sources who provided information for this story are senior Somali intelligence officials; senior members of Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG); former prisoners held at the underground prison; and several well-connected Somali analysts and militia leaders, some of whom have worked with

US agents, including those from the CIA. A US official, who confirmed the existence of both sites, told *The Nation*, "It makes complete sense to have a strong counterterrorism partnership" with the Somali government.

The CIA presence in Mogadishu is part of Washington's intensifying counterterrorism focus on Somalia, which includes targeted strikes by US Special Operations forces, drone attacks and expanded surveillance operations. The US agents "are here full time," a senior Somali intelligence official told me. At times, he said, there are as many as thirty of them in Mogadishu, but he stressed that those working with the Somali NSA do not conduct operations; rather, they advise and train Somali agents. "In this environment, it's very tricky. They want to help us, but the situation is not allowing them to do [it] however they want. They are not in control of the politics, they are not in control of the security," he adds. "They are not controlling the environment like Afghanistan and Iraq. In Somalia, the situation is fluid, the situation is changing, personalities changing."

According to well-connected Somali sources, the CIA is reluctant to deal directly with Somali political leaders, who are regarded by US officials as corrupt and untrustworthy. Instead, the United States has Somali intelligence agents on its payroll. Somali sources with knowledge of the program described the agents as lining up to receive \$200 monthly cash payments from Americans. "They support us in a big way financially," says the senior Somali intelligence official. "They are the largest [funder] by far."

According to former detainees, the underground prison, which is staffed by Somali guards, consists of a long corridor lined with filthy small cells infested with bedbugs and mosquitoes. One said that when he arrived in February, he saw two white men wearing military boots, combat trousers, gray tucked-

in shirts and black sunglasses. The former prisoners described the cells as windowless and the air thick, moist and disgusting. Prisoners, they said, are not allowed outside. Many have developed rashes and scratch themselves incessantly. Some have been detained for a year or more. According to one former prisoner, inmates who had been there for long periods would pace around constantly, while others leaned against walls rocking.

A Somali who was arrested in Mogadishu and taken to the prison told *The Nation* that he was held in a windowless underground cell. Among the prisoners he met during his time there was a man who held a Western passport (he declined to identify the man's nationality). Some of the prisoners told him they were picked up in Nairobi and rendered on small aircraft to Mogadishu, where they were handed over to Somali intelligence agents. Once in custody, according to the senior Somali intelligence official and former prisoners, some detainees are freely interrogated by US and French agents. "Our goal is to please our partners, so we get more [out] of them, like any relationship," said the Somali intelligence official in describing the policy of allowing foreign agents, including from the CIA, to interrogate prisoners. The

A recent abduction from Nairobi 'bears all the hallmarks of a classic US rendition operation,' according to the prisoner's legal team.

Americans, according to the Somali official, operate unilaterally in the country, while the French agents are embedded within the African Union force known as AMISOM.

Among the men believed to be held in the secret underground prison is Ahmed Abdullahi Hassan, a 25- or 26-year-old Kenyan citizen who disappeared from the congested Somali slum of Eastleigh in Nairobi around July 2009. After he went missing, Hassan's family retained Mbugua Mureithi, a well-known Kenyan human rights lawyer, who filed a habeas petition on his behalf. The Kenyan government responded that Hassan was not being held in Kenya and said it had no knowledge of his whereabouts. His fate remained a mystery until this spring, when another man who had been held in the Mogadishu prison contacted Clara Gutteridge, a veteran human rights investigator with the British legal organization Reprieve, and told her he had met Hassan in the prison. Hassan, he said, had told him how Kenyan police had knocked down his door, snatched him and taken him to a secret location in Nairobi. The next night, Hassan had said, he was rendered to Mogadishu.

According to the former fellow prisoner, Hassan told him that his captors took him to Wilson Airport: "They put a bag on my head, Guantánamo style. They tied my hands behind my back and put me on a plane. In the early hours we landed in Mogadishu. The way I realized I was in Mogadishu was because of the smell of the sea—the runway is just next to the seashore. The plane lands and touches the sea. They took me to this

prison, where I have been up to now. I have been here for one year, seven months. I have been interrogated so many times. Interrogated by Somali men and white men. Every day. New faces show up. They have nothing on me. I have never seen a lawyer, never seen an outsider. Only other prisoners, interrogators, guards. Here there is no court or tribunal."

After meeting the man who had spoken with Hassan in the underground prison, Gutteridge began working with Hassan's Kenyan lawyers to determine his whereabouts. She says he has never been charged or brought before a court. "Hassan's abduction from Nairobi and rendition to a secret prison in Somalia bears all the hallmarks of a classic US rendition operation," she says. The US official interviewed for this article denied the CIA had rendered Hassan but said, "The United States provided information which helped get Hassan—a dangerous terrorist—off the street." Human Rights Watch and Reprieve have documented that Kenyan security and intelligence forces have facilitated scores of renditions for the US and other governments, including eighty-five people rendered to Somalia in 2007 alone. Gutteridge says the director of the Mogadishu prison told one

of her sources that Hassan had been targeted in Nairobi because of intelligence suggesting he was the "right-hand man" of Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, at the time a leader of Al Qaeda in East Africa. Nabhan, a Kenyan citizen of Yemeni descent, was among the top suspects sought for questioning by US authorities over his alleged role in the coordinated 2002 attacks on a tourist hotel and an Israeli

aircraft in Mombasa, Kenya, and possible links to the 1998 US Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania.

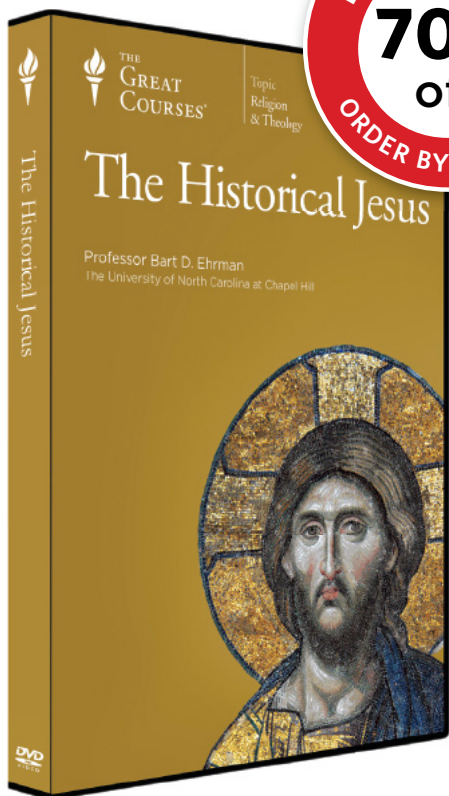
An intelligence report leaked by the Kenyan Anti-Terrorist Police Unit in October 2010 alleged that Hassan, a "former personal assistant to Nabhan...was injured while fighting near the presidential palace in Mogadishu in 2009." The authenticity of the report cannot be independently confirmed, though Hassan did have a leg amputated below the knee, according to his former fellow prisoner in Mogadishu.

Two months after Hassan was allegedly rendered to the secret Mogadishu prison, Nabhan, the man believed to be his Al Qaeda boss, was killed in the first known targeted killing operation in Somalia authorized by President Obama. On September 14, 2009, a team from the elite US counterterrorism force, the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), took off by helicopters from a US Navy ship off Somalia's coast and penetrated Somali airspace. In broad daylight, in an operation code-named Celestial Balance, they gunned down Nabhan's convoy from the air. JSOC troops then landed and collected at least two of the bodies, including Nabhan's.

Hassan's lawyers are preparing to file a habeas petition on his behalf in US courts. "Hassan's case suggests that the US may be involved in a decentralized, out-sourced Guantánamo Bay in central Mogadishu," his legal team asserted in a statement to *The Nation*. "Mr. Hassan must be given the opportunity to challenge both his rendition and continued detention as a matter of urgency. The US must urgently confirm exactly what has been done to Mr. Hassan, why he is being held, and when he will be given a fair hearing."



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Gutteridge, who has worked extensively tracking the disappearances of terror suspects in Kenya, was deported from Kenya on May 11.

The underground prison where Hassan is allegedly being held is housed in the same building once occupied by Somalia's infamous National Security Service (NSS) during the military regime of Siad Barre, who ruled from 1969 to 1991. The former prisoner who met Hassan there said he saw an old NSS sign outside. During Barre's regime, the notorious basement prison and interrogation center, which sits behind the presidential palace in Mogadishu, was a staple of the state's apparatus of repression. It was referred to as Godka, "The Hole."

"The bunker is there, and that's where the intelligence agency does interrogate people," says Abdirahman "Aynte" Ali, a Somali analyst who has researched the Shabab and Somali security forces. "When CIA and other intelligence agencies—who actually are in Mogadishu—want to interrogate those people, they usually just do that." Somali officials "start the interrogation, but then foreign intelligence agencies eventually do their own interrogation as well, the Americans and the French." The US official

'Essentially, the CIA seems to be operating, doing the foreign policy of the United States,' said a well-connected Somali analyst.

said that US agents "debriefing" prisoners in the facility has "been done on only rare occasions" and always jointly with Somali agents.

Some prisoners, like Hassan, were allegedly rendered from Nairobi, while in other cases, according to Aynte, "the US and other intelligence agencies have notified the Somali intelligence agency that some people, some suspects, people who have been in contact with the leadership of Al Shabab, are on their way to Mogadishu on a [commercial] plane, and to essentially be at the airport for those people. Catch them, interrogate them."

In the eighteen years since the infamous "Black Hawk Down" incident in Mogadishu, US policy on Somalia has been marked by neglect, miscalculation and failed attempts to use warlords to build indigenous counterterrorism capacity, many of which have backfired dramatically. At times, largely because of abuses committed by Somali militias the CIA has supported, US policy has strengthened the hand of the very groups it purports to oppose and inadvertently aided the rise of militant groups, including the Shabab. Many Somalis viewed the Islamic movement known as the Islamic Courts Union, which defeated the CIA's warlords in Mogadishu in 2006, as a stabilizing, albeit ruthless, force. The ICU was dismantled in a US-backed Ethiopian invasion in 2007. Over the years, a series of weak Somali administrations have been recognized by the United States and other powers as Somalia's legitimate government. Ironically, its current president is a former leader of the ICU.

Today, Somali government forces control roughly thirty square miles of territory in Mogadishu thanks in large part to the

US-funded and -armed 9,000-member AMISOM force. Much of the rest of the city is under the control of the Shabab or warlords. Outgunned, the Shabab has increasingly relied on the linchpins of asymmetric warfare—suicide bombings, roadside bombs and targeted assassinations. The militant group has repeatedly shown that it can strike deep in the heart of its enemies' territory. On June 9, in one of its most spectacular suicide attacks to date, the Shabab assassinated the Somali government's minister of interior affairs and national security, Abdishakur Sheikh Hassan Farah, who was attacked in his residence by his niece. The girl, whom the minister was putting through university, blew herself up and fatally wounded her uncle. He died hours later in the hospital. Farah was the fifth Somali minister killed by the Shabab in the past two years and the seventeenth official assassinated since 2006. Among the suicide bombers the Shabab has deployed were at least three US citizens of Somali descent; at least seven other Americans have died fighting alongside the Shabab, a fact that has not gone unnoticed in Washington or Mogadishu.

During his confirmation hearings in June to become the head of the US Special Operations Command, Vice Admiral William McRaven said, "From my standpoint as a former JSOC commander, I can tell you we were looking very hard" at Somalia. McRaven said that in order to expand successful "kinetic strikes" there, the United States will have to increase its use of drones as well as on-the-ground intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance operations. "Any expansion of manpower is going to have to come with a commensurate expansion of the enablers," McRaven declared. The expanding US counterterrorism program in Mogadishu appears to be part of that effort.

In an interview with *The Nation* in Mogadishu, Abdulkadir Moallin Noor, the minister of state for the presidency, confirmed that US agents "are working with our intelligence" and "giving them training." Regarding the US counterterrorism effort, Noor said bluntly, "We need more; otherwise, the terrorists will take over the country."

It is unclear how much control, if any, Somalia's internationally recognized president, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, has over this counterterrorism force or if he is even fully briefed on its operations. The CIA personnel and other US intelligence agents "do not bother to be in touch with the political leadership of the country. And that says a lot about the intentions," says Aynte. "Essentially, the CIA seems to be operating, doing the foreign policy of the United States. You should have had State Department people doing foreign policy, but the CIA seems to be doing it across the country."

While the Somali officials interviewed for this story said the CIA is the lead US agency on the Mogadishu counterterrorism program, they also indicated that US military intelligence agents are at times involved. When asked if they are from JSOC or the Defense Intelligence Agency, the senior Somali intelligence official responded, "We don't know. They don't tell us."

In April Ahmed Abdulkadir Warsame, a Somali man the United States alleged had links to the Shabab, was captured by JSOC forces in the Gulf of Aden. He was held incommunicado on a US Navy vessel for more than two months; in July he was

transferred to New York and indicted on terrorism charges. Warsame's case ignited a legal debate over the Obama administration's policies on capturing and detaining terror suspects, particularly in light of the widening counterterrorism campaigns in Somalia and Yemen.

On June 23 the United States reportedly carried out a drone strike against alleged Shabab members near Kismayo, 300 miles from the Somali capital. As with the Nabhan operation, a JSOC team swooped in on helicopters and reportedly snatched the bodies of those killed and wounded. The men were taken to an undisclosed location. On July 6 three more US strikes reportedly targeted Shabab training camps in the same area. Somali analysts warned that if the US bombings cause civilian deaths, as they have in the past, they could increase support for the Shabab. Asked in an interview with *The Nation* in Mogadishu if US drone strikes strengthen or weaken his government, President Sharif replied, "Both at the same time. For our sovereignty, it's not good to attack a sovereign country. That's the negative part. The positive part is you're targeting individuals who are criminals."

A week after the June 23 strike, President Obama's chief counterterrorism adviser, John Brennan, described an emerging US strategy that would focus not on "deploying large armies abroad but delivering targeted, surgical pressure to the groups that threaten us." Brennan singled out the Shabab, saying, "From the territory it controls in Somalia, Al Shabab continues to call for strikes against the United States," adding, "We cannot and we will not let down our guard. We will continue to pummel Al Qaeda and its ilk."

While the United States appears to be ratcheting up both its rhetoric and its drone strikes against the Shabab, it has thus far been able to strike only in rural areas outside Mogadishu. These operations have been isolated and infrequent, and Somali analysts say they have failed to disrupt the Shabab's core leadership, particularly in Mogadishu.

In a series of interviews in Mogadishu, several of the country's recognized leaders, including President Sharif, called on the US government to quickly and dramatically increase its assistance to the Somali military in the form of training, equipment and weapons. Moreover, they argue that without viable civilian institutions, Somalia will remain ripe for terrorist groups that can further destabilize not only Somalia but the region. "I believe that the US should help the Somalis to establish a government that protects civilians and its people," Sharif said.

In the battle against the Shabab, the United States does not, in fact, appear to have cast its lot with the Somali government. The emerging US strategy on Somalia—borne out in stated policy, expanded covert presence and funding plans—is two-pronged: On the one hand, the CIA is training, paying and at times directing Somali intelligence agents who are not firmly under the control of the Somali government, while JSOC conducts unilateral strikes without the prior knowledge of the government; on the other, the Pentagon is increasing its support for and arming of the counterterrorism operations of non-Somali African military forces.

A draft of a defense spending bill approved in late June by the Senate Armed Services Committee would authorize more

than \$75 million in US counterterrorism assistance aimed at fighting the Shabab and Al Qaeda in Somalia. The bill, however, did not authorize additional funding for Somalia's military, as the country's leaders have repeatedly asked. Instead, the aid package would dramatically increase US arming and financing of AMISOM's forces, particularly from Uganda and Burundi, as well as the militaries of Djibouti, Kenya and Ethiopia. The Somali military, the committee asserted, is unable to "exercise control of its territory."

That makes it all the more ironic that perhaps the greatest tactical victory won in recent years in Somalia was delivered not by AMISOM, the CIA or JSOC but by members of a Somali militia fighting as part of the government's chaotic local military. And it was a pure accident.

Late in the evening on June 7, a man whose South African passport identified him as Daniel Robinson was in the passenger seat of a Toyota SUV driving on the outskirts of Mogadishu when his driver, a Kenyan national, missed a turn and headed straight toward a checkpoint manned by Somali forces. A fire-fight broke out, and the two men inside the car were killed. The Somali forces promptly looted the laptops, cellphones, documents, weapons and \$40,000 in cash they found in the car, according to the senior Somali intelligence official.

Upon discovering that the men were foreigners, the Somali NSA launched an investigation and recovered the items that had been looted. "There was a lot of English and Arabic stuff, papers," recalls the Somali intelligence official, containing "very tactical stuff" that appeared to be linked to Al Qaeda,



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including “two senior people communicating.” The Somali agents “realized it was an important man” and informed the CIA in Mogadishu. The men’s bodies were taken to the NSA. The Americans took DNA samples and fingerprints and flew them to Nairobi for processing.

Within hours, the United States confirmed that Robinson was in fact Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, a top leader of Al Qaeda in East Africa and its chief liaison with the Shabab. Fazul, a twenty-year veteran of Al Qaeda, had been indicted by the United States for his alleged role in the 1998 US Embassy bombings and was on the FBI’s “Most Wanted Terrorists” list. A JSOC attempt to kill him in a January 2007 airstrike resulted in the deaths of at least seventy nomads in rural Somalia, and he had been underground ever since. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called Fazul’s death “a significant blow to Al Qaeda, its extremist allies and its operations in East Africa. It is a just end for a terrorist who brought so much death and pain to so many innocents.”

At its facilities in Mogadishu, the CIA and its Somali NSA agents continue to pore over the materials recovered from Fazul’s car, which served as a mobile headquarters. Some deleted and encrypted files were recovered and decoded by US agents. The senior Somali intelligence official said that the intelligence may prove more valuable on a tactical level than the cache found in Osama bin Laden’s house in Pakistan, especially in light of the increasing US focus on East Africa. The Americans, he said, were “unbelievably grateful”; he hopes it means they will take Somalia’s forces more seriously and provide more support.

But the United States continues to wage its campaign against the Shabab primarily by funding the AMISOM forces, which are not conducting their mission with anything resembling surgical precision. Instead, over the past several months the AMISOM forces in Mogadishu have waged a merciless campaign of indiscriminate shelling of Shabab areas, some of which are heavily populated by civilians. While AMISOM regularly puts out press releases boasting of gains against the Shabab and the retaking of territory, the reality paints a far more complicated picture.

Throughout the areas AMISOM has retaken is a honeycomb of underground tunnels once used by Shabab fighters to move from building to building. By some accounts, the tunnels stretch continuously for miles. Leftover food, blankets and ammo cartridges lay scattered near “pop-up” positions once used by Shabab snipers and guarded by sandbags—all that remain of guerrilla warfare positions. Not only have the Shabab fighters been cleared from the aboveground areas; the civilians that once resided there have been cleared too. On several occasions in late June, AMISOM forces fired artillery from their airport base at the Bakaara market, where whole neighborhoods are totally abandoned. Houses lie in ruins and animals wander aimlessly, chewing trash. In some areas, bodies have been hastily buried in trenches with dirt barely masking the remains. On the side of the road in one former Shabab neighborhood, a decapitated corpse lay just meters from a new government checkpoint.

In late June the Pentagon approved plans to send \$45 million worth of military equipment to Uganda and Burundi, the two major forces in the AMISOM operation. Among the new items are four small Raven surveillance drones, night-vision and communications equipment and other surveillance gear, all of which augur a more targeted campaign. Combined with the attempt to build an indigenous counterterrorism force at the Somali NSA, a new US counterterrorism strategy is emerging.

But according to the senior Somali intelligence official, who works directly with the US agents, the CIA-led program in Mogadishu has brought few tangible gains. “So far what we have not seen is the results in terms of the capacity of the [Somali] agency,” says the official. He conceded that neither US nor Somali forces have been able to conduct a single successful targeted mission in the Shabab’s areas in the capital. In late 2010, according to the official, US-trained Somali agents conducted an operation in a Shabab area that failed terribly and resulted in several of them being killed. “There was an attempt, but it was a haphazard one,” he recalls. They have not tried another targeted operation in Shabab-controlled territory since. ■

ALEC Exposed

A trove of documents reveals the vast procorporate strategy of this powerful right-wing group.

by JOHN NICHOLS

“N ever has the time been so right,” Louisiana State Representative Noble Ellington told conservative legislators gathered in Washington to plan the radical remaking of policies in the states. It was one month after the 2010 midterm elections.

Republicans had grabbed 680 legislative seats and secured a power trifecta—control of both legislative chambers and the governorship—in twenty-one states. Ellington was speaking for hundreds of attendees at a “States and Nation Policy Summit,” featuring GOP stars like Texas Governor Rick Perry, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich and House Majority Leader Eric Cantor. Convened by the American Legislative Exchange

Council (ALEC)—“the nation’s largest, non-partisan, individual public-private membership association of state legislators,” as the spin-savvy group describes itself—the meeting did not intend to draw up an agenda for the upcoming legislative session. That had already been done by ALEC’s elite task forces of lawmakers and corporate representatives. The new legislators were there to grab their weapons: carefully crafted model bills seeking to impose a one-size-fits-all agenda on the states.

Founded in 1973 by Paul Weyrich and other conservative activists frustrated by recent electoral setbacks, ALEC is a critical arm of the right-wing network of policy shops that, with infusions of corporate cash, has evolved to shape American politics.

Inspired by Milton Friedman's call for conservatives to "develop alternatives to existing policies [and] keep them alive and available," ALEC's model legislation reflects long-term goals: downsizing government, removing regulations on corporations and making it harder to hold the economically and politically powerful to account. Corporate donors retain veto power over the language, which is developed by the secretive task forces. The task forces cover issues from education to health policy. ALEC's priorities for the 2011 session included bills to privatize education, break unions, deregulate major industries, pass voter ID laws and more. In states across the country they succeeded, with stacks of new laws signed by GOP governors like Ohio's John Kasich and Wisconsin's Scott Walker, both ALEC alums.

The details of ALEC's model bills have been available only to the group's 2,000 legislative and 300 corporate members. But thanks to a leak to Aliya Rahman, an Ohio-based activist who helped organize protests at ALEC's Spring Task Force meeting in Cincinnati, *The Nation* has obtained more than 800 documents representing decades of model legislation. Teaming up with the Center for Media and Democracy, *The Nation* asked policy experts to analyze this never-before-seen archive.

The articles that follow are the first products of that examination. They provide an inside view of the priorities of ALEC's corporate board and billionaire benefactors (including Tea Party funders Charles and David Koch). "Dozens of corporations are investing millions of dollars a year to write business-friendly legislation that is being made into law in statehouses coast to coast, with no regard for the public interest," says Bob Edgar of Common Cause. "This is proof positive of the depth and scope of the corporate reach into our democratic processes." The full archive of ALEC documents is available at a new website, alecexposed.org, thanks to the Center for Media and Democracy, which has provided powerful tools for progressives to turn this knowledge into power. The data tell us that the time has come to refocus on the battle to loosen the grip of corporate America and renew democracy in the states. ■

Business Domination Inc.

by JOEL ROGERS AND LAURA DRESSER

In the world according to ALEC, competing firms in free markets are the only real source of social efficiency and wealth. Government contributes nothing but security. Outside of this function, it should be demonized, starved or privatized. Any force in civil society, especially labor, that contests the right of business to grab all social surplus for itself, and to treat people like roadkill and the earth like a sewer, should be crushed.

This view of the world dominated the legislative sessions that began in January. GOP leaders, fresh from their blowout victory in November, pushed a consistent message—"We're broke"; "Public sector workers are to blame"; "If we tax the rich we'll face economic extinction"—and deployed legislative tools inspired by ALEC to enact their vision. They faced pushback, but they also made great progress—and will be back again soon.

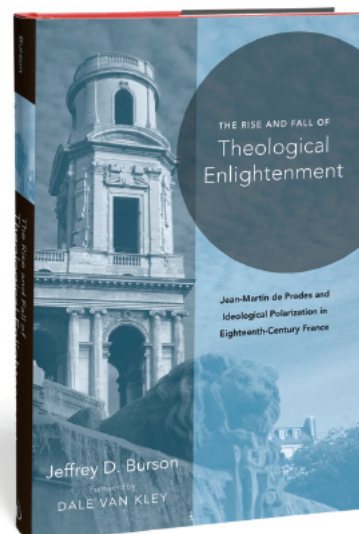
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Revenue

ALEC has long sought to limit the ability of states to raise or collect taxes or fees. Before this spring, it had already succeeded in getting more than thirty to adopt such limits, often hard-wired into their constitutions or requiring supermajorities to change. Its varied model legislation to this end includes the Capital Gains Tax Elimination Act, Use Tax Elimination Act, Super Majority Act, Taxpayer Protection Act and Automatic Income Tax Rate Adjustment Act. Its model resolutions oppose such things as mandatory unitary combined reporting (the chief way states get corporations to pay any taxes at all) while supporting such things as the federal flat tax and efforts to extend the Bush tax cuts permanently. The Automatic Income Tax Rate Adjustment Act, for example, “provides for a biennial reduction in the state adjusted gross income tax rate on residents, non-residents, and corporations if year-over-year revenue...exceeds certain amounts,” in effect ensuring no increase in state revenue, even during periods of growth, while keeping tax cuts on the table. The Taxpayer Protection Act “prohibits the revenue department of a state from basing any employee’s compensation, promotion or evaluation on collections or assessments,” otherwise known as doing their job.

This past session, ALEC members, drawing heavily from the list above, introduced 500 bills to “starve the beast.” But their greatest victory was the most obvious one. Faced with shortfalls in state revenues from the economic crisis, states almost universally and overwhelmingly chose cuts to public employment or services over progressive tax increases as a solution.

Privatization

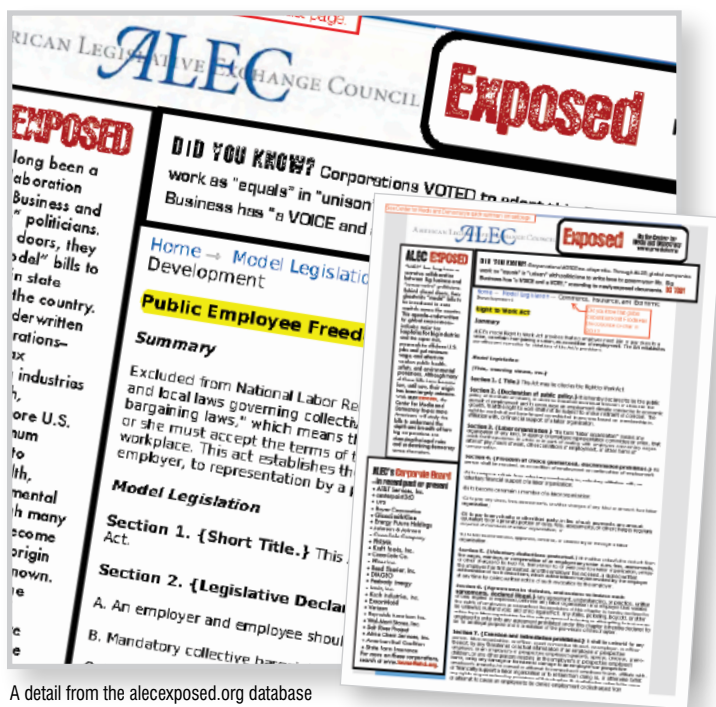
Privatization is so central to ALEC’s agenda that it has built a fake board game, Publicopoly, on its website, where the curious can find model legislation and other resources on privatizing basically everything, from transportation (Competitive Contracting of the Department of Motor Vehicles Act) to the environment (Environmental Services Public-Private Partnership Act). Critical to ALEC’s agenda are the foundational bills that set up the rationale for privatizing government services: the Public-Private Fair Competition Act creates a committee to review “whether state agencies unfairly compete with the private sector,” and the Competitive Contracting of Public Services Act requires “make or buy” decisions to encourage privatization. The hallmark of ALEC’s model privatization legislation, the Council on Efficient Government Act, creates “a council on efficient government to leverage resources and contract with private sector vendors if those vendors can more effectively and efficiently provide goods and services and reduce the cost of government.” These councils typically include representatives from the private sector, who then decide to let their business colleagues bid for public sector work.

In the past few years, with at least three additions this session alone, legislation establishing a state Council on Efficient Government has been introduced in Virginia, Maryland, Arizona, Kansas, Oregon, Illinois and South Carolina. In each case, the concepts in the bill mirror the ALEC proposal. In some cases—South Carolina, Arizona and Illinois—the state

bills read as copies of ALEC’s model legislation. Virginia’s, Oregon’s, Maryland’s and Kansas’ bills, to varying degrees, contain language directly from ALEC’s model.

Unions

The fiercest attacks this session were reserved for public sector unions, especially in the once labor-friendly Midwest states of Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin that went deep red in November. ALEC has a sweeping range of model anti-union laws, the broad aim of which is to make it harder to be a union and easier for workers not to pay the costs of collective bargaining or union political activity. The Right to Work Act eliminates employee obligation to pay the costs of collective bargaining; the Public Employee Freedom Act bars almost any action to induce it; the Public Employer Payroll Deduction Act bars automatic dues collection; the Voluntary Contribution Act bars the use of dues for political activity.



A detail from the alecexposed.org database

This spring, GOP governors or legislatures introduced at least 500 of these and other ALEC-inspired antilabor laws, including laws to restrict the scope of collective bargaining; to limit or eliminate “project labor agreements” and state “prevailing wage” requirements; and to pre-empt local living wage or other labor standards. Just keeping track of all the antiunion legislation was often daunting. In Michigan, the AFL-CIO was dealing with more than fifty laws aimed at its demise.

In some states, the results have been lethal. In Wisconsin, the first state to legalize public sector union bargaining, public sector unions (excluding police and firefighters) were reduced to near irrelevance. The law limits collective bargaining to wages only (no bargaining over benefits, safety or work conditions) and forbids those to be increased faster than inflation. To continue to exist, unions must annually win recertification elections with more than 50 percent of the vote of all workers in their bargaining unit—a threshold requirement that is unheard of. Ohio also passed a law

limiting public sector bargaining rights (including for police and firefighters) and permitting members to opt out of paying dues.

There were limits to this stampede. “Paycheck protection,” introduced in fifteen states, passed only in Alabama and Arizona. “Right to work,” introduced in eighteen states, hasn’t advanced significantly anywhere. (Tennessee reaffirmed a pre-existing right to work, and in New Hampshire the governor’s veto is holding it back.) But damage has been done. It may be that unions and other progressive organizations, moved by the carnage, will work together and with the public to build a mass movement to reverse it. Certainly, many people are trying to do that now. Whatever their success, we can be sure that ALEC will fight them fiercely in the states, while pressing forward with its own project: the complete business domination of American public life. ■

Joel Rogers, a Nation contributing editor, teaches at the University of Wisconsin, where he directs the Center on Wisconsin Strategy. Laura Dresser is the center’s associate director.

Sabotaging Healthcare

by WENDELL POTTER

Days after President Obama signed the Affordable Care Act into law, I arrived at the spring 2010 meeting of the National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC) in Denver, where a fellow consumer representative introduced me to one of the hundreds of industry lobbyists swarming the convention center. “She’s somebody we can work with,” he said, clearly convinced that she would deal with us in good faith, even if we might disagree on certain policy issues. Over the next several months, other consumer reps agreed that she really did seem to want to do what was right for patients, even if the organization that paid her salary often seemed to care more about profits than people.

I was skeptical. I knew from my two decades as an insurance company executive that the industry often conducts duplicitous charm offensives, assuring the public that insurers support consumer-focused reform while executives work surreptitiously to block any reform that might curtail profits. So I was not shocked when I found out that Joan Gardner, executive director of state services for the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association’s Office of Policy and Representation, had been keeping something important from us. As a leading member of ALEC’s Health and Human Services Task Force, she’d been helping write legislation designed to ensure that any healthcare reform implemented at the state level would benefit insurance companies far more than their policyholders. She was also leading an effort to recruit more dues-paying members to ALEC.

I learned of Gardner’s clandestine work when a reform advocate alerted me to a story about a resolution her ALEC committee had drafted in 2008 to forbid “government-mandated health care.” Apparently fearful that a bill would reach Obama’s desk that would allow states to establish single-payer systems, ALEC crafted the Freedom of Choice in Health Care Act, which, despite its Orwellian name, was written to deny the citizens of

any state that passed it the freedom to set up such a system. By declaring that Congressional attempts to regulate health insurance at the federal level would be unconstitutional, it would effectively ban not only a federal single-payer proposal but also a federally created health insurance exchange and a federally operated public insurance option. ALEC has boasted that some forty-four states have introduced its Freedom of Choice in Health Care Act (which itself would not withstand a constitutional challenge). What it hasn’t acknowledged is that attempts to pass healthcare-nullification bills have failed in at least twenty-five states. Only eight states have passed the act so far.

Reviewing ALEC’s healthcare-related bills and resolutions from the past few years makes it clear that insurers realized early on that the best way to block the profit-threatening provisions of any federal reform would be to attack them at the state level through ALEC. With Democrats in control of both houses of Congress and the White House in 2009, insurers assumed some kind of healthcare reform was inevitable, so they adopted a strategy to shape rather than stop reform. Its top five goals became:

§ Keeping single-payer proposals off the table;

§ Ensuring that the final bill contain a clause requiring all Americans not eligible for an existing federal program to buy coverage from a private insurance company;

§ Preventing the new law from establishing a government-run plan (the “public option”) that would compete with private insurers;

§ Making sure that the reform law is implemented primarily at the state level, to keep the federal government from assuming any significant new oversight of private insurers’ business practices; and

§ Keeping any new regulations and consumer protections to a minimum.

Insurers achieved their first four goals, with ALEC playing a key role in a well-coordinated effort to keep the most progressive proposals from being enacted at the state or federal level. Where it fell short was in blocking provisions of the law that will impose more rigorous oversight of insurance companies’ business practices. After Obama signed the bill into law, the industry turned its attention to influencing how the new regulations would be written (by the NAIC and federal bureaucrats) and how the law would be implemented in the states.

As its archive reveals, ALEC has been at work for more than a decade on what amounts to a comprehensive wish list for insurers: from turning over the Medicare and Medicaid programs to them—assuring them a vast new stream of revenue—to letting insurers continue marketing substandard yet highly profitable policies while giving them protection from litigation. Republican lawmakers continue to promote model bills from the 1990s. Some of the most far-reaching and industry-favorable measures adopted by ALEC over the years:

§ The Resolution Urging Congress to Create Private Financing of the Medicare Program, initially adopted in 1998, calls on Congress to privatize Medicare by permitting the creation of Individual Medical Accounts, similar to Health Savings Accounts that accompany high-deductible health plans and that have become attractive tax shelters for well-to-do Americans. Individual Medical Accounts, along with vouchers,

are a feature of Representative Paul Ryan's federal proposal to privatize Medicare.

§ The Resolution on Medicaid Funding Through a Federal Block Grant, adopted in 2008, urges Congress to replace the current financing mechanism for Medicaid with block grants, as Ryan proposes. In another proposal to privatize the program, the

Access to Medicaid Act, beneficiaries would receive vouchers to buy insurance policies in the private market.

§ The Health Care Choice Act for States, adopted in 2007, would permit the sale of individual health insurance policies across state lines, which would not be subject to the mandated benefits required by in-state policies. The effect would be to

The Koch Connection

by LISA GRAVES

Hundreds of ALEC's model bills and resolutions bear traces of Koch DNA: raw ideas that were once at the fringes but that have been carved into "mainstream" policy through the wealth and will of Charles and David Koch. Of all the Kochs' investments in right-wing organizations, ALEC provides some of the best returns: it gives the Kochs a way to make their brand of free-market fundamentalism legally binding.

No one knows how much the Kochs have given ALEC in total, but the amount likely exceeds \$1 million—not including a half-million loaned to ALEC when the group was floundering. ALEC gave the Kochs its Adam Smith Free Enterprise Award, and Koch Industries has been one of the select members of ALEC's corporate board for almost twenty years. The company's top lobbyist was once ALEC's chairman. As a result, the Kochs have shaped legislation touching every state in the country. Like ideological venture capitalists, the Kochs have used ALEC as a way to invest in radical ideas and fertilize them with tons of cash.

Take environmental protections. The Kochs have a penchant for paying their way out of serious violations and coming out ahead. Helped by Koch Industries' lobbying efforts, one of the first measures George W. Bush signed into law as governor of Texas was an ALEC model bill giving corporations immunity from penalties if they tell regulators about their own violation of environmental rules. Dozens of other ALEC bills would limit environmental regulations or litigation in ways that would benefit Koch.

ALEC's model legislation reflects parts of the Kochs' agenda that have little to do with oil profits. Long before ALEC started pushing taxpayer-subsidized school vouchers, for example, the Koch fortune was already underwriting attacks on public education. David Koch helped inject the idea of privatizing public schools into the national debate as a candidate for vice president in 1980. A cornerstone of the Libertarian Party platform, which he bankrolled, was the call for "educational tax credits to encourage alternatives to public education," a plan to the right of Ronald Reagan. Several pieces of ALEC's model legislation echo this plan.

The Kochs' mistrust of public education can be traced to their father, Fred, who ranted and raved that the National Education Association was a communist group and public-school books were filled with "communist propaganda," paranoia that extended to all unions, President Eisenhower and

the "pro-communist" Supreme Court. Such redbaiting might be ancient history if fifty years later David were not calling President Obama a "hard-core socialist" who is "scary."

The Kochs have not just multiplied the wealth of their dad; they've repackaged and amplified his worldview. David's latest venture, Americans for Prosperity, subsidizes the Tea Party movement, which repeats this "socialist" smear. Charles is a member of the exclusive Mount Pelerin Society, inspired by Frederic von Hayek's antisocialist polemic *The Road to Serfdom*. Through the Charles G. Koch Charitable Foundation, the Institute for Humane Studies administers the Hayek Fund for Scholars and sister programs to fund academics and staffers for like-minded groups across the country. "Charles G. Koch Fellows" and interns stock ALEC, and have gone on to direct ALEC task forces.

Another David Koch project, Citizens for a Sound Economy—which launched the effort to repeal Glass-Steagall protections keeping banks from gambling in securities—helped fuel the fight for "free trade," an unpopular policy in the 1980s. The North American Free Trade Agreement passed with help from CSE and its corporate allies. ALEC resolutions for state legislators have long supported such trade agreements in the face of local concerns about job losses, and today the Koch free-market fantasy is reflected in ALEC's support for free trade pacts with Korea, Georgia, Colombia and other countries. On just about every issue taken on by Koch's CSE, ALEC has provided legislative tools to carry them through to state legislatures, from privatizing "federal and state services and assets," as CSE put it, to blocking common-sense caps on unlimited credit card interest rates.

ALEC and the Kochs often pursue parallel tracks. Just as ALEC "educates" legislators, Koch funding has helped "tutor" hundreds of judges with all-expenses-paid junkets at fancy resorts, where they learn about the "free market" impact of their rulings. But ALEC also operates like an arm of the Koch agenda, circulating bills that make their vision of the world concrete. For a mere \$25,000 a year, Koch Industries sits as an "equal" board member with state legislators, influencing bills that serve as a wish list for its financial or ideological interests.

It's a pittance for the Kochs but far out of the reach of working Americans. Ordinary citizens rely on our elected representatives' efforts to restore what's left of the American Dream. But through ALEC, billionaire industrialists are purchasing a version that seems like a real nightmare for most Americans. ■

Lisa Graves, executive director of the Center for Media and Democracy, is the publisher of ALEC Exposed, SourceWatch and PRWatch.

make comprehensive policies significantly more expensive than they already are. (Wyoming was the first state to enact this model bill, in 2010, followed by Georgia and Maine this year.)

§ The Non-Economic Damage Awards Act, adopted in 2002, would limit medical malpractice awards for damages like pain and suffering to \$250,000, making such lawsuits infeasible. (Few lawyers would be willing to represent patients if the total award were limited to that amount because they probably would not be able to cover their costs.) Insurers and the American Medical Association have joined forces in lobbying for such tort reform.

In sum, ALEC's model legislation would not only undermine the consumer protections in the Affordable Care Act; it would shred the social safety net for the most vulnerable among us: older, disabled and poorer Americans, and those who become victims of a system that is supposed to heal, not harm. ■

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Starving Public Schools

by JULIE UNDERWOOD

Public schools," ALEC wrote in its 1985 *Education Source Book*, "meet all of the needs of all of the people without pleasing anyone." A better system, the organization argued, would "foster educational freedom and quality" through various forms of privatization: vouchers, tax incentives for sending children to private schools and unregulated private charter schools. Today ALEC calls this "choice"—and vouchers "scholarships"—but it amounts to an ideological mission to defund and redesign public schools.

The first large-scale voucher program, the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, was enacted in 1990 following the rubric ALEC provided in 1985. It was championed by then-Governor Tommy Thompson, an early ALEC member, who once said he "loved" ALEC meetings, "because I always found new ideas, and then I'd take them back to Wisconsin, disguise them a little bit, and declare [they were] mine."

ALEC's most ambitious and strategic push toward privatizing education came in 2007, through a publication called *School Choice and State Constitutions*, which proposed a list of programs tailored to each state. That year Georgia passed a version of ALEC's Special Needs Scholarship Program Act. Most disability organizations strongly oppose special education vouchers—and decades of evidence suggest that such students are better off receiving additional support in public schools. Nonetheless, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Florida, Utah and Indiana have passed versions of their own. Louisiana also passed a version of ALEC's Parental Choice Scholarship Program Act (renaming it Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence), along with ALEC's Family Education Tax Credit Program (renamed Tax Deductions for Tuition), which has also been passed by Arizona and Indiana. ALEC's so-called Great Schools Tax Credit Program Act has

been passed by Arizona, Indiana and Oklahoma.

ALEC's 2010 *Report Card on American Education* called on members and allies to "Transform the system, don't tweak it," likening the group's current legislative strategy to a game of whack-a-mole: introduce so many pieces of model legislation that there is "no way the person with the mallet [teachers' unions] can get them all." ALEC's agenda includes:

§ Introducing market factors into teaching, through bills like the National Teacher Certification Fairness Act.

§ Privatizing education through vouchers, charters and tax incentives, especially through the Parental Choice Scholarship Program Act and Special Needs Scholarship Program Act, whose many spinoffs encourage the creation of private schools for specific populations: children with autism, children in military families, etc.

§ Increasing student testing and reporting, through more "accountability," as seen in the Education Accountability Act, Longitudinal Student Growth Act, One-to-One Reading Improvement Act and the Resolution Supporting the Principles of No Child Left Behind.

§ Chipping away at local school districts and school boards, through its 2009 Innovation Schools and School Districts Act and more. Proposals like the Public School Financial Transparency Act and School Board Freedom to Contract Act would allow school districts to outsource auxiliary services.

ALEC is also invested in influencing the educational curriculum. Its 2010 Founding Principles Act would require high school students to take "a semester-long course on the philosophical understandings and the founders' principles."

Perhaps the Brookings Institute states the mission most clearly: "Taken seriously, choice is not a system-preserving reform. It is a revolutionary reform that introduces a new system of public education."

ALEC's real motivation for dismantling the public education system is ideological—creating a system where schools do not provide for everyone—and profit-driven. The corporate members on its education task force include the Friedman Foundation, Goldwater Institute, Washington Policy Center, National Association of Charter School Authorizers and corporations providing education services, such as Sylvan Learning and the Connections Academy.

From Milton Friedman on, proponents of vouchers have argued that they foster competition and improve students' learning. But years of research reveal this to be false. Today, students in Milwaukee's public schools perform as well as or better than those in voucher schools. This is true even though voucher schools have advantages that in theory should make it easier to educate children: fewer students with disabilities; broader rights to select, reject and expel students; and parents who are engaged in their children's education (at least enough to have actively moved them to the private system). Voucher schools clearly should outperform public schools, but they do not. Nor are they less expensive; often private costs are shifted to taxpayers; a local school district typically pays for transportation, additional education services and administrative expenses. In programs like Milwaukee's, the actual cost drains funds from the public schools and creates additional charges to taxpayers.

But a deeper crisis emerges when we privatize education. As Benjamin Barber has argued, “public schools are not merely schools for the public, but schools of publicness: institutions where we learn what it means to be a public and start down the road toward common national and civic identity.” What happens to our democracy when we return to an educational system whose access is defined by corporate interests and divided by class, language, ability, race and religion? In a push to free-market education, who pays in the end? ■

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Rigging Elections

by JOHN NICHOLS

In the heat of Wisconsin’s brutal battle over Governor Scott Walker’s assaults on unions, local democracy, public education and social services, one of his closest allies suddenly shifted direction. State Representative Robin Vos, Republican co-chair of the powerful Legislative Joint Finance Committee, determined that making it harder for college students, seniors and low-income citizens to vote was an immediate legislative priority, and pressed lawmakers to focus on enacting one of the most restrictive voter ID laws in the nation.

As ALEC’s chair for Wisconsin, Vos was doing what was expected of him. Enacting burdensome photo ID or proof of citizenship requirements has long been an ALEC priority. ALEC and its sponsors have an enduring mission to pass laws that would make it harder for millions of Americans to vote, impose barriers to direct democracy and let big money flow more freely into campaigns.

Republicans have argued for years that “voter fraud” (rather than unpopular policies) costs the party election victories. A key member of the Corporate Executive Committee for ALEC’s Public Safety and Elections Task Force is Sean Parnell, president of the Center for Competitive Politics, which began highlighting voter ID efforts in 2006, shortly after Karl Rove encouraged conservatives to take up voter fraud as an issue. Kansas Republican Kris Kobach, who along with ALEC itself helped draft Arizona’s anti-immigration law, has warned of “illegally registered aliens.” ALEC’s magazine, *Inside ALEC*, featured a cover story titled “Preventing Election Fraud” following Obama’s election. Shortly afterward, in the summer of 2009, the Public Safety and Elections Task Force adopted voter ID model legislation. And when mid-term elections put Republicans in charge of both chambers of the legislature in twenty-six states (up from fifteen), GOP legislators began moving bills resembling ALEC’s model.

At least thirty-three states have introduced voter ID laws this year. In addition to Wisconsin, Alabama, Kansas, South Carolina and Tennessee have passed similar bills. Only a veto by Democratic Governor John Lynch prevented New Hampshire from enacting a law the Republican House speaker admitted

was advanced to make it harder for “liberal” students to cast ballots, and that one state representative described as “directly attributable to ALEC.”

ALEC’s goal is to influence not just state politics but also the 2012 presidential race, to “give the electoral edge to their preferred candidates,” as Cristina Francisco McGuire of the Progressive States Network pointed out in March. “It’s no coincidence that they are waging the fiercest of these battles in states that are also the likeliest battleground states in 2012, where suppressing the youth vote could have a dramatic impact,” she wrote. The one class of voters that ALEC seeks to protect with resolutions and model legislation—overseas military voters—happens to be likely to vote Republican.

Beyond barriers to voting, ALEC is also committed to building barriers to direct democracy. Horrified by the success of living-wage referendums and other projects that have allowed voters to enact protections for workers and regulations for businesses, ALEC’s corporate sponsors have pushed to toughen the rules for voter initiatives. “The legislative process should be the principal policy-making vehicle for developing state law,” declares one 2006 resolution, which specifically mentions concerns about state minimum wage laws, taxation and “the funding of other government programs and services.” ALEC’s Resolution to Reform the Ballot Initiatives Process recommends making it harder to qualify referendum language and suggests that proposals on fiscal issues should require supermajorities to become law.

ALEC is also determined to ensure that citizens do not have the final say on who is elected president, an agenda outlined in such documents as its Resolution in Support of the Electoral College and its ardent opposition to the National Popular Vote project (which it has warned would “nationalize elections and unravel Federalism”). A related resolution encourages state legislatures to formally complain that an interstate compact to defer to the popular will “would allow a candidate with a plurality—however small—to become President.” While ALEC worries about the candidate with the most votes winning, it has no problem with policies that increase the likelihood that the candidate with the most money and corporate support will prevail. Its 2009 Resolution Supporting Citizen Involvement in Elections bluntly “opposes all efforts to limit [citizen] involvement by limiting campaign contributions.” A resolution approved last year expresses support for the Supreme Court’s *Citizens United* ruling. ALEC even opposes moves to give shareholders a say in the expenditure of corporate funds on campaigning. At the same time, ALEC urges legislators to fight the “federal takeover” of state election procedures, objecting in particular to universal standards for voting procedures.

Of course, ALEC is not opposed to uniformity in election procedures as such. It just wants the rules to be set by CEOs, campaign donors and conservative legislators. Restricting voting and direct democracy while ensuring that corporations can spend freely on campaigning makes advancing the conservative agenda a whole lot easier. “Once they set the rules for elections and campaigns,” says Wisconsin State Representative Mark Pocan, a longtime ALEC critic, “ALEC will pretty much call the shots.” ■

A Creditable Left

To recover lost ground, progressives should focus more on civil society than electoral politics.

by RICHARD SENNETT

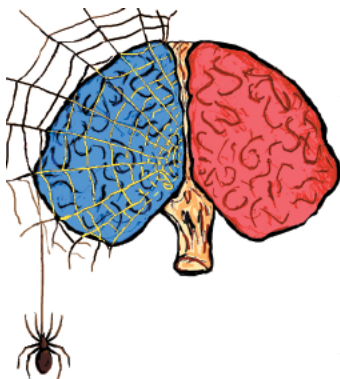
When the financial system collapsed in 2008 I thought our moment had come. The streets would fill with protesters against the Capitalist Beast; governments would move to the left in response; people would rethink how they wanted to live. Yet while there have been some big protests in Wisconsin, and abroad in Spain and Greece, many more voters have instead moved to the right; the financial ancien régime has been restored. In a way this isn't surprising. When things go wrong, people both want change and cling for comfort to the familiar. But the left hasn't succeeded, either in America or across Europe, in making itself a creditable voice for reform.

Since it controls the media as well as money, the Beast can, of course, protect itself. In this crisis, the authors of the Great Recession succeeded in blaming particular people or policies rather than admit to fundamental flaws in the system. Ruling classes don't invariably succeed; across North Africa and the Middle East, the oppressed are rising up against terrible odds. Nor, closer to home, would it be right to blame mass lethargy; people are full of political energy, even if it's directed at immigrants and foreigners.

The unpalatable fact is that we, the ardent left, count for less and less in the public's thinking about how to live together. And if that has long been true in the United States, where the left has occupied only a small corner of public discourse, the decay of the left now marks the old Western European homelands, as in Sweden or Britain. The word "progressive" seems no more arousing than "social democracy." Though progressive think tanks abound in America and Europe, and churn out worthy proposals for social justice, policy-wonkery seems to induce an eyes-glazed-over indifference among the larger public.

As an old lefty, I worry about all this; I'd be sorry if the future consisted just of different shades of capitalism. In the midst of doctors' appointments and funerals, I've wondered how the left could recover its standing in the eyes of the larger society even if the prospects for the left in power are dim. This is a problem, I've come to think, more social than ideological in character.

You become creditable when others take you seriously even though they may not agree with you. To be taken seriously, you need to know when to keep silent and how to listen well; you are then extending respect and recognition to others. The philosopher Anne Phillips rightly insists on the importance of



KAREN CALDICOTT

“presence” in politics, by which she means being someone an individual or group feels can conduct a discussion on equal terms. Presence is something an outsider has to earn by his or her behavior. Scoring points won't alone admit you into other people's lives; winning an argument over them will not include you in their thinking about how to live. Creditability, that is, lies more in the realm of receptiveness than assertiveness.

If this is correct, a certain kind of politics follows. It should concentrate more on civil society than electoral politics—particularly electoral politics at the national level. The community organizer or grassroots activist needs to be honored in his or her own right rather than as a worker bee in the national political hive; he or she is likely to have developed the skills of good listening and discussion that breed respect. In America, Denmark, Finland and Britain the right has colonized effective grassroots politics, building viable and sustained communities even if its goals fail nationally. The right has pulled off a neat trick: though huge mountains of cash stand behind many of its efforts, on the ground right-wing organizers have behaved creditably as speaking in the name of ordinary people. I hope the left will take back this communal territory; but doing so requires a changed mindset on our part.

Political contests revolve around the proposition that if you have a problem, we have a solution. Proposing a solution for another person's problems—particularly if these have become knotty issues, like long-term unemployment—may not in itself earn presence and respect. Our solution may seem correct in the abstract, but it is just that—far away from the family traumas and demoralization, for instance, that afflict the long-term unemployed. A creditable language of mutual engagement must, I think, transcend the discourse of problem-solving; it has to be more responsive to experiences of ambiguity, difficulty and defeat.

I was put in mind of all this in reading a recent study by YouGov, a British polling organization. It surveys the public's attitudes toward progressive politics, and among progressives, in the United States, Britain, Germany and Sweden. The survey provided the background for a recent gathering in Oslo of European left luminaries, the politicians among them all menaced by right-wing trends at home. For Ed Miliband, the Labour leader in Britain; Jens Stoltenberg, prime minister of Norway; or John Podesta, president and CEO of the Center for American Progress, the study cannot have been comforting reading.

The YouGov research (available at policy-network.net)

paints a pessimistic picture of the public's faith in government to solve social problems. This faith is weak in all four countries, and the public especially doubts that simply throwing more taxpayer money around can do much. Progressives are, of course, more tax-friendly in principle, but they are nearly as doubtful that bigger government will in itself accomplish much in practice. This finding is hardly news, but the study came up with a surprising fact: a big slice of centrist voters say they are willing to pay higher taxes if the policies are credible—even 17 percent of American Republicans would do so. The creditability issue turns on the behavior of officials rather than the content of policy.

In all four countries, the general public has “a very low estimation of government's ability to stand up to vested interests.” The numbers here are striking: only 15 percent in the United States think politicians will stand up to powerful outside influence, as do 16 percent in Britain, 21 percent in Germany and 27 percent in the once gold-standard state of Sweden. Nor is the public complacent about those outside interests; all of these countries have massive worries that corporations “care only about profits” (85 percent in Britain think so, as do 83 percent in Germany, 69 percent in the United States and 60 percent in Sweden). President Obama's behavior in domestic affairs could serve as an emblem for this combination—his progressive rhetoric coupled with a disposition to appease powerful interests.

Lack of trust in the public sphere has been sharpened by arbitrary inequality in everyday life. The YouGov researchers found that a majority agree that “who you know is usually more important for getting on in life than hard work and playing by the rules” (even 46 percent of the US public subscribe to this view, despite our country's historic optimism about getting ahead). People apply the fear of arbitrary inequality to themselves and their children when they discuss the value of a university education; most think it has little long-term value (save the Swedes, who have a robust labor market). The larger frame of this fear is the contraction of middle-class fortunes throughout the West—the famously “shrinking” middle class. One consequence of that shrinkage is the desire to avoid risk, which calls for structural reform only seem to aggravate. Among left-leaning survey respondents, YouGov found that only 4 percent of the British, 10 percent of the Americans, 7 percent of the Swedish and 11 percent of the Germans say they would risk job security for the sake of “a greater voice in my employer's decision-making.”

A corrupted state, an economic system indifferent to social goods, a society in which equal opportunity and educational achievement count for little, a pervasive worry about job loss: four beliefs that combine to produce feelings of dread—the most paralyzing and isolating of emotions. In Oslo, however, the political and academic luminaries had other things on their minds; they spoke of the social market economy, social democracy beyond the nation-state, green jobs and economic growth. Nothing was on the agenda about community organizing; nor were grassroots organizations invited. Indeed, no “unimportant” people spoke at the event.

There's nothing new about arguing that we should pay more attention to a socially oriented, community-building politics in civil society. By the dawn of the twentieth century, the left had divided in two: a political left that focused on elections and dealings with government, and a social left involved with mutual support in settlement houses, cooperative banks and other voluntary associations. The two sides confronted each other in 1900 at the Paris Universal Exposition, in a set of rooms devoted to “The Social Question”; here, the political left displayed various manifestoes for government reform and the organization of unions, while the social left showed photographs of the streets and buildings where community organizers worked. Despite both sides' agreement on the evils of capitalism, they talked past each other on how to respond: the political left, represented by German trade unions, accused its opponents of lacking the discipline and strength that should adhere in mass movements; the social left, spoken for by American settlement-house workers, argued that only face-to-face cooperation, no matter how informal or messy, could rescue immigrants and other people from isolation in cities. One side

How can the left regain support among the broader public? The challenge is more social than ideological in character.

sought adherence to policy; the other saw politics as beginning with engagement, empathy and trust-building.

This conflict between top-down and bottom-up action has endured, and Chicago community organizer Saul Alinsky has been, I think, its sharpest analyst. In the 1960s and '70s he contrasted the uncomfortable work of labor organizers, who insisted on defined goals and decision-making, with the local work he was doing whose character, in getting neighbors to cooperate together, was more fluid and informal. The difference lies in the very goal of radical effort. In the midst of the Great Society reforms of the time, Alinsky emphasized that getting people to participate with others unlike themselves was an inherently radical project all its own. He didn't practice identity politics of the sort that depended on racial, class or ethnic solidarity; he wanted diverse groups of people to connect and interact—a messy and informal politics he imbibed in Chicago from the settlement-house leader Jane Addams, and one that has variously informed the Catholic Worker movement, founded by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin; “associationists” in Britain; and A.D. Gordon in Israel.

In our time, the right has colonized and corrupted civil society work in two ways. As in Britain's “big society” program, local and third-sector initiatives are used as a fig leaf for cuts in government spending; unpaid volunteers are meant to take the place of paid professionals in teaching, policing and caring for the elderly. Volunteers come and go; expertise does not accumulate. Worse, civic organizations are forced to compete for funds from private donors or government. Market economics thus invades the third sector and diminishes cooperation among groups.

The Dutch and the Swedes have rescued the third sector from both of these evils by giving communities secure and significant claims on the public purse and ensuring that “nonprofit” means just that. Christian, Jewish and Islamic charities, for instance, are encouraged to work together. Within the organizations, volunteers get real training and are asked to make long-term commitments. So the third sector can be made to work, but in America and Britain this seems a dim territory for action on the left, since the shadows of neoliberalism are so deep.

Nonprofit activism is not a panacea for society’s ills, as sociologist Nina Eliasoph’s fine new book *Making Volunteers* makes clear. She traces the “uses and misuses of hope” in local empowerment projects—projects that founder, she thinks, on raising false hopes, often breeding demoralization among “plug-in” volunteers. She counsels organizations to set achievable, if modest, goals and to make all participants expert in some way. This is just good common sense, but she also understands, as did Addams and Alinsky before her, that “managing conflict is not the same as making it disappear.” The viable grassroots organization needs to bond people together even if achievement lies beyond their grasp; it can do so by making the experience of cooperation an end in itself. Groups like Médecins Sans Frontières hold together over the long term, doing very frustrating work, in large part because the field-mission teams focus so carefully on maintaining esprit de corps. They do so, in my observation, by making receptiveness to others more important than assertiveness.

Some on the left have given up on the union movement, which is understandable but, I think, a great error. Though many unions have become sclerotic bureaucracies, obsessed with seniority privileges, not all are like this. The “new union movement” (which actually began in the 1880s) has sought to broaden the social agenda and mutual support provided by unions, combining direct engagement among diverse workers

with mass action. The Service Employees International Union, for example, has succeeded in drawing in women and immigrant workers by not only engaging in the unending struggle of labor against capital but also providing social services to its members, encouraging informal socializing and even promoting the arts.

What I’ve been mulling over is a change in temperament on the left. Throughout the twentieth century the political left held sway over the social left, the political side seeming more potent in its solutions and policies. It scorned touchy-feely politics, politics as therapy, social engagement as an end in itself. That scorn has proved self-destructive; politicians on the left have proved more adept at arguing and explaining themselves than at connecting to other people. Perhaps solidarity is the nub of the divide. The desire for solidarity seeks to transcend differences; the mess that is ordinary life appears as an impediment to political action. Meanwhile, the social left, from the old “new unionists” to community organizers like Alinsky, has wanted to engage with ambiguity, difference and incompleteness. I don’t believe such engagement can be reduced to touchy-feely good will. Engaging well with others requires skill, whether the skill be that of listening well or cooperating with those who differ.

A shift in temper doesn’t mean rejecting politics—how could we? In principle, renewal of left civil society should restore faith in activism. The YouGov research cautions, however, that the public is skeptical of how politicians behave, whatever their programs. Regaining trust means, paradoxically, acknowledging the limits of political action and emphasizing the inherent worth of action within civil society. The right has colonized this territory; the left has to take it back. In practice this means putting more energy and cash into local issues than into national electoral politics. The Democratic Party has largely taken the votes of the left for granted; a more robust localism would put greater pressure on our national masters—just as has occurred on the right. For ourselves, though, I think it’s a matter of putting the social back into socialism. ■

Like Water for Gold in El Salvador

Activists are risking their lives in the fight against US and Canadian mining companies.

by **ROBIN BROAD** AND **JOHN CAVANAGH**

Thirty years ago, several thousand civilians in the northern Salvadoran community of Santa Marta quickly gathered a few belongings and fled the US-funded Salvadoran military as it burned their houses and fields in an early stage of the country’s twelve-year civil war. Dozens were killed as they crossed the Lempa River into refugee camps in Honduras.

Today, residents of this area, some born in those Honduran refugee camps, are fighting US and Canadian mining com-

panies eager to extract the rich veins of gold buried near the Lempa River, the water source for more than half of El Salvador’s 6.2 million people. Once again, civilians have been killed or are receiving death threats.

The communities’ goal: to make El Salvador the first nation to ban gold mining. We traveled to El Salvador in April to find out if this struggle to keep gold in the ground can be won. Our investigation led us from rural communities in the country’s gold belt to ministries of the new progressive government in San Salvador and ultimately to free trade agreements and a tribunal tucked away inside the World Bank in Washington, DC.

We were greeted at the airport by Miguel Rivera, a quiet man in his early 30s whose face is dominated by dark, sad eyes.

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Miguel is the brother of anti-mining community leader Marcelo Rivera, who was disappeared—tortured and assassinated—in June 2009 in a manner reminiscent of the death squads of the 1980s civil war. We had first met Miguel in October 2009, when he and four others active in El Salvador's National Roundtable on Mining traveled to Washington to receive the Institute for Policy Studies' Letelier-Moffitt Human Rights Award, a prize that brought international recognition to this struggle.

As we drove on the mountainous roads that lead to Santa Marta and other towns in the northern department of Cabañas, we commented on the starkly eroded parched hills that look like landslides waiting to happen. "We are the second most environmentally degraded country in the Americas after Haiti," Miguel explained through an interpreter. "How did you come to oppose mining?" we asked. Miguel pointed to our water bottle and said simply: "Just like you, water is our priority." Over the next days, we would hear testimonies from dozens of people in Cabañas, many of whom are risking their lives in the struggle against mining. Almost all started or ended their stories with some variation of Miguel's answer: "Water for life," for drinking, for fishing, for farming—and not just for Cabañas but for the whole country.

Miguel drove us to the office of his employer, ADES (the Social and Economic Development Association), where local people talked with us late into the night about how they had come to oppose mining. ADES organizer Vidalina Morales acknowledged that "initially, we thought mining was good and it was going to help us out of poverty...through jobs and development."

The mining corporation that had come to Cabañas was the Vancouver-based Pacific Rim, one of several dozen companies interested in obtaining mining "exploitation" permits in the Lempa River watershed. In 2002 Pacific Rim acquired a firm that already had an exploration license for a Cabañas site bearing the promising name El Dorado. That license gave Pacific Rim the right to use such techniques as sinking exploratory wells to determine just how lucrative the site would be.

Francisco Pineda, a corn farmer and charismatic organizer with the Environmental Committee of Cabañas, invited us to spend an afternoon with eighteen of his fellow committee members, some of whom had walked or been driven a long way to join us. One after another, each stood up to tell his or her story. Francisco, who received the 2011 Goldman Environmental Award (which some call the Environmental Nobel Prize), kicked off what became a five-hour session. He talked about watching the river near his farm dry up: "This was very strange, as it had never done this before. So we walked up the river to see why.... And then I found a pump from Pacific Rim that was pumping water for exploratory wells. All of us began to wonder, if they are using this much water in the exploration stage, how much will they use if they actually start mining?"

Francisco, Marcelo, Miguel, Vidalina and others then set out to learn everything they could about gold mining. From experience, they already knew that Cabañas was prone to earthquakes potentially strong enough to crack open the containers that mining companies build to hold the cyanide-laced water used to separate gold from the surrounding rock. Community members traveled to mining communities in neighboring Honduras, Costa Rica and Guatemala, returning home with stories about

the contamination of rivers and lands by cyanide and other toxic chemicals. They turned to water experts, university researchers and international groups like Oxfam. A number of people attended seminars on mining in San Salvador.

They also discovered that only a tiny share of Pacific Rim's profits would stay in the country, and that the El Dorado mine was projected to have an operational life of only about six years, with many of the promised jobs requiring skills that few local people had. And, as a study by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature pointed out, people in Cabañas "living near mining exploration activities began to notice environmental impacts from the mining exploration—reduced access to water, polluted waters, impacts to agriculture, and health issues."

In community meetings, Pacific Rim officials claimed they would leave the water cleaner than they found it. (The Pacific Rim website is filled with promises about "social and environmental responsibility.") But many local people were wary of the company's intentions and honesty. Three people recounted how a Pacific Rim official boasted that cyanide was so safe that the official was willing to drink a glass of a favorite local beverage laced with the chemical. The official, we were told, backed down when community members insisted on authentication of the cyanide. "The company thought we're just ignorant farmers with big hats who don't know what we're doing," Miguel said. "But they're the ones who are lying."

Environmental Martyrs

As the anti-mining coalition strengthened with support from leaders in the Catholic Church, small businesses and the general public (a 2007 national poll showed that 62.4 percent opposed mining), tensions within Cabañas grew. These emerged in the context of other challenges, including the increasing use of Cabañas as an international drug trans-shipment route, with the attendant problems of corruption and violence. While questions remain, many activists believe that pro-mining forces—including local politicians who stood to benefit if Pacific Rim started mining—are ultimately responsible for the 2009 murder of Miguel's brother, Marcelo Rivera. Marcelo, a cultural worker and popular educator from the Cabañas town of San Isidro, was an early and vibrant public face of the anti-mining movement.

In San Isidro, Rina Navarrete, director of the Friends of San Isidro Association (ASIC), whose founders included Marcelo, stressed that his work lives on through the focus of local groups on cultural work and youth leadership development. Members of another citizens group, MUFRAS-32, led us on a walking tour of this small farming town. At the renamed Marcelo Rivera Community Center, a yellow and red mural with Marcelo's face above a line of dancing children covers the front wall.

Four other murals painted by youths, on the outside walls of houses owned by sympathetic residents, make it impossible to forget Marcelo's mission or his assassination. One, for example, offers a dramatic contrast between two alternative paths of development: On the mural's right side, dark and gloomy "monster" projects, including gold mines, dump waste into a river that bisects the wall. On the other side of the mural's river, sunlight bathes healthy agricultural land and trees.

ASIC, MUFRAS-32 and other groups continue to organize

theater and artistic festivals. Jaime Sánchez, a former theater student of Marcelo's now in his mid-20s, told us more: "We use theater, songs, murals and other cultural forms to show resistance. We use laughter." Jaime described ADES's creation of a radio station, Radio Victoria, which teaches young people to become deejays, production engineers and the other roles of running a station. These young people also took courses on mining, and spread what they learned over the airwaves.

Over a six-day period in late 2009, two other local activists were killed, one a woman who was eight months pregnant; the 2-year-old in her arms was wounded. ADES's Nelson Ventura barely escaped an attack. Hector Berrios and Zenayda Serrano, lawyers and leaders of MUFRA-32, had their home broken into while they and their daughter slept, and documents related to their work were stolen. As Hector lamented, "Clandestine organizations still operate with impunity in this country."

Many of the people we interviewed, including youths at Radio Victoria, have received death threats. One person told us he turned down a \$30-a-week offer to meet with representatives of Pacific Rim to inform on anti-mining activists. Mourned another: "Now in our communities, you don't trust people you've trusted your entire life. That's one of the things the mining companies have done."

Democratic Spaces

We traveled from mining country to San Salvador, visiting the sprawling Cuscatlán Park. Along one wall is the Salvadoran version of the US Vietnam Veterans Memorial, in this case etched with the names of about 30,000 of the roughly 75,000 killed in the civil war. Thousands of them, including the dozens killed in the Lempa River massacre of 1981, were victims of massacres perpetrated by the US-backed—often US-trained—government forces and the death squads associated with them.

Peace accords were signed in 1992, and successive elections delivered the presidency to the conservative and pro-free trade ARENA party until 2009, when the progressive Farabundo Martí Liberation Front (FMLN) won the largest bloc in the Congress and, two months later, the presidency. Anti-mining sentiment was already so strong in 2009 that both the reigning ARENA president and the successful FMLN candidate, Mauricio Funes, came out against mining during the campaign.

Much of the credit for this goes to the National Roundtable on Mining, formed in 2005 as leaders in Cabañas began meeting with groups from other departments where mining companies were seeking permits, as well as with research, development, legal aid and human rights groups in San Salvador. Roundtable facilitator Rodolfo Calles enumerated the goals they collectively agreed upon after arduous deliberations: to help resistance at the community level; to win a national law banning metals mining; to link with anti-mining struggles in Honduras and Guatemala, since the Lempa River also winds through those two countries; and to take on the international tribunal in which Pacific Rim is suing El Salvador. Part of what moved the Roundtable to the "complete ban" position, Francisco Pineda explained, "was the realization that the government lacked the ability to regulate the mining activities of giant global firms."

We were eager to understand how the still relatively young

FMLN-led government was deciding whether to ban metals mining. Roundtable members told us the Funes government had announced it would grant no new permits during his five-year term and that it was considering a permanent ban. They also told us the government had initiated a major "strategic environmental review" to help set longer-term policy on mining.

We visited the ministry of the economy, which, along with the environment ministry, is leading the review. The man overseeing it, an engineer named Carlos Duarte, explained that the goal was to do a "scientific" analysis, with the help of a Spanish consulting firm (with Spanish funding). We pushed further, trying to understand how a technical analysis could decide a matter with such high stakes. On the one hand, we posed to Duarte, gold's price has skyrocketed from less than \$300 an ounce a decade ago to more than \$1,500 an ounce today, increasing the temptation in a nation of deep poverty to consider mining. We quoted former Salvadoran finance minister and Pacific Rim economic adviser Manuel Hinds, who said, "Renouncing gold mining would be unjustifiable and globally unprecedented." On the other hand, we quoted the head of the human rights group and Roundtable member FESPAD, Maria Silvia Guillen: "El Salvador is a small beach with a big river that runs through it. If the river dies, the entire country dies."

Duarte explained that the Spanish firm, backed by four technical experts from other countries, had carried out a lengthy study of the issues and was consulting with people affected by mining, ranging from mining companies to the Roundtable groups. While he hoped this process would produce a consensus, Duarte admitted it was more likely the government and the firm would have to lay out "the interests of the majority," after which the two ministries would then make their policy recommendation. (Roundtable members had told us that the first group consultation, about ten days earlier in San Salvador, had turned into a pitched debate between them and representatives of the mining companies.) "If new laws are necessary," Duarte informed us, "then it will go to the legislature."

We proceeded to the national legislature, its hallways a cacophony of red posters bearing the photos of FMLN leaders (and the ever-present martyr Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero, assassinated in 1980 by the right) competing with offices adorned with posters of the leading opposition party, ARENA. We came to meet FMLN members of the legislature's environment and climate change committee, including Lourdes Palacios, a three-term member from San Salvador with purple glasses and an easy smile. Palacios explained that they were ready with a bill to ban metals mining, but at the request of the executive branch, they were waiting for the outcome of the review before introducing it.

A representative from the department of Chalatenango, just west of Cabañas and an FMLN stronghold, expressed impatience at how long the review was taking and his conviction that "economic and political powers" were "putting pressure on non-FMLN legislators." For the FMLN legislators, he stressed, "the pressure is the will of the people, and we are convinced that the majority of the people don't want mining." The FMLN does not have an absolute majority in the legislature; still, those present expressed confidence that the ban could pass if the

executive branch recommended it. One legislator suggested that El Salvador might have an easier time saying no than countries already dependent on revenues from gold exports.

Given the human rights situation in Cabañas, we interviewed the government's human rights ombudsman, a post created after the 1992 peace accords, to be selected by, and report directly to, the legislature. The current ombudsman is Oscar Luna, a former law professor and fierce defender of human rights—for which he too has received death threats. We asked Luna if he agreed with allegations that the killings in Cabañas were “assassinations organized and protected by economic and social powers.” Luna replied with his own phrasing: “There is still a climate of impunity in this country that we are trying to end.” He is pressing El Salvador's attorney general to conduct investigations into the “intellectual” authors of the killings. Several people have been arrested in connection with Marcelo Rivera's assassination, but the attorney general's office appears to be dragging its feet in digging deeper into who ordered and paid for the killings. Critics told us that the attorney general, appointed by the legislature as a compromise candidate between ARENA and the FMLN, has failed to investigate aggressively a number of sensitive cases involving politicians, corruption and organized crime.

Our interactions in Cabañas and San Salvador left us appreciative of the new democratic space that strong citizen movements and a progressive presidential victory have opened up, yet aware of the fragility and complexities that abound. The government faces an epic decision about mining, amid deep divisions and with institutions of democracy that are still quite young. As Vidalina reminded us when we parted, the “complications” are even greater than what we found in Cabañas or in San Salvador, because even if the ban's proponents eventually win, “these decisions could still get trumped in Washington.”

A Tribunal That Can Trump Democracy

Protesters around the globe know the sprawling structures that house the World Bank in Washington, yet few are aware that behind these doors sits a little-known tribunal that will be central to the Salvadoran gold story. The Salvadoran government never approved Pacific Rim's environmental impact study, and thus never gave its permission to begin actual mining. In retaliation, the firm sued the government under the 2005 Central American Free Trade Agreement. Like other trade agreements, CAFTA allows foreign investors to file claims against governments over actions—including health, safety and environmental measures and regulations—that reduce the value of their investment. The affected farmers and communities are not part of the calculus. The most frequently used tribunal for such “investor-state” cases is the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes, housed at the World Bank.

In the words of lawyer Marcos Orellana of the Center for International Environmental Law, who assisted the Roundtable in drafting an amicus brief for the tribunal, Pacific Rim “is trying to dictate El Salvador's environment and social policy using CAFTA's arbitration mechanism.” Pacific Rim's “claim amounts to an abuse of process.” The brief methodically lays out how Canada-headquartered Pacific Rim first incorporated in the Cayman Islands to escape taxes, then brazenly lobbied

Salvadoran officials to shape policies to benefit the firm, and only after that failed, in 2007 reincorporated one of its subsidiaries in the United States to use CAFTA to sue El Salvador.

For this article we attempted to interview Pacific Rim board chair Catherine McLeod-Seltzer, but her office steered us to the CEO of Pacific Rim's US subsidiary, Thomas Shrake. In a tersely worded e-mail, he “respectfully denied” our request.

Pacific Rim is demanding \$77 million in compensation. A case brought against El Salvador by another gold-mining company, Commerce Group, was dismissed earlier this year on a technicality, but the government still had to pay close to \$1 million in legal fees and for half of the arbitration costs. Dozens of human rights, environmental and fair-trade groups across North America, from U.S.-El Salvador Sister Cities and the Committee in Solidarity With the People of El Salvador (CISPES) to Oxfam, Public Citizen, Mining Watch and the Institute for Policy Studies, are pressuring Pacific Rim to withdraw the case.



Members of the Environmental Committee of Cabañas, with Francisco Pineda, far right

JOHN CAVANAGH

Many believe that even if Pacific Rim withdraws its case or loses in this tribunal, the very existence of “investor-state” clauses in trade agreements is an affront to democracy. “For democracy to prevail,” Sarah Anderson of IPS told us, “citizens’ movements and their allies in governments must work hard to eliminate these clauses from all trade and investment agreements.”

Back in Santa Marta, citizen groups are building sustainable farming as an alternative economic base to mining. Their goal: a “solidarity economy,” or, as Vidalina termed it, a “people's economy.” Explained Vidalina: “We reject the image of us just as anti-mining. We are for water and a positive future. We want alternatives to feed us, to clothe us.”

Elvis Nataren, a philosophy student, led us to the riverbank and pointed to communal land where organic farms will be built. Three towering greenhouses already contain plump hydroponic tomatoes, green peppers and other vegetables. Together these should make Santa Marta self-sufficient in corn, beans and veg-

etables. As Elvis explained, “food sovereignty” was even more urgent in the wake of CAFTA’s passage, given the cheap foreign produce that began to flood the Salvadoran market. Elvis, Vidalina, Miguel, Francisco and others we met in Cabañas were well aware that as they nurture farmlands and the river vital to this alternative future, their success also depends upon struggles and debates in San Salvador and Washington.

A month after we returned home, the death threats against individual youths at Radio Victoria escalated, with such ominous untraceable text messages as: “look oscar we aren’t kid-

ding shut up this radio or you also die you dog...”

And in June, nearly two years after Marcelo Rivera’s murder, the body of a student volunteer with the Environmental Committee of Cabañas was found dead, with two bullets in his head. As the Roundtable press release noted: “The last time he was seen by fellow environmental activists was...distributing fliers against metallic mining in [Cabañas] in preparation for a public consultation about the mining sector taking place nearby.” “Not another mine, not another death,” implored the Roundtable. ■

The Shelters That Clinton Built

Shoddily constructed, searingly hot and toxic—inside the Clinton Foundation’s Haiti trailers.

by ISABEL MACDONALD AND ISABEAU DOUCET

When Demosthene Lubert heard that Bill Clinton’s foundation was going to rebuild his collapsed school at the epicenter of Haiti’s January 12, 2010, earthquake, in the coastal city of Léogâne, the academic director thought he was “in paradise.”

The project was announced by Clinton as his foundation’s first contribution to the Interim Haiti Recovery Commission, which the former president co-chairs. The foundation described the project as “hurricane-proof...emergency shelters that can also serve as schools...to ensure the safety of vulnerable populations in high risk areas during the hurricane season,” while also providing Haitian schoolchildren “a decent place to learn” and creating local jobs. The facilities, according to the foundation, would be equipped with power generators, restrooms, water and sanitary storage. They became one of the IHRC’s first projects.

However, when *Nation* reporters visited the “hurricane-proof” shelters in June, six to eight months after they’d been installed, we found them to consist of twenty imported prefab trailers beset by a host of problems, from mold to sweltering heat to shoddy construction. Most disturbing, they were manufactured by the same company, Clayton Homes, that is being sued in the United States for providing the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) with formaldehyde-laced trailers in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Air samples collected from twelve Haiti trailers detected worrying levels of this carcinogen in one, according to laboratory results obtained as part of a joint investigation by *The Nation* and The Nation Institute’s Investigative Fund.

Clayton Homes is owned by Berkshire Hathaway, the holding company run by Warren Buffett, one of the “notable” private-sector members of the Clinton Global Initiative, according to the initiative’s website. (“Members” are typically required to

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Former President Clinton visits a tent camp in the former Petionville Golf Club in October 2010.

pay \$20,000 a year to the charity, but foundation officials would not disclose whether Buffett had made such a donation.) Buffett was also a prominent Hillary Clinton supporter during the 2008 presidential race, and he co-hosted a fundraiser that brought in at least \$1 million for her campaign.

By mid-June, two of the four schools where the Clinton Foundation classrooms were installed had prematurely ended classes for the summer because the temperature in the trailers frequently exceeded 100 degrees, and one had yet to open for lack of water and sanitation facilities.

As Judith Seide, a student in Lubert’s sixth-grade class, explained to *The Nation*, she and her classmates regularly suffer from painful headaches in their new Clinton Foundation classroom. Every day, she said, her “head hurts and I feel it spinning and have to stop moving, otherwise I’d fall.” Her vision goes dark, as is the case with her classmate Judel, who sometimes

can't open his eyes because, said Seide, "he's allergic to the heat." Their teacher regularly relocates the class outside into the shade of the trailer because the swelter inside is insufferable.

Sitting in the sixth-grade classroom, student Mondialie Cineas, who dreams of becoming a nurse, said that three times a week the teacher gives her and her classmates painkillers so that they can make it through the school day. "At noon, the class gets so hot, kids get headaches," the 12-year-old said, wiping beads of sweat from her brow. She is worried because "the kids feel sick, can't work, can't advance to succeed."

Word about the students' headaches has made it all the way to the Léogâne mayor's office, but like the students, their teachers and parents, Mayor Santos Alexis chalked it up to the intense heat inside the trailers.

But headaches were not the only health problems students, staff and parents at the Institut Haitiano-Caribbean (INHAC) told us they've suffered from since the inauguration of the classrooms. Innocent Sylvain, a shy janitor who looks much older than his 41 years, spends more time than anyone in the new trailer classrooms, with the inglorious task of mopping up the water that leaks through the doors and windows each time it rains. He has felt a burning sensation in his eyes ever since he began working long hours in the trailers. One of his eyes is completely bloodshot, and he said, "They itch and burn." He'd previously been sensitive to eye irritation, but he says he's had worse "problems since the month of January"—when the schoolrooms opened their doors.

Any number of factors might be contributing to the headaches and eye irritation reported by INHAC staff and students. However, similar symptoms were experienced by those living in the FEMA trailers that were found by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to have unsafe levels of formaldehyde. Lab tests conducted as part of our investigation in Haiti discovered levels of the carcinogen in the sixth-grade Clinton Foundation classroom in Léogâne at 250 parts per billion—two and a half times the level at which the CDC warned FEMA trailer residents that sensitive people, such as children, could face adverse health effects. Assay Technologies, the accredited lab that analyzed the air tests, identifies 100 parts per billion and more as the level at which "65–80 percent of the population will most likely exhibit some adverse health symptoms...when exposed continually over extended periods of time."

Randy Maddalena, a scientist specializing in indoor pollutants at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, characterized the 250 parts per billion finding as "a very high level" of formaldehyde and warned that "it's of concern," particularly given the small sample size. An elevated level of formaldehyde in one of twelve trailers tested is comparable to the formaldehyde emissions problems detected in about 9 percent of similar Clayton mobile homes supplied by FEMA after Hurricane Katrina. Maddalena explained that in "normal" buildings, you'll see rates twelve to twenty-five times lower than 250 parts per billion, "and even that's considered above regulatory thresholds."

According to the CDC, formaldehyde exposure can exacerbate symptoms of asthma and has been linked to chronic lung disease. Studies have shown that children are particularly vulner-

able to its respiratory effects. The chemical was recently added to the US Department of Health and Human Services' "Report of Carcinogens," based on studies linking exposure to formaldehyde with increased risk for rare types of cancer.

"You should get those kids outta there," Maddalena said. The scientist emphasized that Haiti's hot and humid climate could well be contributing to high emissions of the carcinogen in the classroom. Indeed, months before the launch of the Clinton trailer project, the nation's climate was widely cited as a key problem with a trailer industry proposal to ship FEMA trailers to Haiti for shelter after the earthquake. The proposal was ultimately rejected by FEMA, following a critical letter from Bennie Thompson, chair of the House Committee on Homeland Security, who argued, "This country's immediate response to help in this humanitarian crisis should not be blemished by later concerns over adverse health consequences precipitated by our efforts."

Yet several months later, the *Knoxville News Sentinel* reported that Clayton Homes had been awarded a million-dollar contract to ship twenty trailers to Haiti, for use as classrooms for schoolchildren. The Clinton Foundation claims it went through a bidding process before awarding the contract to Clayton Homes, which was already embroiled in the FEMA trailer lawsuit. But despite repeated requests, the foundation has not provided *The Nation* with any documentation of this process.

There are hints that Clayton Homes aggressively pursued the contract. For example, a company press release dated August 6, 2010, notes, "When former President Bill Clinton was named to head the relief effort, Clayton's Director of International Development, Paul Thomas, called the Clinton Foundation to see if there was a way to help."

The chief of staff for the office of the UN Special Envoy, Garry Conille, emphasized that the foundation's decision-making on the project took place in a context of great urgency, with the advent of the 2010 hurricane season, when 1.5 million people were living in tent camps. "Under the circumstances, with all these people exposed, with the first rains," said Conille, "it would have been completely acceptable to go to a single source, but we didn't."

The Clinton Foundation's chief operating officer, Laura Graham, said in a phone interview that the contract was awarded to Clayton on the basis of a "limited request for proposals" from nine companies. She added that the decision was informed by "recommendations from a panel including a lot of these experts that do this work for a living, and Clayton was recommended as the most cost-efficient, with the best product and with the strongest Haitian partner." She clarified that she did not participate in the bidding process but said there were "representatives from the foundation as well as [the UN] Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], the UN Special Envoy Office and the International Organization for Migration [IOM]...and there was a request for proposals run by them."

When asked to comment on that claim, Bradley Mellicker, IOM's Port-au-Prince-based emergency preparedness and response officer, said, "That's a lie. The Clinton Foundation paid for the containers through a no-bid process." Imogen Wall, former spokeswoman for OCHA in Haiti, responded by e-mail that OCHA never deals with procurement or project management.

The Nation made multiple attempts to reach Bill Clinton for comment. However, the former president, known for championing the role of nonprofits in global affairs (“Unlike the government, we don’t have to be quite as worried about a bad story in the newspapers,” he recently said in a speech), never responded. A Clayton Homes official referred all queries regarding the contract to the Clinton Foundation.

When he heard that the new classrooms in his community had been built by a FEMA formaldehyde litigation defendant, Santos Alexis, Léogâne’s stately mayor, said, “I hope these are not the same trailers that made people sick in the US. Otherwise I would be very critical; it would be chaos.” (They are indeed different trailers, according to an engineer at Clayton Homes, who said the new classrooms were constructed specifically for the Clinton Foundation’s Haiti project.)

“It would be humiliating to us, and we’ll take this as a black thing,” the mayor added, drawing a parallel between his community in Haiti, the world’s first black republic, and the disproportionate numbers of African-Americans affected by the US government’s mismanagement of the emergency response after Hurricane Katrina.

Demosthene Lubert’s disappointment is palpable as he sits in one of his new-smelling classrooms, perspiration dripping from his face. He had envisioned that the foundation of the former US president would rebuild INHAC, his school, as a modern institution with solar panel-powered lights and Wi-Fi. At a meeting of the Clinton Global Initiative in May, Dr. Paul Farmer, Clinton’s deputy UN special envoy, called for healthcare to be integrated into schools. At the very least, Lubert expected the Clinton Foundation, which is active in global health philanthropy and cholera prevention in Haiti, to help with school sanitation.

“I thought the grand foundation of Clinton was going to build us latrines and dig us wells for the children to wash their hands before meals and after using the toilet...especially as we’re at the mercy of cholera,” Lubert says with a sigh. Less than an hour north of Léogâne, in Carrefour, the number of cholera cases went from eighty-five per week at the end of April to 820 a week at the beginning of June, according to Sylvain Groulx, country director of Médecins Sans Frontières. The disease, which is preventable with proper sanitary conditions, has killed 5,500 people since the epidemic began last October.

The Clinton Foundation did not build so much as a latrine at the school, or at any of the three other schools where its trailers were installed. (INHAC and two of the other schools had a limited number of pre-existing outhouses, which the school directors saw as inadequate, while the fourth did not have a single outhouse, making it unusable, according to the school’s director.)

Conille, Clinton’s chief of staff at his UN office, acknowledged in a telephone interview that the trailer classrooms “would never meet the standards for school building” under Haitian or international regulations.

“Normally when you hear ‘Clin-ton,’ when people speak of ‘Clin-ton,’ the name ‘Clin-ton’ carries a lot of weight,” says Lubert. He trails off, looking suddenly uncertain. Clinton’s name echoes ambiguously through the swampy chemical air like

a plea, a mantra or a brand.

June 1 marked the beginning of Haiti’s 2011 hurricane season, and meteorologists project that Haiti could face up to eighteen tropical storms with three to six of these developing to hurricane strength. Léogâne, where 95 percent of the downtown area was flooded by Hurricane Tomas last year, is relying on the Clinton Foundation’s trailers as Plan A in the municipality’s emergency response.

The foundation’s original proposal to the IHRC referred to the buildings it planned to construct in Léogâne as “hurricane-proof” shelters, and this past March, Clinton Foundation foreign policy director Ami Desai reiterated that claim in a phone interview. On the foundation website, the promotional write-up about the trailers is featured under the heading “Emergency Hurricane Shelter Project.”

Larry Tanner, a wind science specialist at Texas Tech University, was “suspicious” when he heard that trailers were to be used as hurricane shelters in Haiti. Tanner thought it unlikely that Clayton Homes had developed a mobile home that could safely be used as a hurricane shelter, saying in a telephone interview that he put the odds at “slim to none.” Mobile homes are considered by FEMA to be so unsafe in hurricanes that the agency unequivocally advises the public to evacuate them.

In an interview with *The Nation*, Clayton Homes engineer Mark Izzo said the Léogâne trailers could withstand winds of up to 140 miles per hour. The company arrived at this figure through calculations, he said, rather than testing.

But Tanner emphasizes that such structures must be rigorously tested for resistance to high winds and projectiles. Clayton Homes’s failure to test the trailers meant that they would not meet the international construction standard for hurricane shelter. “It certainly would not be accepted by FEMA either,” Tanner added. Moreover, the kind of anchoring systems used by the trailers in Léogâne—which rely on metal straps to attach the shelter to the ground—“fail routinely,” according to Tanner.

Two weeks into Haiti’s hurricane season, *The Nation* visited some of the Clinton shelters with Kit Miyamoto, a California-based structural engineer contracted by USAID and the Haitian government to assess the safety of buildings in Port-au-Prince. Standing in front of one of the trailers, Miyamoto looked doubtful when asked whether, in his professional view, these structures were, as the Clinton Foundation has repeatedly claimed, “hurricane-proof.” In the world of engineering, buildings are rarely considered to be truly hurricane-proof, explained Miyamoto, who said he had never heard of a wooden trailer being used as a hurricane shelter, let alone being referred to as a hurricane-proof building. “To be hurricane-proof you need a heavier structure with concrete or blocks,” he explained.

Miyamoto emphasized that one of the most crucial elements for the public safety was how well the shelters’ limitations were explained to the community expected to use them. “Hopefully people do understand that these windows do need to be protected if a major hurricane is expected to be coming,” he said. Miyamoto said the likelihood is “really high” that the windows will break without storm shutters, and “once those window systems break,” he explained, making a toppling motion with his arms, “you cannot just be in there.” The roof will “pop off.”

When asked if the shelters had come with any storm shutters, Andre Hercule, director of Saint Thérèse de Darbonne elementary school, which has also received Clinton trailers, shook his head, then grabbed the nearest open trailer window and effortlessly slid it shut. Clicking it locked, he explained, “We’d close all the windows.” The school director remains confident after hearing Clinton speak at a news conference in August 2010 at his school that the trailers are hurricane-proof.

Léogâne’s Department of Civil Protection may also be operating on this assumption. At the Léogâne town hall, a derelict white paint-chipped building that looks stately in contrast to the seventeen-month-old tent camp nearby, DCP coordinator Philippe Joseph explained the municipality’s plans for community outreach in the event of a hurricane. “We’ll send scouts with megaphones and tell people to gather their papers and go to the Clinton Foundation shelters,” he said as he sketched a rough map, indicating the best routes to the dual-purpose school buildings from the geographic zones most vulnerable to storms.

Asked if he believed the trailers would offer adequate protection during a hurricane, Joseph seemed taken aback: Clinton had himself said that these were hurricane-proof shelters, he said.

In a jungly field on the outskirts of Léogâne, four of the twenty Clinton classrooms sit empty at another school, Coeur de Jesus. Because of the trailers’ leaky roofs, puddles form on the floor that need to be mopped up by the maintenance staff. As school director Antoine Beauvais explained, the new sixteen-by-forty-foot trailers were too bulky to fit in the cramped residential area where his school was previously located. But for lack of toilet facilities or running water provided by the foundation for the newly created remote campus, the school has been unable to use its new trailer classrooms.

When *The Nation* visited the site with Miyamoto, at least one strap on a trailer slated to be used as a hurricane shelter in the coming months was already loose. As Miyamoto moved the slack metal ribbon that is meant to ensure the trailer stays stable during a storm, the structural engineer remarked that these kinds of anchoring systems are liable to corrode. “You definitely want to look at it at least once a year,” he said grimly.

It’s unclear whether such maintenance will occur. Clayton Homes recently visited some of the schools after the International Organization for Migration, which works with the UN, raised concerns about the condition of the shelters. However, Conille said he did not know anything about plans the Clinton Foundation had made for the maintenance of the “hurricane shelters” in the longer term. The Haitian contractor who was initially hired to help install the shelters, Philippe Cinéas of AC Construction, said that neither he nor his staff were trained to service them. This raised concerns for Cinéas because, as he knew from experience, “in Haiti maintenance is always a problem.”

While Clinton Foundation COO Laura Graham claims that the foundation has always been “very accessible” to the school and municipal officials in Léogâne, neither the school directors nor the civil protection coordinator had any way of getting in touch with the foundation, they told *The Nation*, and had to

resort to going through intermediaries.

Joseph, the DCP chief for Léogâne, faults the trailer project for being decided from afar and “from the top down,” like so much of Haiti relief. While the Clinton Foundation claims that it worked with local government to implement the shelter plan, Joseph disputes this. The foundation simply informed him that it was building four schools in his district, he says. “To me this is not a consultation,” the local official remarked. “To consult people you have to ask them what they need and how they think it could best be implemented.”

Joseph ascribes the new shelters’ “infernal” heat, humidity and other problems to this lack of on-the-ground consultation. He added, with regret, that people in desperate need of employment and shelters watched as “the Clinton Foundation came in with all its specialists and equipment, but they didn’t give any training.” He said that “if they use a local firm they will not only create jobs in a community that has been decapitalized by the quake but they will also take into account the environmental reality on the ground.”

In the proposal approved by the IHRC, the Clinton Foundation

‘We all knew the project was misconceived from the start, a classic example of aid designed from a distance.’ —Imogen Wall

said that “up to 300 local workers would be employed to build the schools.” Cinéas said there were only five to eight people hired by his firm on a very temporary basis, and the foundation declined to comment on what additional jobs were created.

Farmer, the Clinton envoy, recently published a report on trends in Haiti’s dysfunctional aid system. He stressed the need for “accompaniment” to be the guiding principle of Haiti’s reconstruction, with Haitians “in the driver’s seat” and the international community listening to their priorities. Farmer also emphasized the importance of local procurement and job creation.

It is hard to imagine a better case study of the very opposite approach than the Clinton trailers. In response to questions about what due diligence the foundation did to ensure the safety of the trailers it purchased for use as hurricane shelters, the Clinton Foundation initially insisted that the most appropriate person to speak to was a Haitian employee of Clinton’s UN Office. When Graham, the foundation’s COO, finally agreed to talk about the project on the record, she denied that the foundation had been responsible for any due diligence regarding its own project, claiming that those responsible were a “panel of experts,” including one point person from the foundation, Greg Milne, and representatives of other organizations. (Milne referred all questions to the foundation’s press office.) The Clinton Foundation agreed to furnish documentation of who was on this panel but by press time had not done so.

Graham said that the staff of the Clinton Foundation—which has for more than a year publicized the “hurricane shelters” that “President Clinton” built in Léogâne—are “not experts” in hurricane shelter construction. She claimed the same “panel of experts”

would have been responsible for due diligence to ensure air quality of the shelters whose secondary purpose was as classrooms.

Explaining Bill Clinton's rationale for the trailers, which were installed at the tail end of the 2010 hurricane season, Conille said, "It was not meant to be sustainable. It was meant because we didn't want to have dead people in September." According to Conille, Clinton was deeply troubled by what would happen to the women and children in case of a serious storm—and as the former president felt that "no one" was doing anything about the issue, he took the lead himself. Moreover, Clinton didn't want to have his new "hurricane shelters" sitting empty while schoolchildren had classes in tents, Conille added.

Yet according to Maddalena, given the high rate of formaldehyde found in one of the classrooms, and the children's headaches, "they'd be better off studying outside under a tarp."

Wall, the former OCHA spokeswoman, responded by e-mail, "We all knew that that project was misconceived from the start, a classic example of aid designed from a distance with no under-

standing of ground level realities or needs. It has had a predictably long and unhappy history from the start."

Even Conille largely concurred, in a telephone interview, that there were many problems with the project, saying, "It made sense at that time, and I guess someone could argue it wasn't the best idea in retrospect."

For his part, Léogâne Mayor Santos Alexis says he is still waiting for Bill Clinton to follow through on his pledge to equip Léogâne with hurricane-proof school buildings. Asked about his view on the Clinton Foundation's claims to having completed an "Emergency Hurricane Shelter Project" replete with new classrooms for his town, Alexis is defiant. "If those at the Clinton Foundation are sure it's done then they should prove it, they should show it to us, because I know nothing about it," he remarked coyly, gazing out from behind his shades. Seated at his desk in a crumbling municipal building, the mayor said he is still waiting for the real Clinton Foundation schools, "built with norms that protect people from hurricanes and flooding." ■

Exchange

(continued from page 2)

because of a president's daddy complex.

Yet the left is ultimately a product of, or at least the protector of, science culture. From its beginning it has largely existed in opposition to religion (Galileo). And it will ultimately embrace neuroscience's new findings in the face of the attempts of the psychoanalytic professionals to reach beyond their licensed expertise in family relationships to explain politics, which is instead based on power processes and product.

Science will never quite find truth, but it will sideline many falsehoods. It's just that neuroscientists, with their heads in the data, might not pay us politicians, left or right, much mind.

ROBERT MUELLER

BALTIMORE

I greatly appreciated the review of Brooks's book. It is so seldom that a word like "blatherskite" rises spontaneously to mind.

KATHARINE W. RYLAARSDAM

Greenberg Replies

SCOTLAND, CONN.

Science is one thing, scientism something else entirely. The one is a method, a way to inquire into the workings of the world; the other is an ontology, an understanding of the nature of being. To note that oxytocin is secreted when mothers nurse their infants or that certain neurons are activated when people watch others doing familiar tasks—that's science. To claim that

these observations mean that empathy is in our nature and that we have located its secret springs, and then to conclude that this means we should run our world in a particular way—that's scientism.

Scientism hinges on the notion that complex living systems can be understood entirely in terms of their constituent parts and that the knowledge thus gained is beyond ideology or metaphysics, produced by experts who possess some bedrock, indisputable understanding of who we are and what we should aspire toward. It turns fMRI snapshots of the blood rocketing around in our brains into depictions of the essence of the human. In another domain, this kind of literal reading is known as fundamentalism.

To point this out is not to say that the science itself is incorrect or poorly reported. (I perhaps should have mentioned in my essay that Brooks is a faithful science writer who cherry-picks no more than any other, including me.) Nor is it necessarily to deny that the findings Brooks reports and the human nature they depict signal the end of the human-centered worldview that arose with the Enlightenment and its replacement by a molecule-centered view. It may well be that the fMRI and other scanning technologies are for us what Galileo's telescope was for seventeenth-century Copernicans: the instrument that confirms the theory that the human mind (as opposed to the brain) is not really the center of human life.

But the jury is still out on that question, and before we reach a verdict, it's worth remembering that we and the heavens differ in

at least one way. The stars and their movements don't seem to change as a result of our observations of them. We do. A mere 500 years ago, we hadn't yet invented ourselves as the kind of people who think our job on earth is to figure out who we are and what our world consists of and how we ought to live. We didn't yet value freedom and equality and justice. If we let science turn us into the people of the molecule, it will not necessarily be because it finally discovered our true nature in our neurotransmitters. It may instead be because ambitious scientists and their scribes furnished us a story that suits our current purposes—or the purposes of those who stand to gain the most from turning us into the expert consumers Brooks envisions.

Freud got many, perhaps most, things wrong. But he captured a moment in our history, the moment when it made sense to think that everything—our bodily aches and pains, our dreams and mistakes, the banalities of everyday existence—meant something, that our lives were a mystery that we were compelled, but unable, to solve; that we were, inexplicably and yet undeniably, more than the sum of our parts; and that therein lay both our folly and our dignity. Brooks may also have captured a moment—the moment when it made sense to abandon tragic humanism for something altogether more agreeable. I think we live on the cusp of that revolution, and those of us who resist that change may only have as comfort our mortality, and its promise that we may not survive to see blatherskite turned into the gospel truth.

GARY GREENBERG

Books & the Arts.



The Girl From F&B

by SIDDHARTHA DEB

Esther once worked as a waitress at Hotel Shangri-La, serving breakfast, high tea and happy hour drinks at the Horizon Club on the nineteenth floor. Some of her guests were businessmen passing through Delhi, while others maintained small but expensive office suites along the corridors twisting away from the club lounge. In the evening, these men sat in the lounge sipping Black Label Scotch with lots of ice, appreciative of the quiet, smiling demeanor with which Esther brought them their food and drinks, leaving them to talk to one another or on their BlackBerrys while outside the sheer glass windows the sun went down softly over the Parliament building and the palatial bungalows of industrialists and politicians. One of the men who sat in the club lounge was an arms dealer. I met him before I met Esther, although the reason I went to see the arms dealer was because I was looking for Esther.

All through the past few years in India,

sometimes in Delhi and sometimes in other cities, I had noticed the women who worked as waitresses in cafes and restaurants and as sales assistants in retail stores. They were usually in their 20s, soft-spoken and fluent in English. In the shape of their eyes, their cheekbones and their light skin, I could read their origins in northeastern India. They were polite but slightly reticent until I spoke to them and told them that I too had grown up in the northeast. Then they seemed to open up, and often there were extra touches of attention as they served me. I flattered myself that they liked me. After all, I knew where they were from, I was generous with my tips and I thought I understood something of their loneliness in the loneliness I had felt when I began to leave my small-town origins behind and started my drift through cities. But in most ways, I wasn't like them. I had grown up in Shillong, the most cosmopolitan of urban centers in the northeast, while the women were from Nagaland or Manipur, the first generation from these states to abandon their poor, violence-ridden homes for the globalized metropolises of the mainland. Their journey was longer and harder than mine had ever been, and although there were tens of thousands of them in Delhi alone, they

were in some sense utterly isolated, always visible in the malls and restaurants but always opaque to their wealthy customers.

Samrat, whom I had met in Bangalore, and who had moved back to Delhi, knew I was looking to interview one of these women. He took me to meet the arms dealer because he thought the man might be able to introduce me to a waitress who worked at the hotel. The arms dealer, who did not like being called an arms dealer and referred to himself as a "security specialist," was also from the northeast. He had grown up in a small town in Assam called Haflong, a picturesque stop on the train I used to take during my college days and where local tribal men often sat on the platform selling deer meat on banana leaves. But Haflong had also been riven by poverty, ethnic violence and insurgency, shut down from time to time by landslides, an ambush by insurgents or a retaliatory rampage by paramilitary forces.

The arms dealer had risen far from such origins, and although he was making a business of the violence that was endemic to his hometown, his role in it reduced violence to an abstraction. He was bald and suave, wearing a black suit and carrying a BlackBerry. Because of our common background, he came

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across as welcoming and gregarious the day I met him, slipping into Sylheti, the Bengali dialect that we shared, while at the same time emphasizing the rarefied atmosphere in which he now moved. He traveled around the world, he said, including the frequent trips he made to his company's headquarters in Virginia. When he visited New York, he stayed at the Four Seasons Hotel. "Not bad, right?" he said. "Is that an OK hotel?"

We were sitting in the Horizon Club, easing ourselves into the atmosphere of soft armchairs, quiet conversation, tinkling glasses and attentive waitresses. The Shangri-La had once been a government-run hotel called Qutab, which had been sold off as part of India's ongoing "divestment" process. It had been rebranded since then, and through its windows Delhi looked nothing like the place I knew. It appeared instead as a vaguely futuristic city, a settlement on a distant planet where human ingenuity had created a lush green canopy of trees, broken up occasionally by the monolith of a government building or the tower of a luxury hotel. I almost expected, when looking up, to see a faintly visible glass dome that kept the oxygen in, as if the city I was looking at was artificial, its comfort and organization disguising the fact that it was at war with a harsh alien environment.

An Indian man with an American accent came over to say hello to the arms dealer. When he left, the arms dealer turned to me and said, "That was Boeing."

"Boeing?"

"All the way from headquarters at Seattle."

"To sell commercial aircraft?" I said, somewhat confused.

"No, no, defense stuff. Boeing does lots of defense. Missiles, drones."

He gave me a list of all the arms companies that were in Delhi: General Dynamics, Boeing, Northrop Grumman. Some had offices in Hotel Shangri-La, while others had suites at Le Méridien, another luxury hotel nearby—all of them wanted physical proximity to the politicians, bureaucrats, businessmen and defense officials with whom they carried out their expensive trade.

The arms dealer took me to see his office. It was a small but luxurious space, with a sitting area that showed us the same futuristic view of Delhi—all trees, neon lights and granite buildings.

"I'm thinking of writing a book," the arms dealer said. "Wouldn't it be nice to sit here, with this view, and write a book?" "Yes," I said, looking at his desk and at the files arranged neatly around the computer and fax machine.

I wondered if there was a stray document lying around that I could steal. I had no idea what I would do with such a document, but it felt like that was what the script demanded.

"If I can't write a book here, with this view and all this nice stuff, then I wouldn't be able to write a book anywhere," the arms dealer said. I was examining a low shelf in front of his desk. There were small models resting on it, looking like toys and making me think momentarily of my son. But these weren't toys. They were scaled-down versions of the products the arms dealer sold. There was an armored personnel carrier and a battle tank, both of them sand-colored, as if to suggest that their theater of operation would be a desert. There was a strange-looking ship too, and Samrat asked the dealer, "What's that?"

"A littoral combat ship," the dealer said, dragging out the t's. He led Samrat and me back to the lounge, pressing us to stay for dinner. When we declined because we had another engagement, he was insistent that we meet again. Then he remembered the reason I had come. He called over a tall Sikh who was in charge of the club lounge.

"What was the name of that girl who used to work here? The one from Manipur?"

"The girl from F&B?" the Sikh said. "Esther."

"Can you get me her cell number?"

The Sikh came back with the number written on a piece of hotel stationery. The arms dealer called, chatted for a while and then handed me the phone. If Esther was surprised, she didn't show it, and we made plans to meet on Saturday afternoon at the "McD" on Janpath. I said goodbye to the arms dealer and wished him a good trip to Dhaka.

"Do you sell to Bangladesh as well?" I asked.

"I sell to everyone on the subcontinent," he said. "It's business."

The "McD" where Esther had wanted to meet me was near the corner of Tolstoy Marg and Janpath (or "People's Way"), directly across from rows of handicraft stores selling tie-dyed scarves and jewelry to unhappy-looking backpackers. It was walking distance from the magazine office at Connaught Place where I had worked in the late 1990s while living in Munirka, and I had often wandered along Janpath, looking at the handicraft stores and the tall office buildings.

The neighborhood had seemed to me then to be the climax of urban civilization, the center of a fantastically alienating and alluring big city, and it was oddly disappointing to see a McDonald's insert itself into the area. It was meant to emphasize how global Delhi

had become, but what it accomplished was a diminution of scale. The McDonald's was a reminder that Janpath was not Times Square. It was no longer even Janpath.

There was a doorman to salute and let me in, a man dressed like a soldier on parade with his peaked cap, sash and boots. The menu had no beef, and chicken had been squeezed in as a replacement in the form of the Chicken Maharaja Mac. The crowd was lively and vocal, gathered in large groups of family and friends, making the place quite unlike McDonald's outlets I had seen in America, with their often solitary diners. Numerous women in uniform, mostly from the northeast, circulated around the restaurant, taking away trays when customers were done eating.

Esther and her younger sister, Renu, were sitting next to each other at a table pushed against the wall, watching me with curiosity as I approached. Renu was slender, darker than Esther and dressed in a *salwar kameez* that made her seem more at ease among the Delhi clientele of McDonald's. She had just graduated from college and seemed full of energy, hurriedly finishing her Happy Meal so that she wouldn't be left out of the conversation.

Esther hadn't ordered any food. She sat pushing around a large Coke, the ice rattling in the cup. There were dark circles around her eyes: she had finished work at two in the morning and got home at 3:30. She was a couple of years older than Renu and stockily built, and her hair was cut short. She was dressed in a green top and jeans, cheap and functional clothes, and the only visible decorative touches were a pair of small earrings and the red nail polish painted onto thick, square fingertips.

As I sat across from Esther, it was difficult to imagine her at Shangri-La. She didn't seem sufficiently polished and demure, unlike the waitresses I had seen at the lounge. The women there had been soft-footed and soft-spoken, flaring momentarily into existence with a smile, putting down a saucer or taking away a cup before receding into the background. Unlike them, and unlike bubbly Renu, Esther exuded both tiredness and toughness. She was a worker, clenching her fist occasionally to make a point as she told me about her journey from the northeast to the imperial center of Delhi.

Esther had grown up in Imphal, the capital of the northeastern state of Manipur. Her father was a Tangkhul Naga from Ukhrul district, while her mother was from the Kom tribe in the Moirang area. To the people sitting in McDonald's, Esther probably looked no more than vaguely Mongoloid, perhaps a Nepali or—in the pejorative language commonly

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used in Delhi for all Mongoloid people—a “Chinky.” Yet the different backgrounds of her parents indicated a coming together of opposites, a meeting between a Naga from the northern mountains of Ukhrul and a Kom from the watery rice valley of Moirang that had produced the contrasting looks and personalities of the sisters in front of me.

Esther’s father was a minor government official, now retired, and her mother taught Hindi at a school. Her parents’ background, along with her mixed tribal heritage, meant that Esther had grown up in a way that was quite cosmopolitan, interacting with people from other communities. (Her best friend, she said, was from Bihar; as a student she had traveled with her friend to Patna, its capital.)

The land of F&B, where Esther lived most of the time, was a place of reversed polarities.

It also meant that in some ways Esther felt removed from her ethnic background. “I don’t know how to speak Tangkhul,” she said. “If I mingle with them, I feel different. They’re not bad people, Nagas. But I want to move ahead. I don’t want to look back. I want to see the world. If I was at home now, I’d be married and with two kids.”

In Imphal, Esther had received a relatively high level of education. She had studied biochemistry in college and then began working on a master’s degree in botany. She had wanted to be a doctor, she said, but she had settled instead for a one-year tourism course in Chandigarh, Punjab, in 2004. Her time in Chandigarh went by quickly, and she had seen little of the city by the time she finished her course and moved to Delhi. Her first job, in 2005, was doing ticketing for a travel agency in Malviya Nagar. She was living near Delhi University in an area called North Campus, and the office was in South Delhi, which meant that she had to take a series of buses across the city to get to work. The men in the buses were aggressive and uncouth, and she often lost her way. But soon she found a better job at the front desk of the five-star Taj Palace Hotel, and her salary increased to 6,500 rupees (\$146) a month from the 4,000 (\$90) she had made as a travel agent.

The Taj Palace Hotel was a very different work environment from the travel agency. In its plush surroundings Esther found herself serving wealthy Indians and foreigners,

who were luxury brands of a kind too, and it was while working among them that Esther began to feel that there were better jobs at such places than serving on the front desk. “I had a friend who worked on a cruise ship. She made so much money, yeah. Every time she came back, she had one lakh [100,000] rupees in her pocket,” Esther said, her tone more of wonder than envy.

The friend worked in F&B, Esther said, by which she meant “food and beverages.” She always used the phrase in its abbreviated form, and she used it often, so that it ran through our many conversations like a potent code, generating positive or negative meanings depending on how Esther was feeling that day about herself, her work and her life.

At that first meeting, Esther was cautious. She was opening up her life to a stranger, and she was understandably anxious to portray that life as a success. She therefore depicted F&B in a particularly optimistic light, emphasizing how much it

had given her and how it had allowed her to move away from the narrow life—married with two kids—that she would have had if she had stayed in Imphal. Esther’s cruise ship friend convinced her that she should move from the front-desk position to one in F&B. The work was harder, but the money was better, largely because of tips. “I wanted F&B so badly,” Esther said. Although there were no openings for her at Taj Palace, a manager there helped her get an interview at Hotel Shangri-La. She began working at Shangri-La in 2006 and remained there for more than two years, earning a salary of 8,000 rupees (\$180) before tips.

At first, she was stationed at the Thai-Chinese restaurant on the first floor. Then she was moved upstairs to the Horizon Club. “The food and drinks are complimentary for club members,” she said, “and there’s a fixed budget from the hotel for the costs run up in the club. We’re supposed to manage within that.”

On February 13, 2009, Esther said with sudden specificity, she left Shangri-La to work in Zest, a new restaurant located in a mall in South Delhi. The salary, with tips, was significantly more than what she had been making at Shangri-La, although money was not the only reason she changed jobs. The hours were far longer at the new place, starting at noon and finishing at two in the morning, and she worked six days a week. “But it’s OK,” Esther said. “In F&B, every day you learn something new.”

A sudden burst of “Happy Birthday” from an adjoining table drowned out Esther’s talk. I looked at the busy tables around us. No one was paying us any attention, although I wondered what they would see if they looked at the two young women sitting across the table from me, an older man. We had been talking for a couple of hours, and Esther and Renu had to leave. Although it was Esther’s day off, she had to go to Shangri-La to pick up some papers from the human resources department. We made plans to meet again, and I offered to give the sisters a lift to Shangri-La. The driver of the car I had hired that day, a young man from Rajasthan, was parked across the street, and he reached around to open the door for me when he saw me coming. I registered the sudden shock on his face when he saw the women accompanying me and realized that they were coming too. He went numb as I let Esther and Renu into the back of the car and came around to sit next to him. He hadn’t said a word, but I knew what he was thinking. He had assumed that the women were prostitutes and that I was going home with them. When we stopped at Shangri-La to drop off Esther and Renu, his expression changed. But I could see, as we drove home-ward, that he was puzzled by what I had been doing with them in the first place.

The land of F&B, where Esther lived much of the time, was a place of reversed polarities. I began to understand this as Esther and I met over the course of the next few months. Since she worked six days a week, we had to squeeze our meetings into her workdays, mostly at three in the afternoon, when there was a lull in the rhythm of the restaurant. Esther usually sent me a text message to let me know that she could meet. The messages arrived at three or four in the morning, when she had just clocked off for the day and was in a van heading home to North Campus, trying to stay ahead of the early summer dawn. I got used to my phone vibrating under my pillow, displaying messages that were oddly cheerful and bouncy for that time of the night but that seemed to reveal only one facet of Esther’s personality. I was living with a friend in Vasant Kunj, not far from where Esther worked. I would meet her at the mall in an auto-rickshaw or taxi, and we would drive to an older, smaller shopping complex in Vasant Vihar fifteen minutes away, where we would sit at a cafe and talk.

The first time I arranged to pick her up, Esther asked me to wait for her at a nearby bus stop rather than at the mall, and I wondered

if she felt self-conscious about being met by a man or if the bus stop was part of a familiar routine. After the initial occasions, however, she seemed to mind less if I went right down to the mall. When I got there, I always found it hard to spot her. She tended to hug the wall, staying away from other people, looking small against the vast facade of the mall, with its granite, glass and luxury-brand logos. The heat was fierce, about 110 degrees at the peak of summer, and Esther seemed utterly isolated from the swirl of activity at the mall entrance: uniformed guards shoving their metal detectors under vehicles being taken to the underground parking garage; attendants rushing to take over those cars whose owners wanted valet parking; shoppers in sunglasses making the transition from air-conditioned cars to air-conditioned mall in a burst of perfume and jewelry.

When we arrived at the Barista cafe—an expensive, Starbucks-like franchise—in Vasant Vihar, Esther stood out among the carefully made-up women meeting their dates or friends. Even though she was the same age as these women, who were mostly in their 20s, she looked older, more worn down. She also didn't know what to order the first time we went to the Barista. When the waitress came to our table, Esther looked self-conscious and said she wanted a Coke. The waitress eyed her with surprise, puzzled that Esther didn't know that you couldn't get a Coke at a Barista.

But it made sense, in a way. The view from F&B was about serving, not about being served. It was about what one was able to offer the customer sitting at the table, across that almost invisible but impregnable barrier of class. At the Barista, Esther happened to be on the wrong side of the table. She would know everything on the menu, down to the minute details, if we had been at Zest or Shangri-La. She would be able to advise customers on what mix of drinks, appetizers and entrees to order. But she hadn't waited tables at a Barista, and so the menu there became an unfamiliar, alien document, something she hadn't studied sufficiently.

Esther finally chose an iced drink, frowning at the menu with its abundance of superlatives. Then she asked the waitress, a slender 19-year-old, "Where are you from?"

"Manipur," the girl replied.

"I'm from Manipur too. Where's your home?"

"Churachandpur," the waitress said, easing up a little in her posture.

The three of us chatted for a while about

Raisin

I dragged my twelve-year-old cousin to see the Broadway production of *A Raisin in the Sun* because the hip-hop mogul and rapping bachelor, Diddy, played the starring role. An aspiring rapper gave my cousin his last name and the occasional child support so I thought the boy would geek to see a pop hero in the flesh as Walter Lee. My wife was newly pregnant, and I was rehearsing, like Diddy swapping fictions, surrendering his manicured thug persona, for a more domestic performance. My cousin mostly yawned throughout the play. Except the moment Walter Lee's tween son stiffened on stage, as if rapt by the sound of a roulette ball. Scene: *no one breathes as Walter Lee vacillates, uncertain of obsequy or rage after Lindner offers to buy the family out of the house they've purchased in the all-white suburb. Walter might kneel to accept, but he senses the tension in his son's gaze.* I was thinking, for real though, what would Diddy do? "Get rich or die trying," 50 Cent tells us. But then my father sang the country lyrics, "Don't get above your raisin'," when as a kid I vowed to be a bigger man than him. That oppressive fruit dropped big as a medicine ball in my lap meant to check my ego, and I imagined generations wimpling in succession like the conga marching raisins that sang Marvin's hit song. Silly, I know. Outside the theater, my cousin told me when Diddy was two, they found his hustler dad draping a steering wheel in Central Park, a bullet in his head. I shared what I knew of dreams deferred and Marvin Gaye. (When asked if he loved his son, Marvin Sr. answered, "Let's just say I didn't *dislike* him.") Beneath the bling of many billion diodes I walked beside the boy through Times Square as if anticipating a magic curtain that would rise, where only one of us would get to take a bow.

GREGORY PARDLO

Churachandpur and Imphal, the Barista waitress telling us that this was her first job and that she had been in Delhi for just four months.

“How much are you making?” Esther asked.

“Four thousand,” the girl said.

“That’s not bad,” Esther said.

“She looks barely 16,” I said when she had left.

“Oh, she’s not so young,” Esther said.

Esther was intimidated by the Barista despite the fact that she worked in one of the most expensive restaurants in Delhi. Zest had been described to me by Manish, a cigar dealer I had visited recently, as “the most happening place” in the city. Manish was less enthusiastic about the Emporio mall, where Zest was located. “It’s a bit imitative. Dubai

Esther’s part in India’s wealth is tiny, like the role of a serving maid at a great imperial palace.

in Delhi, you know?” he said.

At the beginning of our interaction, Esther had appeared quite dazzled by the glamour of working F&B at Zest. It was a “forty-four crore” restaurant serving “seven cuisines,” she told me, with twenty expert chefs, a “mixologist” from Australia, four private dining rooms and an 1,800-bottle wine cellar. The bricks had been imported from China, the marble from Italy and even the music in the restaurant was sent over the Internet by a company based in Britain. “It’s so beautiful,” Esther said.

There were 408 “girls” who worked at the restaurant, all of them reporting for work at noon and most of them finishing their shifts at two in the morning. Only the hostesses got to leave slightly earlier.

The restaurant was split into seven divisions, one for each cuisine; each division had a staff of seventy and a hierarchy that started with the manager, continued through assistant manager, hostess, various levels of waitresses who were called “station assistants” and finally “runners” at the bottom. There was a similar hierarchy among the kitchen staff, and one’s position determined how many “points” one had, with more points translating into a greater share of the tips. In the past fifteen days, Esther said, her division had received 75,000 rupees (\$1,690) in tips, of which she might receive around 500 (\$11).

Esther was in the middle of the hierarchy.

She was a station holder, one of nine in her division. “The others are all guys,” she said, “so I have to challenge them all the time.” Her job was to explain the menu, take orders and serve the food, which brought her into close contact with her customers. “They come in with bags and bags of stuff,” she said, “with Louis Vuitton, Cartier, all these names written on them. Sometimes, a customer drops a receipt on the floor and when I pick it up to give it back to her, I’ll see that the amount of money she has spent runs to tens of lakhs.”

Despite its long hours and stream of wealthy clientele, the restaurant was still waiting for its liquor license from the government. That hadn’t stopped it from functioning unofficially as a restaurant for Delhi’s rich patrons, many of whom knew the owners. Zest was part of the holdings of DLF, India’s largest real estate company, which owned the Emporio mall as well as the restaurant. DLF is “primarily engaged,” as a

Bloomberg Businessweek profile of the company put it, “in the business of colonization and real estate development.” Like other large Indian companies, and despite being publicly traded, it is more or less a family business. In 2008 the executive chairman, K.P. Singh, was rated by *Forbes* as the eighth-richest person in the world and perhaps the richest real estate businessman in the world. But the global downturn had come to India since then. Singh has fallen to No. 130 on the list of the world’s billionaires in 2011, but he remains one of the richest people in India.

Esther’s part in such wealth was tiny, something like the role of a serving maid at a great imperial palace, one of history’s unrecorded, unremembered millions, a barbarian in Rome. Yet Delhi as an imperial capital was also a postmodern, millennial city, where Esther traversed different layers of history every day on her way to work.

She left home at ten in the morning, taking a 10-rupee ride on a cycle rickshaw from her flat to the metro station of North Campus. This area is dominated by Delhi University but contained within the walls of the old city that had for more than two centuries been the Mughal capital of the Indian subcontinent. From North Campus, Esther took the metro, built in the past few years, to Central Secretariat, not far from Shangri-La and sitting at the heart of Lutyens’ Delhi, so called after

the Edwardian architect who planned the neighborhood as a center for the British Raj in the first decades of the twentieth century. After independence, this stretch of Delhi, with its juxtaposition of ministerial buildings, luxury hotels and private mansions, became the heart of the Indian government, although a corporate presence has been added to the neighborhood in recent years. From Central Secretariat, Esther traveled on a bus that took her south into a wealthy, postindependence part of the city that was expanding into the suburbs of Gurgaon. Her journey across these layers of history involved two hours of traveling, 30 rupees in fares and three modes of transportation.

Nothing of this long journey and transition through the different worlds of Delhi would be evident once Esther stepped into the locker room of the restaurant. There, she changed into her uniform and put on her makeup of kajal eyeliner, eye shadow and blusher—items the restaurant required its female staff to have but that each employee had to provide for herself. Finally, she would arrange her hair in the mandatory zigzag pattern that represented the letter Z for Zest. At 1:30 she would have lunch along with the other staff. It was usually Indian food, but if the chefs were feeling good, they would throw in a special dish. Because evening happened to be the busiest time in the restaurant, there was never any opportunity for dinner. Nor was there much chance of a break. When Esther was really tired and could steal some time from being on the restaurant floor, she sat and dozed on a chair in the locker room. “I could lie down on the floor and go to sleep right there, but they’ll come and wake you up even if you’re dead,” she said.

Esther’s long working hours left her little time for reflection. Yet whenever we met, she liked to talk about who she had become, and was still becoming, in the course of her long journey from Imphal to Delhi. In this vast city, she found herself among a wide range of strangers, and her experience of these people through F&B had given her a body of knowledge that was a blend of prejudice and wisdom, sometimes perceptive and sometimes contradictory.

I asked her if there were women from other parts of India among her colleagues.

“There are, but you know, I think, those of us who are from the northeast, we’re stronger. I can fight, like that day when I had a quarrel with the manager. The women who are not from the northeast, they won’t challenge authority. But also, they won’t mingle with other people, the way we can. We girls from the northeast are independent, strong.”

"And what about the men?"

"The guys are high-profile people," she said, laughing. "*Chota kam nabi karrega*. They won't do small work. But me, what to do? I was not born with a kilo of gold. I have a cousin brother in Imphal. He's a 365 drunkard. You understand? He's drunk every day. When I go home, he asks me for money. What to do? I give him money, but he doesn't know how much I sweat to earn the money. In Delhi, I have fifty-four cousin brothers and sisters. Most of the girls are working. The guys are all home ministers. They stay at home, do nothing. They're looking for a good job, the right job."

In Delhi, Esther often felt conscious of her difference from other Indians. "We have small eyes," she said. "They can tell we're from the northeast. Sometimes, the way they think about us, the way they talk about us, makes me not think of myself as Indian. I want them to accept me the way I am, not the way they want me to be."

She thought for a while and then told me of the event that led her to leave Shangri-La. "I worked hard there, and pushed myself to learn F&B. Then, on November 23, 2008, I was working the afternoon shift. At 10:30 PM, I finished work. The rule is for the hotel to drop you off if you're working late, so I took a hotel car, with a new driver. In North Delhi, a drunk man in a cream-colored Maruti Esteem jumped through a red light and rammed into our car. The hotel driver, he just ran away, leaving me there."

Esther was in the back seat, writhing in pain. She dragged herself out of the car and onto the road, but although there were people around, no one came to help her. Finally, a couple walking by stopped and approached her. They asked her where she was from. They were from Manipur too, and the woman was a nurse at a nearby hospital. They took Esther to the hospital, where she got twenty-three stitches in her head.

She still had a scar on her forehead. She lifted her hair so that I could see the bunched-up tissue on the right side of her forehead. She had lost three teeth. "The ones I have now, they're all duplicates," she said. "The people from the hotel came to see me, and the first thing they wanted to know was when I was coming back to work. I said, 'I can't even get up from bed by myself, and you want to know when I can work?'" She was in the hospital for a month, and the hotel, after some initial fuss, covered her medical costs. "They put me on painkillers, on a saline drip, and for one month I just lay in the bed. I got fat, and my weight went up from fifty kilos to sixty-five. That's how much I weigh now. My back

hurts if I stand for long, and of course, in this job you have to do that all the time. When I went back to work, I began to feel bad about being at Shangri-La, and that's when I started looking for another option."

Women did not have it easy in Delhi, whether they were local or from other parts of India. The recent globalization of the city had indeed created new opportunities for some women, especially those working as waitresses and sales assistants. The same globalization had also allowed the use of ultrasound technology to abort some 24,000 female fetuses every year, resulting in a skewed sex ratio of 814 to 1,000 in Delhi. It was into this contradictory realm that women from the northeast arrived in search of work, and the media were full of stories of them being assaulted, molested and killed, of mobs encircling the rooms they rented and beating women up while the police looked on. For its part, the Delhi police had issued a manual for people from the northeast living in the city, whose guidelines, as reported in the *Calcutta Telegraph*, included:

§ Bamboo shoot...and other smelly dishes should be prepared without creating ruckus in neighborhood.

§ Be Roman in "rooms"—revealing dresses should be avoided.

§ Avoid lonely road/bylane when dressed scantily.

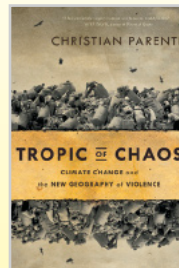
One afternoon I met Lansinglu Rongmei, a lawyer who had started the North East Support Centre in 2007 to help people facing violence and discrimination. We went to the same cafe where I usually talked with Esther, and the waitress from Churachandpur served us. Lansinglu was stocky and energetic, her lawyerly cautiousness alternating with a sense of regional pride that made her talk about the cases she took up of people who had been bullied or violated. She was from Dimapur, a small town in Nagaland, but had gone to high school and college in Calcutta. She had moved to Delhi to study law and now argued cases in front of the Supreme Court, but after fifteen years in the city she still didn't feel fully at home.

"Going from Nagaland to Calcutta wasn't so much of a culture shock," Lansinglu said. "I felt they didn't judge you as much. In Delhi they do. They size you down and they size you up. What kind of a gadget do you have? What kind of a dress are you wearing? What kind of a car do you have? When I was a law

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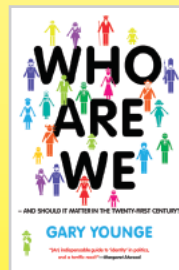
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student in Delhi University, I had friends from southern India and from Bihar. I felt that Biharis, whom they call ‘Haris,’ are sometimes targeted no less here than people from the northeast.”

I asked her what it was like to be a lawyer in such a place.

She thought about it and said, “The racism is very subtle sometimes, but it’s there. Still, the Supreme Court is a pretty cosmopolitan place. When I am presenting a case there or at the High Court, I can wear shirts and trousers, and they won’t judge me for it. But if I’m at a district court, I have to wear a sari or a *salwar kameez* or they’ll be prejudiced against me.”

Lansi’s confidence and legal profession allowed her to deal with the city in a way that

‘She was so beautiful, so fair, that she looked transparent, as if she were made of glass.’

wasn’t possible for many of the women who arrived here from the northeast. Lansi could voice her anger, as she had done in an article where she described eloquently how children from the northeast were grabbed from behind and asked, “Chinky, sexy, how much?” The article had made me want to meet her and find out more about the kind of cases she dealt with at the support center, but Lansi was less combative in person, more reflective and funny.

The support center had been set up, Lansi told me, with the help of local church leaders. Lansi was a practicing Christian, but she emphasized that the cases of harassment they came across were not limited to Christians, and neither was the assistance provided by the center. They had a help line that people could call at any time, but the help line was really the mobile numbers for Lansi and a colleague of hers. Lansi took out a few cards with the numbers on them, pausing briefly to pass one to the waitress from Churachandpur.

The waitress looked surprised but slipped the card into her apron, and Lansi began talking about the kind of cases she dealt with.

She told me about two women working for a Pizza Hut outlet who had not been paid their salary for three months and who, after repeated complaints, were informed that their pay would be released in installments; of a woman locked inside her apartment by her landlord; of another woman taking Hindi lessons from a man who insisted that she make him her boyfriend—a euphemism for wanting sex—in

order to improve her Hindi. The harassment moved easily along the bottom half of the class ladder, targeting semi-literate women who worked as maidservants as well as the more educated ones with jobs at restaurants.

It was possible to see a pattern in Lansi’s stories, of the clash between women from the northeast and local men, two disparate groups thrown together by the modernity of the new India. The sudden explosion of malls and restaurants had created jobs like the ones at Pizza Hut, where men and women worked together; it had drawn thousands of women from the northeast, prized for their English and their lighter skin; it had also stoked the confused desires of men from deeply patriarchal cultures. From the names of the Delhi neighborhoods Lansi mentioned—the areas where women had been harassed, assaulted and raped by landlords, colleagues and neighbors—it was possible to tell that they had been villages not too long ago and

had been haphazardly absorbed into the urban sprawl of Delhi. These were neighborhoods where the local women went around wearing veils while the men eyed the outsiders, lusting after them and yet resenting them, considering themselves to be from superior cultures while also feeling that they were less equipped to take advantage of the service economy of globalized cities like Delhi.

But just as not all men in such neighborhoods were violent toward women, there were also men who were seemingly more modern and more capable of benefiting from the new economy, and who still turned out to be predators. The case that bothered Lansi the most was that of a young Assamese woman who had worked at a food stand in Gurgaon with her boyfriend. The stand sold the Tibetan dumplings called “momos,” ubiquitous in all Indian cities these days. One of the customers at the momo stand, a middle-aged executive working for a multinational, offered the woman a job cleaning his apartment.

“The girl had come straight from a village,” Lansi said. “She was so naïve. And I think the boyfriend encouraged her to take the job. She went to clean the apartment, and the man locked her up and raped her. He kept her there for days, raping her while going to work every morning as usual.”

Eventually, the woman managed to escape and approached Lansi. Because this had happened in Gurgaon, Lansi had to fight the case at the High Court there, something that worried her. The Gurgaon High Court was not as cosmopolitan as the Delhi High

Court, Lansi felt. She thought it was more patriarchal, more prejudiced against women from other parts of the country. In the end, it didn’t matter because the woman refused to testify in court and the charges were dropped. Lansi assumed that something had gone wrong between the filing of the case and the trial. She thought the executive may have paid the woman’s boyfriend and used him to put pressure on the victim, but this was a guess, something Lansi had been unable to verify. When she went to talk to the woman again, she found the momo stand locked up. The couple had apparently left Gurgaon and gone back to Assam.

Esther’s experience of Delhi had been nothing like that of the people Lansi had talked about. She was smarter, tougher and perhaps more fortunate. Yet the initial sense of optimism she had conveyed to me, especially about F&B, gradually gave way to a more complex reality. If Esther had left home, she had done so as much out of a strong sense of independence as out of a need for employment. “I’m a graduate,” she told me the first time we met, clenching her fist to emphasize the point. “Why should I have to depend on my husband for money?”

But Esther’s independence in Delhi had turned out to be a strange thing, with others depending on her. “Most of my friends in Imphal didn’t graduate,” she said at the Barista cafe a few days after I talked to Lansi. “I did my degree and came here to work. But still, in spite of the money I make, I have to think twice before I do anything. I am not a hi-fi type, you know. I have a prepaid phone, on which I spend about 3,000 rupees a month on refills. That’s the only luxury. I don’t have money to buy new clothes or even just a pair of chappals.”

Although Esther’s salary at Zest was 13,000 rupees (\$293) a month, the money was not just for her. She paid a major share of the rent and household expenses for the apartment she shared with Renu, an older sister named Mary and their brother. Mary contributed too—she worked for a collection agency, where she called up people in the United States who had fallen behind on their car payments to threaten them with repossession of their vehicles—but she earned less than Esther. Renu didn’t work, and neither did their brother. I asked Esther if she resented her brother.

“How can I be angry with him?” she said. “He’s so good to me. He massages my neck, clips my nails, washes my hair. Sometimes, he’ll get aloe vera juice from Renu’s plant for me to put on my hands.”

Yet Esther couldn't help getting frustrated with her situation and how all her hard work hadn't resulted in a significant improvement in her life. She talked resentfully at times of her bosses—all men—and sometimes even of the women who worked with her. "There's this friend of mine who works at the restaurant, but she's also a call girl," Esther said. "I asked her why she does such a thing, and she said she needed money. But I need money too, yeah? I don't stoop to selling my body because of that. If you go to Munirka, you will see some of these girls from the northeast waiting around. They have the taste of money and do these things to get the money. It feels so shameful. I can't even look at them. I keep thinking that other people will consider me to be just like them."

Even though Esther had talked about how she resented the way people in Delhi were prejudiced against women from the northeast, she sometimes exhibited a similar attitude. "Sometimes, I wish I looked different," she said. "I wish I had bigger eyes. That I looked more Indian." She began to tell me that when she had worked at Shangri-La, she had seen the most beautiful woman in the world.

"Who was that?" I asked.

"Priyanka Gandhi," she replied dreamily, naming the heiress apparent of the Congress Party, a woman descended from a long line of prime ministers, part Indian and part Italian. Esther had been filling the water glasses at the table where Priyanka Gandhi was having lunch with her husband. "She was so beautiful," Esther said, "so fair that she looked transparent, as if she was made of glass. I watched her drinking water, and it felt like I could see the water going down her throat."

The restaurant Esther worked in was located on the top floor of the Emporio mall, a granite monstrosity that had been a work in progress for many years. It sat on the foothills of the Delhi ridge, a forested area that ran all the way from south to north Delhi. The construction of the mall had been temporarily held up by environmentalists taking the developers to court, but theirs was a losing cause in the new India. The completed mall boasted the "largest luxury collection" in Asia, with four floors of designer stores topped off by the experience of dining at Zest.

Although I had often stopped by the mall to pick up Esther, I had never been inside until I decided to take a closer look one afternoon. I wandered around for a while, increasingly puzzled by what I saw. The people around me were middle-class, no

doubt fairly well-off, but they didn't look like the luxury-brand clientele Esther had spoken of, purchasing items worth lakhs. The shops too were run-of-the mill franchises. Finally, when I asked one of the attendants where Zest was, I discovered my mistake.

I was in the wrong mall. Although it looked like one vast complex from the outside, there were actually two malls next to each other, both owned by DLF. I was standing in the more down-market one. If I went outside and made my way along the winding walkway to the next building, I would reach Emporio.

The luxury mall was like a five-star hotel, with a fountain, brass railings and marble floors. The impression of a hotel was emphasized further by the open lounge on the ground floor, where people sat on couches eating pastries and drinking tea. I went up and down the mall, sometimes using the stairs and sometimes the elevator, wondering what it was like for Esther to work here. The luxury stores seemed quite empty. I decided to go into one, a Paul Smith store, but I lost my nerve at the last moment and veered away from the door. Instead, I continued on my circuit of the corridor winding around the atrium, puzzled that I had been unable to go inside the shop. Below me, in the lobby, I saw a woman stride out to the middle of the marble floor, pirouetting on high heels and sticking out her hips. She was tall and slender, and as I looked more closely I could see the group of people she was posing for. It was some kind of a fashion shoot.

I was still wondering why I had been unable to enter the Paul Smith store. I didn't normally go to designer stores, but when I had ventured into some of them in New York out of curiosity, I hadn't felt such unease. Somehow, I was more exposed and vulnerable in Delhi. This wasn't because it would be apparent to everyone in the shop that I couldn't afford to buy anything—that would be pretty obvious in Manhattan too—but in Delhi it mattered to me that people would know, as if the very objects would sneer at me for daring to enter their space. In the West, with its long excess of capitalism, it might be possible to scoff at luxury brands. They had been around so long that they had lost some of their meaning. But in India, luxury brands still possess power.

I went up to take a look at Zest. Earlier, I had thought of going in and having a drink. But now I felt uncertain, remembering what Esther had said about how it wasn't officially open. And who knew how much a drink there might cost? Instead, I loitered near the entrance, staring into the dark interior of the restaurant while trying not to be too

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obvious. I could see the bar, generic with its dim lighting and polished wood. The dining areas were much further back, and I couldn't see anything of the places where the seven cuisines were served. It was still early in the evening, and despite the music playing softly (piped over the Internet from Britain) and the waitresses walking around looking fresh in their crisp uniforms, there seemed to be few customers. It was like a stage set before the opening of the play, holding no meaning for the audience. It was alive at the moment only for Esther and her colleagues.

I went back down the stairs. When I reached the lobby on the ground floor, I passed the woman I had taken to be a model. Now I understood that I had been mistaken. She had been trying on a pair of shoes, using the vast expanse of the lobby to check out how they looked and felt on her feet. The people I had taken to be a photographer and makeup artist were just her friends.

One afternoon Esther took me to meet a friend of hers in Munirka, someone with whom she occasionally stayed over. I had been curious about how the neighborhood had changed in the years since I last lived there. There had been plenty of people from the northeast when I was a resident of Munirka, but few of them were single women. It had been an unsafe area for women, with sexual assaults not uncommon in the deserted stretches of land between the crowded village and the university campus.

As Esther and I approached Munirka, there was much about the neighborhood that seemed immediately familiar, from the unkept park on our right to the garbage dump that sat at the beginning of a row of concrete buildings. Some of the buildings had become larger, with decorative flourishes like fluted metal bars on the balconies, but they still stood cheek by jowl, separated by little alleyways. People could still jump from one balcony to another if they wanted to.

I slowed down when we came to the building where I had lived. It was unchanged, the passageway in front of it deserted at that time in the afternoon. I felt no sense of triumph that I had seemingly moved up since I lived inside that one-room flat, its back door opening to a sheer drop. The neighborhood became more crowded as we went further in. There were little groups of local Jat men and those from the northeast, keeping their distance from one another. The men from the northeast worked night shifts at call centers, while the local men were either unemployed or running small businesses that did not require their presence at that hour. The street

running past the buildings was still a dirt track, but the buffaloes that had wallowed there had vanished, giving way to cars and motorcycles. The young Jats who stood around looked like prosperous street toughs, wearing branded jeans and sneakers, occasionally sending a glance sliding up the body of a young woman emerging from a building.

Esther's friend Moi lived a couple of buildings down from my former residence, on the third floor. We climbed the narrow stairwell of the building, passing flats whose doors had been left open because of the heat. Moi's single-room flat was almost exactly like mine, from the size of the room to her belongings. There was a cheap mattress on the floor, probably bought from Rama Market; a portable red gas cylinder with a burner attached to it, something easier to get than the regular gas cylinders, which required an immense amount of paperwork; and an odd mishmash of crockery, cooking utensils and clothes.

Moi was from Churachandpur, slim and stylish in jeans and a T-shirt. She shared the flat with two of her siblings—a brother who worked at a laundry and a sister who was a waitress at a cafe in IIT Delhi. We sat on the floor and chatted about how Moi had come to Delhi. She had moved around a lot, working in Arunachal Pradesh as a teacher and a warden at a school, in Calcutta for a Christian charity and in Chennai for another charity doing relief work for people affected by the 2004 tsunami. She had moved to Delhi the year after with a job at a children's home in Noida, which she had followed with a position at a call center for two years. It had been hard going, she said, working evenings and nights at a call center while living in Munirka. One evening, while waiting for a van to pick her up, she had been harassed by men in a car asking if she was available for the night. On another occasion, two men on a motorcycle had grabbed her by her arm, trying to drag her onto the bike and letting go only when her screams attracted attention from passers-by.

At work, Moi had been a "precollector," making calls to American customers falling behind on their payments. I asked her what it had been like. She responded with a surprisingly good rendition of a deep masculine growl. "Tell me the color of the panties you're wearing," she said. The two women started laughing. Moi eventually left the call center because her employers wouldn't give her the two weeks' leave she needed to go home. Since then, she had been looking around for work without much success, and she was considering returning to a call-center job, since it was relatively easy to get one.

Moi's life sounded to me like a strange

combination of Victorian and millennial motifs: on the one hand, there were all those children's homes and boarding schools she had worked at; on the other, there was her job as a precollector talking to men on the other side of the world. But the same was true of Esther, I thought, as we left Moi's flat and walked out of Munirka. She was so modern in some ways, with her job at a fancy restaurant; yet there were other forces acting upon Esther's life that made her look back home, toward possibilities that seemed to have little in them of the new India.

When I first met Esther, she was confident about her F&B work. She said she was better at the work than many of her peers. She knew the menu inside out, knew what to suggest to customers and how to serve the food correctly. Even when she talked about quarreling with the manager, that was part of her ambition, of wanting to become an assistant manager.

These days Esther spoke differently about her job. "I wanted to be a doctor, not this F&B. Sometimes, I want to go back home, but what is there back home? If I go home, what will I do? But this job has no security, no pension." She told me that she had taken an exam for a government schoolteacher's job in Imphal. The salary would start at 14,000 rupees (\$315), and it came with benefits like a pension, and afforded more security than a job in F&B. Her mother was a schoolteacher too, and what Esther sometimes wanted, after all her independence, striving, exposure and mobility, was a simple repetition of her mother's life.

"My mother wants me to take the job if I get it," Esther said. "I got through the exam, but the interview is still left. I'll take the train home, which will take three days, give the interview, get back on the train for another three days and come back to this F&B. If I get the interview call, that is." She began talking about home. "You know, once I flew home to Imphal, and my parents came to get me at the airport. They had become so old that it was painful to see them. I feel scared about them. I think, *Kitna din wo rahega?* How long will they be alive? My mother has a nerve problem; she shakes her head like this." Esther demonstrated how her mother's head shook. "My father has memory loss sometimes. And me, after all these years in Delhi, I have 42 rupees in my bank account. At times I'm fed up. I think I'll go back. At least I won't have to pay rent in Imphal. Then sometimes, I think I won't go back to Imphal but maybe just get out of

Delhi. I want to go to Simla.”

I remembered that I used to feel that way when I lived in Munirka, when I felt the need to get out of the city and went for a brief holiday to the nearby hills of Uttaranchal or Himachal Pradesh. But Esther didn't have that option. “I haven't been able to go to Simla even for a week's holiday,” she said. “I made plans so many times, but every time I had to cancel. At work, I sometimes get sick of the people I am serving. Sometimes, there are fights at the station because no one wants to go and serve a party that's come in. Everyone can tell they'll be difficult. Once, a Korean couple left a 2 rupee coin for us as a tip. At least that allowed us to have a good laugh. Last night a party of Delhi ladies came in. They ordered the Indian appetizer platter. The platter weighs two and a half kilos. I had to hold it with one hand, while with my other hand I held the tongs with which to pick up the food. My back was hurting, the platter was so heavy, and when I got to the ladies, none of them would let me put food on her plate. They were doing that Indian thing, ‘*Pehle aap, pehle aap*. No, no, serve her first.’ And so I would go to the next lady, who would refuse and send me on to the next one, and it went on and on until I was so sick of all of them.”

Esther had begun looking for other jobs, even in Delhi. She wanted something that offered permanence and regular hours, something that demanded less of her body and was not as susceptible to the whims of rich customers. On the last day I met her at the Barista cafe, she told me that she knew a man who was a member of Parliament.

He was from the Congress Party in Agra, she said, one of the youngest MPs in the country. She had come to know the man through his Mizo girlfriend, and he had hinted that he might be able to get her a job in the Parliament.

It was a possibility that excited Esther, but she was worried that he might ask for a bribe in exchange for the job. She was expecting to meet with him later that afternoon. “If he wants money, I'll have to say no. I don't have any money,” she said. Esther decided to call the MP to find out when he wanted to meet.

The conversation was brief. “You're too busy today?” she said. “You want me to try again in a few days?” She put the phone down and shrugged. “Sometimes, I really regret why I joined F&B,” she went on. “My elder brother wanted me to study further and get a job with the central government. Sometimes I think I want to do that, study

something, maybe get an MBA through correspondence. But that would cost me at least 80,000 rupees (\$1,800). And the problem is that now I know the taste of money, I cannot go back to the student life. I called a friend recently who works in Taj Mansingh. She's also fed up with F&B. But we were talking, and I got scared. If I change jobs, what if, in the future, I regret leaving F&B?”

I dropped Esther off in front of the mall and watched as she vanished inside that vast building. It was nearly dusk, and the lights were on everywhere, each luxury-brand logo carved out on the wall bathed in its own glow. When I went home, I decided to look up the Congress MPs from Agra to find out more about the man who had held out the prospect of a job in the Parliament for Esther. It would be nice if it came true, I thought—if a young woman from the border provinces who is smart, hard-working and good ended up working in the building that was the symbol of India's democracy.

I looked for a long time on the Internet, sifting through the names, parties and constituencies of the various MPs. There were no young Congress MPs from Agra.

No one at all with the name Esther had given me. ■

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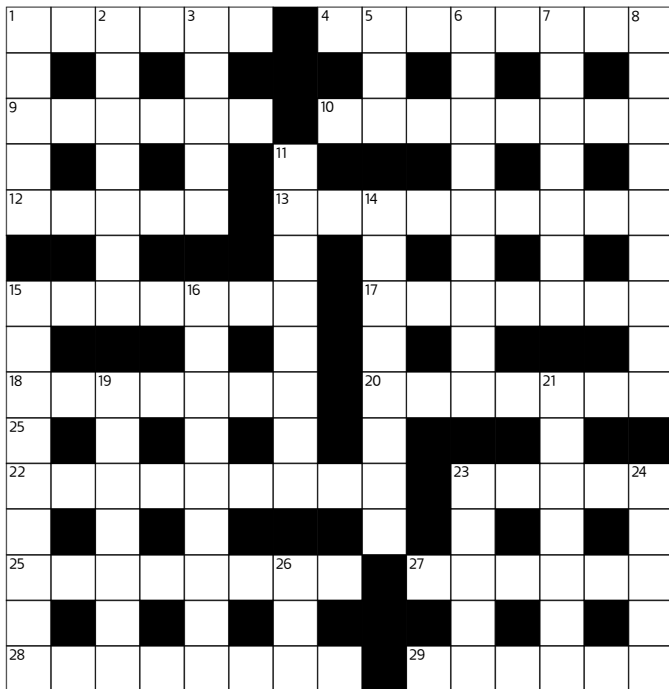
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Puzzle No. 3201

JOSHUA KOSMAN AND HENRI PICCIOTTO



ACROSS

- 1 Spin out, as 192 countries take a covetous look back (6)
- 4 Reps hoot rudely for Jordan, once (8)
- 9 Fisherman's rage when taking Lebanon's premier hostage (6)
- 10 Libels leaderless residents of Comoros, say (8)
- 12 Djibouti's opening lofty type of farm (5)
- 13 Arab chief invested in offense or protective layer (9)
- 15 Symbols of power upset Algeria (7)
- 17 Record niece shattered, blurring the sexes (7)
- 18 Florida city's gold to secure Morocco, at last (7)
- 20 Need to assume Noah's craft returned for rodent (7)
- 22 A crazy retrospective: stage located in a Middle Eastern capital—like the 2008 summit of the Arab League (all of whose members are here) (9)
- 23 First portion in Bahrain: cod with flashy trimmings (5)
- 25 Shockingly, go in for second slates, e.g. (8)
- 27 In Qatar, are lyricists found? Seldom (6)
- 28 Flexible Sudanese ballerina (8)

29 Bush's backing up in Israel—try Mauritania (6)

DOWN

- 1 It helps make Saudi...(2,3)
- 2 ...chains from ring's elements (7)
- 3 Yemen breaking up opponent (5)
- 5 The actual origins of Operation Iraqi Liberty? (3)
- 6 Palestine suffering punishments... (9)
- 7 ...from violent settler frame (7)
- 8 Republican man concealing deception on the rise—and on the rise again (9)
- 11 Rig up a single Jerusalem artichoke (8)
- 14 Unstable Emirates getting hotter (8)
- 15 Called for more supplies, like Yasir's letters in Syria (9)
- 16 Kuwait and Somalia, for instance, top Europe at first in spectacular victory (9)
- 19 Oman, PLO skewered in satire (7)
- 21 Airmen flying to Tunisia's capital for clothing (7)
- 23 Roll all over Libya (5)
- 24 Egypt in turmoil, like the sun (1-4)
- 26 Hoisting flag is what we need, in huge amounts (3)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3200

ACROSS 1 TRAIN + OF + TH[e] + OUGHT 9 FL + OUNCE
10 G-ELATIN[g] 11 FOOT + BALL + CO + ACH 13 LIB + I DO
15 HA + R(D)TACK (*track* anag.)
17 anag. 19 hidden 22 BUS ONE'S + DI + SHE'S (*bomuses* anag.) 25 LO + NG AGO (*a gong* anag.) 26 2 defs. 27 *ate both* anag.

DOWN 1 TUFT[s] 2 A + LOOF (rev.) 3 NO + NWORD (rev.) 4 "flue buy" 5 H + EGELIAN (*lineage* anag.) 6 UN + LACED (rev.) 7 2 defs. 8 anag. 12 2 defs. 14 anag. 16 anag. 18 DEN + MARK 20 "yacht Z" 21 MI(SF + Y)T 23 rev. 24 2 defs.



Kosman and Picciotto explain "How to Work *The Nation's* Cryptic Puzzles" at thenation.com/puzzle-rules.

You deserve a factual look at . . .

Israel: A Light unto the Nations

Those who demonize Israel are either misinformed or malevolent

If that proverbial man from Mars came to visit and read the world's newspapers, especially those in the Arab and Muslim world, he would be convinced that Israel was the most evil nation in the world and the source of all of the world's strife.

What are the facts?

A nation to be emulated. The reality, of course, is that Israel is a nation, a society, that should be admired and emulated by many countries in the world. The very fact of how the State of Israel came into being is one of the most inspiring in history. Born out of the ashes of the Holocaust, it has emerged as one of the most advanced, productive and prosperous countries in the world.

The demonization of Israel, assiduously cultivated by the Muslim world, has reached a crescendo following Israel's 2008 defensive action in Gaza.

Instead of being grateful to the hated Jews for having totally withdrawn, the Palestinian Gazans showed their "gratitude" by almost daily pounding Israeli towns with close to 10,000 rockets and bombs. After countless warnings, Israel ultimately decided to put an end to this travesty.

When Israel finally did invade Gaza it took the most elaborate precautions not to hurt civilians. As a first in the history of warfare, Israel dropped tens of thousands of leaflets, warning the population and urging it to abandon areas in which military action would take place. The Israeli military made thousands of phone calls urging people to leave areas that would come under attack. But fighting in a densely populated environment is difficult and loss of civilian life is hard to avoid. Hamas fighters wear no uniforms. It is impossible to tell them from civilians. Is a person who allows a rocket launcher in his backyard a civilian or a fighter? And how about using schools, hospitals and mosques as munitions depots and staff centers? The hue and cry of Israel's demonizers in accusing it of "disproportionate force" is totally absurd. The ultimate insult, comparing Israel to the Nazis, is freely bandied about by Israel's detractors.

Israel is not an "apartheid state." Another familiar tack of Israel's vilifiers is to call it an "apartheid state," on the model of

"As the prophet Isaiah presaged: Israel is indeed a Light unto the Nations."

former South Africa. But that is so ridiculous, so preposterous, it is hard to believe that serious people can countenance it. The exact opposite is the case. Israel is the only country in its benighted neighborhood in which people of all colors and religions prosper and have equal rights. Israel, expending substantial effort, rescued tens of thousands of black Jews from Ethiopia. And it has given assistance and absorbed countless

Christian expatriates from Sudan, who escaped from being slaughtered by their Muslim countrymen. Israel's over one million Arab citizens enjoy the same rights and privileges as

their Jewish fellows. They are represented in the Knesset, Israel's parliament, and are members of its bureaucracy, of its judiciary, and of its diplomatic service.

All over the world, Leftists, including in the United States and, sad to say, even in Israel itself, tirelessly condemn and vilify Israel. Why would they do that? First, of course, there is good old-fashioned anti-Semitism. Second, many of those who hate the United States vent their poison on Israel, which they consider being America's puppet in that area of the world. But Israel should certainly get top grades in all areas important to the Left. In contrast to all its enemies, Israel has the same democratic institutions as the United States. All religions thrive freely in Israel. Also, in contrast to all of its enemies, women have the same rights as men. The Chief Justice of Israel's Supreme Court is a woman. One-sixth of the Knesset are women. Compare that to Saudi Arabia, a medieval theocracy, where women are not allowed to drive cars, where they cannot leave the country without permission of a male relative, and where they can be and often are condemned to up to 60 lashes if the "modesty police" deems them not to be properly dressed in public. Gays and lesbians are totally unmolested in Israel; in the surrounding Muslim countries they would be subjected to the death penalty.

In spite of demonization and vilification by so much of the world, Israel is indeed a Light unto the Nations. The State of Israel is the foremost creation of the Jewish enterprise and Jewish intellect that has benefited every country in which Jews dwell, certainly our own country, the United States. Second only to the United States itself, Israel is the world's most important factor in science and technology, way out of proportion to the small size of its population. Israeli Jews are at the forefront of the arts, the sciences, law and medicine. They have brought all these sterling qualities to bear in building their own country: Israel. By necessity, they have also become outstanding in agriculture and, most surprisingly, in the military. What a shame that the Arabs opted not to participate in this progress and this prosperity and chose instead the path of revenge, of Jihad and of martyrdom. As the prophet Isaiah presaged: Israel is indeed a Light unto the Nations.

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