

CounterPunch

HOW DID ABORTION RIGHTS COME TO THIS? BY CAROL HANISCH

REMEMBERING AUGUST 1914 BY BINOY KAMPMARK

MEDICAL MARIJUANA: A PERSONAL ODYSSEY BY DOUG VALENTINE

THE SIX DUMBEST DECISIONS OF MY LIFE BY PAUL KRASSNER

UBER VS. THE CABBIES BY BEN TERRALL



CounterPunch

www.counterpunch.org
CounterPunch Magazine, Volume 21, (ISSN 1086-2323) is a journal of progressive politics, investigative reporting, civil liberties, art, and culture published by The Institute for the Advancement of Journalistic Clarity, 631 Chambers Road, Petrolia, California, 95558. Visit counterpunch.org to read dozens of new articles daily, purchase subscriptions, order books, plus access 18 years of archives.

Periodicals postage pending at Eureka, California.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: CounterPunch
P.O. Box 228
Petrolia, CA 95558

ISSN 1086-2323 (print)
ISSN 2328-4331 (digital)
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Subscriptions

1- year print edition \$55
1- year digital edition (PDF) \$35
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1- year print for student/low income \$45
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Cover Image:

This is not a hanger, it's the new pill (after Magritte) by Nick Roney

In Memory of
Alexander Cockburn
1941-2012



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Killer issue!

Shock & Awe in Gaza, Parasitic Finance Capital, Honduras: joined by a theme that might have been summed up by Mr. Alexandrov, who noted that the President was locking the children of Central America in a house he helped ignite, while fanning the flames. Or perhaps Mr. Hossein-Zadeh, noting that it seems to policy-makers a burst bubble is best obliterated by blowing up another. Or Mr. Cook, who shared the fate of a CNN reporter whose ten minute tweet from Gaza landed her in Moscow.

*Thanks again,
Steve Howard*

No Snotzzles Please...

I support CounterPunch's fund drive, but please remove that disgusting image of the nose-picking Kissinger. How about replacing it with one of Oprah

crying because she fears that CounterPunch might disappear?

*Gui Rochat
Paris, France*

Misleading

Chris Floyd's informative piece was butchered by the editors who titled it: "The Moral Failings of Leading Liberals." This is inaccurate. We have no leading liberals.

*Ben Tripp
Pasadena, Cal.*

Who's Your Daddy?

Adam Federman's article Deep Undercover on how a British cop, who infiltrated an animal rights group, ended up fathering a child with one of the women he was spying on was excellent. But it's not the only case. Historically UK cops have infiltrated groups, male under covers have had sex with

activists and fathered more than one child. They also used the I.D. of dead children to complete the ruse. Instead of investigating Stephen Lawrence's murder they put his family under surveillance. No better than the Stasi.

*Margaret Kimberly
New York, NY*

Corporate Supplication

Now the Guardian has finally completely given out to corporate control, I find myself on your pages more and more. It's great work, so I subscribed, I'd buy one of your Ramones Ts, but you don't have any black ones in my size! Anyway, keep up the good work, and please please print some more articles from women contributors!

Tim, London

A Voice of Sanity

Dear Friends,
There are no conceivable reasons for me not to continue my subscription, except that at 94 there are reasons you can guess at. Nonetheless you are a voice of sanity in an incredibly ugly world. Continue my subscription.

*Respectfully,
Burton Shapiro
The Bronx, NY*

When Putin Speaks

Thanks for having the guts to run the text of Putin's speech at Sochi. I watched that attentively on RT. I don't particularly like him; I mean, anyone who pretends to be an Orthodox Christian for political purposes deserves contempt. But he thinks on his feet and is very, very sharp.

*Gary Leupp
Medford, Mass.*

Our Friend Junaid Alam

Startling news came to the CounterPunch offices on the morning of October 30. Junaid Alam, a young writer who had written for CounterPunch for many years, lost his long fight with cancer. Junaid had a brilliant and far-ranging mind. He excelled in writing about complex and controversial subjects with a particular emphasis on the rise of Islamophobia during the Bush era. He had a demanding prose-style which challenged his readers--and sometimes his editors--to up their game to his lofty intellectual level. Junaid's father, Shahid Alam, also a valued CounterPunch contributor, once told me that Junaid had an excitable personality. And, naturally, that's what we loved most about him: his fierce excitement at being fully engaged in one of the most vital struggles of our time: the fight for human freedom against official bigotry and government repression. We will miss him deeply.

—Jeffrey St. Clair





ROAMING CHARGES

The First Un-War

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

Picture the circumstances. You're evaporating politically, less and less remains of you every week. The nation itself is quivering with anxiety, freaking out over each new virus or decapitation posted on Instagram. The economy, six years after the crash, continues to be catatonic: half the GDP generated by liquidation sales, the other half driven by enterprises that require HazMat suits. There's scant hope of finding an exit from that gnawing vortex, not with the gang running the Hill these days.

Some of your closet allies have jumped ship, and shanked you in the back on the way out the door with bitchy tell-all memoirs that excoriate you for not heeding their advice. The rest of the inner circle seems to have lost faith: faith in the office, faith that anything will get better, faith in you.

Yes, put yourself in Obama's chair, there in the cockpit of the Oval Office, under these tremulous circumstances. What would you do when you're flatlining and there's no quick fix, no patch, no system upgrade that will reboot the program? What do you do? You unlock that secret drawer and pull out the old playbook, the binding worn by numerous desperate hands before your own, you pencil in some innovations, a few of your signature moves and then let rip by declaring a new war.

Well, not exactly "declaring" war. That would be problematic. Hmm. There is that sweeping Authorization for Use of Military Force cooked up by Bush's ace team of lawyers back in 2001, the one that sanctioned unilateral war across the Middle East from Afghanistan to Somalia to Iraq. Of course, you once denounced that very document as "constitutional over-reach" but who will hold those naïve opinions against you now?

In any event, this won't be a war like Bush's. In fact, it won't be a "war" at all. It will be the first un-war, a military action of higher moral purpose, designed not for acquisition of land or resources or as a punitive measure or as a settling of old scores. These carefully calibrated missile and drone strikes will be entirely benign, computer-targeted only at the forces of darkness, to keep them from defiling the bodies of the innocent. These bombs are meant to protect not destroy, each one carrying a Humanitarian Exemption for any collateral damage.

But what's the pretext? How can military intervention be sold to a war-weary nation that knows next to nothing about ISIS? When 9 out of 10 members of your cabinet couldn't name the leader of the new Caliphate. Fear is good. Yes, fear is the ticket. Turn the creeping national anxiety to your own advantage. Use the very anonymity of ISIS to hype the spook factor.

Bush labored too hard to market the Iraq war. He had to resort to far-fetched claims about Saddam palling around with Bin Laden or stockpiling an arsenal of chemical weapons and suitcase nukes. Bush had to stretch credibility to the snapping point.

But you're smarter. There's no reason to invoke mysterious elements like the Nigerian yellowcake of Cheney's apocalyptic fantasies. You know that the intimate fears are the ones that haunt us most. The suburban disquietude that plays out in so many movies on the Lifetime channel: the fear of intruders, of being a captive, of being held by violent thugs with no capacity for empathy, of being bound and gagged and decapitated with a scimitar. Those are the sinister scenarios that strike right at the gut and trouble our sleep.

Let the media sell the war for you. Ratcheting the fear index is the press's new métier. They will portray ISIS as a kind of zombie army, capable of engaging in acts of unrivalled depravity. They will even provide the visuals, the terrifying optics of black flags, beheadings and gun-toting masked teenagers roaring into remote desert towns like Marlon Brando's gang in *The Wild Ones*.

There's no one to oppose you. Even Red State America recoils at the bellowing of the boots-on-the-ground right, represented by the increasingly psychotic ravings of John McCain. And the anti-war Left collapsed faster than the Iraqi army. The field is yours to take.

The deep advantage of the un-war is that it's a largely hidden operation, where most of the dirty work plays out in the shadow realm of hunter-killer squads, mercenaries and private contractors. Your hands remain clean. The un-war is a low-risk affair that yields spectacular profits for those with the sense to maintain healthy positions in defense stocks. The un-war is a conflict without a deflating parade of American body bags, where the lethal risk will only materialize years, perhaps decades, later, in a time-released form of blowback—probably, it must be said, finally exploding in some mall in the heartland. But who will ever recall the spark that lit that distant fuse?

The problem is: You're Barack Obama. Despite his impressive body count (and, yes, the Pentagon is back in the body count business), Obama just can't seem to acquire any cred as the stone-cold killer he is. Perhaps it's the halo of righteousness he coolly assumes about the sanctity of each operation. Obama's piety is his tell, his giveaway, his consciousness of guilt. No one really wants their Commander-in-Chief, their Drone Czar, to consult the homilies of Aquinas before each killshot.

So Obama made all the right moves but still continues to evaporate. He launched his un-war, but was un-done by the karmic vagaries of politics. Namaste. **CP**



EMPIRE BURLESQUE

Children of Lies

BY CHRIS FLOYD

In the course of a massive clean-out the other day, I came upon a box of overstuffed folders and musty papers — copies of some of the first pieces I'd ever had published, going back 35 years. For almost two decades they'd lain unseen in the bottom of an old trunk in my parents' basement, stored there during one of the several peripatetic upheavals that punctuated my early adulthood.

Then a freak flood hit the town, and a godly portion of the papers were damaged beyond rescue, fused into crinkled bundles that could not be prised apart without crumbling into pieces.

Only one small box made it through; it had been sitting on top of a cache of love letters and other tender memorabilia destroyed by the water.

This survivor I duly carted back across the ocean, to my home in England, where my peripateticism had come to an end. There it was promptly relegated to a new dark corner, to mold and yellow—until last week's day of cleaning.

Naturally, I took the opportunity to let nostalgia draw me away from my chores, and spent an hour or so leafing through the articles. But beyond the bemusement at my ear

ly style (an odd mix of hellfire preacher and Gore Vidal *manqué*), I was most struck by the grim continuity between then and now. The same themes, and in many cases virtually the same content, sounded over and over, like “an echo from the future,” as Pasternak put it.

With only a slight shifting of names, those yellowed pieces of political commentary could have been written in our era.

It's all there: illegal wars based on lies;

escalating inequality and militarization; the growing lawlessness of the elite; the radicalization of the Right by theocrats and corporate Birchers; the anemia of a “Left” sinking into accommodation and careerism; the manufactured hysteria over “terrorism” to justify the unchecked expansion of state power; the ineradicable racism; and the sinister embrace of “American exceptionalism” to hide the hollowness of a society in deep moral and physical decay, rotting under the sway of neoliberal extremism, letting its communities and infrastructure collapse, scorning the very idea of a “common good.”

Even some of the names were the same. There were reams of rants against a feckless warmonger named Bush, against sell-outs to empire and Big Money by Democratic pols named Clinton and Kerry. There were howls of disbelief as the nation was hustled into a baseless war in, yes, Iraq, attacking an “evil power” which had once been used as a convenient tool to advance Washington's agenda but had gone off the reservation and was suddenly transformed into an existential threat to civilization, its long-ignored and oft-excused atrocities brandished like a bloody shirt to justify war (and war profiteering).

This was back in 1991; we saw the same scenario played out in 2003— and once again this year.

In fact, perhaps the best, most succinct piece of political writing I've ever done concerned that 1991 war crime, the invasion of Iraq on behalf of the Bush Senior's old business partners, the Kuwaiti royals. Oddly enough, it was not a column in this case but a letter to the editor, published in that well-known bastion of radicalism—Knoxville,

Tennessee. It read, in its entirety:

“Concerning the war, and all the noble-sounding reasons adduced for it, and brutal sentimentality of the propaganda and ‘reportage’ surrounding it, I can say only this: I think we are living in a world of lies—lies that don't even know they are lies, because they are the children and grandchildren of lies.”

In some ways, that is the sum total of what I've been writing all these years, not just about war but other issues as well.

There is a despair in it; a despair of ever being able to speak a simple word of truth and make it heard through the lies that have been heaped on our heads—and bred into our bones—since the day we were born. Especially if, as in my case, you were not preaching to the choir but writing for a general audience, hoping to make a difference. It was almost impossible to speak of the reality of any given situation without having to fill in whole volumes of history which our masters and their media scribes had rigorously suppressed. Most readers literally had no idea what you were talking about, they had no context for processing the information.

Things are worse today, of course. The rise of Fox News, Bush Junior's war crimes, Barack Obama's disastrous entrenchment and expansion of the Permanent War State, the now-total takeover of society by the 1-Percenter Kleptocracy, the utter degradation of the national ‘debate’ and democracy itself: the past's rough beasts have grown gargantuan, the lies are higher and wider, the rot is deeper. But in another sense, nothing had changed; and certainly, despite expending millions of furious words, I had changed nothing, nothing at all.

I sat there with the yellowed papers, my meager share of the “fragments shored against our ruins,” all that was left after the love letters were gone. And I thought of a song I heard an old man sing on a London stage last winter: “So much for tears—so much for those long and wasted years.” **CP**



GRASPING AT STRAWS

Assad in the Crosshairs

BY MIKE WHITNEY

If you are confused about what's going on in Syria, you're not alone. There are so many competing agendas and conflicting narratives that it's hard to figure out what's fact and what's fiction. What we know for sure is that the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is largely an invention of Western Intel agencies and their deep pocket supporters, mainly Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey.

According to Vice President Joe Biden, U.S. "allies in the region were... so determined to take down Assad," they started "pouring hundreds of millions of dollars and... tons of weapons to anyone who would fight Assad." As it happens, many of the militants they supplied were from Al-Nusra and Al-Qaeda. These are the extremists who eventually became ISIS.

What Biden leaves out in his explanation, is the fact that the U.S. knew what was going on and probably oversaw the whole seedy operation. He also fails to mention that a sizable number of ISIS leaders, including ISIS Caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, matriculated at the U.S. "Terrorist Academy" at Camp Bucca which was run by the U.S. occupation forces in southeastern Iraq.

While it's only natural that Biden would want to distance Uncle Sam from any blame in this sordid affair, his explanation doesn't square with the facts. Clearly, the U.S. played a crucial role in ISIS's founding and development. They provided weapons, arms and training to numerous so called "moderate" jihadis who then joined ISIS and preceded to go on a two-country rampage. Surely, The CIA knew what was going on.

From the very beginning, ISIS's activities have coincided with U.S. strategic objectives in the region. By seizing

Mosul and moving to within spitting range of Baghdad, ISIS helped Obama to force Nuri al Maliki from office, which is what administration hardliners wanted so they could revisit the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). It now appears that new Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi will be more receptive to allowing U.S. troops to stay in Iraq and carry out their anti-terrorist activities "with full immunity."

The ISIS surge into Iraq also helped splinter the country into three parts, Sunni, Shia and Kurd, which is what prominent neocons have been calling for since 1996. In fact, the ISIS onslaught has not only "rolled back Syria" but also ensured that Iraq will never emerge again as a strong, unified rival to Israeli hegemony. The ISIS invasion has been a big winner for Israel just as the neocons had hoped.

Recent developments in the ISIS saga suggest that the path ahead leads towards another Iraq-type bloodbath. As of this writing, the Syrian border town of Kobani is under siege and about to fall into ISIS hands. Turkish tanks and troops have amassed on the border nearby, but the order has not yet been given to cross-over and defend the predominantly Kurdish city. Why is that? And why has the U.S. launched a mere 5 aerial attacks on advancing ISIS militants instead of bombing them into oblivion like they do their other enemies? Could it be that the U.S. and Turkey don't really want to defend Kobani from this collection of homicidal maniacs?

Right. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan wants Kobani to fall in order to defeat the Kurdish fighters of the Syrian Democratic Union Party (PYD) and their allies, the Turkish

Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). He wants to quash the Kurds aspirations for their own state, so he is letting ISIS do the job for him. But how does Washington benefit from this, after all, Obama has said repeatedly that he intends to defeat ISIS? Now he is letting them destroy a city and kill its occupants without lifting a finger.

What is going on in Kobani is part of a backroom deal between Erdogan and Obama. Erdogan has agreed to allow the U.S. and NATO to use Turkish bases as a launching pad for the upcoming war against Syria provided his demands are met. That's why the U.S. isn't defending the Kurds from ISIS. It's because the Turkish PM wants to see them crushed. Now check this out excerpt from an article by Patrick Cockburn:

"The leader of the (Kurdish) PYD, Salih Muslim, is reported to have met officials from Turkish military intelligence to plead for aid but was told this would only be available if the Syrian Kurds abandoned their claim for self-determination, gave up their self-governing cantons, and agreed to a Turkish buffer zone inside Syria. Mr Muslim turned down the demands and returned to Kobani."

This is blackmail. Turkey has given the Kurds an ultimatum instead of help: 'Give into our demands or face a violent death at the hands of religious psychopaths.' Is this the way Turkey does business?

So what's really going on here? Why does the US support the Kurds in Iraq but allow them to be slaughtered in Syria?

It's all geopolitics. Washington doesn't care about the Kurds any more than it cares about ISIS. What the U.S. cares about is regime change, establishing military bases in Syria, and opening up pipeline routes from Qatar to the Mediterranean. For now ISIS serves a purpose. It provides a pretext for military intervention, that's all. Once the war begins, everyone will see that ISIS was a hoax and that Assad was the real target from the beginning. **CP**



DAYDREAM NATION

The Hunt for Pink October

BY KRISTIN KOLB

On September 30, at 5:00 AM, my mother and sister—who had just flown in from Kansas City—and I loaded my duffel bag and got into the rental car. The last time we'd done so, I was in college. Now in the dark morning, we drove to a small Catholic hospital in Vancouver.

The hospital is part of the Providence system, and I had worked as communication director to try to unionize this West Coast hospital chain. I had lots of dirt on them muddying my head back from my union days—stats and stories of disgruntled staff and questionable patient safety. But it's not easy to smear a group of nuns who cry "social justice" in their tattered mission statement banners. The union campaign was short lasted. My memories were not.

We arrived early and I was first on the O.R. docket. In Canada, it's pretty easy to be admitted to a hospital, even if it was falling apart. The building felt haunted—quiet and small and smelly—elderly death wafted from corners.

And so I was pointed to a curtained bed. My surgeons and anesthesiologist introduced themselves; the nurses were smiling. I changed out of my Sonic Youth t-shirt into the regimented surgical gown. I said goodbye to my family, felt my breasts one last time, took a deep breath from an oxygen mask mixed with surgery drugs, and everything went dark.

The operation lasted three hours—a bilateral mastectomy of my barely 40-year-old breasts—and the insertion of "tissue expanders" (sort of like boob water balloons) to begin the reconstruction.

I woke up screaming in the recovery ward to displeased and haggard nurses, chanting, "No Pain, no gain," at me. I

wanted to see my family, my daughter especially, and begged them to send me to my room. "No pain, no gain, Ms. Kolb."

By the time I saw my family I was delirious, hypodermically on hydromorphone, a.k.a. hospital heroin, as well as a concoction of anti-nausea drugs. My chest was flat and heavily bandaged, with surgical drains that resembled macabre Christmas bulbs hanging from my former breasts. All I remember from my first familial visit was looking up at a crucifix on the wall, and my daughter drawing a cat on the nurse's whiteboard chart. I was up all night itching madly and getting shots of hospital heroin.

The next day, after a pleasant conversation with my sister, a nurse in Kansas, about the corporatization of hospital companies, I began to vomit. And I continued to do so every 15 minutes for 30 hours. No drugs were helping, only absolute quiet and darkness—which are impossible in a hospital. The door would inevitably open and I'd heave. They discharged me four hours after my last episode, and after I had tearfully ordered all nurses to give me peace to rest—a no-no in a hospital. My doctors wanted me out of this infection zone. And it was my child's 11th birthday. My sister drove me home with Simone in the back seat, and me heaving into a plastic garbage bag.

I sipped some seaweed and broth, and celebrated Simone's birthday with my family, between lots of my own tears and pain. Is this the last one I'll celebrate with her? What time have I lost forever?

Once I was home and quiet, my stomach settled and I watched my family blow out candles and eat brown-

ies. I felt shell-shocked. I do think cancer patients can acquire PTSD. I watched the party from a distance.

My general surgeon told me breast cancer has one of the highest rates of post-operative nausea of any surgery—a little reprieve from what I went through. A week later, I had another surgery for a parathyroid tumor, that proved benign. I looked like I barely shimmied out of the guillotine, the cut on my neck is wide and swollen.

Three weeks later, I met with a radiologist who, of course, urged six weeks of daily treatment as soon as four weeks. I will do this, if I can remain in Canada—it's possible the Canadian feds will make me return to the USA because I'm an "undue financial hardship" on their medical system. I'll learn more about that soon.

I received my pathology report a week ago. It reads that I have had a "pathologically complete recovery" from breast cancer and no invasive cancer was left in my breasts or the nine removed lymph nodes after my six-month hell of chemotherapy. "The tumor bed shows complete regression."

I was so shocked I wanted to shove that pathology report down my pants and make sweet love to it. But that might make Immigration uncomfortable.

Thank you for your love, your donations, and your prayers. I know this is a first war of cancer. I know it can easily return. My job is to heal and not be afraid to change my life when it's hit hell. Whatever happens I'll make it work. I know I have family, but what is family? It's a bit of biology, but it's also nontraditional, like the family of idealists and curmudgeons I've met through CounterPunch, some of you I know by name, others are anonymous in the East Village, Madrid, and the Lost Coast. We have something in common, an unflinching love affair with life. We argue for our freedom but with an independent, aesthetic and philosophical grace I find nowhere else. **CP**

Why “Legal” Isn’t Enough

How Did Abortion Rights Come to This?

BY CAROL HANISCH

With the recent setbacks to women’s reproductive rights in the Hobby Lobby and abortion clinic buffer zone rulings by the U.S. Supreme Court, the old “slow boiling of the frog” strategy comes to mind. You know, the one about how if you put frogs in a pan of hot water, they will jump out, but if you put them in cold water and slowly turn up heat, they won’t realize what’s happening until it’s too late.

It’s already too late for many women who have found themselves unable to prevent or terminate a pregnancy. It’s estimated that half of the pregnancies in the U.S. are unintended.

Yes, today’s abortion access situation is still better as a whole than it was before *Roe v. Wade*, but tell that to the woman who can’t get an abortion because she doesn’t meet the criteria, lives in a rural area or the wrong state, and/or just can’t afford it.

Even feminists have been heard to say cavalierly that a woman in states with few or no providers can just “get on a bus” and get an abortion. Perhaps, but she may have a very long and expensive ride, may have to undergo counseling that includes the dangers of breast cancer associated with abortion (a lie), the ability of a fetus to feel pain (very questionable) and/or long-term mental health issues (very rare and surely no worse than bearing an unwanted child). She may have to wait at least 24 hours between the counseling and the time the abortion is performed (meaning a hotel or two trips to the abortion facility). In 28 states if she is a minor, she will need parental involvement. Plus the “date of viability” is being pushed back so any delay adds to her problems. And her health insurance or Medicaid may not pay for it.

States have been passing all kinds of restrictions for many years. According to the Guttmacher Institute, in 2012 alone, 43 abortion restrictions were enacted in 19 states.

The federal government has made its own cutbacks and legislators have indulged in shaming women who insist that preventing pregnancy is critical to their health care, while having no problem with helping men to “get it up” with insurance coverage for Viagra. Poor and low-income women find themselves foregoing contraception to put food on the table and abortions are denied if they use government-subsidized health care.

And never mind the 17 attempted murders and 8 actual murders of abortion providers and the innumerable threats and legal limitations put on those who dare to continue their work despite this terrorism.

So how did we come to this? Why have we been going

backward?

Even before the *Roe v. Wade* decision, a backlash began in response to New York’s liberalized law in 1970. It didn’t get far back then because the abortion rights movement was still in high gear and had a leading sector demanding *repeal of all* laws against abortion, i.e., authentic “abortion on demand.” Leadership of the reproductive rights movement had not yet been taken over by the big non-profits who often have a different agenda (like population control or tamping down the radicals) and who take their marching orders from funding foundations and/or the Democratic Party.

More crucially, the abortion repeal movement was part of a much stronger and more independent and grassroots Women’s Liberation Movement than the remnant that exists today. From consciousness-raising to protests to organizing to lobbying, feminists worked hard and took risks for reproductive control. Some groups, like the underground abortion service know as “Jane” in Chicago and the Self-Help Clinic of the Feminist Women’s Health Center in California, even took matters into their own hands—literally—and learned to perform safe abortions themselves, alarming the power structure.

With the *Roe* decision much of the abortion rights activity ceased. While many were celebrating that the ruling had supposedly “made abortion legal,” leading repeal activist Cindy Cisler, along with Jim Clapp, were writing an important paper, “Abortion Ruling: Some Good News...Some Bad News,” discussing how the Court had actually “rejected abortion on demand.”

They wrote, in part:

Justice Blackman summarized the court’s view of women’s right to abortion by saying, “appellants and some amici argue that the woman’s right is absolute and that she is entitled to terminate her pregnancy at whatever time, in whatever way and for whatever reason she alone chooses. With this we do not agree... the privacy right involved...cannot be said to be absolute.” Chief Justice Berger put it even more bluntly when he concluded: “Plainly, the Court today rejects any claim that the Constitution requires abortion on demand.” ...

But the manifest fury of anti-abortion people will not be appeased by mere attempts to make abortions as scarce, as costly, and as hard to get as the court “permits.” At this writing, January 27 [1973], their best strategists are meeting in Washington and at the state level to circumvent or override the court’s ruling.

It appears that while they may take some forthright steps, such as pressure on state legislatures and on Congress to pass laws and constitutional amendments bestowing legal personhood on fetuses, such

approaches may serve only as doomed stalking-horses for more “moderate”—and thus more dangerous—measures that will not put lawmakers so directly on the spot about abortion per se.

For instance, the court itself, in dealing so extensively with what restrictions the state do and do not have to impose, has stirred up state’s rights resentments. ...

State and federal lawmakers will be asked to pass legislation returning all regulation of pregnancy and related matters to the people through their state legislatures. This regulation could then become a virtual ban.

They also warned abortion rights forces against falling into a strategy “often heard from those who don’t mind if some women are denied abortion as long as most women can get them.” In an author’s note added in 1975, they wrote:

The old feminist goal of the right to abortion may thus never be attained; the so-called “right” to “choose” is still the privilege of some women to make some choices some of the time at prices inflated by special legal strictures.

Cisler and Clapp were right on target. The first major federal setback after the *Roe* decision came only three years later when Congress passed the Hyde Amendment, which cut off federal funding for abortion. This meant that the women able to access the 300,000 abortions a year previously funded by Medicaid were on their own. Medicaid continued to pay for sterilization, however, creating pressure on recipients to go that route. (Many think the days of coerced sterilization are over, but the Center for Investigative Reporting found it is still happening to women in prison as recently as 2010.)

State Medicaid funding eventually picked up the tab for some abortion in some states, but the Hyde Amendment had successfully divided women. It was aimed at the politically weakest sector: poor women, particularly women of color, who on their own did not have the financial and social resources to overturn the law.

Although there was some outcry against the Hyde Amendment, especially in the legal arena, it was nowhere near powerful enough to reinstate Medicaid payments. Many affluent women simply ignored the ruling since it didn’t affect them and continued to claim *Roe* had made abortion “legal.”

It is often said that “with *Roe*, victory was declared and everyone went home or on to the next fight.” While this may be true in part, it is not the whole story.

By 1973, the militant Women’s Liberation Movement that had given strength to “abortion on demand” and “repeal all abortion laws” was floundering. Its radical groups and leadership were being suppressed and replaced by less threatening, establishment-oriented individuals and organizations with “connections.” Some feminists, radical feminists included,

went back to focusing on careers and/or family, wandered off into identity politics, or joined in the “self-empowerment” trend.

As docile, establishment-oriented non-profits with agendas other than women’s liberation began filling the void, even the language changed from “women’s right to control her own body” and “abortion on demand” to “pro-choice”—supposedly a better fit for U.S. ideology. But as we have seen, “choice” has had little power to defend and extend abortion rights.

Furthermore, a segment of the white sector of the feminist movement, already in a somewhat contentious relationship with Black women, exacerbated the situation by focusing on legality and ignoring the huge problem of *accessibility for all*, like that created by the Hyde Amendment.

The next big blow on the federal level came in 1989 with the *Webster vs. Reproductive Services* decision by the Supreme Court, which gave the states more power in regulating abortion, prohibited use of public employees and facilities (including public hospitals) in performing abortions not deemed “medically necessary” and declined to quash the preamble in the Missouri abortion law (which was being challenged) that “life begins at conception.” This was followed by *Casey vs. Planned Parenthood*, another ruling in 1992 that gave the states even more rights to impose limitations. These alarmed many more women than had the Hyde Amendment and there were big protests in support of *Roe*, including massive marches on Washington in 1989 and 1992.

* * *

Roe did not make abortion either legal or accessible to all women, however. The loopholes were big enough to drive a semi-truck through and have been growing ever since. *Roe* was a limited victory to begin with and the slow, steady anti-reproductive rights pushback has been effective. Like the frog, women need to wake up to what’s been happening. The states leading the backlash are creating pressure for further limitations on women’s reproductive control to succeed across the board, even in the most liberal states and on the federal level.

Capitalists want control of women’s reproduction because human propagation of workers and soldiers deeply affects the economy. Sometimes they want more population; sometimes they want less; sometimes they want to differentiate by race and class. But above all, they want to be in control. When we aim our analysis and resistance only at the more obvious anti-abortion, religious Right, we blindly miss the center of the target. We must ask, “Who really benefits?”

Reproductive control is an issue of women’s rights that the powers-that-be need to *cautiously* turn the heat up on. To bring it to a boil too quickly could spark a revolt that they would rather not deal with, perhaps prompting young

“Roe did not make abortions either legal or accessible to all...it was a limited victory to begin with and has been eroding ever since.”

women who it affects most into feminist action beyond social media discussions. By nibbling away at still-existing rights by making abortion inaccessible to one segment of women at a time, the courts and legislatures prevent a massive push back from women (a majority of the population) at any point along the way. Women must learn that old union adage that “an injury to one is an injury to all.”

It has become popular to establish or contribute to abortion funds for women who need financial assistance. While this is helpful, it's only a drop in the bucket of what's needed and does not put power into women's hands. As Billie Holiday used to sing, “Mama may have, Papa may have, but God bless the child that's got his [her] own.”

Abortions—and even contraceptives—are becoming more and more for the privileged. True solidarity demands that women stand together for complete control over their own reproduction, including the right to have children as well as the right to prevent or end a pregnancy.

What can be done?

Whether the current trend toward loss of reproductive rights can be turned around depends greatly on revitalizing the Women's Liberation Movement. That will take the work of many and a refocusing away from fracturing “self-empowerment” and “self-expression” to uniting women with enough collective clout to make a difference. Divisions among feminists abound, much as they always have, but while some seek to understand and settle them justly, others seek to maintain, if not deepen, them. The defeatist ideology of postmodernism reduces everything to individual perception and demands that any idea or theory that might lead to unity be “deconstructed” and “fractured” until it is useless. Without cogent theory and a united movement, we will lose.

Reorganizing a fighting Women's Liberation Movement will take some time. Meanwhile there are a few immediate steps that can be taken to at least clarify the situation in which we find ourselves:

Don't say we won the whole loaf when we have only won a small slice—and the rats are chewing away at even that morsel.

Stop repeating the lie that “Roe made abortion legal.” Get rid of those signs that say “Keep Abortion Legal” because it was legalized only in limited circumstances.

Legal isn't good enough. Accessible makes “legal” meaningful.

We must realize that abortion is only one of the issues involved in reproductive control and demand the whole.

Fight for reproductive control as a crucial part of women's liberation, but as only a part. Go for the whole loaf. And both male supremacy and capitalism must be overcome for such

control and full liberation to be possible. How to best do this requires new collaborative thought.

Hold to the “all women” test. Allowing one sector to be left behind weakens the whole and puts everyone in jeopardy.

Since women don't get pregnant alone, encourage men to assume more responsibility and speak up for universal contraceptive services. Condoms are expensive and should be covered by health plans too.

* * *

While we fight to put reproduction into women's control, we need to remember that the right and social ability to *have* children also needs to be on the agenda. Women spend so much time—most of their lives, actually—trying not to get pregnant, that many forget that sometimes they do want to have children and there are barriers to doing that as well. There is too little awareness that children are a necessity to the whole of society, not just a desire on the part of individual parents. Societal support of childrearing is both crucial and fair: paid pregnancy and parental leaves, public childcare and allowances, universal healthcare, and a major restructuring of the workplace to accommodate the needs of working mothers, fathers and children, for starters—along with continuing pressure on men to do their share, including fighting for changes in public policy.

Unless work is restructured, men cannot do their full share and women cannot be mothers and enjoy full equality in the workplace. Although capitalism can absorb limited reforms for some, just as it has for abortion, capitalists will never accept the unprofitable situation of everyone working part-time outside the home and part-time inside the home.

Therefore those who do the producing (labor) must be in control of production, distribution and exchange, just as those who do the reproducing (childbearing) must be in control of reproduction. This means that in addition to fighting male supremacy in women-only groups, women must work in groups with men who understand their stake in a society reorganized for the benefit of all. **CP**

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Dancing With the Crosses

Remembering August 1914

BY BINOY KAMPMARK

*And when they ask us, how dangerous it was,
Oh, we'll never tell them, no, we'll never tell them:
We spent our pay in some café,
And fought wild women night and day,
'Twas the cushiest job we ever had.
'And When They Ask Us' in Oh! What a Lovely War.*

Oh! What a Lovely War, the sobbingly moving Joan Littlewood musical from 1963 adapted by Richard Attenborough, should be mandatory viewing for those belligerent hyenas who enjoy war games and feel that spilling blood is better than conserving it. At the beginning, there is the imperial pageantry of the dynasts, the ruling families and their servants who treat war as a minor rash, an irritation that arises because opponents feel they know better. They are figures who move like chess pieces across the board of power in the manner that resembles a farce. For film buffs keen on the gravitas meter, it takes place at Brighton, involving such class acts as Kenneth More, Ralph Richardson, and John Gielgud. This is the summer of 1914.

The film set is plain but achingly brilliant—the royal houses of Europe, engaged in disputing and plotting when things will go crash and burn. They do not consider when things might actually go right, when the sweet poison of war must be resisted. But the addiction to dispute resolution via the gun is simply too powerful to resist. Progress, modernity, and the seemingly immaculate motor of civilisation are moving on the path to oblivion.

On June 28, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Hapsburg throne, arrived at Sarajevo railway station with his wife, Sophie Chotek. During the course of a tour of the city, Serbian students associated with a nationalist network based in Belgrade executed their plan, if somewhat clumsily. Ferdinand and his wife were shot, the fateful bullets coming from the gun of Gavrilo Princip.

The next stages proved vital. Speed mattered—it was, after all, the era of train travel, rapid transportation, a revolution in movement. Vienna responded with an ultimatum to Serbia. Serbia accepted most of the points on the table, but the gesture was not deemed sufficient. On July 5, Austro-Hungary's ally, Imperial Germany, proclaimed its support. Russia, with French encouragement, promised to defend Serbia. Mobilisation began against Austria and Germany. Left unpacified by the Serbian response, Vienna declared war. Germany got moving against Russia and France in accordance with its promise. France niggled the British for support. With the violation of Belgian neutrality on August

4, 1914 by German forces, Britain entered the conflict. Death was given a free pass.

Every historian of the Twentieth Century has dabbled, dipped and even drowned in the causes of World War I, which wears an assortment of categorizing hats: the Great War, the war to end all wars, the war of guilt. As historian Christopher Clark noted, the debate is even older than the war itself, a train that started even before the conductors knew where they were going (*London Review of Books*, Aug 29, 2013). And it has proven to be frightfully moral, expansive, and weighty, as heavy in its production of tomes and explanations as the accumulated dead from the conflict.

From the poisoned tree of World War I came terrible bounty for the grim reapers of the following decades. The deaths of some 10 million; the destruction of the imperial system; the uprooting and dislocation of entire states—these prefigured the onset of totalitarianism in Germany and Italy, the hasty, even cowardly retreat of liberalism, economic depression, the October revolution, and Stalinism. For all of that, it is contemporary, something that is far from frozen in its record. The Great War is, as Ezra Pound claimed of literature, news that stays news.

Like scarecrows of memory, the dead men start to lie down on the field. The women do not notice—the dead can only be noticed precisely by being absent. They were not noticed when they were slaughtered by the great industrial machine of 1914. Europe scant noticed when they were sent to deaths before machine guns and heavy armaments.

Germany condemned and blamed

How good it is to find the blood stained culprit, the finger prints displayed so proudly on a safe, the crime scene, the light of moral revulsion shone upon it. The greatest conflict till then, and someone to blame in what must be the neatest excuse of all. It was, for many who turned their attention to it, German militarism, as opposed to a collective system of chronic European pig headedness. It was the Hun equipped with the gun, rather than the confused, immolating European on the run. Against that came the might of Francophone, Anglophone and then American powers combined to crush it with common zeal. Few care that America resisted entry into the conflict like the plague—President Woodrow Wilson did, after all, find much to love in the German academic system, and the Germanic presence in the United States was, as both cultural presence and a voting bloc, formidable. Few care that all powers went to war because they were placing a rabid dog in a fight. The dog, of course, would be slaughtered, but someone had to account for the deadly stupidity that saw over 8 million deaths.

It also gave a virtually unprecedented legal document: exclusive blame for the outbreak of the conflict, with Article 231 of the Versailles Treaty charging Imperial Germany and allies with “causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and

Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them". The popular presses in the Allied powers raged against the first celebrity war criminal of the twentieth century. The "Hang Kaiser Bill" theme was powerful. Not that such crimes had not taken place—German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, fretful at the designs of the German General Staff, did openly argue that violating the neutrality of Belgium was the necessary crime to protect Germany once the trains started moving. His feeling was that somewhere along the line, it would be made good. Unfortunately neutrality, once stolen, cannot be returned.

The rulers of the Third Reich would have none of it. Versailles, and its morally exclusive directives, would be torn down, its moral premises, its absurd notion of spotting the fly in the ointment, removed from the record. Hitler would make his French counterparts sign their own armistice on June 21, 1940 at the very same train carriage in Compiègne where German surrender was received. It was yet another grotesque chapter in an already grotesque century, with much more to come.

When the ointment itself was crowded with flies and causes, the Allies wanted to find the ultimate cause. They were by no means the only ones. A Germany traumatized by two world wars could do nothing but reflect. The valiant, if overly self-convinced historian Fritz Fischer preferred an explanation in such works as *Griff nach der Weltmacht* (1961) and *Krieg der Illusionen* (1969) that warmed those from the Allied side of the fence: Germany did it, though he did explain his reasoning with an ample sprinkling of attitudes from the period. "As Germany willed and coveted the Austro-Serbian war and, in her confidence in her military superiority, deliberately faced the risk of a conflict with Russia and France, her leaders must bear a substantial share of the historical responsibility for the outbreak of general war in 1914."

Fischer's desire to embrace the idea of dominant if not exclusive responsibility put him at odds with the anti-blame brigade. In doing so, he had a tendency to foster the idea of German singularity—that Teutonic mania was exceptional. German historians like Immanuel Geiss, a student of Fischer, added their voices to the suggestion that blame could be saddled to a very specific, and violent, horse. Article 231 of the Versailles Treaty was its crowning justification and provided the great argument for its critics: states could be guilty, outlaws, and clearly deemed as such. The result impeded any result of a healthy Weimar Republic taking root. There were too many scores to settle, too many individuals out to wage battle against the *Kriegsschuldfrage*. Only the odd and even eccentric voice, such as Count Lichnowsky, felt that blame could actually lead to lasting peace. It had been such a terrible conflict, and surely the only sensible outcome of that would be an infinite aversion to bloodletting on such a scale.

The smug militarists in London and Washington also

cheered by explanations that a sole progenitor of conflict had been found—as they still do. Ironically, what took hold was that most dangerous of ideas to international peace: the notion of the preventive war. In Count Stolberg-Wernigerode's words, "The Kaiser and his government... acted under the obsessive notion that time was running out for Germany and risked a kind of preventive war against which Bismarck had always warned."

The troublesome implications of such reasoning should be clear. The cause of terrible wars, should one embrace this logic, does not lie in the domain of the Anglophone regimes, even when it so blatantly does. There are mutterings from the activist circle that former British Prime Minister Tony Blair and former U.S. president George W. Bush be brought to the International Criminal Court, but these remain just that. This, despite the fact that the Iraq of 2003 is a redux-like echo of Belgium in 1914.

Britain's demagogic *Daily Mail* tends to feel the noxious whiff of balance coming its way with every August commemorations regarding the outbreak of the Great War, with its "mud, futility of war, lions led by donkeys, a bit of poetry, a nod to the nurses and the munitions girls and a solemn conclusion that it must 'never be allowed to happen again.'" Those words, penned by Robert Hardman in January last year, say it all. Remind the Germans that they were purveyors of atrocity and that "we were vaguely on the side of right". The good cause is always discernible in war, even when the only cause worth fighting for is mere survival.

Historians today still fight those battles like riot police with blanks, hoping to spot a specific cause, and identify a specific, guilty figure when the mug shots are paraded. Historians are given misguided moral missions, entrusted with a doctor's task of identifying what, exactly, went wrong in the patient that was Europe. Is it a blood rushed Serbian nationalist who selfishly put cause before awareness? Is it grey German militarism, the vast closet that held, within it, the symptoms of Nazism? Is it the Triple Entente-Central Powers falling out, the sort that clubbable gentleman have and then resolve over a duel? How terrible it is to not spot a specific cause, to not find the ultimate solution. It lay in everything that was civilization in 1914, its principles about war, its inability to understand that the shots of Sarajevo were merely a prelude to a broader resolution. The emperors of Europe were found out to be naked, and it was the most awkwardly terrible of truths.

The economists, looking at raw figures and growth variables prior to 1914, would have seen little reason to rush to destroy it all. But if we are to hold to the view expressed by Barbara Tuchman, whose *The Guns of August* still reads majestically years after it was penned, we would see it differently. The fin-de-siècle state of affairs, the tensions within alliances, and realignments bore an ominous mark. Industrial killing was menacingly waiting in the wings, promised by such encounters as those during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5.

“Wars don’t tend to end wars. They merely sow the seeds for the next with ominous promise.”

Military planners were not disheartened by the mass slaughter of soldiers as they approached machinegun posts, be it in colonial theatres of battle or between traditional powers. The only logic there was using more men, more material. Keep the machine going, and it will reward any gamble.

System and globe

A glance at the seemingly growing chaos that is the globe in 2014 shows a world that does bear some superficial resemblance to that of 1914. While the United States retains its pretensions as a Super Power, limping along on a wave of modernizing weaponry but diminishing influence, a ravenous China has become the second largest economy. The BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) are attempting to create a separate power bloc, and have taken some steps towards doing so with a new financial bank. Potential areas of conflict manifest: the growing influence of the Chinese navy in the Pacific; the disagreements between several states over the South China Sea and the prevailing hungers associated with natural resources. And the trauma of conflict afflicts countries in Africa and the Middle East, the result of sectarian conflagration and vicious disagreement. Arab Springs have become Arab freezes.

The reading now of August 1914, and the tectonic movements that led to it, can no longer be deemed the exclusive province of Europeanism and European interests. Laws of causality can be stretched. The consequence of a bullet, or an attack, can go far. Even editorials from July 1914 show awareness about the threat mobilization poses. If war breaks, this will be continental. “With the actual opening of war,” claimed an editorial for the Canadian *Globe and Mail* (Jul 29, 1914), “localisation of the conflict becomes impossible. Even if Austria-Hungary goes no further than the occupation of Belgrade by troops thrown across the Sava at Semlin, Russia will declare for a general mobilisation.”

Works such as Sean McMeekin’s *July 1914: Countdown to War* show how various actors leading up to the conflict were keen to involve others in acts of militarist solidarity. The Russian foreign ministry, led by the wily dissimulating Sergey Sazonov, got busy trying to bring Paris into the fray as quickly as possible even as the French were doing their best to agitate British opinion. Others such as Tuchman’s *The Guns of August* prefer the personal portrait mired in vast historical forces. The leaders of history tend to be a band of the confused, misguided and ill-informed.

Such is the nature of history, however, that the blame worthies will always have a modern audience. Terrible conflicts need their explanations, and those which find themselves

in generalized narratives of human incompetence and fault will always find their detractors. Daniel Allen Butler’s *The Burden of Guilt* (2013) happily relays guilt on the shoulders of Germany in an all too familiar tune.

Wars to begin wars

Wars don’t tend to end wars. They merely shift the ground for another, sow the seeds for the next with ominous promise. 1914 had, within it, the grotesque narrative of 1939, and the fateful seeds of subsequent violations against the international order. But those pursuing such violations could hardly have believed they were undertaking anything improper—they, even as the future U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles had to concede, were bound by rules that did not allow for a flexible adjustment of territories. Germany, Italy and Japan ran riot, but they did so with a degree of tacit approval. Even as attempts were being made to banish war to the history books for good—the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 being the main feature of this—war was being rationalized.

There is a lesson here, and the classroom of war is stacked, choked and stifling with its prescripts. Be wary of the demagogue who insists that wars will end soon. An end by Christmas is the choice special for states celebrating the date. You always need something to motivate your efforts.

Other states prefer other opportune moments: you will be relieved when some killing is done. The death shall stop on a saint’s day, or a religious occasion. The point is that your killing is noble, justified and right. Shove off to all those who think otherwise: we have the solitary truth and cradle it to our breasts. Pity, then, that we should be slaughtered in spite of it. But we choose to accept it, just as we chose to accept it then. The working classes went mutely to their deaths in their hundreds of thousands in 1914 even if their platform may have been against war. Germany’s SPD took the rifle and abandoned pacifism. Peace across Europe fled, its nakedness shamed by the cult of militarism.

The irony of the ceremonies of commemoration taking place across Europe in 2014 suggest that war is not something to avoid on pain of death. States tend to get busy with the custom of memory when more wars lurk in the wings. It is a terrible state of affairs, though it should not surprise the student of politics. Even as wreaths are being laid across European capitals, Gaza has been laid waste again, eastern Ukraine is being shredded, and positions are being bombed in Iraq and Syria at the behest of international policing. Wars are simply too tempting to avoid.

At the end of the Attenborough special, there are men who run through mists of death, clouds of fury, and dreams of

loss. They do so because they are dead, not mobile in their physical selves, but ethereal presences in the memories they have left. Ladies in cream milk gowns gather on a field. They are enjoying a picnic in the summer sun, while their memories gather about them—dead men, all young, all archived. The children chat, and one is curious. The archive is being teased open. “Granny, what did daddy do during the war?” No response, other than a gentle walk, and tender, somewhat oblivious dance, through a seemingly endless field of crosses. We, as spectators, know where we are. We are dancing vicariously through a field of a dead generation. The march of folly ends up being a long dance through the field of lost souls. **CP**

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Medical Marijuana: a Personal Odyssey

Caution: May Induce Euphoria

BY DOUGLAS VALENTINE

I periodically meet John at the rehabilitation center where I receive occupational therapy for my arthritic fingers, and where he receives treatment for the stroke he suffered several years ago. The stroke left his right arm and leg paralyzed.

I’m 64 and John’s a little older. We joke about our disabilities; but when I mentioned that I take Celebrex, a cloud passed over his eyes. He said he’d taken it daily for 15 years. He’s convinced that Celebrex caused his stroke.

While Celebrex provides substantial relief from inflammation, I have no desire to suffer a stroke, so I take the drug once a week. I have other problems I have to take into consideration as well. I have wicked allergies, and eight years ago my immune system collapsed. Bad things happened, including sudden hearing loss. In an effort to prevent further damage, I stopped smoking pot and drinking booze, and weaned myself off many of the pharmaceutical drugs I’d been prescribed. I started practicing Qi Gong meditation instead.

I’m careful about what I ingest. I don’t want to stress my system. But as I age and my arthritis worsens (I’ve had one finger joint replaced already), I need more relief—not just to type, so I can earn a living—but to accomplish simple tasks like tying my shoes. My primary care physician understands my dilemma, and when I said I wanted to try medical marijuana, he gladly sent my records to Dr. Jill Griffin in

Northampton, Massachusetts.

Dr. Griffin opened her practice in January 2013, immediately after Massachusetts voters eliminated criminal and civil penalties for the use of medical marijuana. Her office is across from Cooley Dickenson Hospital, near Smith College. The community is liberal, intellectual and artsy, with many people living alternative lifestyles. As Police Chief Russell Sienkiewicz noted when we spoke, the occasional public smoking of pot in Northampton is nothing to get excited about.

Chief Sienkiewicz applies his discretionary powers in accordance with the values of the people he polices. But Puritanism dies hard, and prohibition persists. As I entered Dr. Griffin’s office, a sign warned me that patients are not allowed to bring marijuana into the building. And the receptionist gave me a handout explaining that while I was breaking no state laws by enrolling in the program, I would be “violating federal law and could be subject to prosecution.”

I hadn’t taken a puff, and already I felt a little paranoid. But the waiting room was crowded, so I forged ahead. I scheduled an appointment in person (my hearing loss makes phone calls impossible) and saw Dr. Griffin several weeks later.

Dr. Griffin was dressed casually, but all business. She had reviewed my records carefully, and we discussed my situation for half an hour before she presented me with a physician’s certification for the humanitarian medical use of marijuana in Massachusetts. She suggested I mix an ointment high in Cannabidiol (CBD), the part of marijuana proven to have anti-inflammatory qualities, with the gel my rheumatologist prescribes, and rub the combo on my fingers several times a day. She also suggested I buy a vaporizer and take two puffs in the evening before bed, to help me sleep.

Alas, Dr. Griffin is not allowed to tell anyone where to buy pot, so I left her office certified to possess, but woefully un-supplied. I also needed paraphernalia, so I drove from Dr. Griffin’s office to Hempfest, an outlet store in Northampton that sells clothing made of hemp and related items. I took it as a favorable sign that Ben, the young clerk, wore a medical marijuana t-shirt. Indeed, Ben is a patient of Dr. Griffin’s, and he’s writing a thesis on medical marijuana. He cheerfully helped me find a suitable “vape.”

Later that day I acquired some buds, went home, and took an exploratory puff.

It was “Déjà vu all over again,” as Yogi said. I felt spiritually enlarged and humbled. I remembered what fascinated me about my soggy back yard. I got the munchies and a burst of creative energy. I typed for hours without pain.

The pain, naturally, returned, and so I began my quest for an ointment high in CBD to rub on my screaming fingers.

In California, where 5% of the adult population has tried and benefited from medical marijuana, a patient in my predicament would simply go to a dispensary. But that’s not possible in Massachusetts. The law passed in 2012 requires the

state to establish at least one dispensary in each county, but the Department of Public Health has found a reason to deny every applicant in my part of the state.

So I called a dispensary in Connecticut, and was summarily told they couldn't serve me because I'm not a resident. With that rude awakening, I began to realize the range of obstacles medical marijuana patients face. Balms and salves are offered on the internet, yes, but so are phony dispensary licenses. One must be careful, and even Leafly.com (which provides updates about the cannabis legalization movement worldwide) recommends consulting with a physician to determine which strain is right for you.

So I returned to Dr. Griffin to interview her about her practice, and learn more about my options.

Doctor, Please

Dr. Griffin is an attractive, down-to-earth mom with short blond hair, living with her partner Kim. There's a Bob Marley poster in her private office.

Dr. Griffin is also courageous and compassionate. She grew up in a rural community where the local doctor kept his medicine in a tackle box and made house calls. Inspired in part by his example, she became a doctor and initially practiced emergency room medicine in Alaska.

I asked her why she opened a medical marijuana practice.

"I'd moved to Northampton and was practicing life-style medicine," she replied. "Diet, sleep, exercise, meditation. And I was making house calls on a bicycle, which is why I call my practice PedalMed. One woman I was visiting was too sick to go to the doctor. So her family got her pot, and she immediately became a different person. She had energy and appetite. She wanted to go shopping. Another patient was dying from melanoma. He wanted to die, and the marijuana helped him a lot. It improved his feelings. I thought, 'How can something like that be bad?'"

From a bureaucratic perspective, opening a medical marijuana practice wasn't hard. Special schooling wasn't required. As a licensed MD, Dr. Griffin only needed two credits of continuing education from the Massachusetts Medical Society. She now has 200 credits, acquired by attending conferences given by the American Academy of Cannabinoids, and by reading books. She's an expert at what she does.

"Cannabinoid receptors have always been in the human body," she explained. "There are CB₁ receptors in the brain, and CB₂ receptors in every cell of the body. They're there because the body produces its own cannabinoids." (For those interested in the science, she recommends *Understanding Marijuana* by Mitch Earleywine.)

Dr. Griffin compared the purpose of cannabinoids in our bodies to that of a dimmer switch. "It's how we naturally maintain homeostasis. If we're having anxiety, the neurons are over-firing. It's the same thing with pain. Once a cell figures out it's getting too many signals, it produces endocannabi-

noids."

Scientists still don't know exactly why CBDs reduce inflammation and pain. What is known is that the compounds work together to create an "entourage effect." One cannot get from any single compound the same level of relief provided by smoking or otherwise ingesting the cannabis plant.

The esoteric qualities of marijuana's healing properties are elusive, and Dr. Griffin carries the burden of prescribing a medicine that is subject to many popular misconceptions. The current law makes matters worse by preventing her from having working relationships with the people most knowledgeable about the strains—the "caregivers" (a person allowed by law to supply one medical marijuana patient) and dispensaries.

"The toughest part is the loneliness," she said wearily. "I'm second-guessing myself all the time now."

Dr. Griffin misses the benefits of working with colleagues. And her sense of isolation is worsened by the sad fact that hospitals in the area have instructed physicians not to write recommendations for cannabis for their patients. Some doctors informally send patients to Dr. Griffin, but they ask not to be named in the medical record as a referring physician.

But, she said, the situation is improving. Early on, people would call and berate her. Now they call and say thanks, especially oncologists. Dr. Griffin compares her experience to that of gay people who were initially afraid to "come out," but are now more willing, as society becomes more accepting.

The situation with local law enforcement is improving as well. "Initially there was a lot of confusion around the paperwork," she explained. "My patients were being arrested and I spent a lot of time in court. But the cops are fine now," she said. "The Department of Public Health sent a letter and now they all know. It's evolving."

Not many doctors dare to do what Dr. Griffin does, and when I asked what keeps her going, she immediately cited the "dramatic" results. "It's overwhelmingly rewarding," she said. "Marijuana treats so many conditions in general. It is especially effective for arthritis and diseases of aging. One can get off a dozen meds just by using medical marijuana."

Access remains the biggest issue: the delay in opening dispensaries and the absurd provision in the law that allows a caregiver to provide for only one patient. "There are people out there good at growing. It's organic with no contaminants," she explained. "But it is hard getting this to people who need it."

"It takes years to put the infrastructure in place," Dr. Griffin sighed.

The Marijuana Consultant

For information about access to medical marijuana, Dr. Griffin suggested I visit marijuana consultant Ezra Parzybok. A few days later I interviewed Ezra at his house, built in 1900,

“The Feds still embrace the ‘reefer madness’ mindset of the DEA and its stepchild, the prison industry.”

in the Riverside neighborhood in Northampton. I felt comfortable the moment I stepped inside.

Ezra is passionate about marijuana. He’s articulate too. He graduated from Rhode Island School of Design and received an MFA from Bard College. But, as he said, “You can’t reach diverse people when you take social justice to the art gallery.”

Seeking a more socially productive career, he taught art to teen mothers in Holyoke. He also worked at a hydroponics store where he met dozens of local growers. Ezra especially enjoyed helping medical marijuana patients. The process appealed to both the humanitarian and the sculptor in him.

His sense of having found his place intensified when he became one of Dr. Griffin’s patients. It is legal in Massachusetts for registered medical marijuana patients to grow a 60-day supply, estimated at ten ounces, until the long-awaited dispensaries kick in. Applying his artistry and scientific knowledge, Ezra does exactly that. He also consults with growers, and offers instruction on the basics of growing organic medical marijuana. He has a website and he blogs.

“I come from an erudite place,” Ezra observed as he rubbed a soothing, homemade ointment high in CBD on my arthritic fingers. “I feel deeply that people with serious medical conditions deserve a knowledgeable consultant. I love the science and the fact that I can prevent some little old lady from getting turned off from what she researches on the internet. People need alternatives.”

Wanting to reach more patients, Ezra at one time sought to open a dispensary with a woman in the alternative medicine business. But the state requirements, packed in a 50-page document that could choke a horse, were insurmountable. The costs, exceeding half a million dollars, included cash in the bank, an exorbitant application fee, and a security system that videotaped each plant’s progress from seed to sale. Dispensaries are also required to have a GPS delivery tracking system. All of which seems like a backhanded way of enforcing prohibition and limiting dispensaries to big corporations.

“It’s like making hardware stores illegal, and limiting each state to a handful of Home Depots,” Ezra said. “But luckily there are already hundreds of otherwise law-abiding growers. The system has been in place for fifty years, and we don’t need centralization.”

“Business is exceeding expectations,” Ezra added optimistically. “I’m not a criminal. I’m an educator.” And the science is fascinating. “Modern medicine is becoming more aware of the mind-body connection and the raw data confirming marijuana’s efficacy,” he emphasized. “We’re beginning to understand how euphoria heals; how openness and connectedness

help return us to a state of grace where pain is minimized. Science confirms this.”

Alas, science doesn’t matter to the creationists in Congress—which is why people need lawyers.

The Awkward Interval

For background on the evolution and status of medical marijuana law in Massachusetts, Dr. Griffin referred me to attorney Richard Evans. A marijuana activist for nearly 40 years, Evans is a fit 70 year-old who led me on a brisk, hour long walk through the forests and fields surrounding his home in rural Northampton. It was a beautiful autumn day. The sun was shining, and the swamp maples and shrubs were turning an array of gorgeous colors.

Evans has been working with the National Organization for Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML) for decades. He’s proud of having been the force behind NORML’s adoption of the Principles of Responsible Cannabis Use. He takes a broad view of legalization, and in 1981 authored the first comprehensive marijuana regulation/taxation plan introduced as legislation in Massachusetts. Although his bill has gone nowhere in the Massachusetts legislature, it has served as a model for legislation in other states.

I asked Evans what had changed in the 30-plus years since his bill was first introduced, and without hesitation he credited the Drug Policy Foundation and massive funding from philanthropists like George Soros. “NORML focused on educating the public,” Evans said with a self-deprecating chuckle. “But people didn’t need to be educated, they needed an opportunity to enter a booth and cast a vote, without fear. By funding state initiatives, the DPF gave people the opportunity to express their views, without fear of being exposed as supporters of reform.”

The 2012 initiative changed Massachusetts law to protect debilitated patients, healthcare providers, and providers of medical marijuana from punishment and penalty. But hurdles still exist. “We’re in the Awkward Interval between prohibition and legalization,” Evans said as we stopped on a ridge and gazed at sparkling waters of the Mill River. “Until dispensaries are allowed to open, enforcement of the law depends on the ‘discretion’ of individual police chiefs. The chief in Northampton is a progressive,” he notes, “but that doesn’t mean the chiefs in other towns won’t see the law differently.

“Cops aren’t the only people who are confused,” he added. “We regularly get calls from physicians and others struggling to understand what they must do, or not do, to gain the benefits of the law and protect their liberty—or their job, or their scholarship. Just yesterday I met with a cancer survivor, a

medical marijuana patient whose graduate studies in nursing are jeopardized because the school is demanding a ‘clean’ drug screen. The excuse offered by the school was that their federal funding would be put at risk if she were to matriculate.”

Dick Evans is not a criminal defense lawyer. He can only help people who want a license to open a dispensary or cultivate marijuana. And while Massachusetts voters have decriminalized possession of less than an ounce, possession and cultivation of marijuana still violate federal law. There’s nothing Evans can do if DEA agents decide to swoop down on dispensaries and small growers.

“Fear,” he says, “is the common denominator. Marijuana prohibition was conceived in fear, and sustained for seven decades by fear. When voters had the opportunity to express their views without fear, things started to change. When fear about marijuana, or being caught using it, is vanquished, then and only then will we know that our long struggle has succeeded.”

Transcendental Medication

As we shook hands and said goodbye, Evans invited me to an event to be held two days later at UMASS Amherst. By happy coincidence, the UMASS Libraries were archiving NORML’s papers for posterity. They were honoring NORML founder Keith Stroup, its current executive director Allen St. Pierre, and Lester Grinspoon, the legendary Harvard-based author of *Marihuana Reconsidered* (1971). Evans also invited me to a cook-out to be held afterwards at his cabin on the Connecticut River.

Nothing points one in the right direction like synchronicity, and where weed is involved, synchronicity abounds. Indeed, my marijuana consultant Ezra attended the UMASS event, as did Ben, the medical marijuana patient I met at Hempest.

Ben and Ezra immediately bonded, and the three of us sat together while Stroup and St. Pierre charted the history of the legalization movement, from the heady days of the 1970s, through the “dark era” initiated by Reagan and prolonged by every president since. They explained that the feds still embrace the “reefer madness” mindset of the DEA and its stepchild, the prison industry. And they warned that although arrests are down from 750,000 a year to 125,000, an entirely new set of problems has arisen, often related to interests that profit from prohibition.

Encouraged, nevertheless, by the progress made in recent years by individual states, about 40-50 of us retired to Evans’s campsite on the Connecticut River. Marijuana is a social drug, and it was inspirational being among veteran activists like Grinspoon, Stroup and Evans. It was fabulous fun, as well, being around the new champions of the cause: folks like Ezra, my politically and spiritually astute consultant, and Ben, who is tuned into the sacred traditions, and drawing strength

from Dr. Griffin, whom he describes as a “saint.”

I especially enjoyed talking with Keith Stroup. A youthful 70, Stroup has long white hair he keeps brushing off his face. He said that social change depends on courageous individuals—that achieving social justice is a higher purpose that requires people willing to risk their personal liberty.

Stroup feels vindicated by the introduction of medical marijuana laws in so many states. But we haven’t reached the promise land yet. He smiled when I asked if he felt the younger generation would carry the fight forward. Baby Boomers are still leading the way; but, he assured me, young people aren’t strapped by the stigma and false assumptions we endured. He seemed to feel that everything was on track.

The irony, of course, is that marijuana helps point the way. And whether or not you indulge, our many and varied personal liberties are inseparable from everyone’s right to smoke pot.

As daylight faded, six of us sat in a semi-circle around the campfire. Keith was on my left. On his left sat Lester’s wife of 60+ years, Betsy. She commented on how beautiful the sunset looked, as a heavy mist settled on the wide Connecticut River. Lester, age 86—who insists I find an ointment of pure CBD for my fingers—was deep in conversation with Ezra, age 44, and Ben, age 22.

Time slowed into silence at the river bend. All was right with the world: four generations of one mind, with nothing more to say, watching the sparks from the campfire fly into the night. **CP**

DOUG VALENTINE is the author of five books, including *The Phoenix Program*.

Dreaming the Future Nostalgia for Socialism

BY LEE BALLINGER

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

Like a raisin in the sun?

Dreamers dream about the future, but if its going to be more than just visions of sugar plums dancing in their heads, they must take account of the past.

For millennia, human beings lived cooperatively, hunting and gathering with a desperation borne of their daily existence. There were no stores of grain for a rainy day, let alone supermarkets. In fact, there was no surplus of any kind, so there was no free time to dream of a better way of life, one

without the dangers of wild animals, starvation, deadly disease, or rival bands of humans. Every moment, except for a bit of sex, was devoted to the pursuit of food and shelter.

It was only with the emergence of agriculture that at least a handful of people could turn their attention to the greater questions of the meaning of life in the present and possibilities for the future. One result of that change was that by the time of Jesus, the Mediterranean world was awash with cooperative experiments. In *The Historical Jesus*, Catholic scholar John Dominic Crossan writes that “Throughout the region, there were independent, egalitarian communities of peasants, tribesmen, or pastoralists in the marginalized hills.”

Yet transportation was so primitive that peasants could only eat food grown near their homes. If the local crops died from pests or drought, the peasants died too. Attempts by the peasants to work cooperatively only equalized their poverty. There simply wasn’t enough to go around.

The advent of industry in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries promised to solve the problem of scarcity. The growth of industrial productivity was accompanied by a host of idealist, utopian, and revolutionary philosophers. Many of these thinkers based their theories for achieving a world of peace and prosperity on the power of heavy industry, the liberation seemingly inherent in iron and steel, locomotive and steam engine. If only ownership could be captured by the workers, enough could be produced for all.

This vision fired the imagination of toilers the world over, from the Paris Commune to Russia to China to the Bolivarian circles of Venezuela. It did not work. It could not work. The productivity of blast furnaces and assembly lines wasn’t great enough to sweep away all privilege on the wings of abundance. An economy based on industry couldn’t eliminate resilient old elites or prevent the rise of new ones. There still wasn’t enough to go around, so someone always figured out how to manage scarcity to their own advantage.

While there was a titanic worldwide clash between capitalism and socialism over who industry would serve, there was no doubt over what the basis of the economic infrastructure would be. This was so much so that in the 1920s Henry Ford’s memoir, *My Life*, was translated into several editions in the USSR and some Russian peasants even named their children after Ford.

It seemed for a while that the dreams of the nineteenth century had a shot at coming true in the twentieth, but that possibility had faded badly by the approach of the twenty-first. Agata Pyzik, a young Polish writer who’s lived in Britain since 2010, makes that clear in her new book *Poor But Sexy: Culture Clashes in Europe East and West* (Zero Books). Pyzik takes a hard look at Poland’s socialist past, mocks its current anti-communism and, above all, skewers Poland’s capitalist present and those who champion it.

Holding on to their new system of capitalism for dear life, Polish leaders invoke a ghostly picture of Poland’s communist

history in an attempt to silence any discussion of the ways the country’s transition has resulted in chaos and poverty. “In Poland, as in much of the former Eastern bloc,” Pyzik writes, “you can’t publish the Communist Manifesto without risking a fine or a ban.” Showing a good grasp of the essence of capitalism, Polish leaders have renamed Warsaw’s Paris Commune Square after American segregationist Woodrow Wilson.

Is anyone buying what Polish leaders are selling? In the 2014 European elections, given a choice between two conservative parties whose main program is that they are opposed to each other, 76% of the Polish electorate didn’t vote.

Behind the stage-managed elections presented by Poland’s version of the two party system lies the very real threat of violence. According to Pyzik, a leader of one of Poland’s tenants movements was murdered by “the Mob.” Lech Walesa, former leader of Poland’s Solidarity trade union movement and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, has recently confirmed which side he is on. “At recent protests of the raising of the pension threshold by Donald Tusk’s neoliberal government, Walesa said that in the prime minister’s place he’d have used truncheons on those ungrateful spongers.”

Not surprisingly, nearly two million Poles have moved abroad and, as is the case everywhere, these immigrants are blamed for the problems of their new host country. Pyzik recounts the absurd lengths that immigrant-bashers in England, a primary destination for emigrant Poles, resort to: “A picture of a depopulated main street in the former cotton-manufacturing city of Lodz appeared recently in the *Sun*, titled as ‘The Polish city that moved to Britain’ as an effect of migration. Yet the paper’s photographer had to try really hard and photograph it around seven in the morning, because usually Piotrkowska Street is one of the liveliest streets in the country, full of original cafes, clubs, restaurants, and singular shops. But if the *Sun* went to any similar-sized British city, there it would discover the real misery, depopulated streets, ugly retail shops and Bargain Booze. In terms of devastated cities, the UK has a visible primacy.”

Despite the experience of so many of its own citizens going abroad to survive, Poland is no more friendly to those who cross its borders than are the countries of the West. “As the leader of the East, Poland started to be an obvious destination for migrants or refugees of the many post-Soviet countries that were less successful in the post-’89 restoration. Chechens, Ukrainians, and Vietnamese are exploited and discriminated against in Poland... This is the world of post-Fordism, a stream of cheap labor flowing from one country to another, all equally fucked despite differences.”

On the other hand, corporate immigrants are given a royal welcome. Eastern bloc cities give tax breaks to Western business while carrying out evictions in poor neighborhoods to make way for elites both domestic and foreign. Privatization includes factories built on public land with public money by

“There is a widespread and very sincere desire in the former Eastern bloc to return to the material guarantees of socialism.”

public labor. In *Privatizing Poland: Baby Food, Big Business, and the Remaking of Labor*, Elizabeth Dunn tells the story of what happened at the Polish factory auctioned off to the cute baby food people at Gerber. “When Gerber realized that their stock holdings made them active agents with the power to decide and strategize, it quickly offered to buy back the shares that it had just helped employees purchase (for several times the original sale price). For Gerber, the money given to employees was a way to clear the moral balance sheet and to shed the social context of labor. To make labor and produce into hard accounting numbers, rather than the artifacts of enduring social relationships, Gerber had to strip away the entangling threads of obligation between workers and the firm.”

In Hungary, which has been a member of the European Union since 2004, the EU took no action when the Hungarian government introduced censorship and marginalized the opposition’s legal rights. It didn’t react when government ministers compared Jews and gypsies to animals, bringing back the rhetoric of the Nazis. It did intervene, though, when Hungary took small steps to limit free trade.

Free trade in Eastern Europe also applies to women’s bodies. The transition to capitalism brought a flourishing sex trade into being in the Eastern bloc and now thousands of emigrant women slave away in the UK sex industry. Many more women work cleaning British houses or waitressing, always with an eye out for the immigration police. This semi-slavery thrives despite the fact that a high percentage of these women have college degrees. Pyzik notes that the word slave derives from Slav, adding: “We were the slaves of Europe and the first real periphery of the capitalist West, and the center cannot live without the periphery.” Socialism threatened but ultimately did not change this relationship.

The historic strivings of the peoples of the Eastern bloc for a better life are not just simply suppressed. Those dreams are also being turned into harmless icons, icons which are for sale. This takes the form of “Ostalgia, a dubious sympathy for communist culture and the symbols of the past without any political investment, uprooting them and rendering them meaningless. In recent years we have seen how popular art exhibitions bringing back the legacy of the communist years, with Cold War Modern in 2008 at the V&A in London, Star City at Nottingham Contemporary and Ostalgia in New Museum New York, could often obliterate the politics and social situations the featured countries live in now.”

There are now companies that focus on taking tourists to any place where things are falling apart. An outfit called Political Tours specializes in post-communist regimes.

Chernobyl is a popular destination. “It seems that even if everything is ruined,” Pyzik writes, “there’s still a way of making money by picking over the corpse.” This led one Polish couple to go back in time as if 1989 had never happened. For a year they wore, ate, read, and consumed only goods produced in the People’s Republic, after which they got a book deal to write about the experience.

At the same time, there is a widespread and very sincere desire in the former Eastern bloc to return to the material guarantees of socialism. This is also seen in the former Soviet Union and in China, where many now demand a return to the security of the Iron Rice Bowl.

Musicians, a key part of Pyzik’s story of modern day Poland, were a significant factor in mobilizing the protests that helped to bring down the Berlin Wall. Peter Wicke, then director of Popular Music Research at Humboldt University in what is now eastern Germany, said in 1991:

The Western media continues to describe these dramatic events in Eastern Europe as the triumph of the Western system and the defeat of socialism. But the intent of the musicians and their young audience in this country was to effect changes *within* socialism. The changes we fought for were quite different than the changes we got.

CBS newsman Bob Simon was on the scene and he asked: “Few tears will be shed over the demise of the East German army but what about the whole East German system, which covered everyone in a security blanket from day care to health care, from housing to education?”

In Poland, Solidarity was “the main agent of the collapse of communism,” Pyzik writes. “But Solidarity members themselves didn’t care about private ownership, which was never part of their program, they wanted to reform socialism.”

And that’s still the case. “It is hard to talk about any ‘specter haunting Europe’ yet, but something has happened recently. As austerity measures are taking their toll, we are surrounded by the rhetoric of scarcity. There’s no more money, politicians convince us—the resources have run out. But to demand more, to demand the return of the welfare state, would be more than just childishness on the part of the impoverished—it’d be calling for...communism!”

Strangely enough, a similar shift of opinion may be taking place in the United States, albeit from a very different historical perspective.

In a recent Gallup poll, 37 per cent of all Americans found “socialism” superior to “capitalism,” while in a Pew poll 43%

of Americans under 30 described “socialism” as positive. It’s hard to know exactly what these people meant when none of the poll interviews were televised and when Americans have had no experience with socialism. Our education about the meaning of capitalism is direct (foreclosure, lack of medical care) and not conceptual. But it seems likely that many of them are saying we should go back to the time of a meaningful safety net. In other words, go back to the glory days of heavy industry. This is the same thing that so many people in the Eastern bloc, Russia, and China are saying. In all cases it’s understandable, yes; a satisfying “fuck you” to capitalists foreign and domestic, yes; but it’s absolutely impossible. Not to mention that the dependence on destructive fossil fuels which heavy industry has bequeathed to us may soon make the question of society itself moot.

Perhaps the *isms* have become so bent and distorted, so painted over, that at least as words they have lost their meaning. In any event, the poll numbers above (and if similar polls were conducted in the former socialist countries they would almost certainly produce even stronger results) do not reflect anything that could be described as a vision for the future. In the world today the imagination is hemmed in by the heavy hand of NGO-driven charity-mongering, and some version of the lesser of two evils is still perceived as a viable political strategy.

Today’s scarcity is artificial, enforced from above. Modern technology could easily provide more than enough for everyone. Yet we stand at the base of a great wall, hungry, our vision blocked by mass media and miseducation, unable to see the mountain of grain on the other side. Encouraged by Tea Partiers and their mirrors on the left, we too often limit ourselves to memories of those thrilling days of yesteryear, when the ass on the assembly line was a human one. We need to move forward but we have lost the ability to dream. But we can still find it in the words of artists who point us toward the future, not the past.

Following in the footsteps of Chrissie Hynde’s prediction that money will soon disappear, Carlos Santana opined at a Latin Grammys press conference: “I envision a world where water, electricity, food, and education would be for free for everyone on this planet.”

In turn, Santana’s words were a remix of John Lennon’s lyrics for “Imagine”:

*No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world*

How can these simply-stated visions be realized? Marshall Brain, founder of HowStuffWorks.com, writes:

To achieve true economic freedom, we must break a

fundamental doctrine in today’s economy: the link between work and income. Robots will be doing all the work, so this link becomes meaningless. We need a new paradigm. In the current paradigm, millions work to make the rich richer. For example, 3.5 million fast food workers get minimum wage so executives can make billions of dollars...Instead of letting the mega-rich swim in an ocean of money...we should tap that ocean to provide a swimming pool of money for each person. Give everyone \$25,000 per year.

Can this work? It’s easy to come up with objections. Without jobs, people will have nothing to do. Where will that money come from if no one’s working? How can you live on \$25,000 a year? But that’s not the point. The point is to be willing to think completely outside the box, the box of any and all industrial systems, with their inherent inequality and planet-destroying essence. **CP**

If you don’t have a dream, how you gonna have a dream come true?

– Oscar Hammerstein

LEE BALLINGER co-edits *Rock & Rap Confidential*. Free email subscriptions are available by writing rockrap@aol.com.

Taken for a Ride Uber vs. the Cabbies

BY BEN TERRALL

Labor activists have long agitated against the status quo for U.S. taxi drivers, arguing that the industry’s lease system extracts exorbitant amounts from cabbies without guaranteeing anything approaching a decent wage. They decry a system where millions have gone to company owners and those that own multiple medallions (the equivalent of licenses) while drivers scramble to make what often hovers around minimum wage.

Ruach Graffis began driving a cab in 1973 and helped found both the San Francisco-based United Taxicab Workers and Green Cab, a worker-owned cooperative that was the first all-hybrid fleet in the U.S. (and the only U.S. cab company with sick days). Graffis told me that cabbies are a modern-day equivalent of sharecroppers. “You have to pay for assigned shifts, and whether you take a cab out or make any money at all is immaterial to the company ... it’s the nature of capitalism, the people in power make the the most amount of money with the least amount of risk.” She described the 1970s crack-down on cab unionization by large San Francisco fleet owners as a precursor to Ronald Reagan’s crushing the air traffic con-

troller's union; previous to that, cab drivers had shorter shifts, worker's comp and other benefits, and an employer-employee relationship with the companies. Deregulation of the industry spread to other cities.

In a phone interview, Donna Blythe-Shaw, who organizes drivers in the Boston Taxi Drivers Association on behalf of the United Steelworkers, outlined the result: "The system has been that a handful of fleet owners became millionaires, one close to a billionaire," without paying a decent wage to the drivers who made them rich.

These activists now have new adversaries which are threatening the survival of traditional cab work: Uber, Lyft, and other app-based outfits defined as Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) by the California Public Utilities Commission. These new companies don't own vehicles, but license taxi, limo, and private car drivers and distribute iPhones to drivers through which payments and routing are handled.

Smartphone-wielding riders have taken to the mobile apps for Uber and its ilk like ducks to water, making these companies one of the fastest growing sectors of the tech industry. Like so many innovations coming out of Silicon Valley, the emphasis is on convenience. TNC PR stresses the ease with which rides can be had, with the app letting the customer know the proximity of the nearest available driver, eliminating long waits. Prices are extremely competitive with cab companies, sometimes cheaper. This new transportation option is also pitched as an improvement for drivers, since workers are no longer tied to a lengthy shift. "Driver partners" can work whenever they want to, driving their own cars for as many hours as they want to. Lyft even refers to its drivers and customers as a "community," and calls Lyft drivers as "your friend with a car."

Critics of these new companies say the reality isn't so sunny. As cab driver Jon Han said in a recent San Francisco forum on the emergence of these venture capitalist-backed paragons of free market libertarianism, "The new boss is the same as the old boss, and might be worse." Driver and organizer Mark Gruberg, another panelist in the forum, skewered the label "ride sharing." After the public event, he told me, "This isn't sharing, this is for profits. The whole notion is bogus, but they successfully insinuated that into media accounts."

Blythe-Shaw also emphasized what she sees as corporate America's misleading use of the term "shared economy." "There's no equal benefit for everyone," she said. "That kind of economy doesn't create infrastructure, the money only goes to the top."

Gruberg says that while the new tech-based companies take credit for being the first to develop transportation apps, taxi fleets were using apps in 2009, and the initial bugs have been worked out of them. Apps like Flywheel, used by traditional cabs in San Francisco and other markets, allow customers to quickly get rides from cab drivers with training that

TNC workers do not have. Unfortunately for those drivers, Flywheel and similar taxi apps have nowhere near the budgets of Uber or Lyft, so few riders know of their existence.

Gruberg told me that one of the chief customer complaints about taxi companies, radio dispatchers not sending cabs to out of the way neighborhoods, could have been addressed long ago by implementing a centralized dispatch system, for which United Taxicab Workers have campaigned for years. However, fleet owners were not forward enough thinking to shift to such a system, which would have entailed companies working with each other.

Critics point to the relatively skimpy regulation applied to the TNCs, but taxi advocates are working to change that at the state and national levels. Uber CEO Travis Kalanick responded to those pressures on Uber's website: "Over the years, what I've come to realize is that this controversy exists because we are in the middle of a political campaign and it turns out the candidate is Uber. Our opponent – the Big Taxi cartel – has used decades of political contributions and influence to restrict competition, reduce choice for consumers and put a stranglehold on economic opportunity for its drivers."

But journalist Dan Brekke recently noted that since the beginning of 2013, Uber, Lyft, and their competitor Sidecar have reported spending a total of \$480,000 in Sacramento lobbying to fight new regulations.

Brekke wrote that by comparison, in California "The Taxicab Paratransit Association, a persistent critic of what it has called lack of regulation for the ride-service companies, has spent about \$32,000 on lobbying during the last 20 months, according to filings with the secretary of state. LiftPAC, the association's political action committee, reports donating about \$25,000 to a total of 15 legislators since June 2013."

Uber's clout in California secured a compromise it could live with when a bill requiring commercial insurance for TNC drivers was significantly watered down in the California State Assembly this summer. Originally the bill would have required up to \$750,000 insurance from the moment the driver turned the smartphone app on. But the bill as passed requires the company to provide coverage of \$50,000 in liability for death or injury to a single person, \$100,000 for all damages in an accident, and \$30,000 for property damage. When the driver's personal policy is insufficient, \$200,000 of excess liability would be required. Sen. Bill Monning (D-Carmel), chairman of the Senate Insurance Committee, said the final bill "compromises the public health and safety."

But that's just one state. Elsewhere, TNC coverage is still skimpily regulated. And drivers may well find that their commercial insurance does not cover accidents that occur while they are driving for a TNC.

Insurance coverage and liability for TNCs has been a hot topic since an Uber driver hit and killed a 6-year-old girl in a San Francisco crosswalk last New Year's Eve. Though his

app was turned on at the time, Uber claimed it wasn't liable. Then in October, an Uber driver attacked (unprovoked) a rider with a hammer. The passenger faces the possibility of losing his eye, but is unlikely to get any help from the TNC, as Uber's terms of service read "YOU EXPRESSLY WAIVE AND RELEASE THE COMPANY FROM ANY AND ALL ANY LIABILITY [sic], CLAIMS OR DAMAGES ARISING FROM OR IN ANY WAY RELATED TO THE THIRD PARTY TRANSPORTATION PROVIDER..."

Uber Technologies, Inc., valued at around \$18 billion and by far the biggest of the tech-based transport outfits, is now a global company in what one investor called "the empire-building phase."

Uber operates in 45 countries, so it's no surprise that the corporation has high-powered executives working to expand its business. After it raised \$258 million from Google Ventures and TPG Investments in 2013, Kalanick exulted that Google has "...the expertise that comes with evangelizing new technology with governments and regulatory bodies around the world," and that TPG Capital has "regulatory know-how in highly regulated ... industries in the farthest corners of the world."

Among the regulations that Uber is eager to skirt is uniform fare pricing. Currently the company specializes in undercutting cab fares: in mid-September it sent out a message to San Francisco Bay Area riders promoting "a price cut that's here to stay... dropping uberX [which utilizes smaller cars like the Toyota Prius] fares in the Bay Area by 15%, making it 40% cheaper than a taxi." But just a month earlier, company drivers engaged in "surge pricing" where they gouged concert goers leaving the San Francisco festival Outside Lands. One passenger wound up paying \$391 for an 11 mile trip, which normally would have cost around \$60.

Uber's campaign to undercut the competition has taken a toll on the company's drivers. In Chicago, percentages taken by Uber from fares left drivers with pay commensurate with wages for traditional cabbies. This built trust with drivers, many of whom acted on Uber's offer of financing for Town Cars. Then Uber increased its cut of the fares, leaving drivers who had committed to car purchases stuck with lower wages. Mona Aboukhalil is a Boston-based activist whose husband Mohamed drove for Uber until he got too fed up with their practices. She told me that when Uber lowered its minimum fares in Massachusetts her husband was assured that he would be getting more business and would not lose money from the shift. But, as with other drivers, his income went down. Ms. Aboukhalil says of the company, "They're a bunch of liars."

In August, Uber supplemented its Washington lobby shop by hiring David Plouffe, who directed Barrack Obama's 2008 campaign, as Senior Vice President of Policy and Strategy. Plouffe stated, "To the extent that there are barriers, then we have to have a strategy to eliminate those barriers." The former Washington insider described his new gray train as

"... a hungry team, with big vision and the skills to execute on that vision."

Mark Gruberg says that the Uber vision includes controlling their drivers' freedom of speech. A Bay Area Uber driver wrote Gruberg that a passenger's complaint resulted in a text message from the company which said "Please refrain from having political conversations when you're driving for Uber." (Equally disturbing, Lyft, the company whose cars sport annoying pink mustaches, has asked its drivers to refrain from playing "ethnic music" or speaking a foreign language.) Gruberg argues that Uber is a "... company without a social conscience" devoted to a libertarian free market philosophy that doesn't care about workers' rights.

Uber's vision of profit sharing is also leaving many of its drivers underwhelmed. Some are now involved in a lawsuit (filed in U.S. District Court in California on behalf of drivers everywhere but Massachusetts – a separate suit has been filed in that state) claiming that they have been misclassified as independent contractors and are entitled to reimbursement for expenses including gas and vehicle maintenance. The lawsuit also alleges that Uber dissuades passengers from tipping, claiming that there is a gratuity included in the total fare, but that drivers receive only part of that gratuity.

Shannon Liss-Riordan, who filed the California and Massachusetts suits, told me that Uber is "... building their business by cutting labor costs." In addition, to get around existing regulations, they're "... claiming they are not in the car service business, but are just a tech company."

Biju Mathew, co-founder of the New York Taxi Workers Alliance and founding secretary of the National Taxi Workers Alliance, has been a key player in efforts to organize cab drivers throughout the U.S. He calls Uber a "ride steal" company and notes that the 18,000 member NYTWA has successfully blocked the tech giant from making inroads into New York City. Mathew is clear that cab drivers should not be at odds with Uber drivers, but should instead oppose the company itself. He told me that he sees the current situation as "a fight between the millionaires and the billionaires," with drivers "caught in the middle in a race to the bottom." **CP**

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CULTURE & REVIEWS

The Six Dumbest Decisions of My Life

BY PAUL KRASSNER

I'm talking here about seriously dumb decisions, not those minor regrets like that time in 1970 when *Esquire* magazine assigned me to fly to New Mexico where director Monte Hellman was filming *Two-Lane Blacktop*, about street-racing. Among the actors was a pair of musicians, James Taylor as a driver, and Dennis Wilson as a mechanic. They both agreed to be interviewed, besides screenwriter Rudy Wurlitzer and others.

During a conversation with Taylor about not laughing at jokes, he said, "My brother once told me a joke that made me laugh."

"Wait, don't tell me now," I said. "Let's save it for the interview."

However, I was supposed to reveal behind the scenes of making the movie, but I learned that there were a couple of violations of law: a few members of the cast had been tripping on magic mushrooms; and a 17-year-old actress, Laurie Bird, who played "The Girl," had sex with two members of the crew. Nine years later she would commit suicide.

Anyway, I decided not to write the article—I was a reporter, not a snitch—and never did get a chance to do any interviews. Nor did I ever hear the joke that James Taylor's brother told him and that made him laugh. I was mildly disappointed. What follows are half a dozen of my really dangerous dumb decisions that continue to make me humble.

1. Early one morning in 1963, at my apartment on the Lower East Side of

New York, I was in bed with a young woman I had met at a party, when the phone rang. It was her boyfriend, a lower-echelon Mafioso. He asked if I knew where she was. I told him no, even as she was cuddling next to me. He said he would check his source and call me right back. A few minutes later, he did.

"You were seen with her last night. You spent the night with her. She didn't come home last night. You *punk!*"

He said that he was coming to my office—which is where he thought he was calling me – to talk about it. I told her she'd better leave, and I rushed to the office, but he was already waiting outside the "Mad building" [where *Mad* magazine was published], peering through the locked outside door into the lobby, expecting the elevator door to open and me to step out and open the door for him. Instead he saw me on the sidewalk coming toward him.

"What are you doing out here?" he said.

"Well, I came out just a minute ago, but you weren't here."

"I was calling you up because you didn't come out."

"Oh—I figured you had the address wrong, so I took a walk around the block."

"Let's go to your apartment."

"Don't you want to come up to my office?"

"I said, 'Let's go to your apartment.'"

"You don't expect to find her *there?*"

"She leaves traces wherever she goes. By the way, do you have a telephone at your apartment?"

"Oh, yeah, well, it happens to be the same number as my office, incidentally."

There was a certain tension between us while we were walking to my apartment.

"Tell me," he said, "do you have

many friends who smoke Tareyton cigarettes?"

I suddenly realized what he meant by "She leaves traces." At the apartment, she was gone, but the bed was unmade and he couldn't help but notice the semen stain on the sheet. Which, of course, was no proof that it was *she* who had been there. However, the ashtray was filled with Tareyton cigarette butts.

"Do *you* smoke Tareytons?"

"No," I answered, "I don't smoke *any* cigarettes."

"I guess I caught you with your pants down, didn't I?"

He picked up the phone and dialed a number. He was calling her mother. "I found him," he said. "What should I do, throw 'im out the window?" I was scared that he might actually do it. He hung up the phone and I didn't know what to expect. I thought, *How could a realist have gotten himself into such an unrealistic situation?*

We proceeded to have a discussion.

"I got the *horns*," he yelled. "I gotta do something! It ain't *manly!*"

"Look, restraint itself can be a form of manliness."

"You know," he said, "I could arrange to have you killed while I was having dinner with your mother and father."

"Well, actually, they're not having too many people over to the house these days."

His low chuckle in response to that wisecrack marked a positive turning point in our conversation. He finally forgave me, and we shook hands. Then he borrowed twenty dollars, which we both knew I would never get back, but it was worth not being thrown out the window. I had known he was her boyfriend, and so I vowed never to risk sleeping with a gangster's girlfriend, especially if she smoked cigarettes;

2. In 1979, I covered the trial of Dan White, an ex-cop who had assassinated two progressive government officials in San Francisco – Mayor George Moscone (in 1975, as a state senator, he

authored a bill to decriminalize marijuana) and Supervisor Harvey Milk (an activist who had become the gay equivalent to Martin Luther King)—yet, after an incompetent prosecution and “the Twinkie defense” (a phrase I coined)—White was sentenced to only seven years.

That evening, I was unwinding at home, smoking a joint and preparing to write my final report for the weekly *Bay Guardian*. My reverie was suddenly interrupted by a phone call from Mike Weiss. We had become friends during the trial, which he had covered for *Time* magazine. He was calling from a phone booth across the street from City Hall. I could hear crowds screaming and sirens wailing behind his voice.

He had to yell: “There’s a riot going on! You should get here right away!”

Reluctantly, I took a cab. When I arrived at Civic Center, there were a dozen police cars that had been set on fire, which in turn set off their alarms, underscoring the shouts from a mob of 5,000 gay protesters. On the night that Milk was murdered, they had been among the 30,000 who marched silently to City Hall for a candlelight vigil. Now they were in the middle of a post-verdict riot, utterly furious.

But where were the cops? They were all fuming *inside* City Hall—where their commander had instructed them to stay—armed prisoners watching helplessly as angry demonstrators broke the glass trying to ram their way through the locked doors.

I spotted Weiss and a student from his magazine-writing class, Marilee Strong. The three of us circulated through the crowd. Standing in the middle of the intersection, *Chronicle* columnist Warren Hinckle was talking with a police official, and he beckoned me to join them. I gathered from their conversation that the cops were about to be released from City Hall. Some were already out. One kept banging his baton on the phone booth where Mike was now calling in his story, and he had to wave his press card before the cop

would leave.

I found Marilee and suggested that we get away from the area. As we walked north on Polk Street, the police were beginning to march slowly in formation not too far behind us. But the instant they were out of view from City Hall, they broke ranks and started running toward us, hitting the metal pole of a bus stop with their billy clubs, making loud, scary *clangs*.

“We better run,” I told Marilee.

“Why? They’re not gonna hit us.”

“Yes, *they are!* Run! Hurry!”

The police had been let out of their cage and they were absolutely enraged. Marilee got away, but I was struck with a nightstick on the outside of my right knee. I fell to the ground. The cop ran off to injure as many other cockroaches in his kitchen as he could. Another cop came charging and he yelled at me, “Get up! Get up!”

“I’m trying to!”

He made a threatening gesture with his billy club, and when I tried to protect my head with my arms, he jabbed me viciously on the exposed right side of my ribs. *Oh, God, the pain!* The cops were running amuck now, in an orgy of indiscriminate sadism, swinging their clubs wildly and screaming, “Get the fuck outta here, you fuckin’ faggots, you motherfuckin’ cocksuckers!”

I managed to drag myself along the sidewalk. It felt like an electric cattle prod was stuck between my ribs. Marilee drove me to a hospital emergency ward. X-rays indicated that I had a fractured rib and a punctured lung.

The City of San Francisco was sued for \$4.3 million by a man who had been a peaceful observer at the riot following the verdict. He was walking away from the Civic Center area when a cop yelled, “We’re gonna kill all you faggots!”—and beat him on the head with his nightstick. He was awarded \$125,000.

I had wanted to sue the city, but an attorney requested \$75 for a filing fee, and I didn’t have it. I was too foolishly proud to borrow it, and I decided to forego the lawsuit. I must’ve been crazy.

3. In 1985, after living in San Francisco for sixteen years, I moved to a small place in Venice, California, a block-and-a-half walk to the beach. I rented a top-floor tiny two-room apartment consisting of a kitchen/office where I could see the ocean and a living-room/bedroom which came with a convertible sofa. The bathroom had a bathtub/shower.

One day I took a bus to Santa Monica to eat at a little soul-food restaurant in a food court and then to see a Woody Allen movie. As I recall, it was *The Purple Rose of Cairo*.

When I returned home, I walked up the steps to the top floor, and when I opened the door to my “penthouse” apartment, it was filled with smoke. I had stupidly, utterly recklessly, left a candle burning in a glass ashtray on the arm of the sofa. I didn’t *forget* to do that. I *chose* to leave it that way.

The ashtray had broken in half from the heat, and the sofa was burning, although asbestos material had prevented it from being on fire in a way that would spread the flames. I ran down the steps and got the fire extinguisher off the wall in the hall, ran back up and sprayed my ass off.

“You should be ashamed of yourself,” I said to myself.

I was grateful that only the sofa had been destroyed. My pride in expanded consciousness was disintegrated. I’ve never quite forgiven myself for having endangered the lives and property of the tenants in the other four apartments. I ignored the concept of cause and effect. My bad. Immensely so.

4. On the morning of April 1st, 1995, I flew to San Francisco. I was scheduled to emcee a benefit for Jack Kerouac’s daughter, Jan, who had been on dialysis treatment for the last few years. On that sunny afternoon, I was stoned in Washington Square Park, wearing the *Mad* magazine jacket that my daughter Holly had given me for Christmas. The smiling face of Alfred E. Neuman – stating his renowned philosophy, “What – me worry?” – graced the back

of my jacket

I was waiting for the arrival of the annual Saint Stupid Day Parade, led this year by Grand Marshal Ken Kesey in an open-topped convertible. The event was sponsored by the First Church of the Last Laugh. Their sound equipment was surrounded by yellow plastic tape warning, "*Police Line—Do Not Cross.*" Somebody in a clown costume handed me a three-foot section of that tape.

The celebration featured music, comedy and a traditional free brunch, along with such favorite rituals as the Sock Exchange and the Leap of Faith. Kesey was also in town to speak at the benefit, which was held only because Jan happened to be the daughter of a ground-breaking literary celebrity, even though he had abandoned her mother when she was pregnant with Jan.

I said to my friend Julius, who drove me there, "It's not enough any more just to be a sperm donor."

Jan had met her father only twice. The first time, she was nine. The second time, six years later, he sat there, drinking a fifth of whiskey and watching *The Beverly Hillbillies*. Jan would eventually die of kidney failure at the age of forty-four, never having fulfilled her fantasy of becoming drinking buddies with her father, who died when she was a teen.

Now, backstage, someone I knew handed me a baggie of what I assumed to be marijuana. I thanked her and put it in my pocket. Ah, yes, one of the perks of the benefit biz. Later, as the final members of the audience were straggling out of the theater, I was sitting with Julius in his car in the parking area at Fort Mason Center.

He was busy rolling a joint in a cigar-box on the dashboard with the map light on. There was a police car circling around in the distance, but we unwisely ignored it. Suddenly, a moment later, there was a fist knocking heavily on the passenger-side window, and a flashlight shining in my eyes. *Shit! Fuck! Caught!*

We were ordered outside and, with our arms outstretched against the side of the car, with the face of Alfred E.

Neuman smiling at the cop and asking, "What—me worry?" And indeed, the cop was worried. He asked me if I had anything sharp in my pockets.

"Because," he explained, "I'm gonna get very mad if I get stuck," obviously referring to a hypodermic needle.

"No," I said, "there's only a pen in this pocket"—gesturing toward the left with my head—"and keys in that one."

He found the coiled-up three feet of yellow plastic tape warning "*Police Line—Do Not Cross,*" and said, "Where'd you get this?"

"At the Saint Stupid Day Parade."

"What's it for?"

"To keep people away."

But then he found the baggie. And, to my surprise, it contained magic mushrooms. He examined the contents. Then, reeking with sarcasm, he said, "So you like mushrooms, huh?" Under the circumstances, it was such a ridiculous question that I almost laughed, but I realized that, from his point of view, this was a *serious* offense.

Julius was given a \$50 citation for possession of marijuana, but I was arrested on the spot, handcuffed behind my back, and my Miranda rights were read to me. I stood there, heart pounding fast and mouth terminally dry, trying to keep my balance on the cusp of reality and unreality. Fortunately, attorney Doron Weinberg got me off with a \$100 fine and nothing on my permanent record.

But I finally understood what that cop meant when he snarled, "So you like *mushrooms*, huh?" His question was asked with such archetypal hostility that it kept reverberating inside my head. *So you like mushrooms, huh?* It was not as though I had done anything that might harm another human being. This was simply an authority figure's need to control. But control what? My pleasure? Or was it deeper than that?

What was his *actual* message? Back through eons of ancestors—all the way back to what psychedelic researcher Terence McKenna called "the *unstoned apes*"—this cop was continuing a nev-

er-ending attempt to maintain the status quo. He had unintentionally revealed the true nature of the threat he perceived. What he *really* said to me was, "So you like the evolution of human consciousness, huh?"

"Well, yeah," I thought, "now that you mention it, I do. I mean, when you put it like that—*So you like the evolution of human consciousness, huh?* -- sure, I do. I like it a whole lot." Too bad I had remained silent instead of using my instinct and advising Julius, "Let's get the hell out of here."

5. Once, in the men's room at an airport, I couldn't help but notice a man standing at a urinal a couple of urinals away from the one where I was carefully aiming my stream with my left hand onto the round marzipan-like disinfectant. But he was allowing his penis to aim itself, because he happened to be busy using both hands to floss his teeth. It was a monument to multi-tasking.

I'm embarrassed to admit that, rather than flossing, I would use a dollar bill to clean between my teeth. Instead, I was actually adding bacteria to my mouth, thereby giving a new, literal meaning to the concept of "dirty money." As a result, my teeth were in terrible shape.

I had known better. Back in 1971, publisher Stewart Brand had invited Ken Kesey and me to co-edit *The Last Supplement to the Whole Earth Catalog*. Our managing editor, Hassler (Ron Bevirt's Merry Prankster name), introduced me to the fine art of flossing.

"I began cleaning between my teeth with dental floss, and then brushing carefully after every meal for the last nine years," he told me. "Dental floss is really important because it removes particles of food from between the teeth that can't be dislodged by the brush. It's this crap between the teeth that really causes decay."

Although I didn't practice what he preached, I immediately assigned him to write a piece about the process of flossing for *The Last Supplement*. After all, the *Whole Earth Catalog* was devoted to informing its readers about a

variety of New Age tools. And floss was definitely a useful tool.

“Floss comes in two thicknesses,” Hassler wrote. “Thin, called Dental Floss; and thick, called Dental Tape. Recently, I found Dental Floss Unwaxed. All the floss and tape I’ve used in the past were waxed. I find that I prefer the waxed because it slips in and out between my teeth cleanly without leaving any of the floss behind, which I find to be a problem with unwaxed floss. I’ve realized the importance of my teeth in the service of my habit. Munch, slurp, slobber, drool...”

In 1987, I was a keynote speaker at the annual International Society for Humor Studies conference, held in Tempe, Arizona. I had dinner with a group of five staffers from the Russian humor magazine *Krokodil* at the Holiday Inn. They all ordered the specialty of the house—pork ribs—which come with these huge bibs. The editor was given a bib with the words “Miss America” on it. The art director got a bib with a big iconic “S” for Superman.

They were really getting a dose of our culture. As we walked along the salad bar, one of the Russians stopped at the corn chowder and asked me, “Is this typical American soup?” As the others gathered around, I didn’t quite know how to answer.

“I’m sorry, I don’t know,” I said. “I’m sure it’s typical somewhere in the country.” And then I remembered that multi-tasking man at the airport urinal. “In America,” I told the Russian, “corn chowder comes with dental floss that has little pieces of corn embedded in it, so if you get hungry between meals you can floss and have a snack at the same time.”

A few years before I met my wife, she had gone to a dentist who required all new patients to take a two-session course in flossing and oral health. Only when he was satisfied that patients would be capable of caring for their teeth properly would he then make their first cleaning appointment. Nancy learned the technique, and recently a

friend named her “the Floss Queen.” We came across an ad stating that “If you follow a vegan diet, you may opt for Eco-Dent’s GentleFloss, which uses beeswax instead of animal products.” Who knew?

The irony behind all this is that Medicare doesn’t cover any dental procedures, even though dentists emphasize how bad teeth can cause illness in other, internal parts of the body. For example, a research team from Columbia University’s School of Public Health released the results of a three-year study of 420 men and women, concluding that the improvement of gum health can help slow the development of atherosclerosis, the build-up of cholesterol-rich plaque along artery walls, which can lead to heart attacks and strokes.

I still regret that I would eat candy without flossing afterward. Especially a Clark Bar, which could cause a cavity and fill it simultaneously.

6. Orson Bean—comedian, raconteur, actor—is my oldest friend. He’s a Christian libertarian conservative, and we’ve had an ongoing email dialogue about religion, but he’s still a Christian and I’m still an atheist, though not a militant atheist, as I used to be.

I changed back in the ’60s when I realized that Martin Luther King was a Christian but I was inspired by his actions, whereas George Lincoln Rockwell, head of the American Nazi Party, was an agnostic but I abhorred what he stood for. So it no longer matters to me what anybody’s religious belief is, as long as they don’t try to turn theological dogma into secular law; and I only care whether they treat others with kindness or cruelty. And Orson is a genuinely kind person.

A few years ago, I emailed him: “If you can arrange for me to interview Andrew Breitbart” – his son-in-law – “I’ll believe in God.” Orson forwarded my email to Breitbart, who in turn sent me an email saying, “Apparently there is a God,” with his own phone number. I called, we spoke, and he agreed to

do an interview. My only ground rule would be that neither of us would interrupt the other.

I contacted my editor at *Playboy*, and I got the assignment. He preferred me to conduct a discussion rather than a Q&A. I immediately sent an email to Orson with the good news. “Praise the fucking Lord,” I wrote. My dialogue with right-wing propagandist Breitbart—maybe his last interview—was published in the December 2011 issue of *Playboy*.

I had taped our conversation on an electric recorder-transcriber, plus a battery-operated cassette recorder as a back-up precaution, which turned out to be an absolute necessity when the electric recorder conked out right in the middle. Later on, I bought a new one to replace it, but first I had to get rid of the old one. My desk consisted of a wooden door supported by a couple of two-drawer filing cabinets. I was just too damn lazy to take all the equipment and books off the desk so that I could move the desk toward me and pull up the wire from behind it. So I simply cut the wire with a pair of scissors. *Bzzzzt!!!* I was shocked, but not injured. Though the recorder had conked out, I had incredibly left the wire still plugged into a socket on the surge protector. Where the scissors had cut the wire, parts of the metal had melted away just a couple of inches from my hand. I might’ve been electrocuted. Yikes!

I could’ve been killed, and the cause would’ve been a simple lack of the practice of mindfulness that I treasure so much. Instead, I had emptied my mind. Oops, wrong discipline. But I was still alive, and I thanked God for that. And then I heard a resplendent voice booming through the clouds: “SHUT UP, YOU SUPERSTITIOUS FOOL!” **CP**

PAUL KRASSNER’s latest book is *Patty Hearst & the Twinkie Murders: A Tale of Two Trials*, available at paulkrassner.com.

CounterPunch

ISSN 1086-2323 (print)

ISSN 2328-4331 (digital)

www.counterpunch.org

1 (800) 840-3683

\$5.00 per issue

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