

TELLS THE FACTS AND NAMES THE NAMES

# CounterPunch

SEPT. 1-30, 2012

ALEXANDER COCKBURN AND JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

VOL. 19, NO. 15-16

*Special Tribute Issue*  
**Alexander Cockburn**  
*June 6, 1941 – July 21, 2012*



Photo by Sonny Anderson for Dobson Images, c. 2010.

**Featuring Essays by: Jeffrey St. Clair, Peter Linebaugh, Frank Bardacke, Robert Pollin, JoAnn Wypijewski, Pierre Sprey, Susanna Hecht, Bruce Anderson, Doug Peacock, Debbie Nathan, Mike Whitney, Ben Tripp, Joe Paff and many others...**

# Go Ask Alex

By Jeffrey St. Clair

"Feed your head."  
—Jefferson Airplane

My last talk with Alex was like so many others. It wandered around from topic to topic in an easy, freestyle way. His voice was a little weaker than usual, a little scratchy in the throat. He was in Germany, talking on a cell-phone, in a hotel room near the clinic where he was being treated for cancer. We talked about how dreary American politics had become, about the spinelessness of Obama and his liberal supporters, the insanity of the Republican ultras, and the stuffiness of Mitt Romney. "Is this all there is?" he asked. "Politics used to be so much more fun."

Then his voice livened up. He described an online photo essay on Bridget Bardot, then vividly recalled his stroll through the Pompidou Center in Paris with his daughter Daisy to view the vast Matisse retrospective. "No question, Matisse was the greatest." Matisse had deposed Samuel Palmer, Edouard Vuillard, Turner, Hokusai, Bruegel the Elder, Morris Graves and Giorgioni, in Alex's ever-changing retinue of favorite painters.

He asked what I'd been listening to. I told him Howlin' Wolf and John Lee Hooker, as usual, reigniting a long-running debate between us. Alex was a Muddy Waters man. I emailed him a video clip of our mutual hero Ike Turner, playing at some odd venue in Italy, with the Ikettes high-stepping it in white mini-skirts and go-go boots. We watched it together online, laughing at the way the dancers seemed to mock Turner. "Ike's headed for trouble," Alex said.

Then Alex asked if the trout were rising in the Deschutes River in central Oregon. He said when he got back to the states we should ring up old Doug Peacock in Montana and spend a couple days tossing dry flies at the rainbows. I told him to count on it.

"Can you bring sausages? I can't believe I'm in the heart of Germany and can't even eat sausages."

I told him I'd order some garlic sausages from Taylor's down in Cave Junction, pack some goat cheese and a dozen bottles of Cote du Rhone.

"Thanks, Buddy."

That was the last time I heard his voice.

The first time I heard his voice was in the fall of 1992, after the presidential elections. I was editing the environmental magazine *Wild Forest Review* at the time. The phone rang. I picked up. "Jeffrey, hullo, Jeffrey, is that you? This is Alexander Cockburn at *The Nation*."

Even though I'd long given up reading the tedious, East Coast-biased prose of *The Nation*, the name was familiar from the *Village Voice*, which I used to read assiduously in the 1970s, and his marvelous books *Corruptions of Empire* and *Fate of the Forest*, with Susanna Hecht, both of which had fractured spines. The voice was sweetly accented, seductive almost. "That was a helluva piece you wrote on Clinton's environmental record in Arkansas. You know, we may be the only two people in the country to the left of David Broder who see Bill for the corporate whore that he is."

We talked for an hour or so about Clinton, Weyerhaeuser, Tyson Chicken and the poisoning of the White River. Turns out, Alex was not "at" *The Nation*, geographically anyway. I was surprised to learn that he lived on the Lost Coast in a little hamlet along the Mattole River called Petrolia. He'd left Manhattan behind to the consternation of many of his readers, friends and editors. But most of them had never seen the Mattole Valley or that wild stretch of California coast that runs from Shelter Cove north to Cape Mendocino.

A few days later, the fax machine began to spit out Alex's column. It was pretty much a verbatim transcript of our talk—though I didn't make an appearance. And that was vintage Alex, too. If there was a deadline, he would run right up to it and often past it. This wasn't because Alex had writer's block, it was because he had better things to do, like feed the horses, teach his cockatiel Percy to whistle the Internationale, fix—or try to fix—the septic, prune the apple trees, tweezer out a deer tick from Frank the cat's black dreadlocks, distill hard cider, check the progress of the pit barbecue, negotiate a complex Persian rug deal with Lawrence of La Brea or find his glasses. Alex could write faster than anyone I've ever met and the faster he wrote the sharper his prose. And Alex wrote very sharp prose. His old partner at the

*Village Voice*, James Ridgeway, called him "the Master."

Two months later Alex was writing for me. After his first column appeared in *Wild Forest Review*, Alex rang me up. "Jeffrey, nice looking issue. But didn't you forget something?"

"What's that?" I said, fearing that I'd mangled one of his paragraphs.

"My payment. I'm a professional writer, you know. Just a little something to make me feel I'm not giving it away."

We weren't paying writers then. We could barely pay the rent. I scrambled for a plan.

"Can I send you a bottle of Scotch?"

"I hate Scotch. Make it Irish whiskey. Jameson's."

Alex had a reputation as a heavy drinker. But that wasn't my experience with him. In the last few years, he tended to drink wine more than hard liquor. He flirted with hard cider and often came into possession of exotic distillations of dubious legality. But he didn't get rip-roaring drunk very often. Instead, he revealed a predisposition toward narcolepsy. He could simply fall asleep, often at surreal times. Once his ex-girlfriend Barbara Yaley had gotten us tickets to see Little Richard perform in San Francisco as a birthday present. Twenty-minutes into a raucous performance, Alex's head was nodding on my shoulder, snoring in sync to the beat of "Good Golly Miss Molly."

A few years earlier we gave a book talk at Powell's in downtown Portland. As usual, Alex drove his precious white Plymouth Valiant. After the gig we enjoyed a nice dinner at Jake's Famous Crayfish, drained a couple glasses of wine and headed back to Oregon City on Highway 99. We'd barely reached the swank community of Eastmoreland, near Reed College, when Alex muttered, "Jeffrey, can you take the wheel? Now..." His chin dropped to his sternum, the tiny car veering toward the Willamette. I leaned over, grabbed the steering wheel with one hand, pounded the break with the other. I negotiated the car to the side of the highway, heaved Alex into the passenger seat, then sat befuddled at the control panels wondering how to get the car into gear. It was my first, though not last, encounter with the Valiant's infamous push-button transmission.

Then there was the notorious incident in North Richmond, California. Our



book *Whiteout: the CIA, Drugs and the Press* had recently been published, greeted by what was perhaps the most hostile review ever printed by the *New York Times Book Review*. We were speaking to a big and boisterous crowd in this largely black community in the East Bay Area detailing the CIA's role in abetting cocaine trafficking during the Contra wars. I was about halfway through my talk when I was distracted by a delicate purring sound to my left. It was Alex, glasses perched on his forehead, hypnotized by the sedative power of my voice into a somnatic state. So, yes, even Cockburn nods.

Nearly every morning for the past 20 years, the phone would ring in our house at 7 am. "Jeffrey, this is Alex." As if it could be anyone else. We talked an hour each morning. Several hours a day when we were writing books together. Those calls oriented my days. Now there is a strange lacunae, as I wait for those early morning calls and find only silence. I feel lost without them.

These weren't business calls. They weren't "about" *CounterPunch*. They were notations on our lives. We talked about car mechanics and fishing; French cinema and the best way to bake salmon; the architecture of Barcelona and the merits of free jazz; surrealist poets and the proper way to stack hay; Kimberly and Daisy's adventures with the, yes, Alexander Technique; Roman emperors (we were intent on reclaiming the reputation of Nero) and the harvesting of mussels; the paintings Tintoretto and the dancing of James Brown; the plot of *Tron Legacy* ("Jeffrey, what's it all about? I've got to talk with Olivia later and I couldn't make heads or tails of it, could you?"); Becky Grant's dazzling ceramics and Greg Smith's latest project at Rancho Cockburn. One morning he called up and said, "Jeffrey, we have to rethink our opposition to journalism prizes. It seems my brother Patrick has just won the

Gellhorn Prize for war reporting. And he's going to accept it!" Who says Alex refused to change his mind?

Increasingly, we didn't talk much about the political scene: too dull, too predictable, too dreary. We taunted each other on the phone with jokes and pop quizzes: identify this painting, this singer, this line from Joyce, Wodehouse, Ruskin, Edward Gibbon or Henry Miller. We played these games right up to the end. On Bastille day, a week before he died, I sent Alex this stanza under the subject heading: "?"



*Now was it that both found,  
The meek and lofty did both find,  
Helpers to their heart's desire,  
And stuff at hand, plastic as they could wish,  
Both were called upon to exercise their skill—  
Not in Utopia, subterranean fields, or  
some secreted island,  
Or heaven knows where!  
But in the very world, which is the world  
of all of us—  
The place where in the end we find our  
happiness—  
Or not at all.*

Five minutes later an email skids into my Mac from Germany. "Wordsworth!"

And so he won again. Those are the closing lines of "The French Revolution as it Appeared to Enthusiasts at its Commencement." The young Wordsworth was something of an arm-chair revolutionary, cheering on the French radicals from his cottage in the

Lake District. But those were dangerous sentiments, even coded in verse, and Wordsworth was hounded by the secret police and broke under the pressure.

Alex never broke, never retreated, but always moved forward, toward greater liberation, toward justice and sometimes toward vengeance for grievous wrongs. His favorite line from Lenin was "Be as radical as reality." This became *CounterPunch's* motto. Alex's politics weren't static and they weren't theoretical. They were geared toward the circumstances of our daily lives.

In the hundreds of interviews I've given since Alex's death, I've taken to calling him "our Voltaire." He shared Voltaire's wide-ranging mind, his hatred of oppression, his rapier wit and astounding productivity. Alex wrote with breathtaking speed. I think he wrote as fast as Jean-Paul Sartre, but without the amphetamines. And the prose emerged, from the Underwood and later (thank god) his

Mac, with a vicious lucidity. His columns deepen and expand with re-reading, because, like Voltaire, they are studded with inside jokes, puns, secret insults and allusions. It's one of the reasons his friend Edward Said called him, "Alexander the Brilliant."

The last email Alex sent chastised me: "Jeffrey, why haven't you posted my diary! I sent it to you three DAYS ago!" I chuckled when I read it. He had actually sent the essay a few hours earlier and I had edited it and put it online only a few minutes later.

By that point Alex was apparently exploring Zeno's Paradox, he was surfing other waves of time, subdividing the seconds into infinite segments, as if he was hot on the trial of Schroedinger's Cat (the one that might be dead and alive at the same moment), a cat which, when he finally catches up with him, will be big and black and fluffy. Alex will call out: "Frankie!" And he will come...

## Cockburn's Promontory

By Peter Linebaugh

**B**ack in 1995 on a cool autumn day in Toledo, Ohio, Alexander slowly drove up Alvin Street in a big red convertible and, since it was mid-afternoon and school was out, scores of kids were following on the sidewalks talking and gaping at the white man in the magnificent machine. He slowed further and the youngsters spilled into the streets or walked alongside. The man arrived in our slummy neighborhood of rat-infested basements and Saturday night gun-shots, leading a giggling, happy parade!

In minutes he was making Turkish coffee and plugging his fax machine into some electrical fixture in our oven to get his column in for *The Nation*. This was back in the day before they cut it in half. A few days later he bid farewell snapping pictures with his vintage Leica. An eighteenth century European connoisseur attached to 1950s American consumerist, I thought. Introducing him later in Toledo for the launch of his *The Golden Age Is Within Us* (1995) I totally goofed calling him English. "No, no. Irish actually," he kindly corrected me. Ever forgiving like a gentle older brother, and ever since I've thought about it, what is Irish?

He spoke with his characteristic swashbuckling, entertaining, gonzo, informative, vulgar (*vulgus*, Latin for common people) combination of ferocity, wit, naughty innuendo, pure intelligence, and arresting phrase. He cheered up us slaves, and horrified the despots leaving their time-servers sputtering with hostility. Even now you can see the obituary writers of Established Opinion snigger as they undertake to slip the worm of diminishment into his coffin.

He was a respector of work, its craft. He aligned with the dockers, he was solid with the miners, he praised the nurses. He was in the streets. He had cartons of his latest book in the trunk that we sold in a strip-mall parking lot. Although he believed we attended the same north London school sometime in the late 1940s, I do not think that we were 'chums'. As a scholar I knew him as a journalist, and he re-paid the compliment. We were fellow workers in the USA.

I compare him to Daniel Defoe, who for more than a decade in the early eighteenth century when the newspaper business began, wrote, edited, and published *The Review* every fortnight, writing more prose in a life-time than anyone else, 'til Alex came around. Well, William Cobbett in the early nineteenth century also wrote a huge amount and who Alex reminds me of also. Defoe could be bought and sold. Not so with Cobbett who besides his books wrote, edited, and published *The Political Register* for decades, a root-and-branch radical, quite opinionated, and always entertaining precursor to *CounterPunch*. In that era of the first enclosures Cobbett wrote for cottagers and was himself a practicing husbandman, like Alex.

Alex wrote me a tremendous e-mail once on the subject of pomology, and assumed that I too was familiar, on speaking terms as it were, with John Evelyn, the great tree man of the seventeenth century. Like Tom Paine, Alex didn't care for capital punishment, and like E.P. Thompson he put great stock in the jury.

Alex respected scholars, as he respected miners or dockers. He understood our skills, our vanities, and believed our contributions were necessary. He didn't mind our jargon, and would indulge in the fancy word, just to get your attention. He respected the monograph. He was a fine scholar himself, as evidenced by, for

instance, his "A Short, Meat-Oriented History of the World" (*New Left Review*, January-February 1996). He was not awed by scholarship, and consequently did not find it necessary to deride it. In this, too, he was like Karl Marx. He loved Roman history not for its corruptions or voluptuaries and certainly not for its laws and stone piles but for its decline and fall, an unfailing fountain of hope for us who, like William Morris, hate civilization. He kept company with the characters of the French Revolution. His sensibility was aristocratic *and* barbaric, perhaps this is where the Gael comes in.

All this learning he wore lightly. His mind contained a gallery of characters from centuries past, *philosophes*, revolutionaries, beautiful women, humorists, bar-flies, and *soixant-huitards* whom he brought alive in his writings and who provided him with sustenance against the whips and scorns of time. He did not inhabit the coat-and-tie world or write conventionally for the creeps and twerps of licensed opposition.

While he had his feet on the ground, the ground itself, whether in Youghal, Manhattan, Key West, or Petrolia seemed, if not at the edge of the world, then at the end of some gigantic land mass – a true promontory - staring into space. Now that he has arrived at that bourn whence no traveller returns nor Leica records, I want, with you (otherwise I'll stumble), to stop, stand, salute. And try to get on with it in a world without him.

**Peter Linebaugh** teaches history at the University of Toledo. He is the author of *Magna Carta Manifesto*.

## Ridiculing the Celebrated, Celebrating the Ridiculed

By Frank Bardacke

*"The country was at the time divided into two unequal parts, or rather zones; in the upper, which alone was intended to contain the whole of the nation's political life, there reigned nothing but languor, impotence, stagnation, and boredom; in the lower, on the contrary, political life was beginning to make itself manifest by means of feverish and irregular signs, of which the attentive observer was eas-*

## CounterPunch

EDITORS

**JEFFREY ST. CLAIR**  
**ALEXANDER COCKBURN**  
JUNE 06, 1941- JULY 21, 2012

BUSINESS

**BECKY GRANT**  
**DEVA WHEELER**

DESIGN

**TIFFANY WARDLE**

COUNSELOR

**BEN SONNENBERG**  
1937-2010

CounterPunch

P.O. Box 228

Petrolia, CA 95558

1-800-840-3683

counterpunch@counterpunch.org

www.counterpunch.org

All rights reserved.

ily able to seize the meaning.” -- *Alexis de Tocqueville on America in 1848, in Recollections*

I am not sure that our Alex would have enjoyed the comparison. Tocqueville was a wide-thinker and a far-seer, but his prose was not deft (at least not in English translation) and he could go on and on. Cockburn was a livelier writer, and would have preferred (and perhaps deserved) a comparison to Twain.

Nonetheless. Tocqueville, the French aristocrat and bearer of high culture, certain that his class was doomed, traveling in the wilds of the New World, was astounded and horrified by what it might become. He tried mightily, but unsuccessfully, to accept it. Cockburn, from the impoverished Anglo-Irish aristocracy, another bearer of high culture, fleeing to the not-so-New World, was just as disdainful of all that was official, but was delighted by so much of what he found in the “lower zone.” Re-enacting the essential westward drift, he finally became an American. In my favorite photo (it is a hard choice) he sardonically holds a little red, white, and blue flag.

I read three periods in the prolific career of Alexander Cockburn. He begins on the East Coast in the 1970s, dismantling bourgeois pundits with one glorious insult after another. (“Thomas Friedman’s is an industrial, implacable voice, like having a generator running under the next table in a restaurant. The only sensible thing to do is leave.”) Alex is scornful, bored, dismissive. He is superior. Like Tocqueville, he sees the bourgeoisie as capable of nothing great except business, its largest aspiration a trivial, shallow happiness. “One of the great mysteries of your country,” he once told me, “is that the rich are so boring. In England, they cherish their eccentricities. What’s the point of having money, if you are going to live like everyone else?”

Next, in the 1980s, he’s on the road, traveling west in his Imperial or his Valiant, reporting on the unreported left, discovering a thriving, idiosyncratic America of competent car mechanics, skilled carpenters, knowledgeable fisherman, wild theorists, Little Richard, and a small town editor of genius. He listens hard, with a raised eyebrow, amused eyes, and unbounded affection. He learns about Michoacan from the man who re-does the upholstery in the Valiant; about India from the Sikh who tends the liquor

store; about bleeding his brakes from the woman in the apartment downstairs. Folks are startled by his attention, feel loved in his presence, miss him when he is gone. Spread across two pages in the *Nation*, he floats like a butterfly and stings like a bee, our left champion, ridiculing the celebrated and celebrating the ridiculed.

He keeps moving west until he reaches the sea. He buys land. He becomes a friend and patron of artists, craftsmen, and gardeners on the wonderfully named Lost Coast. Together they build his place. A wondrous country house and garden, with dog, cat, bird, and horses, the refrigerator in the garage, photographs, momentos, records, books, paintings all scattered about a long room that ends in a small atrium overlooking the orchard. It is exotic and comfortable, without affectation. It is here, facing the orchard at the end of the great room, that he does his work. He still visits New York, but infrequently. He stops reading the *New York Times*.

It is the *CounterPunch* years. Together with Jeffrey, he enlarges and occupies a small, precious space in U.S. politics, outside the Democratic Party but having no truck with conspiracy theorists or sectarians. He spends years cheering on the left, but as the prison gulag grows, the imperial wars intensify, and popular culture becomes more thoroughly banal, he looks for other allies. He never deserts the left, but decries its absence.

He takes enormous flak for some of his opinions. A good neighbor is a scientist. Alex has some kind words to say about him and his religion. He jumps in on global warming, doubting the computer-generated models, and challenging the standard predictions of imminent global collapse. Perhaps he is not the man to adjudicate that issue, but at least for me, he did expose the historical egomania of those who once chanted, “revolution in our lifetime,” and now sigh, “after me, the deluge.”

He was a great friend. Generous, fun, cheerful, helpful when times were tough. He made an adventure of daily life. It was all an entertainment: cooking a meal; working out a watering scheme in the garden; the inevitable consultation with the car mechanic. He never played the victim; he rarely acted the injured party. In the habit of shielding us from whatever pain he might be suffering, he kept

quiet about his final battle.

Six months before he died, unaware that he was fighting for his life, I sent him a note about a close friend of mine who had died. He emailed an answer: “This sort of news will get more familiar. I used to be slightly surprised at the seeming equanimity with which my father took the news of the passing of old and well-liked friends. Now I understand better.”

No, Alex, we don’t accept your passing with equanimity. We curse your cancer, bemoan your death. There is a huge hole where you are supposed to be.

Frank Bardacke is the author of *Trampling Out the Vintage*.

## Connoisseur of Trailing Edge Technology

By Pierre Sprey

I first met Alexander at a Buzzards Bay shore weekend in the summer of 1979. Andrew and Leslie, my close friends, had rented a sprawling old shingle style beachfront cottage and had asked me up. The weekend proved to be one of those unforgettable Cockburn family get-togethers; Claud and Patricia were there and so was Daisy, Alexander’s 10-year-old daughter. She and I were the only non-journalists present. The air was thick with book talk, flashing wit, irreverent tales of encounters with the high and the mighty.

Endlessly fascinating to me were Claud and Patricia’s reminiscences of Beaverbrook dinners and air raid wardening under the Blitz, travels in Africa and horse trading in wartime Ireland, the struggles of a one-man newsletter scuffling for new stories while goading Her Majesty’s Government. My most vivid memory of the weekend is of Daisy disappearing for an hour, then returning to perform for us an amazingly polished quarter hour impersonation of a TV news anchor, replete with convincingly concocted news. Alexander and the dotting grandparents, Claud and Patricia, were bursting with pride.

That weekend marked the start of a thirty year friendship with Alexander, one in which I happily served as a secret source on Pentagon weapons disasters and defense waste, open source for EPA’s blunders and sellouts, statistical consul-



tant, science critic, and personal technology adviser for things automotive and electronic.

In those early years, Alexander would call up every few weeks looking for grist for his *Village Voice*, *The Nation*, or *Wall Street Journal* columns. We'd start out talking about the Army's latest disastrous test results for the M1 *wunderpanzer* or how many hundreds of drug-running Cessnas the Air Force's vaunted AWACs radar plane had failed to detect. From there, the conversation would turn to subjects closer to our hearts: the superb handling of the 57 Plymouth with torsion bar front suspension, Muddy Waters' best piano player, pigsfeet in the 'hood versus *cru-beens*.

Those calls could come from almost anywhere in America—from South Carolina where Alexander had just picked up another classic clunker, from a Minneapolis anarchists' convention, or from an LA campus after a speech inciting students to revolt. The 80s were peripatetic years for Alexander and it was my great good fortune that he made Mapleshade, my home *cum* recording studio, one of his regular East Coast way stations. His stopovers were always huge fun, almost none of it planned.

An Alex visit might start with an afternoon's repairs on the aging gas guzzler he had just driven in from New Orleans; then a run to D.C.'s nearest Goodwill to paw through musty boxes of LPs looking for an Otis Redding or Dinah Washington gem; and then on to one of the Rhode Island Avenue clubs, perhaps Moore's Love and Peace or Mr. Y's, to hear a soulsinger or a soul jazz organ trio. Back at Mapleshade, the evening would end in the wee hours with a bibulously intense discussion of the unreliability of Thucydides' war reporting or the Trotskyite roots of the Appalachian Trail. The next morning's always-too-early breakfast might turn into a thinly-veiled cutting contest at the stove: say, my her-ring roe omelet against Alexander's Pecorino Romano soufflé, jousts in which

I was almost always outclassed. And then Alexander would hit the road for an admiring interview with some octogenarian radical union organizer in Woodstock, or to Boston for a public debate with a law school professor whose conventional progressivism he despised.

Although our shared admiration for obsolete (or, as I prefer to call them, trailing edge) technologies was one of the many bonds between us, we didn't always

His audio interests back then were also shaped by the exigencies of the road. He was, of course, deeply interested in small portable cassette players, both for recording interviews and for playing music—so I spent lots of time advising him on some of the amazingly good-sounding players and tape brands available back then. He was also deep into eight-track cassette machines and collecting eight-track tapes, an interest sparked by the eight-tracks on board a couple of his old Chryslers. We parted company there: eight tracks were both maddeningly inconvenient and bad-sounding.

In culinary technology, as in audio, Alex honed in on the trailing edge: black iron pans instead of stainless or copper-coated, whisks instead of electric beaters, and no blenders bearing push buttons or younger than thirty years old. Stoves had to be flame-based, preferably fueled by peat, coal or wood. Of course, spits, skewers and grills over stone or brick pits were better yet. In pursuit of that conviction, Alexander supervised construction of a sequence of

ever-improving—and ever-handsomer—outdoor pits at Petrolia; they stand to this day as a testament to his brilliance as a barbecue oven architect. For anyone who had ever tasted Alex's cooking, there was no arguing with his kitchen *fatwas*; the results simply crushed all opposition.

Once settled at Petrolia, circa 1990, Alexander's audiophilic ambitions grew in scale, in part fueled by the good sound he'd heard during his Mapleshade stopovers. My very first visit was largely consumed in audio talk and equipment installation—though I did manage to see enough to fall in love with Petrolia and to get in a couple of memorable horseback rides with Alex in full Western regalia (he was a very recent apostate from his lifelong English equestrianism). From the start of our collaboration on his sound system, Alexander made his audiophile priorities clear: playing LP records came first; the components were to be as retro as possible; the system had to sound



Photo by Tao Ruspoli, c. 2011

see eye to eye. Alexander had a long-standing love affair with his Underwood typewriter, whose beauties and virtues he would laud for hours to anyone who showed the slightest interest. I found that monogamous devotion mostly admirable, though his resulting contempt for my Olivetti was rather wounding. Indeed, Alexander's constancy was undeniable; long after every other journalist in the country had moved on to computers, he was still scouring the country for almost impossible to find Underwood ribbons and repairmen.

In those peripatetic years, Alexander's technical passions were shaped by the need for mobility. He became one of the country's true experts on compact facsimile machines—I'd guess the majority of his columns from that decade were written on the road and faxed in to New York or London. Not surprisingly, he continued to fax his copy long after everyone else was using the internet.

good in the far-from-ideal acoustics of that long, long, magnificently all-purpose room at Petrolia; it had to survive under hard partying; and it had to play *loud*.

I was certainly in sympathy with those priorities, though we found ourselves struggling with the long room and the party-inflicted casualties over the ensuing years. One of my first acquisitions for Alex, replacing an ancient and awful phonograph of pawn shop provenance, was a marvelous sounding air-bearing turntable made by my old comrade-in-arms from the bloody Pentagon battles over the A-10, Col. Bob Dilger. With its oak frame and cast iron pipe, AK-47 styling, it met Alex's retro requirement in spades. Unfortunately, the turntable depended intimately on a rather unreliable air compressor and associated plumbing that consumed lots of phone calls and lots of fixing over the next 20 years. In between fixes, it was usually supplanted by one or another pawn shop stand-in.

Acquired at the same time as the turntable was a pair of diminutive little black box speakers up on camera tripods flanking a slightly ominous looking, black coffin-like subwoofer on the floor. They sounded very good indeed, even better after Alex and I re-sculpted their front face with blue modeling clay and laminated their sides with lead sheets. They lasted a goodly number of years, though the looks got mixed reviews and eventually Alexander retired them because they didn't play quite loud enough.

Alex's next acquisition, on my advice, was a legendary small British amplifier from the 70s that had the shape of a very low black tin shack with a flat corrugated roof. It looked retro enough and the sound was certainly mesmerizing. But it ran hot enough to fry eggs and, within a couple of years, there was a rather spectacular meltdown. It was replaced by an early 80s stopgap receiver from the Salvation Army which, in due time, succumbed to Alexander's discovery of 60s vacuum tube gear. Vacuum tubes proved to be another one of his long-lasting, trailing technology love affairs. Every six months thereafter, I'd get excited phone calls from Alex from some pawn shop in Oakland or thrift store in Seattle, "Hey Pierre, I'm looking at a Fisher 100 (or Heathkit W5 or Scott 340) tube amp. It's a bit rusty but the guy wants only \$175 for it. Should I grab it?" And if the call wasn't about tube amps, then it would be about

some irresistibly ancient pair of massive wooden cabinet speakers, Altec-Lansings or Pioneers or JBLs, that looked like they might play *really* loud.

But in the midst of all this audiophilic improving, changing and retrogressing, Alexander's underlying passion for music—as well as his record collection—was growing steadily. Over the years, we never stopped swapping gems we had just found. He turned me on to some of Jimmy Cliff's early bandmates; I sent him Midnite, a stunning St. Croix reggae band we had just recorded. Fascinated with jump blues and the earliest vestiges of rock and roll, he touted me on to Wynonie Harris; I led him to Goree Carter and possibly the first distorted guitar solo. He turned me onto Clyde McPhatter with Billy Ward's Dominoes; I brought him two D.C. treasures, The Clovers and Marvin Gaye's Marquees. Both of us were endlessly fascinated with music of the civil rights struggle: he tipped me to Bernice Reagon's SNCC Freedom Singers; I introduced him to John Coltrane's agonized response to the Birmingham bombing, "Alabama." In fact, the last music Alexander sent me was Chuck Berry's hard-hitting movement song, "The Promised Land."

I loved that piece when he sent it. Now it's hard to listen to.

**Pierre Sprey** was a principal member of the aircraft design team that created the F-16 and A-10 jet-fighter bombers. He now runs Mapleshade Records.

## A Memory of Alexander

By William Broyles

**T**he world knew Alexander through his writing, which flowed out of him, millions of words, with grace, outrage and luminous intelligence. But I knew him first, and most closely, as the son of Claud and Patricia. I lived with them for months at Brook Lodge in Ireland when I was a student. I would never have become a writer without their support and inspiration. It was at Brook Lodge, in the 1960s, when I first met Alexander.

Not too long ago Alexander sent me this note, describing himself back then: "A.C. Cockburn in '66? Long velours coat, chiffon scarf, Borsalino hat." The

main thing I noticed about Alexander, however, was not his rock star style but how touchingly devoted he was to his parents. He adored Claud and Patricia and channeled both of them throughout his professional and personal life.

In the 1940s, after a brilliant, subversive career as a journalist in London, Claud moved to a beautiful village, on a wild green coast on the banks of a salmon river in Ireland, where, reinvigorated, he wrote even more brilliantly for decades.

In the 1990s, after a brilliant, subversive career as a journalist in London and New York, Alexander moved to a beautiful village, on a wild green coast on the banks of a salmon river in California, where he wrote even more brilliantly for decades.

Alexander's writing continued to reflect Claud's inspiration, but the life he made in Petrolia was pure Patricia. Patricia bred horses, cultivated new varieties of roses, revived the Georgian art of shell paintings, cooked brilliantly, and managed chaos with flair and irony. She could discourse with contagious enthusiasm on everything from language patterns in Africa to the design of ancient Irish fish weirs. Brook Lodge was her creation, and it was a magical place to grow up.

That brings me back to salmon rivers. Salmon return to where they were born. So did Alexander. In Petrolia he created his own whimsical, artistic version of the world Patricia created in Ireland. He had his horses and his dogs and his garden, and devoted as much energy to brewing the perfect apple cider as Patricia did to breeding the perfect green rose. He even mortared dishes from Brook Lodge into the garden wall.

When I was at *Newsweek* in the early 1980s I was inspired by Alexander's revolutionary, thrilling media writing in the *Village Voice*. I ran mildly critical articles about two prominent journalists, both of whom were close to the *New York Times* managing editor, Abe Rosenthal. Abe had me to lunch at the *Times*, where he flew into a rage, spit flying everywhere, his face about to explode like a Roman candle. When he finally got control of himself, he screamed at me:

"Who do you think you are? Alexander Cockburn?"

The answer is: I wish. I wish I was even a tenth the writer Alexander was, had a fraction of his wit and intelligence and

courage, had also a fraction of his love of life and his ability to create a world that so deeply reflected who he was.

It was the best compliment I ever got.

**William Broyles** is the founder of *Texas Monthly*, the former editor of *Newsweek* and a screenwriter (*Apollo 13*, *Castaway*, *Planet of the Apes*).

## Gatherer of Worlds

By JoAnn Wypijewski

I called him Alex. “Alexander” seemed part of the old world he left in 1972; “Alex” was a better fit with the world of highway maps and car engines, roadside stops and unruly nature, with which I most associated him apart from words on a page for the almost thirty years that I knew him. Alexander Cockburn died on July 21. To write those words is shattering. A big life, approachable now, for me, only in fragments.

*Incredible Journey.* Alex spent a good bit of his early days in London movie houses, and the palimpsest of his memory was scored with the lines, images and mood shadings of even the most obscure films of the great *auteurs*. But by the time I met him, at *The Nation* magazine in New York in 1984, that was all another country. He loved animal movies. Talismans of childhood, they offered respite from the barbarism of the age—Reagan’s America and Central America and Occupied Palestine, “the violence program”, as he called it, which cranked along whether or not there was a social program, and there was less and less of that as the rich got fit and the poor got prison and the cries of the oppressed rose up, spilled over, year upon ghastly year. “Is your hate pure?” he would ask a new *Nation* intern, one eyebrow raised, in merriment or inquisition the intern was unsure. It was a startling question, but then this was—still is—a startling time. For what the ancients called avarice and iniquity Alex’s hate was pure, and across the years no writer had a deadlier sting against the cruelties and dangerous illusions, the corruptions of empire.

But, oh, how much more he was the sum of all he loved.

Animal movies, in the scheme of things, were pretty small change. Smaller than animals themselves: his great, lanky dog, Jasper; his cockatiel, Percy. Smaller than nature, which he embraced not with solemnity but with a free-ranging brio.

Smaller than the culture made by human hands and imagination down the ages, for which he had boundless and particular enthusiasms. Smaller by far than the constellation of strangers who became friends, friends who became loved ones and comrades-in-arms, associates whom he gave a boost into the world of words and ideas and intellectual curiosity.

But what he called “the small change of life” was a thing of constant wonder to Alex. A perfect blue. An oxidized red on junkyard metal. A lovely turned bowl. The flutter of cheap fabric on a flirty girl. A bar of blues or country gospel on a Southern radio. Banana trees, “vagabonds of the plant world”. A bit of gossip on the telephone. Any one of his experiments: searching for the best road-tramp system of brewing coffee and avoiding the hated Styrofoam cup, a goal he finally achieved with two screw-top Mason jars, a circle of fine-grade mesh cut so as to form a makeshift cone, and precise instructions on the ratio of coffee to boiling water to droplet of cold to do the trick.

He phoned once after a long plane trip, excited from watching the onboard movie, *Homeward Bound* without the irritating human voiceover. Two dogs and a cat are lost and have to find their way home against tremendous odds. They get separated; the cat is thought done for but is rescued by a kindly woodsman. Revived, she harkens to a familiar bark, and there follows one of the great reunion scenes in cinematic history, with dogs and cat racing from either end of a wide, sun-cast field to meet, ecstatically, in the middle. Alex said the other grown passengers glared in his direction as he sat dissolved in tears before the little screen. It was a happy-ender, the only type of film he would watch.

*Sweetpeas.* People called Alex elegant, and he was in his way. Charming, and he was. Witty, and he was. I always thought his special grace was having been born into class but not money—his father, Claud, dodging bill collectors, his mother, Patricia, shooting pigeons out of the sky so the family could eat. He had the best education for both reducing a political opponent to shreds and becoming American during the country’s downward slope from liberatory promise to colossal wreck, a phrase he used for the title of his last, as yet unpublished book. He knew the road better than Kerouac ever did, and understood survival in his

bones.

Alex invented a style of press criticism when few took the ideological shaping power of the media seriously, and moved on when others got in the game. He loved the density and flamboyant energy of New York, but moved on when he felt the quicksand of ’80s vulgarity, “Trumpismo”, flowing close. He traveled stylishly in the stream of elite media, and then walked away from that stream, prefiguring by a decade the era of do-it-yourself, independent media by joining first with Ken Silverstein, his former intern, and then with Jeffrey St. Clair in making *CounterPunch* a name that would become more widely familiar than his own. He took such risks, and wore them so lightly.

In personal and political style he was radically original—part fancy man, part anarcho-syndicalist, part nineteenth-century naturalist, part materialist. The years spent traveling from one sister city, one solidarity event, one labor stand, one independent bookstore to the next, and all the stop-off points and temporary roosts along the way, added layers of color to his outlook and sensitivities. While scouting for a permanent home in California, he lived for a year in the Adobe Motel in Aptos, his neighbors mainly people who worked in the construction boom and people who waited for modest welfare disbursements, an “ordinary” place, where drugs and a low-boil violence were integral to that ordinariness.

He had an upstairs corner room with kitchenette, the sitting area wall covered with Ida Applebroog’s disturbingly magnificent suite of drawings, *What did you dream?*, the balcony alive with sweetpeas, hanging baskets and potted herbs. The residents thought he was a little odd, but their children ran in and out his door, and he worried over their bruises as he counseled one parent about a bad engine noise and another about a bad man. He embodied a kind of radical democracy, harbored utopian dreams; he was a romantic, but as an act of will, despite life’s messiness.

*The Golden Age is in us.* Alex found home in Petrolia, in raffish country on the Lost Coast, along the the Mattole River, among pot growers, lamb farmers, artists and free-wheeling others: his place to re-create the marvelous, to insist on magical possibility against the certain



knowledge of horror. Many years earlier he had spent the summers up the country in Vermont with Andy Kopkind, his oldest friend in America and a *Nation* colleague, where they and the people they loved did something of the same on a former commune. When Andy died, in 1994, Alex told the audience at his memorial service, "Andy's not dead to me." He said it in an abstracted, achy way uncharacteristic of him. Nine years later Edward Said died. Then Ben Sonnenberg died. The circle of friends who lit up the sky for me and so many is now complete again in death.

Alex once wrote that in the Golden Age, "as opposed to the successive ages of silver, bronze and iron, death came as a pleasant sleep, followed by easy release into a spirit form which continues to inhabit the earth, attending its own funeral, dispensing wealth to its favorites. So death in the Golden Age was always incorporated into life as a sensate pleasure, followed immediately by an improved life, the way most folks would like it." I favor that idea, and, echoing him, I can say, "Alex is not dead to me," but the small change of death can never be spent. The phone doesn't trill its urgent summons. The old private language turns to dust as no one else can speak it.

*Remember you are dust.* Death haunts *The Golden Age Is In Us*. It begins with a funeral, and unfurls, in a sequence of entries—Alex's own notations, letters from friends, letters from enemies, chunks of columns he wrote across those years, bits of other people's writing—as a meditation on loss and radical hope, with a lot of pleasure and fury mixed in. My friend Jeff Sharlet says, "There's a psalm-like quality to it, and I like the idea of psalmists, plural, better than lonely David plucking away at his strings. That seems at odds with the lessons of the psalms,

among which is the notion that grief is singular and lonesome, but remembrance and joy are not."

Alex was the great collaborator, a gatherer of worlds, a singular voice that contained multitudes. I carried a psalm in my pocket to his funeral, Psalm 26: "Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in mine integrity..." which I take as a quest song for graciousness and authentic life, or as Jeff, who knows these things better, put it, as a song "about the ambition to speak truthfully and act kindly and resist the temptation to sell out." Alex appreciated the world of belief, the storehouse of totems and legends, gods and

his death, admirers said he was fearless; that was loving but untrue, because to be fearless is to be other than human, and Alex was briskly, maddeningly, awesomely human.

Revolutionary Prosecutor Fouquier-Tinville, his alter ego in "Tumbril Time," *CounterPunch's* scourge against the corruption of common speech, would disprove of 'awesome' owing to slacker overuse, but awe is a sentiment that deserves to be rehabilitated. Alex inspired it, and expressed it, as anyone will recognize who ever breezed through a thrift shop with him, or shared a luscious pear, or gazed about Petrolia.

His own funeral began and ended outside his house there, a fairyland of fruit trees and gardens; mud brick walls adorned with flecks of color here, tiles there, a relief of a nude woman over there; a cider house with immense flagons of amber liquid, cryptically labeled; a fire pit ingeniously designed; a bird bath full of dahlias; eccentric pillars and three



Photo by Elizabeth Lennard

monsters (sometimes one and the same) that people have made since human time began to get them through—and also over, over the crude and the petty, the painful and pretentious, to a place of grace. He liked to recall his father saying that his own radical beliefs came as much from the Magnificat as from Marx: "He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts;/He hath put down the mighty from their seat."

No one could mistake Alex for "the humble and the meek", who are exalted in the next line of the great canticle. He could be cutting in anger, and impatient, rushing headlong with some plan and only later realizing the cost. He could be fearful. As he said, writing of Andy Kopkind, what radical, what feeling person sensitive to the exactions of those proud and mighty, could not be? After

golden orbs. The craftspeople who had created this fairyland with Alex also built his coffin. They used plain and curly redwood, and its sides they inlaid with copper plates, one bearing a dog, another a hen, the third a typewriter, the last a 1959 Chrysler Crown Imperial convertible. Into the coffin's lid they pressed a gold leaf tile by the artist Jim Danisch, an antique jade cabochon set in silver by Becky Grant, and a small silver shield with the initials AC. They placed the box bearing the body on a hay truck banded with flowers—magenta and bright orange and vivid pinks and yellows—and this proceeded to the gravesite, blaring New Orleans jazz, followed by a parade of cars.

The weather had been all mist and drear on the way in from the airport that day, what Alex's Irish nanny, Kitty Lee,

would have called “a grand soft day,” until the road curved toward the sea, where suddenly the sky became what some meteorologists call radical clear. That is how it was in Petrolia that day, radical clear, and every color electric. Boys in suits and girls in short dresses and cowboy boots carried the coffin from the hay truck. And there under cerulean skies, in sight of an aged eucalyptus and a field of burnt grass rolling out to older mountains, they bore it to the grave.

“On heav’nly ground they stood, and from the shore/They viewed the vast immeasurable Abyss,” Alex’s daughter, Daisy, began reading a passage from *Paradise Lost*. Afterward, a friend wondered absently, perhaps the bit from the Devil preferring to reign in hell than serve in heaven would have been more apt? But Alex had strived for something far removed from reign or servitude.

...and in his hand

*He took the golden Compasses, prepar’d  
In God’s Eternal store, to circumscribe  
This Universe, and all created things:  
One foot he center’d, and the other turn’d  
Round through the vast profundities ob-*

*scure,*  
*And said, thus farr extend, thus farr thy*

*bounds,*  
*This be thy just Circumference, O World.*

JoAnn Wypijewski writes for the *Nation* and *CounterPunch*.

## Cockburn on Socialism, Capitalism and People’s Lives

By Robert Pollin

Alex, of course, was a ridiculously good writer. Lots of ingredients combined to put his words onto pages in ways that were his alone: his ability to read people and situations; his great sense of humor; his contempt for high falutin’ big-shot phonies, especially liberal ones; his love of, as he would put it, *le mot juste* (“the right word” in high falutin’ French); his deep curiosity—about buildings, gardens, natural vistas, cars, antiques, on and on—and his sheer joy in living. Good upbringing and hard work helped a lot. But mixing all of these things together, still, the most important factor was his commitment to social justice. This was deep in his bones. Alex was fundamentally guided by his hatred of

how capitalism ground down the lives of ordinary people and how some version of socialism could offer something a whole lot better.

After 1989—the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union, etc.—Alex and I spent a lot of time talking about this huge historical transition. We wrote up our thoughts in a long *Nation* article in early 1991 called “Capitalism and its Specters: The World, The Free Market, and the Left.” I hadn’t thought about that article for a long time, but did go back to it after Alex’s passing. If I myself must say so, I think there is a lot in it that captures well some of what made Alex “Alex.” These include the following:

**On the Soviet Union:** Alex and I recognized that, under the Soviets, “Central premises of socialism were, time and again, debauched.” But we also emphasized that there were substantial successes that should not be forgotten. Among these successes—especially worth remembering as the world today continues to slog through the wreckage of the Wall Street crash, Great Recession, and global austerity agenda—was that from 1928 – 37, exactly when the West was suffering through its worst depression, Soviet industrial growth as measured by conservative Western analysts averaged more than 12 percent. They achieved this through operating a centrally-planned economy. We noted that even Friedrich von Hayek, the renowned right-wing economist and arch-foe of central planning, had to acknowledge, in considering this Soviet era, “the conspicuous success which the Russians have achieved in certain fields.”

**On China under Mao:** Again, while recognizing failures and betrayals, there were profound successes that Alex and I didn’t want people to forget. This included the fact that average life expectancy rose from around 40 years when the Communists came to power in 1949 to 70 years in 1988, a near-doubling of the lifespan of the average Chinese worker or peasant in less than 40 years. Nearly all these gains came prior to Mao’s death in 1976.

**Globalization and the Working Class:** In thinking about how to rebuild a strong global left, one of our main points was the obvious: there can never be a vibrant left without a creative, forceful democratic union movement at its heart. But we noted then a point that is even more

true now, i.e. that “Unionism is in eclipse in Western countries and under attack virtually everywhere else. Union strength will continue to erode as long as multinational firms are increasingly able to pit workers in one region or country against those in others.” We therefore argued that, “In the contemporary world more than ever, Marx’s call for workers of the world to unite is no mere slogan; it is a practical necessity.”

**Social Justice and Ecology:** Alex was a serious environmentalist, as was clear, for example, in his excellent book with Susanna Hecht, *The Fate of the Forest*. This commitment was also reflected toward our article’s conclusion when we wrote that “A left-labor movement today...can seize the time only if it leads the debate on the social and political implications on new and old technologies and how they affect the natural, that is to say, social environment.” Yes, Alex and I could have been more clear in making our point here. More importantly, it is a true shame that Alex somehow subsequently became a climate change doubter, as many people have noted since his death. This does not gainsay the fact that Alex was a strong advocate of what we now call blue/green alliances, as we tried to emphasize in our 1991 article.

Alex, like all of us, definitely had his flaws and blind spots. Also, the fact that he was such a dazzling writer and personality made it possible to overlook just how firmly he held to his core values of equality, social justice, and ecology, and how hard he worked throughout his life in behalf of them. These core values were what made Alex a lifelong socialist. Thus, in the face of the Soviet collapse, we concluded our 1991 article by writing that “Socialism puts economic rationality at the service of individual and social autonomy. It is in pursuit of this autonomy that economic planning and an activist state should be seen as our indispensable tools: tools for defending and broadening democracy, for raising mass living standards rather than acquiescing in the imposition of mass austerity, for protecting ourselves against the brutalities of an unfettered free market and for recapturing socialism’s great life-affirming vision.”

**Robert Pollin**, professor of economics and co-director of the Political Economy Research Institute (PERI), is the author of *Back to Full Employment* (MIT Press).



## Satanic Sex Panic

By Debbie Nathan and Michael Snedecker

When Cockburn phoned one of us in early 1990, sounding exasperated, the call was so out of the blue that neither of us yet knew how to pronounce his last name. He said he'd been kicked out of a Reed College student-organizing conference at which he'd been scheduled to speak, and his column had been dropped from at least one alternative newspaper. He was mystified. Someone told him we could explain.

His sin? He'd written about the McMartin Preschool case in Los Angeles, doubting the existence of ritual sex abuse in daycare centers and calling for the accusing children to be jailed for perjury.

That call seemed way over the top—certainly we, ourselves, had never blamed the children. Still, we knew just how it felt to be excoriated, shut out of the media and worse for critiquing the insane wave of satanic child abuse cases that flooded America in the early 1980s and did not let up for a decade.

McMartin and scores of other cases featured charges against hapless daycare and school workers, including many women. The cases included the most fantastical and sordid accusations: four-year-olds attacked on airplanes with swords, knives, drugs, and staged scenarios where infants were boiled and cannibalized (the better to terrorize the preschooler victims into keeping mum about the crimes).

There was never any evidence except for the word of the children, interviewed over and over by investigators, in the most leading and coercive ways. Yet, across the country, in case after case, adults were convicted and slapped with generations, even centuries, of hard time.

One of us is a journalist, the other a lawyer. We reported on and litigated against this panic for years, and we eventually wrote a book: *Satan's Silence: Ritual Abuse and the Making of a Modern American Witch Hunt*. Today it's hard to recall how awful it was, early on, to be leftists and feminists critical of child-sex-abuse hysteria. We were told by people who we respected that we were hurting women, children, our own children. One of us had a home visit from the police, inquiring after the welfare of her young daughter and baby son, after she

published an article in *The Village Voice* questioning the particularly heinous prosecution of a young woman daycare worker in New Jersey.

So we knew why Cockburn had problems from people he'd never have thought would censure him. We explained to him that only the barest handful of progressives and feminists were critical of the panic (Ellen Willis was one). The rest had bought into the craziness and were even (like Gloria Steinem) actively promoting it, in the name of protecting women and children.

Ironically given that buy-in, male workers in early childhood education were being scared out of the profession, along with gays and lesbians. The development of public childcare was stalling, even being dismantled. Women were being treated as witches. The country was battling chimeras instead of attacking the real social problems plaguing kids. And woe to anyone who criticized. Even at Reed or in the alt press.

But maybe it's good Cockburn had problems. The experience glued him to the satanic daycare cases.

"[T]here was a general social awakening to the reality and pervasiveness of child abuse," he'd written in the 1990 column that got him in trouble. During that awakening, "some children's testimony was taken too seriously precisely because in the past it had not been taken seriously enough." But the McCarthyist tone of the early Reagan years was also to blame, Cockburn theorized, making "society ripe for a new witch hunt, whose energies 'displaced themselves onto the cause of hunting for body snatchers of the nation's children.'"

In a subsequent *Nation* column, he noted that the infant mortality rate among blacks and Latinos in Los Angeles County had spiked 17 percent and dropped among Anglos. "Here is horrifying child abuse," he wrote. "Why



Photo by Sylvia Plachy

don't [the McMartin prosecutors] start denouncing the real satanic rites being practiced by the butchers of social programs snugly ensconced in the White House and on Capitol Hill?"

By 1993 he was discussing Janet Reno's role in the panic. She'd noisily prosecuted two satanic childcare cases in Miami, fueling her political career in Florida, which brought her to the attention of Bill Clinton, who named her as his Attorney General.

Cockburn began connecting the satanic-panic dots to more subtly noxious forces. In a column updating one of Reno's cases, he noted her role in an emerging movement to create a national sex offender registry. (That registry is well ensconced by now, and as studies show, it has ruined countless people's lives while protecting virtually no children.)

By the beginning of the new century, satanic panic had died down. Still, Cockburn kept sniffing out its evolving iterations of fear, loathing, unreason and destruction.

In 2007, he was stunningly generous in helping one of us publish a story

in *CounterPunch*. It dealt with yet a new panic about exaggerated claims of sexual danger to children on the Internet. A major promoter of the hype, former *New York Times* reporter Kurt Eichenwald, was implicated in highly unethical practices related to researching and writing the story. He aggressively tried to suppress the *CounterPunch* piece, threatening to sue if it ran. Rather than back down, Cockburn and St. Clair gave over \$10,000 of *CounterPunch*'s money for a media lawyer to vet and "lawsuit-proof" the article. It came out on schedule.

A couple years later, in a *CounterPunch* piece reprising recent busts of people for walking around their homes in the buff, Cockburn noted that "Sexual repression, through the allegation of 'deviant' fantasy crimes, is often the designated stand-in for violations of the social order harder to stand up in court." And he presciently pointed out—as later elaborated on by scholars such as Roger Lancaster in his recent book *Sex Panic and the Punitive State*—that "regulation of sexual behavior is the preferred route to wider social control."

That last statement is short, neat, and in the abstract easy to promote. It's not so easy to apply concretely, though, even for the savviest of lefties, when the craziness and high moralism of a particular sex panic crashes into our heads and hearts. But Cockburn truly did "Beat the Devil" on this issue. He kept about him his wits and his passion for the ideal that freedom and justice should always trump prejudice and coercion—even when the protection of children is purportedly at stake.

We would never have said the McMartin kids deserved jail, and we suspect Cockburn was just trying to shock some sense into readers. In the short run he did not do that very well. But in his long run with satanic ritual abuse and successor panics that have come down the pike, he was heroic and very, very good.

**Debbie Nathan** is a journalist, editor and translator. Her most recent book is *Pornography: a Groundwork Guide*.

**Michael Snedeker** is an appellate attorney. He and Nathan wrote *Satan's Silence: Ritual Abuse and the Making of a Modern American Witch Hunt*.

## Big Al

By Bruce Anderson

I last saw him in person a year ago in San Francisco. He looked thin and drawn but, as always, he was in good spirits. I'd been on long hikes with Cockburn where he walked me into the ground, and he'd looked thin and drawn then, too. If he was sick with something I knew he'd beat it, that he'd marshal his unique determination, his pure courage and emerge laughing.

That night in the city, he was driving one of his beater vehicles we later had to jumpstart. Another car he steered with a pipe wrench. His cars were always dense with the jumble of stuff Cockburn seemed to travel with. I always wondered if he ever quite off-loaded. There'd be a couple of rose bushes, piles of unsheathed audio tapes, books, maybe a car part or two. If you didn't know Cockburn you might think he was living in his car. That last time I'd seen him, we'd walked down the street to a Burmese restaurant where, as the unhearing waiter turned Cockburn's salad over an absurd number of times, Cockburn asked, "Which one of us is going to have to restrain him?"

I've never known anyone even remotely like him. Everywhere you went with the guy was an adventure, and wherever he went he met someone he knew, and if he didn't know them he did by the time he left, beguiling the stranger with his unique blend of charm and interrogation. Cockburn was interested in everybody and everything, and he seemed to gulp experience. I remember him insisting on a hike in the Boonville hills the same afternoon I'd picked him up in Santa Rosa after he'd had oral surgery. He was still groggy from anesthesia, having been knocked out for three hours, and still bleeding from the mouth. "No, no. I'm fine," he insisted, and off we went.

This other encounter a decade ago still makes me laugh: Warren Hinckle had gotten us some work with the interim *Examiner*. It was headquartered over the Warfield Theater on Market Street. "Cockburn's been a lion for our side for years," Hinckle, an old lion himself, had remarked. Amen to that, I thought. Name the struggle, Cockburn was there. He brought the clarity. That day, Cockburn said he wanted to stop at a camera shop, also on Market not far from the *Examiner*. The instant he'd crossed

the threshold the Pakistani proprietor had come to heel-clicking attention, snapped off a Raj salute and announced, "The excellent Mr. Alexander Cockburn, gentleman, scholar, journalist. I am honored to see you again, my friend."

What I most admired about Cockburn was his refusal to hedge. He defended his opinions to anyone, not letting the incorrect slide simply in the interests of some fleeting harmony. I challenged him a few times. I told him once I liked Trollope. He looked skeptically at me and asked, "Which Trollope do you like best?" He probably had them all committed to memory, and I was annoyed that I was getting a pop quiz. But I'd just binged on Trollope, and I was ready! I said I thought Trollope was funnier than Dickens without resorting to caricature the way Dickens did, and that *The Way We Live Now* is the best deconstruction of capitalism in novel form that there is. "Maybe Balzac is better," I said, "but I don't know enough about Balzac to lay a violent opinion on you about it."

To smoke him out over his reason for quizzing me, I added, "You're asking because you don't believe I know anything about Trollope." He came right back with, "I must confess..." I had to laugh.

Even if you were irritated with him, he'd disarm you, as he did me on another occasion when I told him his lead sentence was confusing. "How?" he barked, very unhappy. But he promptly agreed and re-wrote it, and this was a guy who routinely batted out a nearly perfect first draft on anything and everything, as I saw him do for his *Nation* column one night at Peter Lit's Caspar Inn before he spoke there.

I first met Cockburn in 1986. He'd driven to Boonville with Fred Gardner — "My first friend in America," as Cockburn often said — after I'd arranged with Cockburn to reprint his weekly column, then as now simply the best on national and international matters in the language. Michael Moore had just been fired by *Mother Jones*, and Moore called Boonville several times as he and Cockburn conferred on what Moore might do about it. Under Moore, *Mother Jones* had been briefly interesting, radical even, which is why Moore had been sacked. You stray from received opinion and you soon see you're pretty much out there by yourself. Moore has since strayed back in, as have many others.



Cockburn, the rock, never trimmed his sails for anyone.

Lots of people are better equipped to remember Cockburn in relation to the American left, but for me, and I daresay a million or so other people, Cockburn was the left, the one person who consistently, relentlessly inspired the rest of us; he's been a steadfast friend to me and to so many people I often wondered how he fit us all in. He'll live on through *CounterPunch*, read daily by several million people, and what an irony it is that after years of left ghetto-ization in a few magazines, fewer radio programs, that he and Jeffrey St. Clair have created a daily newspaper of the left.

You can get a very good sense of Cockburn from a three-hour interview he did back in 2007 on C-Span's Book TV. (It's preserved on-line.) The callers-in are the usual parade of cranks and demagogues Cockburn's national appearances inevitably mobilized because he was the only major intellectual on our side who was always ready and eager to take on The Beast. On this program, the more shameless defenders of Israel call in to equate criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism, another nut calls in to go on about Building 7, and on it goes, as serial outpatients line up for their Cockburn comeuppance. Cockburn, with some heat, refuses to permit the liars and the crazy people to misrepresent his opinions. I remember seeing him on the old Donahue Show when he mopped up some *New York Times* opinion hack who was defending Clinton's handling of the economy. They'd never admit it, but the David Brooks-Mark Shields Axis were afraid of the guy, and now that he's gone watch them roll out with all the old snide slanders of Cockburn as some kind of holdout against reason and the great imperial consensus.

What's invariably left out of the Cockburn discussion is what a good writer he was, how witty and elegant his prose was. Compare any essay on the same subject by Cockburn and, say, George Will, the idiot's thinking man and one of the more prominent unindicted criminals of mass media, and it will be Cockburn all the way. I'll always be grateful that I knew Alexander Cockburn, and prouder yet that we were friends and allies all the way.

**Bruce Anderson** is publisher of the *Anderson Valley Advertiser*.

## The Kindness of Strangers

By Carolyn Cooke

I met Alex in 1991, while working for Bruce Anderson at the *Anderson Valley Advertiser*, the anarcho-syn-dicalist weekly in Boonville better known by its friends and enemies as The AVA. Alex had recently moved to Petrolia, on the Lost Coast – though his range, pan-therlike, was broader.

Bruce and Alex were pals and kindred spirits – courtly bon vivants given to hyperbole. Alex had famously called the AVA “the best newspaper in America.” Another time he called it “the only newspaper in America.” Grand rhetorical gestures best expressed what he called “the moral truth.”

To help boost my modest income as a reporter Bruce “put in a word with Cockburn” who might, Bruce thought, need a hand. In those days Alex didn't use a computer on principle – I never knew what principle. Not exactly a Luddite, he loved his fax machine to the point where he carried it almost everywhere. He insisted I buy the same model from a particular person at a company in New York; his loyalties were fierce.

Our typing and faxing began around 7 a.m. or sometimes 3 p.m. or occasionally at 3 a.m. Alex approached deadlines with cheerful intensity. He typed up a column, then faxed it over for me to “punch in” on my Apple 170. His lively scrawl and fresh revisions kept rolling through – he was a tireless and eloquent reviser.

Alex had nothing but contempt for the faddish laptop, which, in the days before e-mail or Apple Care, served without complaint for seven years. The Panasonic fax, with its unwieldy rolls of thermal paper, lasted, too. The Panasonic and the Apple 170 are today the only functioning – yet useless – electronics in my arsenal.

His advice to a young writer strongly emphasized thrift. “Never, ever show your wallet,” he told me once. He advocated sleeping in one's vehicle instead of squandering money on hotels.

We used to see him occasionally in Point Arena when he'd stop overnight en route to Fort Bragg or Boonville. Once he drove down our mile and a half of unmarked dirt road in a 1959 Nash Rambler without directions, cell phone or GPS, in a torrential rainstorm with lightning.

He simply arrived. When I asked how he found us, he held up a flashlight and said in his pretty accent, “I had a torch.” He brought many bottles of Minervois, which we drank at dinner, and his own Turkish coffee pot, with which he brewed a muddy broth in the morning. He described improvements to his property in Petrolia – a tower, frescoes, horses, his stable of vintage cars. He discoursed on the aesthetic crime of heavy beam construction (one of his favorite books was Edith Wharton's interior design primer *The Decoration of Houses*), the best preparation for salt cod, Christopher Hitchens, the state of the empire. In the morning he rushed downstairs with my college art history text under his arm and gently critiqued my marginal notes.

Moments before he drove away from what would be his final visit he discovered a leak in the Rambler's radiator, but the matter didn't faze him. On the loopy back roads of Humboldt and Mendocino Counties Alex was occasionally seen standing beside some steaming automobile with the hood up or the gas tank empty, waving down random motorists. This manic polemicist who so relished his enemies trusted completely in the kindness of strangers.

**Carolyn Cooke** is the author of *Daughters of the Revolution* and *The Bostons*.

## Xander at Aldermaston

By Conn Hallinan

I first encountered Alex Cockburn at a London dinner party at the flat of Konni Zilliacus, a leftwing Labor Party Member of Parliament. It was the winter of 1961 and it had been a heady year for the Labor left. At the Labor Party's 1960 conference in Scarborough, “Zilly” and his parliamentary posse—Sydney Silverman, Michael Foot, and Barbara Castle (the Baroness of Blackburn, the “Red Queen,” whose flaming locks matched her politics)—had out maneuvered and out organized the Party's right wing and passed a resolution calling for unilateral nuclear disarmament.

It was a bombshell, no pun intended. In the middle of the Cold War, a powerful political party at the center of the U.S.'s most reliable nuclear ally was bailing. The

Tories went crazy, Labor's rightwing—led by the despicable Hugh Gaitskell—went crazy, Washington went crazy. Oh, it was just grand fun.

Alex (or “Xander,” as he was then called) had come up from Oxford for the dinner—no one in their right mind passed up a meal cooked by Jan Zilliacus—and we spent the evening eating, drinking, and plotting.

Alex was organizing around the nuclear disarmament issue at Keble College, Oxford, and was trying to put together a debate between Zilliacus and Gaitskell. Zilly had been barnstorming across the country pressing for the Labor Party to actually implement the Scarborough resolution, and Gaitskell was ducking a one-on-one debate. The plot was that the Oxford event wouldn't be called a “debate,” until “Zilly” showed up, then the fireworks would ensue.

I quite got Gaitskell's reluctance to debate Zilliacus. “Zilly” was probably the smartest person I ever met (and that includes some serious heavyweights). The man spoke 15 languages—so perfectly that many native speakers took him for one of their own—and he had a breadth of knowledge that put the Encyclopedia Britannica to shame. Hugh Gaitskell was no slouch in a debate, but Zilliacus would have annihilated him.

I was only 18 at the time, but I knew something about Alex's father, Claud. My parents were active supporters of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, and I had already read a good deal on the Spanish Civil War, including some of Claud's writings that Zilly gave me. Claud Cockburn was smart, erudite, and quite likely the best reporter at the front (against rather formidable competition).

“Xander” was much then as he was later: very quick, very funny, with a fierce streak. In the end, the plot would stumble because Zilliacus had other commitments. But Gaitskell did show, and Alex and his friends organized a proper greeting: they tossed chairs onto the podium and hooted the Labor Party leader off the stage.

As the dinner wound down my brother Terance (Kayo) and I talked about the demonstrations we have been at over the past year, including the huge San Francisco protest that confronted the House Un-American Activities Committee in the spring of 1960. It turned out that Alex had never been to

a demonstration, and the obvious cure for that was the Aldermaston to London march by the Committee for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). Aldermaston was the location of Britain's major nuclear weapons research facilities.

On April 1 we all—now including my younger brother, Danny—met up in Aldermaston and joined the four-day, 52-mile trek to London. Like all things in the English spring, it was wet, but the Scarborough resolution had fired the masses. Between the march and the rally in Trafalgar Square, more than 150,000 people would participate, one of the largest demonstrations in British history and unarguably the biggest peace rally in the world to date.

For all his inexperience with demonstrations, Alex handled the march considerably better than his American comrades. Most Californians do not do well with wet. For Alex, raised as he was in County Cork—there are few places soggy than the West of Ireland—it was all beer and skittles. “This isn't rain, just humidity” was one of his more annoying lines. My brothers and I clumped along, soaked, chilled and glum, while Alex regaled us with stories, bits of poetry and an occasional song.

It was pure Alex. I would never call him cheerful—he would have struck me if I had—it was just that he didn't let things derail him. Even when he fell sick, he soldiered on. I am looking at his last column, written quite literally a few days before he died. It is spot on: smart, funny, and fierce. How does one do that?

Someone called him fearless, which is not accurate. If you don't have any fear then it's easy to put yourself in harm's way. Alex wasn't fearless, he was brave. He came from a brave family. His father was courageous, and his brothers, Patrick and Andrew, are the kind of journalists who actually practiced Finley Peter Dunne's dictum to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted.

How do you replace Alex? You don't. Another world and another Universe will pass before we fill that particular hole in our line (and now that he is gone I can write those words. I would never have dared while he was alive. “Cant,” he would have growled).

At his funeral the mourners tossed earth and flowers into his grave. I threw in a pen. I am not much for the afterlife, but if there is one, and God doesn't have

his head screwed on right, I hope Alex will use that pen to set him straight.

We can't bring him back, but we can make sure that *CounterPunch* continues his work. I am writing out 12 envelopes this week, and once a month I am sending in a check, just like paying a bill, only this one actually buys you something worth having.

*Slan lan avic*, minstrel Alex, this harp shall ever praise thee.

Conn Hallinan blogs at Dispatches From the Edge.

## Wooing Cockburn

By John Straussbaugh

At some point in the early 1990s I met Alex for the first time and raised the idea of his writing for *New York Press*. The paper was just beginning to expand from a small downtown Manhattan weekly into more of a playa in New York journalism, and as part of that we were wooing idiosyncratic political writers from both the right (Taki) and the left. Alex, being Alex, teased and played coy and made me woo him a long time. I didn't mind. I had admired him from afar for decades, and as I got to know him some I came to like him very much. I found him brilliant, witty, irascible, vain, complicated, unpredictable, and never dull. A charming rascal. I know some people saw more of his rascality than his charm; I'm just reporting for myself.

From the instant he started writing for us he was, not surprisingly, one of our most loved and most hated columnists. Oh the mail we got. We loved mail. We took hate mail as a sign that at least some one was paying attention. They paid ferocious attention to Alex's column, even though he sometimes confused them as he took political incorrectness to dizzying heights. Was he a hero of the left or a traitor, a diehard Stalinist or a libertarian, anti-fascist or an anti-Semite? The debate rolled on. I must say that some of my favorites of the columns he wrote for us had nothing overtly to do with politics. There was a beautiful, hilarious one about marijuana harvest time in the wilds of Humboldt County I especially loved.

After he'd been writing for us a while I set out on the fool's errand of trying to talk Christopher Hitchens into writing



for us too. Cockburn and Hitchens duking it out in our pages. What a coup. I have a fond memory of Hitchens slamming the phone down on me after railing that he would never disgrace himself by writing for any yellow gutter rag that published Alexander Cockburn. That was better than hate mail.

When I went on a book tour in 2001 Alex graciously arranged a reading with him for a bunch of anarchists in Oakland. The previous night I read in San Francisco to a bookstore filled with neo-hippies, hipsters and wymyn who hadn't dug my act in the slightest. In Oakland, Alex pretended that I was the headliner and insisted on reading first. The anarchists adored him, and the room was still bathed in a warm glow of adulation when I got up to do my thing. They were much more polite to me than the San Francisco crowd had been. He'd planned it that way. It was very nice of him. That's the Alex Cockburn I remember.

**John Strausbaugh** is the author of *Rock Til You Drop*, *Black Like You* and *Sissy Nation*.

## Alex the Philosopher

By Michael Neumann

I met Alex and Jeff face-to-face for the first time at New Orleans' Jazzfest 2004. We saw Joss Stone, who was great, but the standout was Alain Toussaint. You could feel the whole authoritatively cool tradition of New Orleans in every bar, every assured vocal. That's something Alex appreciated in depth, as he did the R&B in the original sense of the label. I still have under 'current' an email from him asking if there is any more from the Question Marks, who from all I could find out, left one beautiful track, "Another Solider Gone", in 1953, and vanished.

It was the same with the searing issue of barbecue. We had Frank and Free Discussions over whether real Q had to include the candied meat of Memphis, or Texas brisket, or whether it really referred only to the pulled pork out of the Carolinas – then there was the problem of mustard versus pepper-vinegar sauce. Much later Alex drove a beautiful Imperial out East for an on-the-scene investigation.

Somehow you got the feeling that Alex was always out to know things, to under-

stand them. He was a philosopher in a way that academic philosophers should never claim to be, a lover of knowledge. Not that he was unacquainted with the academic side: he told me how he'd met my mother long ago at a conference on Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*, and how she'd whispered to him: "too much civilization, not enough Eros". So he must have familiarized himself with that sort of material.

After column after column of careful analytic work, you take a few swings and all that people remember are the vivid slaggings. Some of the obituaries are like that. As if mesmerized by his brilliant style, people overlook his very real search for knowledge – not just the analysis, but also the diligent research. Sure, sometimes he loved to know things a little too much – I wanted to tell him that a layman shouldn't pit meteorologists and physicists against climatologists on global warming. But Alex never just talked, never just experienced. He was always researching, always trying to get at the roots of things, whether it was making food or writing a column. There was a very serious guy behind the wit. That's what impressed me so much.

**Michael Neumann** teaches philosophy at Trent University. He is the author of *The Case Against Israel*.

## Thunderbolts and Lightning Rods

By Mike Whitney

I still have a hard time believing that Alexander is dead. He was great inspiration to me and his writing had a profound effect on the way I look at politics and the world. I always looked forward to Alex's Friday installment which would appear at the top of *CounterPunch's* weekend slate of articles. You knew that Cockburn would never disappoint; that even if you didn't agree with what he had to say, you'd still enjoy the way he said it. You also knew that somewhere amid the edgy political analysis, there'd be a zinger or two that would make you chuckle, even lift your spirits a bit. That's because Cockburn was basically a cheerful person who took a positive view of things. He wasn't your typical scowling leftist who wasted railing about the "exploitation of the masses". That wasn't his style at all. He was much

subtler and upbeat.

Lately, I've been digging through seven years of e-mails to see if I can patch together a picture of the Alexander that I knew, Cockburn the editor. Unfortunately, it's hard to create a sense of the man by reprinting the short, terse lightning rods that used to appear periodically in the morning mail. I should add, that we never really talked at length about the issues themselves, mainly because we seemed to see eye-to-eye on most points. So communication was limited to bulletins that periodically crowded the subjectline in bold, capitalized print: COCKBURN TO WHITNEY or AHOY WHITNEY, which was usually followed by a gulping sound on my part knowing that I had either goofed up on an earlier article or was being directed to something that was going on in the news. The contents of the e-mail could be equally succinct, like this gem: "MIKE - YOU WRITING ON THE GREAT BETRAYAL? CD USE YR THUNDERBOLTS ASAP".

That's vintage Cockburn there, a one-liner with no frills. The man was obsessed with the news and loved knowing what was going on behind the headlines. He was also the sharpest political critic of our time, which goes without saying. I was always amazed at the breadth of his knowledge, particularly, on matters related to finance, which weren't really his beat. The man had a mind like a steel trap; he could recite all kinds of minutia going back to before Lehman Brothers defaulted, illustrating his incredible grasp of the big picture. On that point, it's worth noting that Cockburn anticipated the financial meltdown long before the experts. Just take a look at his article "Lame Duck: The Downside of Capitalism" and you'll see that he was onto the whole derivatives-scam long before the markets crashed. As early as 2006, Cockburn knew that "The world's credit system is a vast recycling bin of untraceable transactions of wildly inflated value" (and that) "It's about to blow!" How's that for prescience?

But, then again, it just shows Cockburn's extraordinary analytical abilities as well as his razor-sharp journalistic instincts. It was as easy for him to make farsighted observations on the state of the economy as it was to keelhaul a phony congressman on Capital Hill. Nothing seemed to escape his notice, but

that made him a bit intimidating at times. I remember one time in particular when I was sure that I'd made a mistake in an article that would require a retraction, so I dashed off an e-mail to Alex explaining where I'd gone wrong. Just minutes after I'd hit the "send" button, I got this back: "Yes, comrade Whitney, we were just trying the hempen noose and oiling the hinges on the trap door, and then we had to issue the reprieve. Good work."

What a guy. He was so generous and supportive, always willing to take his time to help you out or keep you on-track. I can recall just one time when he was short with me and that was a matter where I was clearly in the wrong. Even then, he treated me with respect and dignity. He was a real friend.

Following our first meeting at a book launch in Olympia, I sent Alexander an e-mail: "It was great to finally meet the man who's been editing my work all these years. I hope we can get together soon over dinner in Seattle or in Snohomish, whatever works with your schedule. Next time we'll have to include the irascible Mrs. Whitney, who is looking forward to meeting you. Thanks again for all your help over the years. It is greatly appreciated, Mike." Later that afternoon, I got his response: "Likewise. Great to meet you - and yes, a quiet meal up in your climes would be great INCLUDING the irascible Mrs W - Very best Alex."

Of course, by then he knew his time was short and we'd never see each other again. He died a few weeks later. Not a day goes by that I don't think of him.

**Mike Whitney** is economics correspondent for *CounterPunch*.

## No Cockburn, No Voice

By Harry Clark

Alexander Cockburn was probably the most distinguished left journalist in his adopted land. He was fortified by his father Claud's career in British journalism and the Communist Party, above all in the crucible of the late 1930s, when the British government abandoned the Spanish Republic to Franco's Nationalists, and appeased Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.

I knew Alex only as an editor, one with a light but sure touch. He ran one piece of mine in the *CounterPunch* newsletter,

titled "Suez 1956, Iran 2007?" It described how Israel, in invading the Sinai peninsula, provided the excuse for Britain and France to invade the Suez Canal Zone. It was intended to draw parallels with Israel's role in fomenting the crisis with Iran. Today, alas, only the title would need updating, as Alex would have agreed.

His Pressclips column with James Ridgeway at the *Village Voice* popularized "media analysis", especially of the *New York Times*, and inspired a host of imitators. He would probably have become editor if he had stayed, but instead he was forced out just as the times demanded such a pulpit for his talents, when Reaganism was setting the stage for our present apocalypse.

Alex's departure from the *Voice* came in early 1984, after Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon; the massacre in the Palestinian Sabra and Shatila refugee camps by Israel's Phalangist allies, which it facilitated; the seizure of a security strip in south Lebanon, under the control of the turncoat "South Lebanon Army", and contingent horrors. Alex's coverage was suitably critical, and tempers were very high at the *Voice* because many Jewish writers simply couldn't take the truth. There had been the usual hyperbolic slander of "anti-Semitism on the left" in *Voice* columns.

This was the backdrop to the contrived controversy over the grant from the Institute for Arab Studies, an affiliate of the Association of Arab American University Graduates, to write about the invasion of Lebanon. The *Boston Phoenix* discovered this grant, in a piece which ran on January 10, 1984. The *Phoenix* responded to Alex's passing by crowing "How the Boston Phoenix got Alexander Cockburn fired from the Village Voice." This ghoulish display linked to the 1984 piece, "Alexander Cockburn's \$10,000 Arab connection: A question of propriety," retrieved and rendered for the web on Monday, July 23, immediately after the weekend announcement of his death by *CounterPunch* co-editor Jeffrey St. Clair.

This is purely an Israel lobby hatchet job, early 1980s edition. The author inflated a controversy, by citing the Anti-Defamation League, *et alia*, as independent, unbiased sources, repeating their attacks on the AAUG and IAS as sinister propaganda outfits simply because they represented an Arab point of view.

AAUG and IAS were non-profit, academic research institutions, supported by private, not government funds. They were a perfectly respectable source of funds for a book, though the *Voice* editor called them a "special political interest" in the manner of the ADL's attacks. "Alex's death brought back many ugly memories of Zionist hysteria over Arab organizations," said a senior Arab-American scholar with knowledge of the events.

The topic was special, Israel's conduct. Absent that, there would have been no "controversy" at all. The *Voice* ran a "Blazing Typewriters" issue of commentary on the matter (after Mel Brooks's film, "Blazing Saddles"), including a piece from Noam Chomsky. Alex was suspended indefinitely, and eventually invited back, which he sensibly declined. A writer on the *Voice* at the time told me that he was popular there, and his effective dismissal may have been a coup by the incumbent editor against a threat to his position. But only in the US would Zionism be a factor in office politics at a left publication.

The *Wall Street Journal*, for which Alex wrote a monthly column, shrugged it off. The *New York Times* reported that the *Journal* "was considering whether to continue running the column." Indeed, stated the *Journal*, his "editor had just penned a purple paragraph threatening to fill that space with Letters to the Editor unless Mr. Cockburn started to deliver his copy on deadline." Upon learning the facts, his editor said, "Well, among all the things I can imagine Alex doing, this one seems fairly innocuous." The *Journal* stated that "we have no opinion, except that even Arabs should enjoy freedom of speech." (*Wall Street Journal*, "Alexflap," January 13, 1984).

*Voice* readers were very supportive. The best letter, I recall even now, came from a reader in Brooklyn, and said simply: NO BISH, NO REVO, NO COCKBURN, NO VOICE

This was at the time of the US invasion of Grenada, an early Reagan exercise of muscle-flexing. The popular revolutionary leader, Maurice Bishop, was eulogized in Grenada in the first line.

What Maurice Bishop meant to Grenadians, Alex meant to many of us. NO COCKBURN, NO VOICE.

**Harry Clark** can be reached at his web site, <http://questionofpalestine.net>.



## Tropical Utopias

By Susanna Hecht

Jeffrey St. Clair asked me to write a bit about the production of *Fate of the Forest: Developers, Destroyers and Defenders of the Amazon*, a book Alexander Cockburn would be amused to note stood at number 12 in rank of rain-forest books on that “other” Amazon, and has just gone into its 4th edition almost a quarter century since it was first written. When it came out it was reviewed everywhere from the *New York Times* to *Nature*, and was widely discussed in popular as well as academic circles. None of Alexander’s other books was reviewed by more than 50 scientific and mainstream journals and papers nor clocks in the thousands of citations.

*Fate of the Forest* is considered one of the founding texts of political ecology, a term Cockburn and James Ridgeway actually had introduced earlier. As the phrase is used today it is considered one of the most vibrant approaches to environmental issues because it links history, political economy and ecological dynamics to understand how politics and interests play out on the ground and in ecosystems, and what that means in terms of both. The book is widely used as a text in development studies, tropical ecology, Latin American, and environmental history studies throughout the US. People who never in a million years would read the *Nation* or *CounterPunch* have, through *FOF*, been exposed to Alexander Cockburn.

I had lived in Amazonia for many years and by the mid 1980s with Brazil’s political opening underway, social movements of the most marginalized and invisible populations imaginable – indigenous peoples (whose supposed destiny was assimilation), rubber tappers (the boom that supposedly ended in 1912), *Quilombolas* (members of former runaway slave communities), and a raft of other kinds of forest inhabitants began to emerge from woodlands that were rapidly being destroyed by massive clearing for largely unproductive pastures (the focus of my PhD) to defend their livelihoods, histories and the forest itself. This was not the sleek environmentalisms of international organizations, but a set of political movements allied to labor, liberation theology, rural peasant movements that would ultimately help catapult an

obscure metal worker, Ignacio “Lula” da Silva, head of the Workers Party, into such prominence that he would eventually become president of Brazil. This extraordinary coalition had by 1988 produced a new constitution that recognized the land, social and economic rights of traditional peoples.

While 1989 is most known for the collapse of the Soviet Union, the period from the late 1980s to mid 1990s was equally the end of the Latin American authoritarian period and US regional hegemony, and new constitutions that recognized a much broader array of land and political rights were ratified throughout Latin America, often taking elements of the Brazilian document as their template.

Just for comparison, imagine in 1776, on those hot days in Philadelphia, if the Founders had not only been slaveholders like Jefferson, but the slaves themselves, indentured servants, free people of color, the native populations, women and the communities of resistance who would formulate the ideas and deep institutional structures of a new nation and, well, you have an inkling of how profoundly different, and important the Brazilian Constitutional Convention was.

Many would pay the price for this kind of democracy, and one of these was Chico Mendes, the leader of the rubber tappers movement, who in early December 1988 was greeted with a hail of bullets as he stepped into his backyard. It had to do with local politics, of course: there had been a standoff with a rancher over Mendes family rubber forests, but the repercussions were international. The assassins were quite surprised that what they had taken to be an obscure labor leader in some remote backwater was somehow galvanizing much more complex international and national socio-environmental battles, battles that would shake the tail end of the dictatorships to their core. And, indeed, what the Chico Mendes movement and its allies had managed to do was transform the “nature” of environmentalism away from the ideas of a Muirist set aside, the US “empty forest” model for spiritual and scientific contemplation that mimicked in its practice the technocratic control, derogatory view of local people, and exclusionary politics of Brazil’s authoritarians. In its place emerged an idea about conservation in inhabited places as key

regional strategies, that valued native as well as formal scientific knowledge, and began to explore hybrid approaches to economies that would maintain forests, livelihoods, and the solidarity networks that had developed in the long anti-authoritarian struggles. One of the new approaches was the extractive reserve, but since that time many other land classifications (“sustainable use” areas) have come into play, so much so that today more than 50 percent of Amazonia is in some form of conservation, and of these lands more than 60 percent are in working forested landscapes – and more than half of the extractive reserves are in areas of Quilombos. It’s a remarkable story. And throughout Latin America now, the ideas of “socio-environmentalism”: the importance of place for life, livelihood and meaning underpins environmental politics and policy, taking its inspiration from the most unlikely muses imaginable.

Alexander went with me to Mexico and Brazil several times, but he was an essentially urban creature, he lacked Latin American languages, and treks through Amazon forests to various settlements, to hang a hammock and mosquito net and eat roasted agouti – a three to five pound rodent – were really not to his tastes. His idea of hiking down the Lost Coast, to which Joe and Karen Paff, and Bruce Anderson can attest, involved wearing sandals and carrying two plastic Mexican shopping bags filled with cooked tri-tips, a couple bottles of whiskey and a few other things and that’s (biscuits, steel cut oats, hardbound books). Nothing so vulgar as a backpack. As a person who had worked most summers in grad school doing research in the high Sierra, trekked the Andes, and did field work in Amazonia, I felt I did have some helpful hints about how one might proceed on expeditions that involved carrying your own stuff. I made gentle suggestions but these were, predictably, completely ignored, since some kind of extended picnic was really what he had in mind. One rather imagined that he might clone himself so that part of him could be the native bearer, while the rest of him chatted on, on increasingly blistering feet. Victorian tropical travel was really the idea – perhaps like the Harvard naturalist Louis Agassiz and his interesting wife Elizabeth (she would later help found Radcliffe) on Emperor Pedro the

Second's yacht. So while some recent obits had him residing in a cabin in austere rusticity, that was entirely wrong. As sybaritic as possible was fine.

But back to *Fate of the Forest*: the first meeting of the Forest People's Alliance was described in our book. What was remarkable was actually Alexander's wonderful acuity about what was going on, his good humor, and his ability to find Irishmen in Amazonia. His interview with Father Micheal Feeney, whom he first encountered on the plane to Rio Branco in Acre, was cut down for the book, but the two of them reminisced about Ireland, about the US (Feeney had spent time in Colorado) and then Feeney spoke about the work he'd done for decades near Tefé far up in the western Amazon. He was with a group of river forest dwellers, called "Ribeirinhos" and indigenous people who were going to the first big meeting of this type, people who knew profoundly how to navigate tropical rivers, lakes and lands but were negotiating airplanes and Amazonian global politics for the first time. How successfully they would do it!

Many people from remote places all over Amazonia were at this meeting, and it was momentous, even if to speak of it in this way is to use a cliché. All were amazed and amazing. The Forest People's Manifesto, which we published in *FOF*, remains to this day, one of the most trenchant documents about the ecology of justice. These "invisibles" were taking charge of their own history, and, though they didn't know it – in fact no one did – they were about to remake the Amazon map. It was no longer empty space of noble savages or savage brutes, but a place where a forest was one big thing, with plants, animals and people. All of Amazonia's future politics would have to take this into account.

*Fate of the Forest* was produced in about 10 weeks. It proceeded with a martial discipline that the Brazilian dictators

might have admired. Every afternoon my grad students, Priya and Junco, would ferry up yet more volumes (some whose page leaves had never been cut) from the staggeringly excellent Amazon collection of UCLA, and integrate the changes we'd made on the text we'd worked on in the morning, while we advanced and wrote in the afternoon. We worked in the large upstairs living room, which meant that at eye level one was greeted by the July flowering "Red Gum" Eucalyptus of hallucinatory scarlet (these are one of the glories of LA) crammed with urgent bees, hummingbirds and irritated squir-



Photo by Tao Ruspoli, c. 2011

rels, so there was a constant drone and chatter, which rather matched those of our brains. This was washed through the sweet medicinal scent of the fuzzy red flowers and criminal sweetness of the Angel Trumpet datura. The space filled with books, field notes, histories, ecological studies, calls into many Amazonistas and Amazonians of many types. There was also quite a bit of reading that had to be done and the usual other stuff of life. We'd stop, naturally, for tea: with a crew composed of Irish, Indian and Japanese thinkers, this was imperative. This project like everything Amazonian, was insistent, but with the rich intellectual challenge and sensuality of the place. It was deliriously fun.

Alexander's mother, Patricia, would be dead in a couple of months – in October. She, an avid collector of Irish shells, had begun to notice that their saturated nacreous colors were bleaching out. This

pallor in corals and shells are signs of ocean acidification associated with rising CO<sub>2</sub> levels – a marker of climate change. My mom would die a few months later, after her red tulips finished blooming.

When I got the news that Alexander was dead, I, like probably many others, went into the box of papers and photos and reviewed my "Alexander Archive" to find a note from Claude Levi-Strauss, whose classic *Tristes Tropiques* was the source for Alexander's quote about the Golden Age: "The Golden Age' which blinds superstition had placed behind (or ahead of) us, is in us." Levi-Strauss was

then 94 and complaining that he had to remember this stuff that he'd written 50 years ago about the "Golden Age". The quote, he said, was from Babouef, a socialist, utopianist and follower of the positivist Auguste Comte, not some fiery Jacobin.

But the point of that quote is not about the past or the future but about the calibre of daily life. It's useful to note, because few seem to have done

so, that the places Alexander really liked in the US were places of high eccentricity, places that were, in fact, infused with modern utopianism. Not the least of these was Petrolia with its assemblage of back to the land hippies, pot growers, artisans, ranchers and rednecks. Alexander could, of course, have lived anywhere, but he chose perhaps the most ardent of back to the land outposts in California. While he might have snarked a bit at various neighbors, the reality is that he loved the place and chose to leave his bones there. Yet old Babouef's admonitions about paradise being neither in the past nor the future but made and remade in our dailyness was especially true in the end for Alexander: whatever other Paradise he had lost, he found another in the Arcadia of Petrolia.

But beyond his love for Petrolia was the usefulness of the "internally, eternally mutable" Golden Age. At a time when



many books portentously asserted the “End of Utopia” – largely due to the collapse of the Soviet Union – his position was that it could always be rediscovered and reinvented, even if it had failed before. In fact it had to be. I think part of the reason Alexander was so attracted to the Amazonian movements and why we wrote so well about them was how meaningful he found the emergence of these practical, tropical utopias that were carved from lost histories, forgotten people and remote landscapes. They could indeed recast everything: take on the Generals, the World Bank and powerful ranchers and create a New World in the Tropics. These humble former slaves, Indians, and forest dwellers of all kinds that he met in Amazonia – as unlikely a bunch as you can imagine – had done it.

**Susanna Hecht** is a professor of urban planning at UCLA. Her most recent book is *Scramble for the Amazon*.

## An Indian Adventure

By P. Sainath

Looking at the largish room packed with journalists and several television cameras, Alex was surprised. He knew he had a following in India, especially in the state of Kerala with its strong Left culture. But he did not know it was this big and had not expected such a turnout for what was simply a press conference. Of the six states Alexander Cockburn visited in India (a couple of them very briefly), he loved Kerala. Finding it as lively, humorous, eccentric, argumentative and Left-wing as himself. He even had a sense of the local media's taste for fun and mischief. But he was not quite prepared for what was to follow.

Is it not a fact, asked one reporter, that Professor X of University Y in the United States is working actively on behalf of the CIA? That query came from a right-winger working for a Hindu-fundamentalist owned publication. The poor Professor thus maligned was actually one working closely with the Left in its decentralisation programme. Alex sensed trouble and was cautious. He said that he had “zero idea” about the specific issue raised by the questioner. Then added that the CIA presence on university campuses had a long and inglorious history and briefly spoke on the history of that phenomenon.

Our little group of fellow travelers told Alex after the presser: you just confirmed that the learned Professor is a CIA fink. “Rubbish,” he snapped. “I said nothing of the sort.” True, we told him, but in tomorrow's paper, you will find that you did. It took a couple of days more, but the right-wing newspaper had it up there: Alexander Cockburn confirms CIA presence at University Y and went on to portray the place as a hotbed of CIA activity and the unfortunate academic as its resident villain. Alex had to repeatedly clarify what he'd really said.

Even with that little drama, his India (particularly Kerala) trip was an astonishing success. He struck an amazing rapport with his audiences, with those he met, spoke to, interviewed. All the time surprised by the turnout for his talks. “This is India, Alex,” one of our group explained to him. “If people like what you write, they'll translate and publish it in their language. Informing the author about it is a minor and irritating distraction.” And at meeting after meeting people across Kerala did show up with little essays or articles of his they had translated into Malayalam. He'd been read by far more people in Kerala and India than he'd ever imagined.

I had been one of those people for a very long time. I remember bursting out laughing in the Jawaharlal Nehru University library – not far from the ‘Silence’ sign – reading Alex Cockburn for the first time. That was in New Delhi in 1978. I was learning -- as I'm sure countless future journos like myself did learn -- that you could write on extremely serious subjects with fun, wit and humor. A very good lesson to learn when progressives and Leftists seemed to believe that the heavier the language, the more dense the content, the more serious and intellectual a writer you were. Alex showed us that you could be yourselves, have fun writing, without sacrificing an iota of content. That irreverence towards the very powerful was more than just a writing style: it was important for your own learning as a political person. It helped you and others break out of false and exaggerated respect for authority. He certainly helped that happen for me.

In 2005, as Alex learned of the unreported stuff around the tsunami of a few months earlier, he was much taken with the story of one of the icons of India's spiritual corporate world, Sri Sri Ravi

Shankar. The godman, who presides over an opulent spiritual empire, had taken it on himself to go down to a tsunami-hit region and tend the souls in distress, both living and dead. In fact, his cavalcade with dozens of swanky cars left the spot very quickly. In Alex's words:

“...some subversive wag raised the cry that a second tsunami, even more immense in destructive potential than the first, was just over the horizon. The swami made a quick estimate of his powers versus those of the cosmic forces and ordered his car to turn round. The road was narrow, and the ensuing jam very terrible to behold as Sri Sri Ravi Shankar tried to beat a retreat.”

However, while humor, which made grim subjects palatable, was such an important part of Alexander Cockburn's writing, there was much more. There were the razor sharp insights and analysis-- and the sheer, astonishing range. In the few weeks he was in India, Alex managed to write on politics, history, globalization's Indian avatar, our media, cuisine (he managed, I think, to sample about eight distinct kinds), architectural styles (including a put down for the Taj Mahal and a boost for Fatehpur Sikri), culture and anti-displacement struggles. Also throwing up little vignettes from the street while on travel. I marveled at that discipline and energy.

In Plachimada, Kerala, he met with those resisting the Coca Cola plant's appropriation of local water resources. I was with him through that meeting and the way he bonded with people whose language he did not know was striking. The protestors spoke with that ease and sense of security that comes when you know that the person you are speaking to is not planning to make a fool of you. The result: that simple but telling piece ‘Message in a bottle.’

The high-point of his interviews in his own view, I think was a meeting with Dinesan a young farmer whose father had committed suicide in the agrarian crisis-hit district of Wayanad in Kerala. (Over a quarter of a million Indian farmers committed suicide between 1995 and 2011). Dinesan held him spellbound. A young farmer--and part time film projectionist at the local theatre--without any advanced formal education, Dinesan gave Alex a brilliant analysis of the farm crisis, its links with neo-liberal economics and the globalization of that variety. He even



forewarned of a crisis within the United States. Early in the discussion, I could tell Alex was wondering if the translator was not putting his own spin on it. As he spent more time in Kerala, he learned that there were thousands of Dinesans amongst the rural peasantry, who could speak similarly.

Alex's own talks went off very well. He was particularly pleased with one in Kozhikode, organized by the Bank employees' unions. A large hall filled up with people of every religious and political denomination. As he captured it:

"My big evening in Calicut, sponsored by the extremely militant Bank Clerks' Union. There's a full house, I'm glad to say, with Muslim clerics front row right, Hindu fundamentalists, secularist leftists, Christians of various stripes. Kerala is a third Muslim, a third Hindu and a third Christian the latter faith being brought to the Malabar coast in 60 AD by Thomas the Doubting Apostle, no doubt plaguing the navigator with anxious questions."

There was another lesson for me and my friends. Barely an hour after landing, Alex was looking for stories, and enjoying himself while doing so. We had put him up at the very-British-era Yacht Club, thinking this would appeal to his sense of fun. It did. He had hardly checked in when he was already browsing through the memoirs of assorted Colonel Blimps bragging about their valor and success in hunting. His favourite was *The Indian Field Shikar Book* edited by W.S. Burke. Burke, amongst other things, urged readers to treat leopards as vermin to be ruthlessly eliminated along with other "game destroyers." You can imagine the fun Alex had writing on that.

As he got deeper into issues Indian, his pieces served as a powerful antidote to the corporate codswallop of Tom Friedman and assorted other neo-liberal globalizers. Alex was able to grasp some of the fundamentals of Indian elections and political trends in a very brief space of time - partly because he was always at it, reading, interviewing, discussing and yes, arguing all the time. He was possibly the earliest well-known western journalist to rip apart the fraudulent and exploitative industry that the increasingly corporatized micro-finance sector had become. This was at a time when micro-finance was still a sacred mantra in the West. He had scathing columns on

the subject in both *Counterpunch* and the *Nation*. A piece on his in the latter drew howls of anguish from true believers. Subsequent developments have fully vindicated Alex's criticisms of what was - and is - going on.

The next year, as I came to the US, Alex, Jeffrey St. Clair and I did a talk at Olympia - after which Alex drove me all the way, always along the coast, to his place in Petrolia. He and I were to do a couple of more double-bill talks, one of them at UC Berkeley. It was typical of Alex that he wanted to do the six-hour drive in an ancient open-back van. His



Photo by Elizabeth Lennard

excuse was that he needed to pick up his season's consignment of apples for cider. My own belief is that he wanted to make an entrance into the UC Berkeley campus in that dilapidated machine that seemed to me at least, to be falling apart. I was all for it, anyway, but it didn't work out on the day as the wreck coughed pathetically but would not run.

So we took one of his other - old - cars and made the ride, getting badly stuck in traffic and in danger of being late for the

talk organized Professor Raka Ray and others. Since we would have no time in Berkeley before the talk, I offered to help Alex by jotting down the points he wanted to make, and did so. Only, in the chaos on arrival, I left the paper in my room. The paper I did hand him at the talk was some old laundry list of things to do. A furious Alex had to think on his feet. He made one of the most brilliant powerful speeches on 'neo-liberal destructions' completely extempore. As the villain who had robbed him of his speech, if only briefly, I was relieved.

From year 2000 when I first met him, to just weeks before he died, I was regularly in touch with Alexander Cockburn. And, of course, always finding my pieces in *CounterPunch* - for me the best English-language political newsletter anywhere in the world.

I spoke to him quite a few times this year, too. As others writing on him have also said: he never once mentioned his illness, never once let me know he was dying. It was typical of him, and it was his right to go the way he wished. I only wish I'd been able to tell him, just once, how much he meant to me, as journalist, author, friend, inspiration and human being.

**P. Sainath** writes for *The Hindu*. He is the author of *Everyone Loves a Good Drought*.

## Cockburn for the Defense

By George Szamuely

I got to know Alex in October 1999 in very unusual circumstances. I had of course read and admired him for years but I had never met or spoken to him. At the time we were both writing weekly columns for *New York Press*, an alternative newspaper that, briefly, became one of the liveliest and most-talked about papers in the city. One fine day, I became the subject of a minor media feeding frenzy. I was arrested, placed in handcuffs, made to do the perp walk and hauled off to face an ill-humored judge at Manhattan Criminal Court. I was informed that I was facing two grand larceny charges, each of which carried a prison term of up to seven years. My crime consisted of borrowing a substantial number of books—570, to be exact—from the New York University library and

failing to return them.

It all started when I undertook an overambitious writing project, for which I needed to peruse a great number of books. I hit upon the idea of signing up for courses at NYU's School for Continuing Education—affordable even for someone as impecunious as I was—and thereby gaining library-borrowing privileges. Every day, I would wander over to the Bobst Library on Washington Square Park, leaf through various tomes, borrow some, return or renew others, never ceasing to marvel at how few competitors I had for so many outstanding books. I duly plunged into my reading, checking out Hegel's *Phenomenology*, Leo Strauss's *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, Heidegger's lectures on Nietzsche and lighter fare such as the complete wartime correspondence between Churchill and Roosevelt.

All good things come to an end. I was so caught up in my reading that I became careless and, one semester, neglected to sign up for a course, but went on using the library. NYU found out, immediately canceled my library membership and demanded the return of all books I had checked out. I rushed over to the registration center to find a course I could join. Unfortunately, it was summer and the school wasn't running any classes until the fall. I was stuck. Returning the books would have meant giving up on months of work. I pleaded with NYU to be allowed to hold on to the books until the start of the fall semester when I could register for another course. Nothing doing: The books had to be returned at once. And I would have to pay a fine on all late books. The fines had begun to accrue from the day NYU canceled my library membership. At 25 cents per book per day, the fine was quickly adding up to a staggering sum.

News of my arrest was greeted with predictable glee by the media. "NYU Library Scofflaw Taken out of Circulation" screamed the headline above the story in the *New York Times*. "Book Thrown at Library Scofflaw" ran the headline in the *New York Daily News*. With lip-smacking relish, the media reported that I was facing not only prison time but a fine of \$31,000. No one bothered to explain how this sum was arrived at. NYU had got all of its books back, and they were in fine condition. And while I certainly didn't think that I deserved

sympathy, prison time struck me as a little excessive in a case involving overdue library books. I had not sold any of the books and had not the slightest intention of selling any of the books. All I wanted was restoration of my former status of student at the School of Continuing Education and member of the library in good standing.

Suddenly Alex stepped into the fray. In a withering column in *New York Press*, he ridiculed New York's prosecutors and media. But he reserved most of his scorn for NYU. I wasn't expecting anyone to defend me, least of all someone I didn't even know. Alex had neither interviewed me nor called me to find out what all the fuss was about. For him, the case was nonsense from start to finish. NYU was no victim, but a powerful institution picking on an easy target. There was nothing unusual, he wrote, about people taking out hundreds of books at a time from university libraries and holding on to them for years. Professors do it all the time, but no one goes after them. "If every member of tenured faculty in universities across the country were arrested for holding upwards of 400 library books for periods in excess of three years, they'd have to double the rate of prison construction, or hold the profs on barges offshore. But of course, these profs aren't liable to arrest."

Hilariously, he asserted that library users like me could be trusted to take better care of books than university libraries, "which often sell off all the interesting rarities on the grounds that there's been no demand for them and the shelf space would be better taken up with expensive computer equipment." Besides, Alex went on, NYU should be thanking me "for freeing up its shelf space." If I hadn't borrowed the books, no one would have. The books would have sat on the shelves "ignored, awaiting the moment NYU decided to sell them off to a book broker." In any case, NYU "was probably phasing out its printed books in favor of electronic storage"

Warming to his theme, Alex called on me to resist all entreaties to take a plea deal. I should go to trial and ask my attorney to "make a pile of the books in the courtroom, and then, let the jurors note how many times these books had been checked out before" I got my hands on them.

Then Alex addressed the legal case that

the New York County District Attorney's Office had brought against me. He dismissed the \$31,000 fine as "nonsense." The sum was "merely what the library reckons to be the cost of replacement of all the books." However, it was "irrelevant to this case, since all the books are present and accounted for." As for the claim that I had committed grand larceny, Alex wrote, "Stealing books is not a crime unless the books are sold. There's no evidence Szamuely was popping along to the Strand to flog off editions of Hobbes." Alex had understood what the case was really about without speaking to me or hearing anyone speak on my behalf. (The latter would certainly have been hard to do since no one was doing so.) It was a case of overdue library books. Not admirable, certainly, but not grand larceny either.

Alex's defense of me was extraordinary. He wasn't rallying round a friend who had got himself into trouble. He didn't say that I was basically a decent sort who had made a mistake. For him this was a matter of principle. Powerful institutions were ganging up on a little guy and behaving disproportionately and hypocritically. He took up the cause of someone who was unlikely to garner much public sympathy. Everybody who has ever had to pay a library fine must have felt a twinge of Schadenfreude on hearing that someone had been really remiss about returning books, so much so that he might end up doing time.

In the end, I heeded the advice of attorneys rather than that of Alex: I pleaded guilty to a petit larceny misdemeanor, paid a fine of \$4000 and performed community service. The one good thing that came out of this sorry episode was that I got to know and became friends with Alex. We met up occasionally when he visited New York and we corresponded intermittently. The other day, I re-read the library-books article--the first time in 13 years--and I found it not only hilarious but surprisingly moving. Toward the end of his column, Alex speculated as to why I had held on to the books. My reasons, he claimed, were "admirable," and ones that a jury would understand. He needed them for the same reasons my shelves groan with volumes...I may never get to, may never re-read. To surrender them is to confess that, yes, I may die before I get around to reading Hegel properly, or all the dialogues of Plato, or

all Balzac's novels, or all the volumes of Motley's *Rise of the Dutch Republic*; I may die before I write the column or the essay or the book that requires absolutely that these books be instantly to hand.

Buying, borrowing and, above all, holding on to books that in all likelihood one will never get around to reading or re-reading is a way of denying one's mortality. It is of course illusory. It is in one's output and in the recollections of one's friends and family that one gains a few shards of immortality. Alex has certainly left more than his fair share of those.

**George Szamuely** was born in Hungary. He was editor at the *Times Literary Supplement* and at *The National Law Journal*.

## Alex's Architecture

By Sigrid Miller Pollin

In 1990 Alex asked me to design a house for him. It made sense; he had fallen in love with California. We began looking at a spectacular site in Big Sur, overlooking the Pacific, and designing a house in the shape of a half-boat hull. On the site plan it looked as if this boat fragment had run aground parallel to the hillside slope. The entry (at the stern) led through a tower across a small bridge into the main space. The triangular bathroom (at the bow) had a flap wall that hinged open for a sea view from the loo.

For Alex design and construction ideas held the same kind of secret excitement you feel as a kid, trying to build a tree house or a fort. His ideas were both idiosyncratic and full of identifiable architectural elements: sleeping alcoves, shaded verandas, an intimate bathing courtyard, a gate made of welded Ford model-T fenders.

The Big Sur house didn't pan out, so we looked to Petrolia. This site opened onto the Mattole River, but had a cramped, musty ranch house located on it. Alex saw the potential for transformation, and I had a blast helping to make the transformation real, using models and drawings. Again, a set of clear architectural typologies emerged, through phone calls and rapidly scrawled notes: a conservatory, a linear veranda, an important column. The conservatory was simply a glassy corner of the main living space, but calling it a conservatory invit-

ed the imagination into sun-dappled historic greenhouses. The column was a log from the nearby woods, but had as much meaning as the carefully-chosen tree column in a traditional Japanese house.

The house would later acquire many layers of additions: a courtyard, a barn, an outdoor oven, a study (the old garage), a stoa doubling as an arbor, and, of course, a tower. The tower was a reference to a strong, simple stone tower in Alex's hometown in Ireland. His feel for materials was evident throughout the house. He reused old 12" x 1" redwood boards, and had a bathroom floor made of sawdust composite – an idea borrowed from a Frank Lloyd Wright house.

I hadn't seen the house for many years when I arrived at Alex's memorial last month. I walked the rooms and the gardens, picturing the boyish delight he must have taken in each new layer of this panoply of art and architecture, a collage of memorable artifacts, spaces, and materials. He made the place magical.

**Sigrid Miller Pollin** is an architect and professor of architecture at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

## The Anti-Statist

By Sheldon Richman

A libertarian—a radical, decentralist, pro-market, but anti-capitalist left-libertarian, at any rate—could tell that Alex Cockburn was exceptional when even his eulogy for a departed Marxist compelled interest.

After the Marxist economist Paul Sweezy died, Alex wrote that Sweezy "trenchantly detected and explained: the reasons for the New Deal's failure, until World War II bailed out the system; military Keynesianism and the Korean war as the factors in US recovery after that war; underdevelopment in the Third World, consequence of dependency that was created by imperialism . . . ; the increasing role of finance in the operations of capitalism. . . ."

The implied debunking of the standard left-right fairy tale that constitutes most people's notion of American history, is—or should be—of great interest to libertarians, who ought to understand that capitalism equals, not radically decentralized *freed* markets, but exploitative corporatism. That insight and attitude are what drew me and my left-libertar-

ian comrades to Alex. My last contact with him was to ask that he blurb a book to which I contributed, *Markets Not Capitalism*, edited by Gary Chartier and Charles W. Johnson. He delivered the blurb: "We on the left need a good shake to get us thinking, and these arguments for market anarchism do the job in lively and thoughtful fashion."

Unfortunately, I only met Alex once, in 2008. We both spoke at an extraordinary conference put on by the Future of Freedom Foundation in Reston, Virginia titled "Restoring the Republic: Foreign Policy and Civil Liberties." What was extraordinary was that this well-attended anti-empire, pro-Bill of Rights gathering featured the most prominent conservatives, progressives, leftists, and libertarians who were alarmed about imperial war and domestic tyranny. They included: Glenn Greenwald, Bruce Fein, Stephen Kinzer, Robert Higgs, Justin Raimondo, and Ron Paul.

I knew of Alex's work long before that, and followed his writings in *The Village Voice*, *The Nation*, even *The War Street Journal*. Now, finally, I would have my chance to talk to him. (He had already published me at *CounterPunch*.) He did not disappoint; he was funny and charming, and interested in what subversion I was up to. I'd like to think we hit it off.

In his wonderfully wide-ranging talk, he discussed the prospect of an alliance between the libertarians and his kind of left. "There has to be more utopianism, and there has to be more straightforward spirit of mutiny, which I think you libertarians are good at offering. If the left would offer a little bit of utopia—some of the utopia may differ—then I think we can continue to have an enjoyable and hopefully a creative association." When I asked him to elaborate in the Q&A, he referred to an earlier attempted alliance, namely, the old *Inquiry* magazine (which I helped edit, 1982-1984), which assembled the best anti-statists no matter where they placed themselves on the political spectrum. Acknowledging that there are "some big issues [between libertarians and him] that . . . have to be sorted through," he continued, "I think a battle of the ideas, maybe one a year, would be a lot of fun. We should talk about it. I hope we do." Alas, we never got to do it.

**Sheldon Richman** keeps the blog *Free Association*.



## Cockburn Clips

By Elizabeth Lennard

Some people grow up with religion; I was brought up in the cult of *Beat the Devil*. My father, a Viennese sociologist – and film buff – must have seen the movie more than fifty times, long before the advent of video-on-demand. A line of dialogue from the Huston movie would be his response to almost any situation. He would speak *Beat the Devil* with my Viennese psychoanalyst aunt, another aficionado. We even showed excerpts of *Beat the Devil* at my father's funeral! It was our bible.

When I first read *Beat the Devil*, the novel, I was amazed to discover that James Helvick was the pseudonym for blacklisted journalist Claud Cockburn, father of my good friend Alexander. I was even more surprised to discover how closely the John Huston movie adheres to the Helvick/Cockburn book. Wikipedia says the film was “loosely based” on the novel and the script was written “day-to-day”. A few years ago, when Alexander Cockburn asked me to compare novel and film, I was able to prove that almost every line, including the wittiest, as well as all the character descriptions and almost all scene descriptions, were in fact contained in the book, while very little seems to be based on the Truman Capote script. Here are excerpts from a filmed interview I did with Alexander on that subject.

July 2010:

**AC:** My first column for *The Nation* magazine, started in about 1984, was called *Beat the Devil* and I told the story about *Beat the Devil*, the movie and I said, *that*, in a way, helped pay for my education. And of course I liked the idea of *Beat the Devil*, what is *Beat the Devil*? The phrase in England, “beat the devil at his own game” which I guess is the meaning of the line. Or ‘that beats the devil’ meaning that’s really far out.

**EL:** Why Helvick?

**AC:** This was the height of the cold war 1951, 1952, 1953 and my father had been listed by a Senate committee as one of the two hundred and sixty most dangerous Communists in the entire world.

**EL:** And was he?

**AC:** There were many candidates for this list, but he was very effective in what he did. He was also very famous for *The Week*, which was his own sort of newsletter. The Communist party never liked it very much because it wasn't under their control and it was very influential in the 1930s. (It was a very big deal. It was read by Roosevelt. It was read by all sorts of people. So he had been blacklisted, and when it came to publishing the novel, long before Huston entered the picture, it was thought that to have *Beat the Devil* by Claud Cockburn would com-



Photo by Elizabeth Lennard

promise the book's possibility of success, a bit like *Children's Fairy Stories* by Karl Marx. Or Lenin's *How to Put on a Really Good Dinner Party*. My father was under continuous surveillance by the British Secret Service from 1934 to 1954. I can build up my parents early relationships just by looking at the records. I can follow episodes in my childhood, like when I first told him to come and read me Christopher Robin, because it's all there in the British MI5 transcripts, which are available for inspection at the British Museum.

He wrote this novel actually in a house they later moved into in Ardmore, County Waterford, Ireland. My mother grew up in Ireland. And so we had this cottage and then you looked out the window across Ardmore Bay and there was a long finger of land reaching out and it was called at the end of it: *Helvick Head*-- and I remember saying to my father, ‘now well daddy, why are you called Helvick?’ He said ‘it's a good name because it's easy to pronounce, Helvick. It's not like Cockburn, which is Cock burn which

is – Coburn...’ He had an earlier name, Pitcairn. He did a lot of work under the name Pitcairn. Because of the Cold War he had lots of pseudonyms. Our dining room table, if it had been filled with all the pseudonyms he had-- it would have been a very substantial dinner party. We had Patrick Cork who was a bouncy little fellow, who wrote sort of feature articles about Ireland. Then we had James Helvick, writing these novels and having a little measure of success. And we had a rather worthy one who wrote essays about history called Kenneth Drew.

**EL:** Did you ever use a pseudonym?

**AC:** No, almost never. I think my very first piece for *Punch* when I was 16, I wrote under the name Alexander Blake, because my father was writing for *Punch* and we didn't want to make it seem like nepotism.

September 1988: Alex Cockburn convinces Shelley Wanger, editor of Andy Warhol's *Interview*, to let him do a story on the bi-centennial of the French Revolution. He asks me to think of some friends to “interview”-- in France, where

I live - and I land the job of doing the photos. I am slightly dubious. Who was I to photograph? How was the 200-year-old French Revolution going to make news in New York?

February 1989: the story of our travels to photograph statues of Robespierre, St. Just and Marie Antoinette and Alex's conversations with my friends appears, transformed splendidly into a piece entitled *tête a tête*.

2011: Alexander instigates the “tumbrils” in *CounterPunch*, for words to be sent to the guillotine. My heart is warmed that he has remained faithful to our French Revolution.

**Elizabeth Lennard** is a Paris based, American interdisciplinary artist/photographer & filmmaker/director. Her work is often associated with writers, notably Gertrude Stein, who inspired the video-opera *Accents in Alsace* and the documentary film *The Stein Family, the Making of Modern Art*. Her most recent video on *Battle Scenes* of Napoleon's wars was commissioned by, and shown at the Palace of Versailles in 2012.



## Partisan of the Working Class

By Jack Heyman

Alexander Cockburn was a strong supporter of ILWU rank and file longshoremen. In his and Jeffrey's online zine, *CounterPunch*, he not only covered the Liverpool dockers' dispute in England but participated in support rallies on the West Coast, aiding in the struggle to revive international workers' solidarity. Alex was not one of those "left" journalists who wrote easy platitudes praising the labor movement. He wasn't afraid to criticize the trade union bureaucracy when it held back class struggle.

*CounterPunch* also ran extensive coverage on the 2000 Charleston longshore struggle, the 2002 PMA (maritime employers) lockout of West Coast longshore workers and the Bush administrations invoking of Taft-Hartley, the vicious 2003 police attack on anti-war protesters and longshoremen in the port of Oakland at the start of the Iraq War and the 2008 May Day strike by ILWU longshore workers against the imperialist wars in Afghanistan and Iraq which shut down all West Coast ports.

A bloody clash of longshore workers and their mobilized supporters in the Occupy movement against government strikebreaking forces was averted when Washington's Democrat Governor Gregoire, eyeing the upcoming presidential elections, prevailed upon top union officials and EGT to "settle". A concessionary contract was quickly reached, which the heads of both sides heralded as a "victory" without even the rank and file having the right to vote.

Cockburn was an unabashed partisan of the working class, unafraid to joust with the capitalist powers that be, bankers and politicians alike. Cockburn's father, Claud, had been a writer, a member of the British Communist Party and a fan of Harry Bridges, a leader of the 1934 Maritime Strike. Alexander Cockburn lived in a small town, Petrolia, in the redwood country of northern California. Besides having an acerbic wit, he had a fondness for classic American cars. His intelligence, fearlessness and humor will be missed on the waterfront around the world.

**Jack Heyman** is a former longshoreman and labor organizer who worked on the Oakland docks.

Most recently, *CounterPunch* covered the longshore battle in Longview, Washington at a new EGT grain terminal. Men and women longshore workers had been blocking grain trains and briefly occupying the scab grain terminal, defying both a federal judge and AFL-CIO head Richard Trumka who'd disingenuously called it a "jurisdictional" fight between unions.

The Obama administration had ordered an armed Coast Guard cutter to escort a scab ship up the Columbia River to the EGT terminal.

## Myra, Come Home

By Ben Tripp

One evening many years ago – I've got no idea when, but it was during my first marriage, so between the years 1216 and 2005 – I was trying to come up with a synonym for the word 'antonym' when the phone rang. It was Cockburn. He was in Hollywood. He wanted to know if I was busy.

Well, you can imagine my excitement. These calls always led to adventure. Also, he looked damn good in organza, even then before his third set of teeth, so I figured we'd be meeting up at the IHOP on Sunset Boulevard to throw French fries at tourists for drag night. However, Alex surprised me: he was at the residence of an elderly writer improbably named Gore Vidal, and he thought I might like to come along to observe the festivities.

In hindsight I'm pretty sure he wanted me there as a witness – he was conducting an interview and it had already fallen to bits by the time I arrived, with little chance of being reproduced in ink. *Someone* ought to see what was happening. I had no difficulty finding the place because my burro knew the neighborhood. The Vidal residence, for those of you who haven't been there, was a 1920s Mediterranean-style villa in the Hills set in half an acre of verdant grounds, an entertainer's delight with terrazzo floors, abundant light, hand-wrought ironwork, and a manservant named Kato.

Alex and Gore were at the dining room table, drinking. There were some journalistic props – a tape recorder and a notebook, primarily, and maybe a copy of *Molodaya Gvardiya* – on the table. But this wasn't an interview, it was a match of wits.

For hours I observed the fray. Mr. Vidal had recently lost Howard Austen, his companion of several decades, and seemed sunken and frail, not the Disco-era metrosexual of the *Caligula* DVD special features with whom I was familiar. His wit had not suffered. Every other statement he made was a worthy epigram, and he showed baffling ingenuity in the variety of ways in which he failed to answer any of Alex's questions.

Then again, Alexander son of Claud, was not to be outdone, and most of his questions were actually digs at Mr. Vidal's many auto-contradictions and vainglorious postures over the years. I'd seen Alex



at this before: he didn't ask questions, he interrogated, and woe to the subject whose evasions could be joined together to form a lie. But Mr. Vidal didn't lie, he spun legends, setting the pencil of memory into the ink of history.

They were two titanic intellects fighting like schoolgirls over which one *really* deserved the Pulitzer. You know, as schoolgirls will. Both of them were intense, charming, and cruel, with a contrasting layer of mutual admiration worked in there like the ash in a Morbier cheese. My role in the proceedings was very like that of Bilbo Baggins on the eve of his great adventure: while heroic deeds and cruel treacheries were argued over by the mighty in the room, I sort of crouched down at the end of the table and ate crackers.

Topics I recall included the role of the Church in modernity and Mr. Vidal's recent return to Christ; what a bunch of bastards Italian real estate agents were; the *Village Voice*, Christopher Hitchens (who had the poor taste to be alive at that time; he has since recanted); and fags. It was Mr. Vidal who favored the latter term, no doubt seeking an easy objection. We were made of sterner stuff. The subject of wine came up repeatedly, but only in the form of a demand.

Eventually we ended up on the back patio with the great and inebriate author whizzing into the potted palms and Alex mocking the tennis court on the property for being both bourgeois and disused, and as the hour was late, we were soon permitted by our host to fuck off out of it, which we did.

As a parting shot, Alex managed to ram one of the gateposts of the Vidal residence with his car, which was a specimen of Oldsmobile's mid-60's attempt to fill the void left behind when Germany stopped producing the Panzer VIII. And so he drove off into the night on the wrong side of the road, perhaps in homage to his Irish heritage, and I walked the fifteen blocks back to where I'd left my burro, only to discover it had been slaughtered and made into *Guisado de chambarete* by some local *ejecutivos de la televisión*. It was a memorable evening with memorable men. In my role as referee I withheld judgment at the time as to who won the contest of wits; now the truth can be told.

As always, the victor was wine.

**Ben Tripp** is a screenwriter and novelist.

## Making the Gods Jealous

By Marianne McDonald

What amazes me about Alexander Cockburn is not that he died so young, but that he lived so long. I always thought he would be assassinated. No one could get away with speaking the truth as he did. With brilliance and humor, he gave us courage to be the people we wished we were.

Alexander and I were friends for years. I would visit him in his home in Ireland, fortified by a nearby wishing well. He would visit me here in Rancho Santa Fe. We shared many of the same friends, whom we both missed when they died, for instance, Edward Said, and Bernard Knox (who fought with Alexander's father Claud in Spain against Franco). I'll miss our shared memories.

No abuse of civil liberties was too trivial. He published an article (May, 2003, *CounterPunch*) about my humiliating strip search in a Chicago Airport when I went to my son's graduation, calling it "How Dangerous are Professor McDonald's Hips? Paranoia At Airport Security." (I have two replaced hips and set off every alarm; I gather the authorities feared I, a grandmother, would whip them out and take over the cockpit.) He quoted me, "When are Americans going to wake up to what is happening? We were once proud of our Democracy." He cited a passage from my translation of Euripides's *Children of Heracles*, written around 430 BC in response to the murder by Euripides' own Athenians of two envoys from Sparta during the early days of the Peloponnesian War between two Greek superpowers. The play applies now to the question of killing a POW in the name of national security, and national revenge. Alcmena, Heracles's mother, sees Eurystheus, who condemned her son to so many labors, now a prisoner. She claims he shouldn't live for all the crimes he caused. But a servant tells her she has no right to kill him, and forbids her because the city wants him. She answers, both the city and she will get what they want: she will kill him, and then give the city his body. The servant reluctantly agrees. It is obvious this dialogue won't be revealed for reasons of national security.

Alexander would regularly call me when he needed some information from the ancient classics. He respected the insights of the ancients and realized, like George Santayana, if one didn't remember the past, one would be condemned to repeat it.

Alexander asked about Sophocles' *Ajax*, a play that gave some more insights into what Americans face day after day. The result was "The Madness of Ajax" (*CounterPunch*, January, 2006). Ajax said, "A brave man must either live with honor, or die with it." It sounds like Cockburn himself. He lived and died with honor.

Perhaps the gods were jealous, Cockburn died young, and Athena drove Ajax mad. 9/11 drove America mad. America thought itself immune from what the rest of the world had experienced, the madness of terrorism. Many political leaders of our day sanction madness, and so a country is invaded because of non-existent weapons of mass destruction. There's a line in *Ajax*: "It's a bad citizen who does not obey those in authority: laws never function well in a city without fear." The Patriot Act ensures that patriots also live in fear. Sophocles urged some compromise between authority and civil liberties. The Greeks, who invented the world's first democracy (flawed though it was) seemed to ask more of their citizens than we do today in America: they asked them to have a conscience and be accountable for their actions.

Cockburn respected the past and learned from it. He was a Socrates who posed embarrassing questions to those in power. They taught people to think and question for themselves. This also seems to me the mission of *CounterPunch*.

Cockburn published a long article on "Staging Anti-Colonial Protests" (*CounterPunch*, March, 2007). Greek tragedy was alive and well in occupied Ireland, whereas the occupying British preferred the brutal Romans (See Brian Friel's *Translations*). There were four Irish versions of Sophocles' *Antigone* in 1984. Antigone represents the unwritten laws of the gods (conscience), vs. the civil authority in Creon that goes too far.

She was the first civil disobedient, and thus appealed to Cockburn. Antigone would die defending her honor and defying unjust authority. There were culturally specific reactions to my trans-



lation (Nick Hern Books) in Ireland, Austria, Greece. In America, Creon makes a victory announcement to the audience before a sign that said, "Mission Accomplished," written in pseudo-Greek letters that were legible to the audience. To the Greeks and many moderns, Antigone represents defiance when god-given rights were threatened. The Greeks believed their citizens were entitled to justice and equal rights, in ways that were well defined by Plato and Aristotle, such that Albert N. Whitehead said that all later European philosophy consisted of footnotes to Plato.

Alexander called me this spring and asked me about the Caesars and Roman history. He said he was writing about American imperialism. I cited Suetonius and Tacitus, and told him that many made the mistake of condemning all the Caesars as corrupt orging imperialists. I told him even Nero wasn't all bad just because he lined the way to his party with the burning bodies of those who irritated him. Besides an excessive commitment to brutal theatre, he also made the decision not to waste whole boars, since guests never finished them, and in the future decreed only half boars at parties (would that was always true).

But the empire overextended itself, and eventually imploded. In his talk on April 17<sup>th</sup>, Cockburn once again told the truth about our excesses, which was published in *CounterPunch* in May as "Where we're at in 2012: Nero's Half Boar and Other Disclosures." Cockburn showed how over recent years the haves have dramatically more and the have nots even less. He said it was a no brainer to vote democratically; still showed no party was exempt from criticism. He showed that our constitutional rights have been eroded, how torture is accepted, drone flights sanctioned, murder condoned, our every step is monitored, and it is legal to make any citizen disappear for 30 years without representation. So, if you fear a police state resulting from the next election, don't. You're living in it now. Thank the gods for *CounterPunch* that continues to deliver the truth, no matter how dangerous it is.

Alexander died as he lived, a super nova, a man who fearlessly stood up for what he believed.

**Marianne McDonald**, Professor of Classics and Theatre, UCSD, playwright, Member Royal Irish Academy.

## A Great American

By Paul Craig Roberts

**I**n order to stay in touch with his adopted country, Alex would periodically travel from his home in northern California to the East Coast where he would purchase a clunker and drive it back across the country to California, stopping along the way to converse with Americans about the events that were affecting and shaping their lives. It was on one such journey that Alex stopped off at my home for a few days.

What a delight he was! Civilized and feisty. Conversation with Alex convinced me that intelligent and involved beings were still extant in America.

I had given up on academicians, politicians, corporate boards, think tanks, and media pundits years previously and had taken up residence in a relatively low density area in the Florida panhandle. Alex enjoyed the area, and we had a great time. He also enjoyed my cats, and it is his photo of me with the cats in my arms that graces my web site.

What I admire most about Alex is that he held everyone accountable, not only his opponents and enemies but also his friends and supporters. Alex was a real person, one in a million or a billion. He held his old country accountable and his new one, and every other one.

Despite Alex's acute awareness of the descent of the western world into greed and mendacity that would make Karl Marx blush over his mild portrait of capitalism and democracy, Alex remained optimistic. He believed that truth, justice, and people infused with these values would ultimately prevail, no matter how many dungeons, tortures, and deprivations they suffered in the meantime. I told Alex that he shared optimism in common with Ronald Reagan.

Alex believed in the good things, not in the bad things. This made him almost unique as a writer and observer. I discovered in our conversations that he was far more optimistic than I. For example, many have wondered and speculated over the disagreement Alex and I had over 9/11. Being pragmatic, having been a graduate student of one of the best 20th century physical scientists, and trained to respect evidence, I reported the findings of the experts who concluded that the US government's account of 9/11 was

improbable.

Alex, despite my popularity on *CounterPunch*, would not post my columns that reported experts' questions about 9/11. If you think about it, it seems odd that one of the last few legitimate leftists ended up on the side of the government's account of the event. Many, who don't know Alex, have accused him of helping to cover up a false flag event. People who say this do not know the man.

It was very important to Alex's optimism about our future as a free, just society, respectful of other ways and cultures, that Washington's imperialistic oppression of Muslim countries produced blowback and 9/11.

Alex derided David Ray Griffin and the 9/11 Truth Movement, because he interpreted their questioning of 9/11 as a statement that oppressed peoples were impotent to repay the US for its crimes against them.

Alex objected to the implication that the US government is so competent that, by following the rules on the books, the government could have easily prevented the attack. For Alex, the implication of the totally successful attack was that the US government is incompetent, a pleasing thought to a person concerned about the US government's underhanded ways.

For Alex, the idea that Big Brother had control over us all and that Big Brother's victims had no means of replying to Washington's oppression was simply unacceptable.

Alex's belief that the oppressed are capable now and then of throwing off their chains and striking back at injustice and oppression was important to his optimism. He would have found confirmation of his belief in the one million people who went into the streets in cities all over Spain on July 20 to protest being looted in behalf of bankers' profits.

I agree with Alex that there are occasions when optimism can be more encouraging than facts and when hope might be more important than truth. As Alex was above all, despite his fire and fury, a gentleman, our difference over 9/11 did not affect our relationship. Alex and Jeffrey put together a collection of my *CounterPunch* columns and published their selections as a *CounterPunch* book, *How The Economy Was Lost*, which sold out.

I will miss Alex as I watch intelligence

and humanity drain from our society.

I am certain that Jeffrey St. Clair will succeed in keeping *CounterPunch* in the forefront of intelligent information where Alex and Jeffrey placed it. I will always support CounterPunch for its forthrightness and courage.

**Paul Craig Roberts** is a former Assistant Secretary of the Treasury and author of *How the Economy Was Lost*.

## An Audacious Man

by Rep. Dennis J. Kucinich

**M**r. Speaker, I rise today in honor of Alexander Cockburn, the bold Irish-American journalist who passed away after a courageous, private battle with cancer. He left this world on Saturday, July 21, 2012 at the youthful age of 71.

Alexander Cockburn was born in Scotland on June 6, 1941 and spent most of his childhood living in Ireland. He attended the University of Oxford and earned a degree in English literature and language in 1963. Alexander became a permanent resident of the United States in 1973, where he wrote for several noteworthy publications. He spent his first ten years in the US writing for *The Village Voice*, an alternative weekly magazine based in New York City. He then became a writer for *The Nation* until the time of his death, in addition to a variety of publications including *The Wall Street Journal* and *New York Press*. Alexander was also the co-editor of *CounterPunch*, a newsletter in which he frequently expressed his controversial, unfiltered opinions for which he became renowned and deeply respected.

Friends and co-workers remember Alexander for his remarkable talents. He could quickly write dazzling columns that were full of passion and conviction. He was unafraid to speak his mind, often writing in opposition to his colleagues at the same publications. His bold style set him apart as a truly remarkable journalist.

Alexander died on July 21, two years after he was diagnosed with cancer. He kept his illness a secret and continued to write until the day of his death, refusing to let cancer get in the way of his passion. He will be missed by his family, friends, and many readers.

Mr. Speaker and colleagues, please join

me in honoring Alexander Cockburn, the talented journalist and audacious man who has left a lasting legacy on the world of literature and the world at large.

(Appearing in the *Congressional Record* during August, 2012)

## Alex Goes Camping

By Doug Peacock

**O**n March 14, 2008, I had the privilege of introducing Alex Cockburn, a man I had admired and appreciated for decades, to my close friend Edward Abbey who was, like Alex, a fighter and anarchist. Of course I was a bit late; Ed had died on us 20 years ago to the day. And Abbey's burial site: It wasn't quite a cemetery setting. In fact, three friends and I had dumped Ed's body into an illegal grave as far-flung, wild and rugged as we could dig before the cops caught up with us.

My social inelegance is a piece of the larger diagnosis that gave me a 100% combat disability and I often substitute trips for words to the people I love to show them how important they are to me. I take friends out to see a bear, canoe a river or visit a sacred, wild place like a rock art panel or a grave.

Naturally, I wanted to thank Alex for his moxie in the good fight. That spring, Andrea and I invited Alex to join us on a camping trip out to Ed's grave. We met up near Tucson. Alex knew I was writing a book about global warming and asked the who-done-it climate change question, which, I replied would be answered by the last Inuit sitting on the last iceberg. That was it for business. We checked our collective camping gear for our three-day trip into the uninhabited western desert of Arizona. Though camping and sleeping in desert washes, we were not exactly roughing it; we packed camp chairs, an ice chest full of beer for us and soft drinks for Andrea.

Our route aimed west across the Reservation to the end of the road at Why, then southwest on sandy two-tracks in which we managed to get our inadequate pickup stuck a number of times. Alex, cool and calm, helped me jack the sucker up and pack brush under the wheels.

We made camp somewhere northwest of Organ Pipe National Monument, far up a desert wash, many miles from the

nearest human, although, of course, this was Border Country and you never know who's sneaking up from Mexico or where Homeland Security is prowling. I offered Alex Abbey's .357 Magnum for the night, sort of frontier manners for the occasion. Jeffrey St. Clair later remarked: "You don't know how lucky you are he (Alex) refused. He'd have likely blown out the tires of your truck or shot himself in the foot."

With camp chairs surrounding a roaring mesquite fire, I popped a good cabernet and poured us both a tin-cup-full. The garlic and Italian sausage sizzled in a frying pan off to the side of the blaze in anticipation of puttanesca sauce.

A waning gibbous moon rose over the darkening desert hills. We dragged our sleeping bags down the wash at the last call of curved billed thrasher. In our sleep, great horned owls hooted down from the saguaros.

On the morning of March 14<sup>th</sup>, we set off walking along a line of basaltic boulders decorated with ancient petroglyphs. We entered a tiny arroyo, out of the gusty wind blowing in from Mexico.

### Subscription Information

#### Published 22 times per year.

1 - year hardcopy edition \$55

1 - year email edition \$35

1 - year email & hardcopy edition \$65

1 - year institutions/supporters \$100

1 - year hardcopy edition  
student/low income \$45

1 - year email edition  
student/low income \$30

Renew by telephone, mail, or on our

website. For mailed orders please

include name, address and email

address with payment, or call 1-800-

840-3683 or 1-707-629 3683. Add

\$17.50 per year for subscriptions mailed  
outside the U.S.A.

#### Make checks or money orders payable to:

CounterPunch PO Box 228, Petrolia,  
CA 95558



The March breeze rattled in the brittle-bush. An immense silence encased the staggered breaths of wind. Alex, poorly armed against the spiny desert in his hip-hop Puma shoes, kept stepping on cholla cactus. Repeatedly. At first, I used the pliers on my Portland tool; later I just pulled them out with my teeth.

Finally, we climbed out of the gully onto a small flat. A big boulder sits among ironwood trees. On its brown patina is etched:

Edward Paul Abbey, 1927-1989  
NO COMMENT

**Doug Peacock** is the author of *Grizzly Years* and *Walking It Off*. His next book, *Dangerous Travel in a Melting World*, will be published next spring by CounterPunch / AK Press.

## I Was Cockburn's Banker

by Mark Scaramella

Alexander Cockburn began writing for the *Anderson Valley Advertiser* in 1986. His column was called "Ashes and Diamonds." Given the times, it was mostly ashes but he did ashes as brilliantly as the diamonds.

Mendocino County is teeming with global affairs experts, nearly as many of them as poets and artists. We thought by luring Cockburn onto our pages we could say to the locals, "We've got the best guy there is in all the English language on everything that happens outside Boonville. Thanks anyway." Cockburn liked our paper, frequently plugged it, and when he'd relocated to nearby Petrolia, he often contributed stories on local and regional matters, toning up our provincial paper no end. Over time, he became a personal friend and I became his banker of first and last resort.

In those early years we got Cockburn's copy via fax, often unnervingly close to our deadline. But Cockburn, a true newspaperman trained in the tough old school of traditional, pre-gizmo journalism, was always on time every Monday night. Around the office, out of his presence we called him "Big Al," never daring to risk the Cockburn fisheye in person.

Sometimes on Tuesday there would be an edit or an update. Cockburn's edits were minor works of art done with a fine tipped pen and that swooping, barely leg-

ible handwriting of his, as if he'd learned his penmanship from the Founding Fathers. He could crank out clean drafts with apparent ease; the guy was a genius after all, and us dull-normals in Boonville looked on in slack-jawed awe as he

Mendocino Coast. I had squirreled away enough money to live on, apart from the expenses and meals I received as pay from the AVA. Local friends warned me early on that I should never loan money to lefties; they're usually broke or total

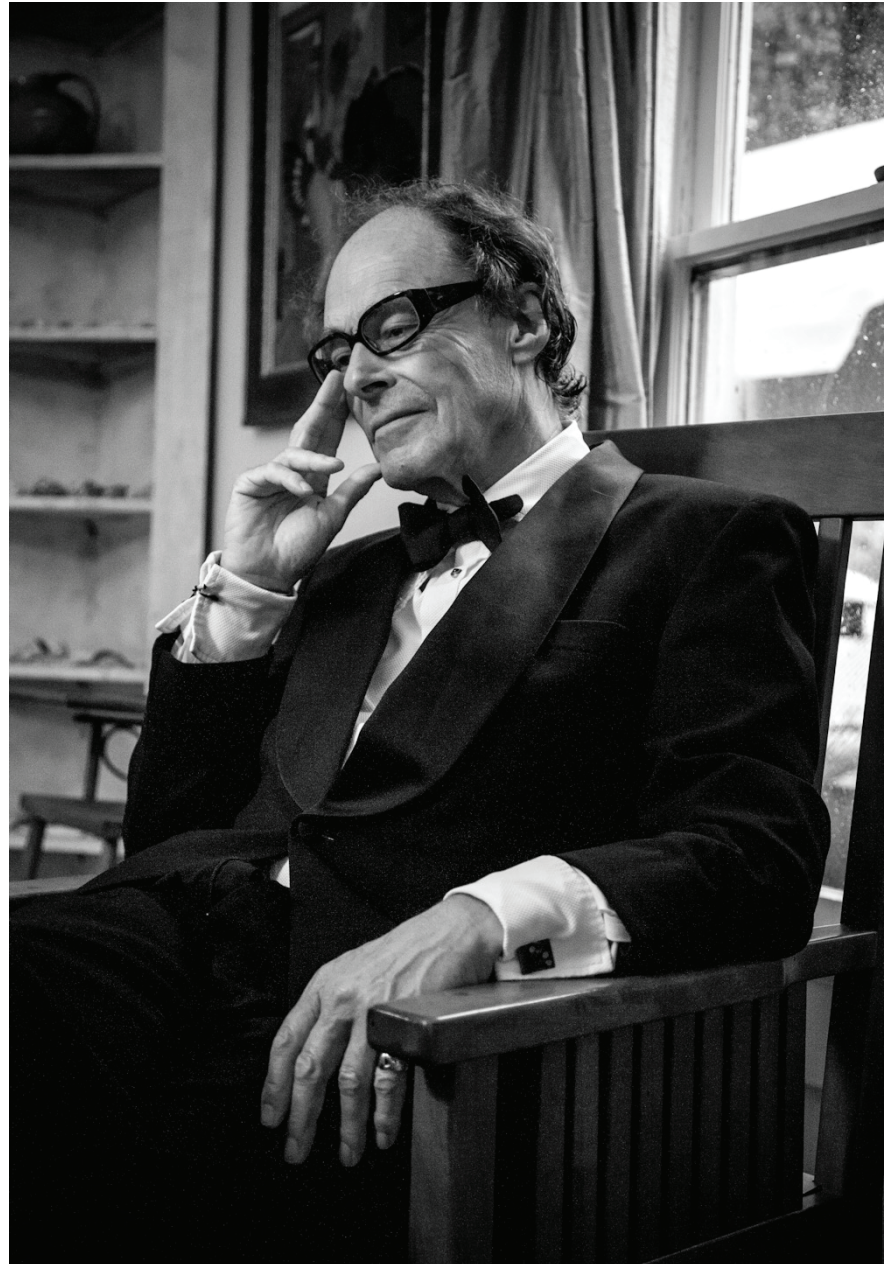


Photo by Tao Ruspoli, c. 2011

pounded out a nearly flawless first draft. We used to keep copies of his more artful edit-faxes on our wall they were so good, but fax paper quickly fades and that technology was soon extinct.

I had pre-retired to Boonville to escape the corporate world of GizmoLandia when I came to work at the AVA. My parents had retired and lived a ridge away near where my father was born on the

deadbeats. The editor was constantly plotting ways to pry even the smallest amounts of cash out of the paper's treasurer, his wife Ling.

I developed a strategy I called the "inoculatory loan." Loan a small amount if it seemed like a true emergency, and only if the leftie supplicant had come up with a plausible story why he or she needed it. If the inoculatory loan wasn't paid back,



I wasn't out much. But when they asked for the next loan, I could simply say, "Sure, as soon as you pay off the last one."

It wasn't long after my arrival in Boonville that Cockburn called to ask me for an emergency loan of a few thousand dollars. It had something to do with back taxes he owed, and an IRS guy out of Eureka, with whom Cockburn enjoyed a jolly first name relationship that ended abruptly when the subject became the money Cockburn owed our arbitrary government. But this time the wolf was at the door. I said I could go maybe \$1,000. He accepted, of course. And about a year later he paid me back out of a speaker's honorarium.

This qualified him for another loan, which arrived by a less personal fax. Subsequent requests came by email. The ancient axiom never to lend money to a friend was waived in this case. We'd negotiate an amount, usually less than what Cockburn wanted because he always wanted it in a hurry and I'd agree. Then, more often than not, he'd put me through a contorted rush process of sending this check here, that check there, the checks keeping his mini-labyrinth of transactions straight in that unfailing memory of his.

One of the hurry-up loans had something to do with his horse(s) which, to me, seemed about as crucial as money for a parakeet tuxedo.

All the loans were eventually paid off. That's why I kept doing it, that and the mesmerizing charm that guy could turn on. He was hard to turn down.

I know Cockburn occasionally got nice payments for his mainstream writing (*LA Times*, *Architectural Digest*, etc.) and he raked in some nice fees for college speaking engagements. But it seemed to me that whatever he got for those efforts was never enough, and of all the big gun lefties who make thousands wowing the sophomores, Cockburn spent much of his time on unpaid grassroots efforts like Redwood Summer here on the NorthCoast in the 1990s.

He would appear anywhere he was asked because he really was as radical as reality.

In a lesser known tribute to Cockburn in the Arcata-based *Northcoast Journal*, Humboldt County journalism instructor Marcy Burstiner made an astute observation about one of the many times Cockburn appeared in the Eureka area:

"He didn't care that it was raining, or that he was talking to a ragtag bunch of nobodies about as far removed from the rest of the world as you can get, or that only two dozen people came to hear him when he might have attracted several hundred at least in the Bay Area. And I bet that he didn't care that someone like Sebourn [a Humboldt County radio talk show jock] would label him on the post-ing only as 'local resident'."

Where his old nemesis Hitchens made millions adjusting his views to imperialism, Cockburn made peanuts or nothing actually trying to do something about it. We once suggested to him that he debate Hitchens. "You're the only guy who can handle Hitchens' rhetorical flummery, and you could demand half the gate. You'd pack them in and deflate that guy at the same time."

I don't think Cockburn even gave it a thought, and I doubt Hitchens would have gone for it. On one loan, during the negotiations of the amount, Cockburn got the impression that I was worried about being paid back, so he sent me a thick envelope full of several dozen personal checks, each with the total amount divided by the number of months of the loan, calculated to the penny, each dated with the first of the month that it was supposed to be deposited, plus a final check for the remainder amount. I guess I was supposed to feel better about the repayment.

The checks were so hastily written in that Thomas Jefferson scrawl that one of them was rejected at the local bank as illegible. Cockburn promptly sent a batch of replacements. The last two loans were made against his *Anderson Valley Advertiser* contributor's fee, which was, of course, a pittance. After the second of those two loans was paid off last year, I expected that another loan request would be coming right up, as usual.

But no request. Hmmm, that's odd. Had Cockburn's finances suddenly improved? Not likely. Little did I know that, honest to the end in even the smallest matters, he didn't want to take out a loan he couldn't repay. I like to think that in a small way I helped keep Cockburn independent.

**Mark Scaramella** is the Managing Editor of the *Anderson Valley Advertiser* based in Boonville, Mendocino County, California.

## A Measure of Sanity in Solitary

By Richard Ostrander

**G**reetings from the Texas gulag! I first heard about the passing of Alexander Cockburn on Democracy Now and I was stunned almost to tears.

I wrote Mr. Cockburn several years ago explaining that I was confined in Super Seg, completely indigent, and requesting a subscription to *CounterPunch* to help ward off insanity from sensory deprivation. Every year he would renew my subscription for another year, and I'd occasionally write to him letters about the bad old days of the 70s when we had inmate guards and we'd be beaten senseless and tossed into solitary for failing to pick our weight or quota in cotton, or about some book or article I'd read. I came to consider him a friend.

I promised I'd give him a thank-you call in December 2014, when I complete my quarter-century sentence. I'll not be able to make that call now, and it saddens me greatly. It seems to me he was a persnickety ol' curmudgeon with a keen sense of justice and a heart of gold. I already miss his presence in the world.

**Richard Ostrander** is an inmate in Estelle High Security Prison in Huntsville, Texas.

## The Keeper of Cats

By Alex Cockburn

**I** was 11 when I flew out from England to visit my uncle Alexander in Petrolia. My strongest memories are of his four cats. He had a cat called Euclid, who at some point had gone missing, so Alexander had replaced him with a similar-looking cat, which he also called Euclid. However, the first Euclid eventually returned, so the cats were re-named Euclid I and Euclid II. There was also a tortoiseshell called Madame Curie, and a black cat called Frankie, who had long hair and was more affectionate but less elegant than the others, which might have explained his less highbrow name. I remember Alexander's interest in cooking; he used to bake his own bread in an oven in the garden, and he taught me how to poach a perfect egg.

Alexander also took me hiking. We drove to a forest the night before, and

slept outside under the stars, the silence broken only by Alexander's snoring. We rose at dawn and made our way up a mountain. I found it hard going, and Alexander was sympathetic but prodded me forward. I remember a view from the mountain of mist below me with the sun still low enough to illuminate it.

The last conversation I had with Alexander was in his hospital in Germany. He was groggy but still funny and charming. He said that with my recently-grown beard I looked like a 'Russian revolutionary' and was curious about my research (I'm a physics graduate student).

**Alex Cockburn**, son of Patrick and Jan, is a PhD candidate at Durham University.

## Alexander's Treasure Box

By Joe Paff

At the funeral my wife Karen asked our three grandchildren: "Do you remember Alexander?" Five-year-old Lincoln said "Yes, he used to come visit us in his big red pop-up car" (a bright red '59 Imperial convertible). Three-year-old Austin said, "They put Alexander in the treasure box. We'll have to make another Alexander." Lincoln's twin brother Spencer: "No, Austin. They can't make another Alexander. We'll have to find new friends and call them Alexander."

We drove the treasure box to the cemetery on a flat bed with Jazz music playing, the parade led by our fire truck went past the fire station where the flag was at half staff. All the friends followed in a long car procession up the hill to the cemetery. When we arrived four-year-old-Arlo said, "They're going to put him in the hole; it's under the green carpet."

Karen and I had flown to Germany on the 4th of July. Alexander's daughter Daisy had been constantly by his side through many weeks of treatments in Bad Salzhausen. What a daughter! We took some small walks; talked through the medium of Wodehouse. (Alex: "People talk about Jeeves but Bertie is the hero.") We watched Alex energize himself to write another piece and then fall back on his pillow; on his desk was a history of the Hundred Years War and I asked, "Good?" A.C. said "OK, scholarly,

footnotes, but it doesn't bring it to life." (And didn't Alex "bring it to life?") We sat in the "Absolute Silence!" salt room on lounge chairs – translucent glowing walls and craftsman-style roof. We nibbled food together – A.C. with no appetite and me, Karen, and Daisy with our stomachs in knots. We planned his return to Petrolia and tried to help A.C. gain the strength to do it.

When he weakened suddenly, his family gathered at his side (A.C.: "The Cockburns are coming!"). With Daisy by his bed, he peacefully stopped breathing and died.

Here in Petrolia his friends gathered and all knew just what he wanted done. True friend and CounterPunch business manager Becky flew to Germany. Alex's house in Petrolia – described in East Coast media as a "cabin" – is actually a great work of art, featuring rammed earth walls and a rood screen adorned with art – tiles, sculptures, reliefs. The interior walls covered floor to ceiling with art and photographs; a cider house with gold leaf dome; fabulous large ceramic sculptures by Jim Danisch climb a steep (steep!) hill to a guest house, all fabulously gardened. Alexander so animated this house by his personality, by his vitality, by his unrivaled hospitality, that it vibrates with him gone, just as it did with him present. Builder/artists Greg Smith and Dave Grant began crafting his coffin – what my grandchildren called the "treasure box."

The memorial service. I stood anesthetized and spoke incoherently of the way Alexander made every day an astounding celebration and a great adventure. Every day was Bloomsday. Every car trip was an Odyssey. Every person he met received his full attention and engagement. Many people never in their lives had been so engaged – people with 500 Facebook "friends" who'd never been listened to; people whom no one thought mattered were important to Alex.

At the burial Daisy sang and Jenny Scheinman (born in Petrolia) played violin. Violet-green swallows circled above – and as he was lowered, a young red-tail hawk soared over with a triumphant s-c-r-e-e-e-e.

Petrolia is a tiny, remote, isolated village six hours north of San Francisco. Narrow, fragile, twisting barely paved roads climb over several steep mountain ridges to get here. No one comes to

Petrolia accidentally. Alex came 21 years ago to cover "Redwood Summer" – the years long battle to defend the last old growth redwoods from logging – an action combining tree sits, blockades, legal challenges, arrests, and demonstrations in many venues. Like most of us living here, he wandered in and never left. He sank deep roots; became a U.S. citizen here; his last art project was to have Greg Smith make a copy of the large baptismal font in Ardmore near his Irish home.

We all know each other here. Everyone has 100 percent name recognition. Fame or prestige from outside our valley matters very little. Each is judged by acts, words, generosity, humor, kindness, skills. Alex was living in the Golden Age and we were all in it with him. Our postmaster Jackie was always for Alex the "Goddess." The women in the (only) local store were Laughing Angels. The grumbling, growling Ed at the dump was Cerberus; and he was replaced by Gary who Alex called courtly and sweetly gracious. Don't we all long for that table where all are welcome, where a place is set for everyone?

Alex will long be remembered here for his parties, where hundreds were welcome; where the music was loud and came from vinyl; where the food was fabulous – the gumbos, the jambalaya, the pit barbecues of pig; the spits turning whole lambs over the coals; the home made cider like French champagne. It was as close as humans get to the "Big Rock Candy Mountain."

Then the wonderful dinner parties – where visitors from "outside" met his local intimate friends and we ate homemade lox, sausage, sour kraut, poached pheasants (bought from 4H kids) – and talked til the next day. As Wodehouse said about Blandings Castle, if you drag friends and relatives to an isolated place you have to provide sparky locals to entertain them. And always the music – mostly American blues, R&B, rock, or jazz. And always loud and always an authoritative background for every song and performer, if asked.

Alex was a man who celebrated every day and every thing. We ate haggis on Robert Burns Day; we went to the apple trees to Wassail and toast the next years crop and beat pans to drive off bad spirits from the trees; we celebrated Bloomsday; we celebrated flat tires when we traveled; and, of course, Easter, Christmas, New

Years, and all close friends' birthdays.

One day with Alex was like five days with anyone else. With that 5:1 ratio, Alex was 355 years old. Like an Old Testament prophet, he died FULL of LIFE.

**Joe Paff** is president of the board of the Institute for the Advancement of Journalistic Clarity. He and his wife Karen own Gold Rush Coffee.

## Hecho en Mattole

By Becky Grant

**P**etrolia knows Alex the horseman, lover of animals, host of epic bacchanalia, fine chef and a patron of the arts. Alex cultivated remarkable relationships with many craftsman and artists he commissioned.

The CounterPunch office sits on our land in Petrolia, only a couple of miles from Alex's house. Almost daily, he would race over to grab a check or sign a document and when he wasn't in a hurry, he would look in on my husband Dave, in his woodshop to see what he had going, borrow a tool, or drop off a project and they would chat about woodworking and architecture. Alex, in his extraordinary way, would share bits of history of architecture and ancient building practices, and he and Dave would carry on and soon a project would be born: Dave's skills and Alex's inspiration melding into another collaboration. This became an integral part of Dave's craftsman education and over the years they grew close, sharing stories and projects.

Alex had this same sort of friendship with Greg Smith, a master of many mediums. Bill and Barbara Bush made everything from jewelry to the anti-aviary over the currant patch in his garden. Jim Danisch is the ceramicist behind Alex's large-scale porcelain sculptures. Also in his collection are several of my pieces, from prints to figurative sculptures and mosaic installations. Deva Wheeler, a fine seamstress and also part of CounterPunch business operations, stitched up many of Alex's clothes and manicured his garden for many years. It was appropriate that these were the collaborators for the casket, which is now Alex's resting place.

Dave and Greg worked long hours from the moment they learned of Alex's death, until the morning of the burial. This was an intense time mirroring the

intensity of their grieving. It was deeply bonding for them and necessary, because now they will have to lean on each other for inspiration.

Jim Groeling and Greg Smith contributed old growth redwood salvaged from antique wine tanks – the inside of the coffin emits a rich scent from decades of aging wine. The handles, fabricated by Bill Bush were similar in aesthetic to many other pieces he has constructed for Alex. Raised copper panels, featuring a initials AC, his loyal dog Jasper, his 1959 Imperial and the mighty Underwood typewriter were handsomely embossed by Greg. On the lid of curly redwood Greg inlaid a silver and gold Celtic spoon by Barbara Bush, gilded tiles by Jim Danisch and a tiny antique jadeite cabochon I set in silver with daisies representing his daughter Daisy and a shamrock for Ireland. Dave hand-planed the fine wood and assembled it with mortise and tenon joinery and polished the surface to a rich, silky finish. The final piece of furniture was almost too gorgeous to put in the ground. Still, one my favorite moments from the funeral was at the burial when men, who all loved Alex deeply, worked together to gently set him down. Their low banter – while coaxing such an unwieldy load – was so brotherly and gentle. I'll never forget it.

## Joy in the Morning

By Daisy Cockburn

*Whoop-i oh yeh yeh*

*Walking back to happi-ness*

*Whoop-i oh yeh yeh*

**S**o sang my father several months ago as he potted around the house, and I ran to my notebook. It was wondrous, this fragment of happy lyric – another joyous moment in the morning. Who wrote that? I urgently enquired. 'Sung by Helen Schapiro in about 1967. Who wrote that masterpiece I can not remember.'

Oh, What to do without my father's voice? A few transcriptions I find scrawled in my book help counter the absence.

*Gardening-* 'The application of water is frequently beneficial to plants.'

*Footwear-* 'I've never had a successful relationship with slippers, ever.'

*Gratitude Cafe-* 'That's a live sandwich – no you can't possibly go to this place.'

*Onion Soup-* 'If it's hot, long and stringy

it goes on your chin and burns it, and you look silly too. Chop your onions into bits rather than circles.'

*Broccoli:-* 'Don't despise the stalks.'

*78 Records-* 'Most records of this sort last two and a half minutes, so you can boil your egg pretty accurately.'

*And Fried Eggs-* 'Should look like a sun that's just left the morning mist, the white tender and firmly clouded and the yellow – (this being from a happy chicken pecking away at grass not labeled organic because it has only one foot nailed to the bottom of the cage) – the yellow a firm strong yellow almost with a bit of orange in it, not the pissy yellow beloved of commercial paint manufacturers, except for the French who tend to get yellow right. Now you've got your egg, the vast matter of the toast accompaniment is a separate subject so encyclopedic that we will restrain comment at this time. And there will be a longer statement of my views on breakfast too, coming up'.

Joy.

## Guillotined

*Being a Summary Broadside*

*Against the Corruption  
of the English Language*

by  
**Alexander  
Cockburn**  
and the Readers of  
CounterPunch

Available Now

[www.counterpunch.org](http://www.counterpunch.org)

by phone:

1(800) 840-3683

by mail:

CounterPunch Books

P.O. Box 228

Petrolia, CA 95558

\$10.00 plus s & h

(US Priority \$5.75

Overseas \$9.75)



**CounterPunch**

PO Box 228  
Petrolia, CA 95558  
[www.counterpunch.org](http://www.counterpunch.org)  
1-800-840-3683

**1st Class**

Presort  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Permit No. 269  
Skokie, IL

**First Class**

**return service requested**

**CounterPunch**

presents

*West Coast Memorial  
Celebrating the Life and  
Work of Our Friend*

**Alexander  
COCKBURN**

Saturday  
October 20, 2012  
5:00-7:30pm  
Citizen's Space  
425 2nd Street  
San Francisco, California

