Tells the Facts and Names the Names

CounterPunch

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A Silver Lining

"February payroll employment surged by 705,000, more than double expectations and the largest monthly rise in 13 years. ...In addition to the surge in employment, the unemployment rate fell to 5.5%. The only good news was a 0.1 % decline in hourly wages."

—Merrill Lynch financial newsletter, March 8, 1996.

A Knight of Babylon

Few mourn the passing of Ron Brown more deeply than the editors of **CounterPunch**. From our very first issue, when we reported his personal services for Baby Doc Duvalier, the late secretary of commerce could always be counted upon to furnish lurid copy in a slow week. He died in the best possible taste, not burdened by indictments virtually certain to have issued from the special prosecutor investigating his tangled affairs, but gallantly leading a corporate boarding party of big-time CEOs (whose firms have been grateful contributors to the Democratic Party) on the conquest of new Balkan markets.

It was no disinterested crusade for peaceful reconstruction that sent Brown and his corporate posse on the Bosnian and Croatian trip. At stake are $5.1 billion in reconstruction funds over the next five years, with the World Bank scheduled to raise $1.8 billion this year alone. Why, for example, was the late Claudio Elia, chairman of Air and Water Technologies, on the ill-fated Boeing 737? One answer might be that $70 million in funding is scheduled by the World Bank for water sanitation and solid waste disposal. The executives from Bechtel, ABB, Harza Engineering and Parsons Corp., were with Brown because $149 million in road and transportation construction has already been approved by the Bank, with millions more coming available through the year 2000.

Brown's journey was the consummation of US strategy throughout the past five years of the Balkan crisis, namely to bring the region firmly into the American sphere of military and commercial interest. His was the tour to cash in the investment and bring home the trophies.

Brown took the corporate A Team with him on the Balkan journey: Boeing, AT&T, Bechtel, Enron and Northwest Airlines, whose unpalatable co-chairman Alfred Checchi begged off the fatal trip in order to have dinner at the White House.

All five of these big-name companies on the Balkans trip had important ties to the Democratic Party, especially financial. In 1994, Saudi Arabia was looking to increase the size of its commercial air fleet and examined proposals from American and European aircraft makers. After furious lobbying by President Clinton and Ron Brown, the Saudis placed a $3.6 billion order. Within six months of having closed the Saudi deal, Boeing had enriched Democratic Party coffers to the tune of $65,000, four times more than it had donated during the previous three years.

AT&T has showered the Democrats with money in recent years, including a soft money contribution of $190,000 — its largest ever — last December 21. That came immediately after Clinton and Democrats in Congress had helped the big long distance companies insert favorable language into the telecommunications bill.

Bechtel, one of the biggest political donors in America, gave the Democrats $84,450 during Bill Clinton's first 21 months in office. Company representatives have also traveled with Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary on her junkets abroad and the Clinton administration has fiercely pressed the Indian government to give the go-ahead to a controversial energy project in which Bechtel is a major player,

The prime contractor on the Indian project is the natural gas giant, Enron, which since 1988 has given more than $250,000 to the two major political parties. While the majority of that money has flowed to the GOP, the Democrats have also received substantial dispensations. Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin represented Enron during his days at the Gold-

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The New China Lobby

Terrified that China could become a hot issue during this year's presidential election campaign, especially with Peking's "most favored nation" trade status up for review in June, several US corporations have started a covert PR blitz to convince the public that the Chinese leadership is deserving of greater sympathy. To coordinate the public relations effort, the companies have hired Hill and Knowlton, whose president, Howard Paster, is President Clinton's former congressional lobbyist.

The stakes are high. Bilateral trade between the two countries rose to $55 billion last year and US direct investment in China has gone from $358 million in 1990 to $5.4 billion in 1995.

In 1992, Clinton attacked George Bush for being too friendly toward China, a policy he described as "coddling dictators", then promptly embraced Peking as soon as he took office. Speaking at a Freedom Forum panel discussion in late March, Assistant Secretary of State Winston Lord declared that the administration this year "will press very hard with the Congress for extension of MFN".

Bob Dole has occasionally criticized Peking but he has also been a keen advocate of the Chinese government. Peter Rodman, one of Dole's foreign policy advisers and a man who once worked under Henry Kissinger on the National Security Council, told a Freedom House panel that cutting China off this year would cause American companies "much collateral damage".

A bevy of Fortune 500 firms has started a covert PR blitz to generate sympathy for Peking.

The business lobby has reason to worry. In Congress, China is being attacked by everyone from Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina, who views Peking as Red Central after the fall of the Soviet Union, to Rep. Nancy Pelosi of California, a liberal Democrat and critic of China's human rights record.

Helms and his allies point to China's threats against Taiwan and its 1995 shipment of nuclear technology to Pakistan. Pelosi criticizes Peking's mass executions (11,000 people last year, including people convicted only of petty theft or passing counterfeit currency); the abysmal conditions of orphanages in Shanghai, as documented by Human Rights Watch; the re-imprisonment of Wei Jingsheng, whose call for greater democracy earned him a 14-year sentence for "conspiracy to subvert the government".

To counter Peking's critics, the US companies have initiated a pro-China campaign that our informant at a beltway public relations firm says is budgeted at well over one million dollars. "Five years ago, when US companies talked about the political risk of investing in China, they were worried about Peking", one business consultant says of the edgy mood among the China trade tycoons. "Now they see the political risk as coming from Washington."

The firms behind the PR campaign are among the biggest players in China:

- Boeing, which has provided Peking with 75 percent of its commercial air fleet — including 64 planes sold for $3.9 billion two years ago — views China as its major market during the next fifty years. The company estimates that during the next two decades alone China will spend $100 billion on new planes.
- AT&T forecasts earnings of $3 billion from its operations in China by the year 2000. In 1995, when human rights groups urged American companies in China to adhere to a "code of conduct", AT&T led the resistance, saying that it "would be viewed by the Chinese government as another attempt to influence Chinese domestic politics and would be detrimental to US business".
- GM in 1995 closed a $2 billion joint venture to manufacture automobiles for China's domestic market.
- Motorola has investments in China worth $1.2 billion and in February announced plans to build a new plant in China to produce pocket pagers.
- Ford, a latecomer to China, last November bought a $40 million share in a truck manufacturing plant in Jianxi province.
- GE longs to sell China nuclear equipment for its energy program, though it is now prevented from doing so owing to China's covert export of nuclear materials to Pakistan. Steve Barber, a company marketing executive, told *Reuters* on March 26 that GE favored "the removal of US curbs so we are not left in France's dust in terms of reactor orders".
- Allied-Signal has a lucrative joint venture in Shanghai to produce engine boosters.

Hill and Knowlton has represented human rights abusers like Kuwait, Turkey and Indonesia. Handling the China whitewash for the PR firm is Allan Myer. He has been putting company representatives in touch with members of Congress and renting scholars to draft op-ed articles for major newspapers and to speak at media events. These "third party" advocates, as they are dubbed by industry, are well paid for their labors but do not reveal their affiliations to the public.

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Myer is also preparing upbeat promotional items which avoid disagreeable issues such as China's routine use of torture. These materials, which include a brochure on trade discussing the benefits of "engagement" and a movie which interviews young Chinese professionals about their hopes for the future, are to be distributed to journalists, schools and community groups such as the Rotary Club. Myer is not eager to discuss his efforts, telling us he would "decline to talk about anything that I might or might not be doing".

The China lobby also counts on support from the scores of American consultants who advise US companies about investing in China. These include ex-White House chief of staff Howard Baker and former secretaries of state Kissinger, Al Haig, and Lawrence Eagleburger. The Chinese are especially fond of Eagleburger, who traveled to Peking for a pleasant round of high-level chats shortly after the 1989Tiananmen Square massacre.

The secret China lobby won't have an easy fight. While Clinton will certainly extend China's "most favored" status in June, some in Congress are wavering. GOP Rep. Matt Salmon of Arizona has long been an eager advocate of the argument that increased trade produces political freedom. But in March he sent out a "Dear Colleague" letter saying that "the events of recent months have shaken my confidence in that assessment".

Salmon is correct in his disquiet. There's been no easing of repression by the Chinese government. Just months ago, the State Department released its annual report on human rights which concluded that increased trade makes little difference "in the absence of a willingness by political authorities to abide by the fundamental international norms". ■

Why Elephants Hate Neo-Liberals

All through the Reagan-Bush years, greens thundered their indignation at the Republicans' indifference to endangered species. Nothing roused more passion than the slaughter of the world's few remaining elephants, leopards, rhinos and kindred species dear to the big game hunters' hearts.

And indeed both Reagan and Bush did thwart efforts to strengthen international protection for rare wildlife species. With the return to power of the Democrats in 1992, many environmentalists looked to Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt to end the international trade in exotic animal trophies.

Certain regulations govern big game hunting and the taking of trophies. These include the US Endangered Species Act and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

In theory, the Endangered Species Act allows only for import of listed species for scientific research or enhancment/ survival of species. Under the threat of lawsuits from green groups, both Reagan and Bush more or less stuck to the letter of the law, with the species being admitted primarily for scientific research. The relevant agency here is the Fish and Wildlife Service in the Interior Department. Its officials decide which listed species may be imported and whether these species are from approved countries. Between 1981 and 1992, in the 12 years of Republican tenure of the White House, the average annual import of species listed under the International Convention was 2,000 trophy animals.

With the arrival of the Democrats in 1993 came a new philosophy based on inane neo-liberal dogma. Theory here took the form of our old friend, the cash carrot. The idea has been that if the Fish and Wildlife Service charges hefty permit fees for the hunting of these species, it will provide a financial incentive to preserve their habitat. Some of the money is remitted to the relevant countries, which are meant to pass it on to their environmental bureaucracies, which in turn crack down on poachers and protect existing stocks.

All of this twaddle betrays staggering ignorance of Third World conditions, where corruption means that the money is often immediately stolen and where the governments are broke. Mozambique, which has the famous Maputo elephant reserve, has been forced to lease the 3-million-acre eco-system to James Blanchard, a right-wing financier from Louisiana who proposes to turn it into a hunting theme park. Blanchard used to finance RENAMO, a CIA-backed mercenary army which during the 1980s killed off 80 percent of Mozambique's elephant population.

In the first year of Babbit's supervision, imports of exotic species shot up from an average of 2,000 during the Reagan-Bush years to 18,000. The following year the number rose again, to 21,000. In 1992, Bush's last year, the Fish and Wildlife Service authorized the importation of 400 African elephant and leopard trophies. In 1994, the Clinton administration allowed 1,200 trophy imports of these two species.

A significant player in this story is Safari Club International, at whose annual convention in 1994 Babbitt was a speaker. These tour operators naturally relish the possibility of sharply raising the number of animals they can legally kill and import. A trophy elephant sells for $50,000.

In his speech, Babbit spoke favorably of auctioning exotic hunting permits, saying "these auctions promise much needed currency benefits ... and enlist area residents in on-the-ground efforts to conserve the species".

Only Babbitt could babble such imbecilities with a hopeful countenance. ■

Shark Among Sharks

A few years ago, a friend of ours in the PR industry worked on a project with Alan Stoga of Kissinger Associates consulting firm. Our friend asked what it was like to work for the semi-retired mass murderer. Stoga responded in harsh terms. He said Kissinger was a wretched sort, rude to underlings and, overall, "an asshole".

The better to depict the Kissinger spirit, Stoga told of a late-1980s trip H.K. made to the Mexican coast. The waters in the area were notorious for sharks and Kissinger hesitated to go for a swim. He soon solved this dilemma by ordering several aides into the ocean. After ten minutes the water had not turned red with blood, so the intrepid Kissinger took his dip at last. ■

NAFTA's Swift Sword

Still enamored of NAFTA despite Mexico's swift demise after its passage, the press has studiously ignored an important related story unfolding north of the border. March 31 marked the deadline for states in the US, Canada and Mexico to file "reservations" — a listing of economic activities and laws to be exempted from the NAFTA free trade regime — with their respective federal governments.

The outcome is momentous. Any rules not listed, and even some that are, can be challenged. For example, US tobacco companies could press to have Canada's strict cigarette labelling requirements outlawed as an "unfair trade barrier".

Under GATT, the European Union, Canada and Japan have used the "unfair trade" ploy in seeking to strike down US laws such as the Delaney Clause, which bars carcinogenic additives in processed food, the ban on asbestos, recycling requirements and restrictions on lead in consumer products. Any disputes about NAFTA "reservations" are to be settled by panels created by the trade agreement. These are uniformly stacked with rabid free marketeers.

This process works just as well in reverse. The Clinton administration, pressured by Gerber, recently forced Guatemala to rescind its laws requiring that baby food carry only generic labelling. Gerber will now be able to market its products in Guatemala with the same fat, smiling tot displayed on its US merchandise.

Some provincial leaders in Canada, are alarmed at NAFTA's potential impact on the country's social welfare system. The provinces can now bar non-Canadian firms from providing health care services by invoking residency rules or by giving special advantages to non-profit organizations. But with the conservative government in Ottawa already reducing the national health budget and some state governments proposing big privatizations, it's feared that US firms will use NAFTA as a tool to force their way into the Canadian market.

These fears are understandable. The US Trade Representative has issued draft guidelines saying that American companies should be able to bid on contracts for traditional government services such as law enforcement, prisons and welfare programs if "the state allows private providers to offer similar services on a commercial basis".

Spurred by the refusal of the US and Mexico to provide written assurances that they would not seek to enter Canada's health care market, British Columbia filed extensive NAFTA reservations on March 22. Health Minister Andrew Petter said Canada would "need to move quickly and decisively to make sure that American corporations ... are stopped at the border".

The reservations issue has also resonated in the US. For Oregon, a vital issue is a law that restricts bulk water removal from state watersheds, this being primarily intended to prevent raids from developers in southern California. The US Trade Rep has promised Oregon that a challenge to the bulk water law would not succeed. But Suzanne Townsend, a state assistant attorney general, is not convinced. "There's a general concern that some of our laws may end up being vulnerable, especially if the ultimate interpretation is left to the NAFTA panels", she tells us. ■

The Secret Team

As reported here on March 1, the beltway consulting firm of APCO Associates has secretly been leading the national campaign to pass a bill to gut product liability laws, which allows people to sue corporations for their sale of dangerous products. Senator Joseph Lieberman, a Connecticut "New Democrat", helped push the bill through Congress and attacked Clinton for promising to veto it.

It turns out that Hadassah Freilich Lieberman, the senator's wife, is a senior associate at APCO, which represents firms including, Philip Morris, Brown & Wiliamson and State Farm. Needless to say, Senator Leiberman has not drawn attention to his wife's job as he bustles to do APCO's bidding on Capitol Hill. ■

Brown, (continued from p. 1)

man, Sachs investment house. During Clinton's tenure, at least five of Enron's overseas projects have been blessed with financing from the Export-Import Bank.

Northwest Airlines, too, has been generous with the Democrats. In 1994 alone, it gave $105,716 to the party, roughly twice the amount that it shipped to Republicans.

The Marxist dictum that "the state is the executive committee of the bourgeoisie" was perfectly exemplified at Brown's Commerce Department. Press accounts glowed over the department's Advocacy Center, a computer-lined "war room" where bureaucrats monitor bidding on dozens of global deals, and try to get an inside track for US firms by gathering intelligence (with help from the CIA) and by coordinating financing from government sources.

Brown also led groups of executives on commercial trips to Brazil, Argentina, Chile, China, Hong Kong, South Africa, Russia, India and the Middle East. These eagerly sought journeys — some 300 CEOs applied for seats on the trip to Russia, of which only 29 were picked — provided a handy means for the Democrats to reward their campaign contributors. Melissa Moss, formerly with the pro-corporate Democratic Leadership Council and a fundraiser for the Democratic National Committee, picked the CEOs who got to fly along with Brown.

Twenty-five executives flew to China with Brown in September of 1994. This was three months after Clinton bowed to business pressure and re-extended Most Favored Nation trade status to Peking, whose vast market makes CEOs quiver with excitement.

Lodwrick Cook of Atlantic Richfield was one of the CEOs who made the trip to Peking. His company gave $201,500 to the Democrats between 1992 and 1994. Cook is also close to Clinton, who in June 1994 presented the ARCO chieftain with a birthday cake during a lunch for executives at the White House. Another CEO touring with Brown was Edwin Lupberger of Entergy, who closed an $800 million deal to build a power plant during the China trip. Lupberger is a personal friend of Clinton's and his firm donated $60,000 to the Democrats during the election cycle preceding the trip.

It's not surprising that so many business leaders raved about Ron Brown. As James Treybig, CEO at Tandem Computers Inc. – who negotiated a $100 million joint venture agreement while in China with the commerce secretary – told *The Wall Street Journal*, "Whether you're a Democrat or a Republican, you really have to respect this guy for what he's done for Corporate America."

So at least Ron Brown died among friends.

No one was more smoothly symbolic of fin de siècle Washington than the late secretary. Corruption breeds most rankly at the crossroads between political parties, corporate interests and the public trough, and here is where Brown established permanent residence.

In the early 1980s Brown was working for the influence peddling firm of Patton, Boggs & Blow. At that time, Brown signed a plum account with the Sugar Growers of Guatemala. The Sugar Growers were an ultra-conservative group headed by a man whose family had links to the death squads. On the very day that Brown closed the deal – Jan. 19, 1982 – the Sugar Growers' enforcement division, otherwise known as the Guatemalan army, "disappeared" religious worker Sergio Berten. On February 13, with Brown now eagerly advancing his clients' cause in Washington, Brother James Miller, an American Christian lay worker, was shot dead by masked men as he worked with a group of poor indigenous students in Huehuetenango. In the four months after Brown signed the agreement, more than 2,000 people were killed in what Amnesty International termed "large scale extrajudicial assassinations".

Brown's Haiti connection dates to 1982, the year he agreed to represent the Duvalier dictatorship. The $150,000 annual contract was signed by Brown and three of Baby Doc's "super ministers", Jean-Robert Estime, Frantz Merceron and Jean-Marie Chanoine. Brown continued to lobby for Baby Doc until shortly before the Duvaliers fell in early 1986. A Haitian informant remembers with revulsion how, after the Duvaliers' fall, Brown had the effrontery to present himself at the Haitian embassy in Washington, arguing strenuously that the country should still retain Patton, Boggs & Blow.

Much of Brown's early work involved an unsuccessful effort to prevent Fritz Bennett, Baby Doc's brother-in-law, from spending time in an American jail on cocaine trafficking charges. His other central focus was jacking up levels of U.S. aid, which increased from $35 million to $55 million annually during Brown's tenure.

CounterPunch acquired a number of items that shed light on Brown's relationship with Baby Doc's government, including letters he wrote to top Duvalierists and two pleasant color snapshots of Brown and First Lady Michele Bennett Duvalier entertaining American visitors to Haiti. Most interesting of all was a nine-page memorandum from Brown to Baby Doc, detailing his activities on the dictator's behalf. Dated November 1983 and written in French on Patton, Boggs & Blow letterhead, the memorandum never refers to the dictator's notorious human rights record. Instead, it blames "Monsieur le President's" problems on an "unfair image" created by the U.S. media. As to his efforts on Haiti's behalf, Brown wrote that "we continue to dedicate a considerable amount of time to the improvement of relations between the Republic of Haiti and members of Congress and the American government, with the goal of substantially increasing American aid to Haiti". Early success in this regard, Brown crowed, "is essentially the result of our Washington team".

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Brown also informed Baby Doc that he was looking after Haiti's "long-term interests" by maintaining "good relations" with leading American political figures: "While we have always enjoyed excellent relations with the government of President Reagan, we have also established personal contacts with almost all the Democratic candidates in order to ensure that we continue to have access to the White House regardless of who wins the presidential election in 1984." Brown boasted that his leading role in the Democratic National Committee "has served us in these efforts, while a certain number of my colleagues in the Republican Party assure the permanence of our access and the excellence of our relations with the government of President Reagan".

During his years in Haiti, Brown established an intimate relationship with Lillian Madsen, who had married into one of Haiti's wealthiest and most conservative families. Several of her friends told us that Madsen traveled in the highest circles of Baby Doc's regime. She now lives in a $360,000 Washington home bought in 1992 by Brown and his son, the lobbyist Michael Brown.

From his power base at the Commerce Department Brown had a decisive and disastrous effect on environmental policies. It was after his intervention that the administration tore the guts out of the Toxic Substances Control Act, which banned international trade in hazardous materials. By doing so it revived a lethal incineration industry on its last legs. The big US hazardous waste incineration companies faced a seemingly inexorable deadline: a falling supply of PCBs, as the lethal inventory steadily diminished. *(continued)*

For 15 years the US had maintained an absolute ban on the production and importation of polychlorinated biphenyls, familiarly known as PCBs, an extremely toxic chemical used as an industrial lubricant and a fire retardant in electric transformers. PCBs have been shown to cause cancer, liver damage and other health disorders. In the Great Lakes region alone, more than 40,000 people will die from eating PCB-laced fish.

As of November 22, 1995, the United States became a PCB-importing nation. The incinerators will be fed deadly PCBs and spew out even deadlier dioxin.

For five years the S.D. Myers Company had pleaded with the EPA to grant an exemption from the Toxic Substances Control Act, allowing the company to import PCBs to its Tallmadge "decontamination" facility outside Akron. The EPA had consistently denied all such requests, including the most recent one in March of 1995. At this point the Ohio congressional delegation led by Senator John Glenn and Congressman Tom Sawyer (both Democrats) went to work on behalf of S.D. Myers, which expected to make nearly $100 million a year from the enterprise. Sawyer and Glenn went directly to Commerce Secretary Ron Brown, who speedily convinced EPA director Carol Browner of the error of her ways.

The failing incineration industry has now been given its necessary fuel for years to come, with PCBs only the start.

Brown also paved the way for American timber companies to begin logging off the dense forests of Siberia. In 1994, Brown jetted to Vladivostok with executives from Weyerhaeuser, Roseburg Lumber Company, Louisiana-Pacific, and International Paper, scouting out sites for pulp and paper mills and cheap contracts for the lucrative Russian timber. When the timber executives expressed concerns about threats from the Russian mafia to their investments, Brown graciously offered to provide $500 million in federal funds and $2 billion in insurance bought by the government.

One of Brown's achievements on the environmental front was to pave the way for US timber companies to begin logging off the dense forests of Siberia.

Passing from the human to other species of fauna, chinook salmon and steelhead have no cause to mourn Brown's passing. In the niceties of federal demarcation they came under the pitiless sway of the Commerce Department rather than the potentially more merciful supervision of Interior. These anadromous fish swam through Interior's oversight of fresh water fish and out into Brown's fiefdom.

On Williams Creek, a tributary of the Salmon River, outside the little town of Salmon, Idaho, is a 648-acre mining claim now held by FMC Gold Co., partially owned by the South African gold and diamond giant, De Beers. FMC plans to earn expected revenues of over $300 million by digging out a square mile of rock 800 feet deep, down to the water table, then crush up the boulders, flush the resultant dirt and rubble through a mile-long pipe, heap it up, soak it with cyanide and garner .036 ounces of gold dust per ton of crushed rock.

The federal biologists held that such chinook and steelhead as had survived the dams downriver on the Columbia would not do well on cyanide. It was a stand-off until March 7, 1994, when Ron Brown met with the corporate honchos of FMC, who gave him a piece of their mind on the topic of the fish cops at the National Marine Fisheries Service, a group not exactly known for beating up on corporate executives.

Soon after came a letter of appreciation from FMC corporate headquarters to Secretary Brown thanking him profusely for expediting the approval process. The level of understanding and mutual esteem attained by FMC and Brown remained a secret between them until a source at the National Marine Fisheries Service leaked the relevant memos and letters to the *The Oregonian* of Portland, which disclosed them on June 12, 1995.

When FMC leaves Williams Creek after a few years, its legacy will be a polluted water table and cyanide-laced tailings. Someone should put a historic marker in homage to Ron Brown, and in memory of the fish. ■

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