

Americans who voted Bush

By William Blum

Bush won by a large margin amongst those who cited terrorism as one of their main concerns. Did Kerry say a word about this record to question Bush's success in fighting terrorism?

Some thoughts on that election thing: "How can 59,054,087 people be so dumb?" asked the Daily Mirror of England in large type on its front page two days after the American presidential election. What the Brits may not realise is that many of those who voted for Bush actually pride themselves on their ignorance. They associate being any kind of intellectual with elitist East and West Coasters, the dissolute 1960s, "old Europe", and other nasties on their love-to-hate list; for many of them as well, whether consciously or unconsciously, it is a source of satisfaction that they have a president who's no smarter than they are.

"Moral values", we are told, is the thing that was of primary concern to most of those who voted for Bush. The daily horror brought by Bush to the people of Iraq does not indicate less-than-noble moral values in the minds of these Americans. Bush is a religious man; religious people are moral people; ergo, Bush is a moral man. Discarding a clump of embryonic tissue cells, as unconscious as a rock, is much more "morally" upsetting to these good folk than sending a cruise missile screaming into a crowded Iraqi apartment building. Two people of the same sex who love each other and wish to get married is a greater crime in their, and god's, eyes, than the sadistic torture of Iraqi prisoners.

There is now discussion amongst progressives about reaching such people, trying to win large numbers of them over. This is certainly an understandable goal, but I suggest that we not waste our time, energy, and resources. Certainly, with any one individual amongst them, if we secluded that person on a farm with a dozen articulate progressive activists for a few months, and with a plethora of moving audio-visual materials, something would probably click in that individual's head. But we haven't got enough activists, time, or farms to make even a crease in the target population of "Valueites".

As ignorant and lacking in empathetic imagination as they might be, these people, if transported to Iraq to see the bombs-falling, the houses destroyed, the missing limbs, the mangled children's bodies, the wailing parents - even such Americans would be moved to a higher political consciousness. This has already happened with a number of American military personnel in Iraq, but is of course impossible to arrange for the many Valueites.

In any event, any such tactics couldn't be pursued in behalf of an electoral campaign that supports the war every bit as strongly as Bush does. (See, as an example chosen at random, the John Kerry campaign.)

Whether trying to win over Valueites in behalf of the Democratic Party, an independent party, or for any other reason, we must keep Harry Truman's dictum in mind: "If you give the voters a choice of a Republican and a Republican, they'll always choose a Republican." Who knows how many liberals and radicals stayed home on Election Day because Kerry failed to offer them anything like a decent alternative to Bush? I went to my polling place only because Nader was on the ballot. The 18-to-29 portion of the population voted decisively in favour of Kerry. But how many more of these idealistic young people stayed home in disgust?

I've tried to console myself by thinking that it's good that Kerry lost for at least two reasons:

1) Kerry would probably not have alienated the rest of the world as much as Bush did, and thus might get more support for the historical continuance of American interventions, resulting in even more American interventions, this time under

unindicted war criminals Secretary of Defence Wesley Clark and Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke. Bush, on the other hand, is now free to continue infuriating the entire planet, increasing anti-Americanism to yet more frightful levels, and driving the empire into total disgrace and disintegration in some unpredictable manner, hopefully not taking the entire planet along. This may be the only way the American imperial dragon will be slain.

2) If Kerry won, the chance of any reform of the Democratic Party would have been negligible, and the party would have moved even further to the right, confident that the voters had "vindicated" their conservative policies.

Well, we'll have to wait to see how number one plays out. As for the second, the prospect of the Democrats returning to more liberal ways does not appear to be off to a running start. A week after the election, veteran Democratic political and policy operatives began an advocacy group aimed at "using moderate Senate Democrats as the front line in a campaign to give the party a more centrist profile", as the Washington Post (November 11) put it. They call themselves Third Way (Did someone say Tony Blair?), from the idea that there should be

fighting terrorism?

What century are we living in?: 350 years ago, in the English Civil War, both Catholics and Protestants went into battle shouting, "Kill for Jesus". Presented here is a short current report to show you how far humankind has come since that time.

Fallujah ... a dialogue amongst a group of young insurgents: "I had a vision yesterday that I would finally be granted the martyrdom" ... "A friend was injured in an attack. They took him to the hospital. When he opened his eyes he saw a beautiful woman. He cheered and thanked God that he had finally become a martyr and was granted one of the divine virgins. But then he realised that he was still alive and started crying." ... "They exchanged Quranic verses and sayings of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), divine poetry about the beauty of martyrdom."

With US forces massing outside Fallujah ... "35 marines swayed to Christian rock music and asked Jesus Christ to protect them ... (the marines) perceive themselves as warriors fighting barbaric men opposed to all that is good in the world. ... waved their hands in the air, M-16 assault rifles beside them, and chanted heavy metal-flavoured lyrics in praise of Christ ... 'Victory belongs to the Lord,' another young marine read. ... The marines then lined up and their chaplain blessed them with holy oil to protect them." ... Marine Colonel Gareth Brandl declared: "The enemy has got a face. He's called Satan. He lives in Fallujah. And we're

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an alternative to conservative and liberal orthodoxies. They also entertain the conceit that they're "progressive centrists". One of them, Sen Birch Bayh of Indiana, a possible 2008 presidential candidate, said that the Election Day exit polls showed there are more self-described conservatives, 34 percent, than self-described liberals, 21 percent, while 45 percent described themselves as moderate. "Do the math," Bayh said. Presumably, if the polls had shown more conservatives than moderates he would be urging the party to become conservative, this time out of the closet. The Post added, however, that some Democrats believe that the Bush campaign "showed that softening ideological edges or seeking common ground with opponents is not a winning strategy."

Kerry forfeited playing the "values" card by his support of the war, but he could have played the equally important "national security" card by exploiting Bush's awful record: Not only did September 11 occur on Bush's watch (while Bush read a book about goats to a class of children), but the US bombing and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq have unleashed scores of terrorist acts against American targets, as was predicted - military, civilian, Christian, and others targets - in the Mideast, South Asia, and the South Pacific, including two major ones in Indonesia. Bush won by a large margin amongst those who cited terrorism as one of their main concerns. Did Kerry say a word about this record to question Bush's success in

going to destroy him"

As another writer named William once said, "A plague on both your houses!"

The thing called 'collateral damage': John Danforth, US Ambassador to the United Nations, said last month that the Security Council "has pussyfooted around" its obligation to confront all terrorists for too long. The council's new anti-terrorism resolution, he declared, "states quite clearly that the intentional targeting of civilians for death or serious bodily injury are criminal and never justifiable. The alternative position is that some 'root causes' may, from time to time, justify terrorists. The resolution, which we have adopted, states very simply that the deliberate massacre of innocents is never justifiable in any cause. Never."

If one were to ask Danforth about the tens of thousands of innocent civilians killed by the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq, the good ambassador would most likely quote from his State Department handbook: "Those were not deliberate deaths, they were all accidental. Why, we even have a name for it, 'collateral damage'."

But if day after day, year after year, in one country after another, the same scenario takes place - American aircraft dropping prodigious quantities of powerfully-lethal ordnance, with the full knowledge that large numbers of civilians will perish or be maimed, even without missiles going "astray" - what can one say about the intentions of the American military? The best thing that can be said is that they simply

in are proud to be ignorant

don't care. They want to bomb and destroy for certain political ends and they are not particularly concerned if the civilian population suffers grievously. "Negligent homicide" might be the suitable legal terminology. The most charitable. As to bombing houses in Fallujah because an (often unreliable) informant has reported that a "bad guy" is there ... Well, killing innocent bystanders when targeting someone else has long been considered murder in Western law.

In Afghanistan, when, on successive days in October 2001, US gun ships machine-gunned and cannoned the remote farming village of Chowkar-Karez, killing as many as 93 civilians, a Pentagon official was moved to respond at one point: "the people there are

dead because we wanted them dead", while US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld commented: "I cannot deal with that particular village."

On occasion, US bombing campaigns do have as part of their agenda the causing of suffering in the hope that it will lead the people under the falling bombs to turn against their government. This was a recurrent feature of the bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999. US/NATO officials, in their consummate arrogance, openly admitted to this again and again.

And in Afghanistan we had the example of the chief of the British Defence Staff, Adm Sir Michael Boyce, declaring that the bombing will continue "until the people of the country themselves recognise that this is going to go on until

least one officer within hearing distance, today's aspiring CO could ask his fellow soldiers in a raised voice if they know why they're in Iraq, whether they're prepared to kill and be killed for oil, Halliburton, and American imperialism, denounce the war as illegal and immoral, and point out that the vast majority of Iraqis had a better life under Saddam Hussein than they do now under the American occupation. The person might not be able to get all this in before being grabbed by the military police, but his military career, in one way or another, would likely be over. The same tactic could be used in the states prior to being shipped to Iraq.

Of course, you wouldn't actually want to advocate this to any present member of the armed forces. That could bring down upon you the wrath of several kinds of domestic police, and a taste of justice Ayatollah Ashcroft style.

Anti-communism redux: Richard Morin is the Director of Polling for the Washington Post. In his column of November 14 he discussed a study by two university economists of the possible reasons for the remarkable drop in life expectancy in Russia since the fall of communism. The professors and Morin are certain that the drop is not due to either the soaring unemployment rate or the elimination of the state-run health care system. Instead, they point the finger at "alcohol consumption and feelings of hopelessness". Hmmm. I pointed out to Mr Morin what I

diplomat or two to make light of the whole matter. In fact, what finally appeared, on page 17, was not a news story, but a story playing down the real news story. The Post story was headlined: "Spying Report No Shock To UN"

The Post had done the exact same thing three days earlier with the story about the Iraqi defector, Gen Hussein Kamel, Saddam's son-in-law, who had informed the UN weapons inspectors in 1995 that Iraq had destroyed the vast majority of its WMD, a revelation which didn't fit well with US preparation to invade Iraq. The Post ran the story on page zero until it could find someone to cast doubt upon the veracity of Kamel's disclosure.

And now we have the story about the multiple possible cases of error, manipulation, and intimidation in the presidential voting and counting. The first mention of this appeared in the Post a full week after the story had been highlighted all over the world. The Post finally acknowledged the existence of the story primarily to make light of it, as the headline above testifies.

These are examples of news coverage that's counter-journalistic, aimed at suppressing an investigation or creating doubt about an investigation that's already underway.

What about Watergate? The Post's exposure of Watergate was so unusual they had to make a movie out of it. And it too would have been called a conspiracy theory if the parties involved had not been caught so quickly.

At least the world is paying attention: This should not be surprising to my select body of readers, but it's good to know about it for possible use with the unenlightened ones of America.

A visit by an Amnesty International team to Darfur, Sudan in September showed that the US human rights record has weakened its case to intervene in a human rights crisis elsewhere.

"It has made it much harder for the US to take on its self-described role as human rights leader," said William Schulz, executive director of Amnesty International in the United States.

"The US loses an effective voice as a moral force in the world because of a blotched record of its own." He said that in about a third of all conversations with Sudanese government officials, they had brought up one or other element of the US human rights record. Schulz was of course aware that the US record had been raised by officials to "justify their own ill-advised practices", but he said that this showed that "if you commit human rights abuses yourself, you hand fodder to others to justify their deviations". Sudanese officials had raised issues such as the detentions in Guantanamo Bay and the abuses at Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad, said the Amnesty official.

Amnesty's director-general, Irene Khan, added: "The so-called war on terror, the way it is being implemented by restricting civil liberties, has had an enormous impact on our work and that of human rights organisations." Sudan is not the first country to say that its record is no worse than what the United States is doing, said Khan. "We've heard this from many countries, in Asia, in Africa."

Please be quiet. Reading not permitted: Reading about the new Clinton Library, I had the thought that the future George W Bush Library (or Liebrary) will probably not be too big, even if it holds all three of Dubya's books. (Yeah, I know, the same joke was made about Reagan's library.) **COURTESY AMERICA ON LINE**

The writer is the author of: Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War 2, Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower, West-Bloc dissident: A Cold War Memoir and Freeing the world to death: Essays on the American empire

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they get the leadership changed."

But as Telford Taylor, chief prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials, has asked: "Is there any significant difference between killing a babe-in-arms by a bomb dropped from a high-flying aircraft, or by an infantryman's point-blank gunfire? ... The aviator's act (is described) as more 'impersonal' than the ground soldier's. This may be psychologically valid, but surely is not morally satisfactory."

Conscientious objectors: A while ago some soldiers home on leave from Iraq refused to go back. Nineteen soldiers in Iraq refused to go on what they called "a suicide mission". The military has forced thousands of soldiers in Iraq to postpone their departures when their enlistment obligations ended, incensing many of the GIs. More than 2,000 former soldiers in the states, ordered back to duty, are resisting in various ways. Some of the last have applied for exemptions based on hardship, others have gone to court to avoid being sent to the killing fields.

A number of these young men have applied to become conscientious objectors. Very few of them have so far succeeded in becoming a CO, one reason being that the government still rejects the idea of "selective opposition" to a particular war, as opposed to a pacifist opposition to all wars. I wonder if any of those trying escape the god-awful war are familiar with a method that was successful during the Vietnam War on some occasions. Choosing the right moment, with a bunch of other soldiers and at

think would be obvious to many a high school sophomore, that unemployment and lack of needed health care can contribute directly to alcohol consumption and feelings of hopelessness.

What can explain the refusal of these three educated people to look the obvious in the eye other than ideology? Like most Americans, they may find it difficult to admit that the Soviet system had some very good things going for it, which are missing in their new capitalist paradise.

Oh, it's a conspiracy theory? (chuckle, chuckle, wink, wink): "The Latest Conspiracy Theory - Kerry Won - Hits the Ether", read a Washington Post headline on November 11.

This is in keeping with a Post tradition of damage control of stories embarrassing to the power elite or American narcissism.

In the mid-1980s, there was the famous expose by Garry Webb in the San Jose Mercury about CIA funding drug traffickers in California, which reportedly helped to spawn the crack epidemic. It was clearly an important story, but the Post refrained from any report on it at all for about three weeks, until it ran a brief mention of the story as part of a larger story that cast doubt upon it.

On March 4, 2003, the Post ran the story of US spying on Security Council members during an ongoing crucial debate about attacking Iraq. This was a day after the story broke all over the world. Why the wait? Apparently to locate a UN