

"All the News  
Unfit to Print"

# Signs of the Times

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"Spectacular fiasco for the organizers . . . a damning verdict on globalization that ignores its own consequences" was *Le Monde's* assessment (December 2) of the World Trade Organization summit in Seattle. Dozens of dailies all over the world concurred. But the reporting of this event, its background, and the accompanying protests in the "mainstream" American media provided another depressing example of information management at its most brazenly manipulative.

Even before the conference, as tens of thousands of anti-WTO activists accompanied 130 trade ministers to Seattle, the news coverage anticipating the protests shed little light on the specific charges against the WTO. Typically misleading was a November 1 article in *U.S. News & World Report* that equated opposition to the WTO with opposition to "trade" in general—but, happily, "the movement against free trade seems to have little traction in the United States . . . All major presidential candidates support free trade and the WTO."

Most pre-summit reports claimed that the WTO sought to "open up" trade around the globe and that its detractors were "anti-trade" eccentrics. ABC's Peter Jennings said that "it seems as though every group with every complaint from every corner of the world is represented in Seattle this week." The Associated Press called protesters' concerns "far-fetched." Dan Rather noted that the WTO had "ruled on many environmental issues"—thus implying that it was not indifferent to such issues—but did not note that the WTO has ruled *against* environmental restrictions in every single case that has come before it.

For the real score, one had to go to the internet. Dean Baker's feature in FAIR (Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting, [www.fair.org/err/991108.html](http://www.fair.org/err/991108.html)) pointed out that the WTO's model of global trade is anything but "free":

While its rules are designed to facilitate foreign investment, such as a U.S. auto manufacturer building a factory in In-

donesia, in other areas the WTO has taken little action to facilitate trade, while in some areas its rules are intended to impede free trade. In the case of professional services, such as those provided by doctors, lawyers and other highly paid professionals, the WTO has done virtually nothing to facilitate international trade and competition.

In his new book, Francis Fukuyama, an unabashed fan of the WTO, confirms what critics of the organization have long feared:

The WTO is the only international organization that stands any chance of evolving into an institution of global governance, setting rules not only for how countries will trade and invest with one another, but also for how they will deal with issues like labor standards and the environ-

The U.S. media's agitprop was immediately exposed by journalists from other countries. "TV networks turn a blinkered camera to the violence" read a headline in the *Independent* (December 2):

Anyone who switched on the television in the second half of Tuesday, wondering what was happening in Seattle . . . would have been little the wiser. The dozens of network and cable stations that shelved regular programming to show . . . the O J Simpson car chase, the phalanxes of terrified children running out of Columbine High School and the office complex in Atlanta where a gunman was on the loose, offered viewers precisely nothing. The time billed for the World Trade Or-

ganization's opening ceremony, frequently announced beforehand, came and went without the barest acknowledgement that it had been postponed because delegates were held up by street demonstrations.

Instead of showing clips of the demonstrations, or an interview with a demonstrator or a delegate, hour upon hour of vacuous fill-in programs followed on all major networks, obviously reflecting a conscious editorial decision:

News bulletins were led by the previous day's discovery of suspected mass graves in Mexico. If the disturbances in Seattle figured at all, it was in snatches, lower down the newscast. By late evening, when the governor of Washington state had declared a state of emergency and announced that the National Guard would be dispatched the next morning, a number of cable news stations were showing footage, or rather snippets, of the Seattle mayhem, most of it edited. . . . There was no live, open-ended coverage of the "battle in Seattle" on American television; it was not until [a day later] that viewers were shown the scale of the disturbances, by which time it was history, and edited.

That all major networks suppressed the news from Seattle was noted at home, too, but only on the internet—and none did so more biting than Matt Drudge ([www.freerepublic.com](http://www.freerepublic.com), December 1):

Imagine, if you will, that an explosion rocks Pristina. You just know Christiane Amanpour would rush to the airwaves in breaking news urgency, with onions under her fingernails,

reporting the sound of the atom splitting. Jamie would be feeding the script in her ear from State.

What was going on in the country's newsrooms? ABC's Seattle affiliate was frank enough to announce, even before the conference opened, that it would "not devote coverage to irresponsible or illegal activities of disruptive groups," adding that it was "taking a stand on not giving some protest groups the publicity they want." In a revealing choice of words, news director Joe Barnes described civil disobedience as "illegally disrupting the commerce of the city."

The magnitude of protests that greeted President Clinton during his tour of the Balkans—ten days before the "battle in Seattle"—was also unfit to print. The streets of Athens exploded with tens of thousands of demonstrators, forcing the unprecedented last-minute postponement of Clinton's visit. This prompted the *Times* of London to comment (November 12) that the Greek fiasco "has compounded the impression of a presidency stumbling rather than striding into its final lap." Clinton himself smugly referred to some "communists and anarchists" in an interview, thus revealing his total incomprehension of the Greek nation's view of him and his policies in Kosovo and Cyprus. To make Mr. Clinton's visit possible, a week later, the Greek government had to introduce sweeping restrictions on public gatherings. As the AP reported on November 16:

Police banned demonstrations and protest marches in large parts of Athens, saying Tuesday that it was necessary to protect President Clinton during his visit to Greece. The 26-hour ban . . . is the most severe restriction on protests since the fall of military rule 25 years ago. The chief of the Athens metropolitan police banned all open-air gatherings and protest marches on routes stretching from Athens international airport to the U.S. embassy, located 10 miles away.

But when Mr. Clinton eventually arrived on a 24-hour stop ("like a thief in the night" according to *Eleferios Tivos*) the protests—and violence—exceeded any-

thing seen in Greece since the 1960's. Across the Aegean in Turkey (his previous stop), police beat and arrested hundreds of protesters. In Ankara, many now await trial under draconian Turkish laws against "illegal protests." "Turkish Anti-Clinton Protesters Face Jail," the AP reported on November 17:

A Turkish court charged 113 leftists with illegally protesting against President Clinton—a charge carrying up to three years jail—during his current visit in which he has called for greater freedom of speech. Television pictures on Monday showed riot police beating the demonstrators and forcing them onto buses. Clinton was meanwhile telling the Turkish parliament he wanted to see greater freedom of speech and respect for human rights in Turkey.

In Sofia, the Bulgarians tasted police oppression unseen since the days of Todor Zhivkov's "real socialism." The "pro-Western" government wanted to present the best possible face to the guest. But many Bulgarians, appalled by the NATO bombing, fear that they may be next. To preempt them, the government issued a blanket ban on all anti-Clinton protests, even peaceful ones, in clear violation of the country's constitution. Over 100 people were arrested when they tried to demonstrate. One of them was Blagovesta Doncheva, a former anticommunist dissident who has written about the country's suffering under the new regime, including a recent op-ed piece for the *New York Times*. In a reminder that old habits die hard in ex-communist countries, she was brutally arrested and thrown into a mental ward "for observation." She was released after Clinton's departure and described her experiences ([www.emperorsclothes.com](http://www.emperorsclothes.com)):

If they [the Bulgarian police] order to a protesting citizen: "Get out of that area!" (the pavement outside the US Embassy in Sofia), and the addressed person dares to say: "No, I will not. You are trying to infringe on my constitutional right to protest according to Article 39, paragraph 1 of the Bulgarian

Constitution"—that is "inadequate behavior." Another, more serious sign of inadequate behavior (i.e. mental disorder): You choose to resist their attempts to push you into the police jeep, but your possibilities for resistance are deplorably limited: you are a woman in your fifties, and they are healthy and strong young men.

Opposition in the Balkans to Mr. Clinton and all that he embodies goes well beyond "communists and anarchists." It reflects the unease of people all over the world with what America has done, and what it has become. There is some comfort in the fact that people as different as Greeks, Bulgars, and Turks are growing apprehensive of the forces at work.

In *Al-Ahram Weekly* ("The globalisation brigade marches on," November 18), Gamil Mattar wrote that, after the Age of Divinity and the Age of Reason, we are being inexorably pushed into the globalist Age of Certainty. *Al-Ahram* concluded that the ongoing "assault on any glimmerings of national culture, the barrage of drivel and misinformation channeled through the ever-expanding media" is the harbinger of a new totalitarianism:

The state is besieged increasingly by demands to ignore the principle of national unity based on a shared culture, history and fate, and . . . to adopt the principle of cultural plurality . . . They overlook these tenets, however, when preaching the inevitability of globalisation. The world is racing headlong toward a new monolithic ideology, which heralds a new totalitarianism far more dangerous than all those of the 20th century. The strident and aggressive campaign for globalisation brooks no resistance, no dissenting ideas, . . . no free and open global dialogue on the notions of political and cultural plurality. As such, it has come to depend on a propagandist style that the West viewed with derision as long as it profited the communist machine.

# Waugh Stories

by George McCartney

*“A shriller note could now be heard rising from Sir Alastair’s rooms;  
any who have heard that sound will shrink at the recollection of it;  
it is the sound of the English county families baying for broken glass.”*

—Evelyn Waugh, *Decline and Fall*

**The Complete Stories of  
Evelyn Waugh**  
by Evelyn Waugh  
Boston: Little, Brown and Company;  
536 pp., \$29.95

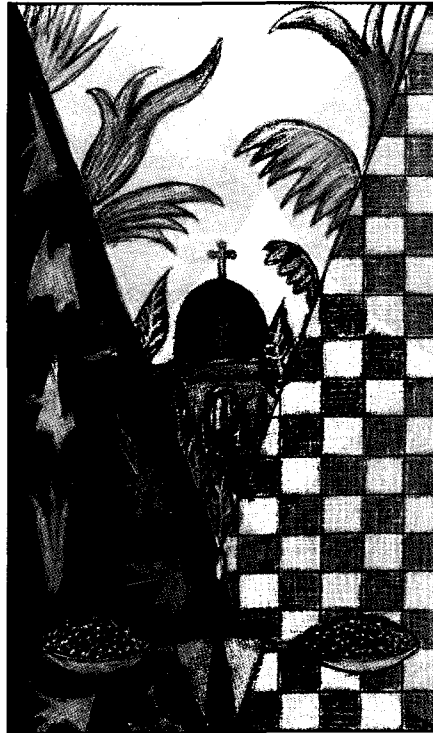


Two vignettes illustrate Evelyn Waugh’s character. One has to do with art; the other, protocol. In 1951, Evelyn Waugh commissioned a painting depicting the interior of a plane’s cabin. At Waugh’s direction, all the passengers’ faces are contorted in various expressions of horror. The implication is unavoidable. The plane is moments away from crashing. Upon seeing it in Waugh’s home, a guest wondered aloud if people might find it shocking. Waugh gleefully replied, “I hope so.”

As for protocol, Waugh was so committed to the pre-Vatican II Lenten discipline that he carried a tiny scale with him when dining away from home. Whether visiting friends or a restaurant, he would produce his scale at the dinner table and weigh his portions to ensure they did not exceed the requirements of the season’s fasting regulations.

Shocking excess, on one hand; scrupulous fussing, on the other: These were the poles that bounded Waugh’s life. He was, in short, a man of extremes, mischievously provocative one moment and unwaveringly austere the next. It was this inner tension that made him preternatu-

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Stephen Wende Anderson

rally alert to the struggle between anarchy and order in the world at large. When Waugh attended a Paris art exhibit in 1929, he was particularly fascinated by the contrast between two of the works on display. One was a surrealist effort by Max Ernst; the other, a Cubist work by Francis Picabia. He reports that they:

hung cheek by jowl, these two abstract pictures, the one so defiant and chaotic, probing with such fierce intensity into every crevice and convolution of negation, the other so delicately poised, so impossibly tidy, discarding so austere-ly every accident, however agreeable that could tempt disorder.

[They] seemed between them to typify the continual conflict of modern society.

Waugh’s interest in these paintings is

not difficult to understand. Their “continual conflict” between chaotic energy and tidy poise marked the fault line from which his creativity sprung. They represented his own personal dialectic, a tension that equipped him to render satirically an age in which, according to Father Rothschild, S.J., in *Vile Bodies*, “a radical instability” had provoked “an almost fatal hunger for permanence.”

The experts in our century have provided us with plenty of ideological maps, but Waugh was convinced that what people really need is a reliable compass. He found his in the Roman Catholic Church. It provided him the absolute coordinates he craved. This does not mean he stayed on course throughout his journey; but he had the grace never to pretend to be a saint or even reasonably good. His son Auberon supplies a vivid instance. During the rationing mania following World War II, some British bureaucrats hit upon the notion of allotting one banana per child to households throughout the isles. At the time, this meant three bananas for the Waughs, the family not having reached its full six-child dimensions yet. When the fruit arrived and was placed on the luncheon table, the children sat down eagerly. They then submitted quietly to the spectacle of their father slicing all three bananas into a bowl and, after adding cream and sugar, eating them himself. A lesson in the unforeseen consequences of good intentions, perhaps.

From that day, Auberon continues, he never took seriously anything his father had to say about morality. Quite right. We do not go to Waugh for preaching. We turn to him for his abundant and ev-